

IS HAVING TALENT ENOUGH? HOW LEADERSHIP TALENT ENACTS SUCCESS
AND WHY SOME LEADERS DERAILED

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Abstract

Evident in leadership derailment literature is that the promise of leadership talent and potential does not always manifest as success. Talented leaders derail at an alarming rate and at significant cost. Through this study, how leadership talent enacts success or derails is explored. The aims of the study are firstly, to extend understanding of the attributes of leadership talent adopting a multi-disciplinary approach. Secondly, to investigate how leaders enact their talents into success and finally, to understand why some talented leaders derail from their career path.

Qualitative data is used from twenty-six interviews with senior leaders categorised as successful, opted out or derailed forming a typology of three leadership talent types. A qualitative interview approach gives leaders a voice currently lacking in both talent management and derailment literature. Through thematic analysis, nine themes and twenty-eight attributes of importance to theory building were identified from which talent profiles were created for each talent type. These comprised inputs (characteristics) and mechanisms (actions and behaviours). It was found successful leaders were more likely to want to break new ground, be resilient, decisive, driven and ambitious, set high standards, deliver results, proactively develop business management skills and demonstrate greater career decision-making self-efficacy. Higher levels of resilience contributed to their ability to manage career setbacks and failures. Derailed leaders appeared less resilient, to suffer crisis of confidence, deliver inconsistent results, over emphasise their expert knowledge and remain in roles where they were failing.

The resilience of leaders is contextualised in resilience literature contributing to knowledge in an area of increasing academic and practitioner interest. The study also contributes to talent management and leadership derailment literature. It will be of relevance to academics, practitioners and leaders. A theoretical framework of leadership talent type profiles offers clarity on the attributes of each leadership talent type. Emphasis on the 'mechanisms' for enacting talent into success is advocated and has implications for future research and practice by focussing more on acquired than innate characteristics, providing hope for leaders who feel they have derailed.

Content

List of tables	x
List of exhibits	xii
List of figures	xiii
Abbreviations	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Context	1
1.2 Definitions	4
1.3 The purpose and aims of the study.....	11
1.4 The nature of the study.....	13
1.5 The structure of the thesis	14
Chapter 2: Literature review	17
2.1 Introduction.....	17
2.2 TM factors affecting the identification of leadership talent.....	20
2.3 The impact of TM perspectives on leadership talent as subject	22
2.3.1 Differentiating employees for TM purposes.....	23
2.3.2 The strategic talent management approach to TM	24
2.3.3 Global talent management.....	27
2.3.4 Multi-disciplinary approaches to TM	30
2.4 The impact of operationalising definitions of talent.....	33
2.5 'Tensions' in TM that impact definitions of leadership talent.....	35
2.5.1 Talents as innate or acquired	35
2.5.2 Talents as input or output	36
2.5.3 Talents as transferable or contextual.....	36
2.6 The influence of historical definitions of talent	37
2.7 Defining leadership talent and the notion of success	39
2.8 Defining leadership talent as object	40
2.8.1 Competencies as talents	42
2.8.2 Emotional intelligence as talents	48
2.8.3 Talents as a collection of attributes	50
2.8.4 Talents as creativity and innovation	51
2.8.5 Talents as the ability to learn	52
2.9 Revisiting the notion of talent and success: are they the same or different?	54
2.10 Leadership derailment	57
2.10.1 Defining leadership derailment.....	59
2.10.2 Getting it wrong: derailing flaws, factors and behaviours.....	62
2.10.3 Overplayed strengths	67
2.10.4 Dysfunctional characteristics, tendencies and behaviours	67
2.10.5 Managing leadership transitions.....	69
2.10.6 How success contributes to derailment.....	73
2.10.7 Bridging the gap between leadership derailment literature and TM literature.....	75
2.11 Conclusion.....	76

2.11.1	Formulating the research questions.....	78
2.11.2	Implications for methodology and research methods.....	81
Chapter 3:	Research methodology and methods.....	83
3.1	Introduction.....	83
3.2	A qualitative approach to the research.....	86
3.3	The research philosophy	87
3.3.1	Ontological considerations.....	88
3.3.2	Epistemological considerations.....	90
3.4	Theory in the context of the research: deduction and induction.....	93
3.5	The research methodology	94
3.6	Research methods.....	95
3.6.1	The research strategy and design	95
3.6.2	Ethical considerations	96
3.6.3	The research participants.....	98
3.6.4	The research procedure	107
3.7	Research analysis.....	107
3.7.1	Transcribing the interviews.....	108
3.7.2	Using thematic analysis to code the transcripts	108
3.7.3	Key themes identified from the thematic analysis	111
3.7.4	Reliability, validity and credibility in qualitative research.....	114
3.8	Summary.....	118
Chapter 4:	Findings: Defining leadership talent - an organisational case study.....	120
4.1	Positioning the case study in the research.....	120
4.2	The case study	121
4.3	How the organisation defined talent	121
4.4	How leadership talent was defined in the organisation	122
4.5	Causes of leadership derailment in the organisation	126
4.6	The leader's perception of the organisation's TM process.....	127
4.7	Implications of the organisations definition of leadership talent.....	129
4.8	Summary.....	130
Chapter 5:	Findings from the thematic analysis.....	131
5.1	Introduction.....	131
5.2	The theme of 'attitudes'.....	134
5.2.1	Comparison across the types	135
5.2.2	Attitude to learning.....	135
5.2.3	Attitude to work	139
5.2.4	Attitude to risk.....	141
5.2.5	Summary of the theme of 'attitudes'	142
5.3	The theme of 'achievement orientation'	143
5.3.1	Comparison across the types	144
5.3.2	Delivering results.....	145
5.3.3	Ambitious	147
5.3.4	Driven	148
5.3.5	Setting high standards.....	148

5.3.6	Working hard.....	149
5.3.7	Decisive.....	150
5.3.8	Summary of the theme of ‘achievement orientation’	151
5.4	The theme of ‘resilience’.....	153
5.4.1	Comparison across the types	154
5.4.2	Resilience.....	154
5.4.3	Adaptable	156
5.4.4	Summary of the theme of ‘resilience’	156
5.5	The theme of ‘personal characteristics’	156
5.5.1	Comparison across the types	157
5.5.2	Confidence.....	158
5.5.3	Ethical	161
5.5.4	Realistic.....	163
5.5.5	Independent.....	163
5.5.6	Summary of the theme of ‘personal characteristics’.....	164
5.6	The theme of ‘self-awareness’	165
5.6.1	Comparison across the types	166
5.6.2	Awareness of strengths and weaknesses.....	167
5.6.3	Understanding how they are perceived by others.....	169
5.6.4	Understanding of own capabilities compared to others	171
5.6.5	Summary of the theme of ‘self-awareness’	172
5.7	The theme of ‘change’.....	172
5.7.1	Comparison across the types	173
5.7.2	Breaking new ground	174
5.7.3	Leading strategic or culture change.....	176
5.7.4	Being part of something big.....	178
5.7.5	Summary of the theme of ‘change’.....	178
5.8	The theme of ‘relationships with senior leaders’	179
5.8.1	Comparison across the types	180
5.8.2	Relationship with line manager.....	182
5.8.3	Relationships with senior executives	185
5.8.4	Relationship with CEO	188
5.8.5	Summary of the theme of ‘relationships with senior leaders’.....	189
5.9	The theme of ‘skills, knowledge and capabilities’.....	190
5.9.1	Comparison across the types	191
5.9.2	Business management skills.....	193
5.9.3	Strategic thinking.....	195
5.9.4	Expert knowledge.....	195
5.9.5	Summary of the ‘skills, knowledge and capabilities’ theme.....	197
5.10	The theme of ‘relationships with others’.....	197
5.10.1	Comparison across the types	198
5.10.2	Building relationships.....	198
5.10.3	Summary of the theme of ‘relationships with others’.....	200
5.11	Summary of the findings from the thematic analysis.....	200
5.11.1	The emergence of theory: Leadership talent type profiles	203
5.11.2	The emergence of theory: The key themes and attributes	208

Chapter 6: Findings: A ‘deep dive’ into success and derailment	210
6.1 Introduction.....	210
6.2 Causes of leadership derailment: The view of successful leaders	211
6.2.1 Lack of resilience	212
6.2.2 Failure to manage or adapt to change	213
6.2.3 Over identifying with the role	214
6.2.4 Complex personal lives.....	216
6.2.5 Failure to respect the basics/not being up to the job.....	217
6.2.6 Anxiety	218
6.2.7 Lack of integration.....	218
6.2.8 Inability to work with or get support of others.....	219
6.2.9 Failure to deliver results.....	220
6.2.10 Not asking enough questions.....	220
6.2.11 Dysfunctional characteristics and behaviours	220
6.2.12 Summary of the view of derailment by successful leaders	223
6.3 Causes of leadership derailment: A view from the derailed.....	225
6.4 Comparing careers across the types	226
6.4.1 Career aspirations	226
6.4.2 Career planning	227
6.4.3 Geographical mobility	229
6.4.4 Career decision-making.....	231
6.4.5 Career setbacks, mistakes and failures	238
6.4.6 Summary of a comparison of the careers across the types	241
6.5 The meaning participants gave to success	242
6.6 Summary of the deep dive into success and derailment.....	248
Chapter 7: Discussion	250
7.1 Introduction.....	250
7.1.1 Self-reported data: reliability and causality	251
7.1.2 Significant findings	252
7.1.3 Structure of the chapter	255
7.2 A theory of talent as inputs, mechanisms and outputs using leadership talent type profiles	255
7.2.1 The theory of definitions of talent as inputs, mechanisms and outputs	259
7.2.2 Comparing the talent profiles: why some leaders succeed and others derail.....	262
7.3 Key themes: resilience, change, career decision-making and achievement orientation	268
7.3.1 Resilience as a differentiator of successful leaders	270
7.3.2 Change as a differentiator of successful leaders.....	282
7.3.3 Career decision-making as a differentiator of successful leaders	284
7.3.4 Achievement orientation as a differentiator of successful leaders	288
7.3.5 Summary of the key themes	289

7.4	A spotlight on the opted-out leaders	290
7.5	The meaning given to success	291
7.6	Contribution to knowledge	292
7.6.1	A theory of leadership talent as input, mechanisms and outputs.....	293
7.6.2	Construction of theory on the attributes of leadership talent type profiles	293
7.6.3	Conceptualising talent and success.....	294
7.6.4	Understanding the causes of leadership derailment	294
7.6.5	Positioning resilience in leaders in the TM, derailment and resilience literature.....	294
7.6.6	Opted-out leaders and the dynamic nature of derailment.....	295
7.7	Implications of the research	295
7.7.1	Implications for theory	295
7.7.2	Implications for practice.....	296
7.7.3	Implications for research methodology	297
7.7.4	Implications for methodology: advocating a multi-disciplinary approach	297
7.8	Future research	298
7.9	Limitations of the research.....	303
7.10	Conclusion	303
Chapter 8: Conclusion.....		305
References		312
Appendices		335

List of tables

Table 1: Definitions of TM	5
Table 2: Definitions of talent.....	7
Table 3: Attributes of talent extrapolated from definitions of talent.....	41
Table 4: Definitions of leadership derailment identified in literature	60
Table 5: Comparison summary of research on characteristics of derailed leaders.....	65
Table 6: Summary of the effects of management skills and leadership skills in leadership success and failure	72
Table 7: Ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods.....	88
Table 8: Definition of the three leadership talent types.....	104
Table 9: Participants within the talented and successful leadership talent type.....	105
Table 10: Participants within the talented and successful leadership talent type accessed through their company.....	105
Table 11: Participants within the talented and derailed leadership talent type.....	106
Table 12: Participants within the talented and opted-out leadership talent type.....	106
Table 13: Initial themes identified through coding.....	110
Table 14: The key themes of the leadership talent types.....	112
Table 15: Summary of the key themes and corresponding attribute descriptors.....	113
Table 16: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘attitudes’ theme	134
Table 17: ‘Attitude’ theme: comparison of number of codes	135
Table 18: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘achievement orientation’ theme....	144
Table 19: ‘Achievement orientation’ theme: comparison of number of codes	145
Table 20: Summary of the differences across the types for the ‘achievement orientation’ theme.....	152
Table 21: ‘Resilience’ theme: comparison of number of codes.....	154
Table 22: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘personal characteristics’ theme.....	157
Table 23: Personal characteristics theme: comparison of number of codes	158
Table 24: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘self-awareness’ theme	166
Table 25: Self-awareness theme: comparison of number of codes	167
Table 26: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘change’ theme	173

Table 27: ‘Change’ theme: comparison of number of codes.....	174
Table 28: ‘Relationships with senior leaders’ theme: comparison of number of codes	181
Table 29: Summary of positive and negative relationship status.....	181
Table 30: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘skills, knowledge and capabilities’ theme	191
Table 31: ‘Skills, knowledge and capabilities’ theme: comparison of number of codes	192
Table 32: Summary of the positive or negative demonstration of the ‘skills, knowledge and capabilities’ attributes.....	192
Table 33: ‘Relationships with others’ theme: comparison of number of codes.....	198
Table 34: Summary of the importance of the themes for the research part 1 of 2	202
Table 35: Summary of the importance of the themes for the research part 2 of 2	203
Table 36: Summary of the reasons successful leaders gave for derailment linked to the findings	224
Table 37: The meaning of success: early years	244
Table 38: The meaning of success: career building stage.....	245
Table 39: The meaning of success: present day, going forward and looking back.....	246
Table 40: Summary of the inputs from the leadership talent type profiles	263

List of exhibits

Exhibit 1: The research questions	13
Exhibit 2: Characteristics of clever people (talent)	52
Exhibit 3: Career patterns in failed leaders.....	70
Exhibit 4: A summary of the aims of the research and research questions	84
Exhibit 5: Example LinkedIn post used to recruit derailed leaders.....	103
Exhibit 6: Competencies and behaviours used to define leadership talent in the case study organisation.....	122
Exhibit 7: Attributes required of leadership talent in the case study organisation	125
Exhibit 8: Summary of the case study organisation’s definition of leadership talent	126
Exhibit 9: Reasons for leadership derailment in the case study organisation	127
Exhibit 10: Comparison of statements on ‘attitude to education’	137
Exhibit 11: Comparison of statements on ‘delivering results’	146
Exhibit 12: Differences in meaning given to ‘delivering results’.....	146
Exhibit 13: Comparison of statements on ‘ambitious’.....	147
Exhibit 14: Comparison of statements on ‘driven’	148
Exhibit 15: Comparison of statements on ‘setting high standards’.....	149
Exhibit 16: Comparison of statements on ‘working hard’	150
Exhibit 17: Comparison of statements on ‘decisive’.....	150
Exhibit 18: Perception of the importance of ethical behaviour across the types	162
Exhibit 19: Comparison of statements on ‘leading strategic or culture change’.....	176
Exhibit 20: Comparison of statements on ‘relationship with line manager’	184
Exhibit 21: Comparison of statements on ‘expert knowledge’.....	196
Exhibit 22: Comparison of statements on ‘building relationships’.....	199
Exhibit 23: Examples of dysfunctional behaviours cited by successful leaders.....	221
Exhibit 24: Successful and opted-out: Examples of resilience in early years trauma...	273
Exhibit 25: Enacting talent into success through the mechanisms of resilience	281

List of figures

Figure 1: The relationship between epistemology, methodology and method	90
Figure 2: Summary profile of the talented and successful leadership talent type.....	205
Figure 3: Summary profile of the talented and opted-out leadership talent type.....	206
Figure 4: Summary profile of the talented and derailed leadership talent type.....	207
Figure 5: Final talent profile of the talented and successful leadership talent type ...	256
Figure 6: Final talent profile of the talented and opted-out leadership talent type ...	257
Figure 7: Final talent profile of the talented and derailed leadership talent type	258

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this study.

CCL	-	Centre for Creative Leadership
CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	-	Chief Finance Officer
CIPD	-	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
COO	-	Chief Operating Office
CTO	-	Chief Technology Officer
EI	-	Emotional Intelligence
GTM	-	Global Talent Management
HR	-	Human Resources
HRM	-	Human Resource Management
I/O	-	Industrial/Organisational
MNC	-	Multi-national Corporation
PsyCap	-	Psychological Capital
TM	-	Talent Management
TMT	-	Top Management Team

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context

In talent management (TM) literature the strategic imperative for organisations to effectively manage their talent is rooted in two basic assumptions; that talent is a source of competitive advantage (Thunnissen *et al.* 2013) critical to organisational success (Axelrod *et al.* 2002) and that attracting and retaining such talent has become increasingly difficult (Dries 2013b) implying a scarcity of talent. This has resulted in a 'war for talent' rhetoric that has been an influential feature of TM discourse since Chambers *et al.* (1998) used the phrase. TM is even more of an imperative in a recessionary economic climate (Iqbal *et al.* 2013; Collings and Mellahi 2009). Research published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) suggests that TM is one of the top three priorities for organisations (CIPD 2017). To be able to attract and retain talent, we must firstly identify it. Swales (2013a, p.354) suggests that rather than any scarcity of talent there is a convincing and plausible argument that it is the "inability of organisations to spot talent in their workforce, and in the labour market," that fuels the notion of scarcity.

In TM literature talent remains curiously undefined with the two important questions remaining firstly, "to whom does the 'term' talent refer?" (McDonnell *et al.* 2010, p.150) and secondly "what is talent?" (Meyers *et al.* 2013, p.305). Some authors present specific groups of people as a definition of 'talent' for example, Branham (2005) suggests managers, professionals or front line workers are talent however, this relates to the perceived strategic nature of their role rather than the talents the individual has. Ulrich and Smallwood (2012) suggest target groups for 'talent' should be C-suite executives, a leadership cadre, high potentials and all employees. This latter addition implies that everyone has 'talent'.

There is a lack of clarity in literature over talent as subject and talent as object (Dries 2013a). Talent as subject refers to 'who' talent is perceived to be. Talent as object focusses on the 'what' of talent, the characteristics talented people have. In TM literature, it is prevalent to identify 'leaders' as subject. There appears an erroneous assumption that all leaders are talented leaders. A lack of differentiation between

'talented leaders' and 'leaders' as subject results in a corresponding lack of consideration of 'leadership talent' as object and the attributes of talented leaders that distinguish them from other leaders. An absence of an understanding of what constitutes leadership talent makes the effective 'spotting' of such leaders an unlikely occurrence.

Leadership derailment literature evidences the serious consequences of an inability to effectively spot leadership talent. McDonnell (2011, p.170) suggests that misidentification of talent "can mean individuals are placed in roles for which they are ill-equipped which can lead to fatal events." According to research, between 20%-50% of executives were at a high risk of derailment (Furnham 2015; Korn Ferry 2014; Lombardo and Eichinger 1989). Unlike definitions of talent, there is relative consensus over definitions of leadership derailment (Ross 2013a) A working definition of derailment is that: derailed leaders typically plateau at a lower level than expected, stall, are demoted or leave their organisation voluntarily or involuntarily (Ross 2013a; Burke 2006; Van Velsor and Leslie 1995; Lombardo *et al.* 1988).

Leadership failure costs up to \$1.5 million per executive (Furnham 2010; Hogan *et al.* 2009; Smart 1999). The puzzle is that most derailed leaders were "stars; wunderkinds; highly talented; golden boys and girls. Clever, confident and ambitious, their careers seemed to give no hint of what was to come" (Furnham 2010, p.3). In literature, where leaders are identified as a sub-group of talent there is a lack of empirical research to provide greater clarity on the 'talents' such leaders should have. The assumption is that being a leader is enough for such individuals to be 'talent.' The lack of empirical research on the attributes of leadership talent; how those talents are enacted into success and whether it is the absence of such talents or the presence of other attributes that causes derailment prevents a critical understanding of the very concepts TM and leadership derailment literature seek to address. For practitioners this lack of clarity of the attributes of leadership talent affects the identification and development of talented leaders potentially increasing the risk of leadership derailment. The high incidents of leadership derailment challenge the notion that those leaders derailing were 'talented' in the first place (Ross 2013a). An important question then becomes; if talented leaders derail at a significant rate, is having 'talent' enough to ensure 'success' as a leader? Greater

consideration needs to be given in TM literature to leadership talent as object in order to address this question.

There is a prevalence in literature to suggest that talent is contextual and therefore needs to be defined by the organisation (Collings and Mellahi 2009; Branham 2005; Michaels *et al.* 2001). In the case of leadership talent one might intuitively expect that where an organisation was specifically citing the talents they require of their leaders, and identifying those talents effectively, that leaders then matching this talent 'criteria' would be successful in their organisation and would certainly not derail. However, research found that more than 40% of those on company high-potential programs categorised as having leadership potential were below average in the organisations' outcomes associated with leadership effectiveness (Zenger and Folkman 2017). This and the extent to which leadership derailment occurs indicate that these organisationally specific definitions are lacking. Flawed definitions of leadership talent and flawed processes for identifying that talent are likely to result in the creation of correspondingly flawed 'pools' of supposedly high potential leadership talent, increasing the risk of leadership derailment. There is a need to empirically examine taken for granted assumptions about talent (Dries 2013b) particularly in relation to the criteria used to define and identify leadership talent.

The literature on TM and the literature on leadership derailment are surprisingly disconnected. Thunnissen *et al.* (2013, p.328) argue that in the field of TM "the academic traditions are rarely integrated or linked and put into a broader perspective." Whilst TM literature focuses on 'talent' authors of derailment literature suggest "research that examines what leads to executive success is a critical area of inquiry for organisational scholars" (Robie *et al.* 2008, p.131) as "more leaders fail and derail than become great successes" (Furnham 2010, p.4). Here success is an outcome. Rather than a singular focus on being 'talent' or having 'talents', an understanding of how leaders enact their talents into success and why some seemingly talented leaders derail provides a significant contribution to both TM and leadership derailment literature. A lack of adequate definition of leadership talent, a lack of clarity of what constitutes the attributes of leadership talent, the curious relationship between having talent and being successful and the increasing incidence of leadership derailment provided the catalyst for this study.

The contributions are both academic and rooted in practice. In an emerging phenomenon-driven field, the study contributes empirically to the development of TM theory of the criteria that can be used to identify leadership talent. The study also contributes to a greater theoretical understanding of leadership derailment. For practice, the study provides greater clarity on the attributes of leadership talent, how these are enacted into success and why some leaders derail. This enables the more effective identification of leadership talent in organisations and the design of interventions to help prevent costly leadership derailment. At an individual level, it enables leaders to manage their leadership careers more effectively to ensure success and avoid leadership derailment.

1.2 Definitions

Despite the strategic imperative of TM, academic and practitioner based literature presents different and often conflicting views of who and what constitutes talent in an organisational context (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013; Ross 2013b; Tansley 2011; CIPD 2011; Thorne and Pellant 2007; Blanchard 2007; Goffee and Jones 2006; Berger 2004). Formal conceptual definitions provide a structure for good theory-building (Wacker 2004). Nijs *et al.* (2014, p.180) suggest that a lack of any clear definition of talent is “one of the major challenges the TM field has ahead of it.” Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013, p.290) argue, “ongoing confusion about the meaning of ‘talent’...is hindering the establishment of widely accepted TM theories and practice.” The lack of conceptualisation, definition and theory relating to TM and talent combined with the continued rise in publications, have important implications for research with scholars suggesting that TM research is phenomenon-driven rather than theory-driven (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2015; Collings *et al.* 2015; Dries 2013b).

Lewis and Heckman (2006, p.139) in their review of TM literature conclude there is a “disturbing lack of clarity regarding the scope and overall goals of talent management.” They attribute this to TM defined alternatively as an outcome, a process or a decision. These alternative approaches to defining TM have a corresponding impact on the understanding of leadership talent. Reilly (2008, p.381) is particularly scathing of the lack of definition of TM suggesting that “proposed definitions are, at worst, a melange of

different concepts strung together without a clear statement of what is meant by talent and how we might manage it.” Whilst agreeing with the lack of clarity on how TM is defined Dries (2013a, p.274) identified the following definitions present in literature:

Source	Definition of talent management
Silzer and Dowell (2010, p.18)	“Talent management is an integrated set of processes, programs, and cultural norms in an organisation designed and implemented to attract, develop, deploy, and retain talent to achieve strategic objectives and meet future business needs.”
Collings and Mellahi (2009, p.2)	“We define strategic talent management as activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differently contribute to the organisation’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potentials 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 commitment to the organisation.”
Cappelli (2008, p.1)	“At its heart, talent management is simply a matter of anticipating the need for human talent and setting out a plan to meet it.”
Slan-Jerusalim and Hausdorf (2007, p.934)	“High potential identification and development (also known as talent management) refers to the process by which an organisation identifies and develops employees who are potentially able to move into leadership roles sometime in the future.”
Warren (2006, p.26)	“In its broadest sense, the term can be seen as the identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment of talent, although it is often used more narrowly to describe the short – and longer – term resourcing of senior executives and high performers.”
Ahston and Morton (2005, P.9)	“TM is a strategic and holistic approach to both HR and business planning or a new route to organisational effectiveness. This improves the performance and the potential of people – the talent – who can make a measurable difference to the organisation now and in the future. And it aspires to yield enhanced performance among all levels in the workforce, thus allowing everyone to reach his/her potential, no matter what that may be.”
Dutttagupta (2005, p.2)	“In the broadest possible terms, TM is the strategic management of the flow of talent through an organisation. Its purpose is to assure that a supply of talent is available to align the right people with the right jobs at the right time based on its strategic business objectives.”
Pascal (2004, p.9)	“Talent management encompasses managing the supply, demand, and flow of talent through the human capital engine.”
Sloan <i>et al.</i> (2003, p.236)	“Managing leadership talent strategically, to put the right person in the right place at the right time.”

Table 1: Definitions of TM. Sourced from Dries (2013a, p.274).

This table presents an array of definitions of TM spanning a seven-year period. It provides a useful illustration of the diversity of TM definitions. However, explanation is lacking from Dries (2013a) on why there is this diversity. Lewis and Heckman (2006) provide the rationale that TM can be seen alternatively as an outcome, a process or a decision. In the table above for example, Sloan *et al.* (2003 in Dries 2013a, p.274) defines TM as the

outcome of putting the right people in the right roles at the right time. In comparison, Slan-Jerusalim and Hausdorf (2007 in Dries 2013a, p.274) describe TM as a process comprising the identification and development of 'high potentials' who can move into leadership roles. Lewis and Heckman (2006) categorise the definition of Pascal (2004 cited in both Dries 2013a, p.274 and in Lewis and Heckman 2006, p.140) as a decision relating to supply and demand. Regardless of TM being defined as an outcome, a process or a decision, prevalent in more widely used definitions of TM for example, that of Collings and Mellahi (2009 and see table above), is that these definitions encompass the identification of talent which by implication includes 'who' and 'what' constitutes talent.

As well as the alternate referencing of a process, decision or outcome, the diversity in definitions of TM is caused by the adoption of broader alternate perspectives. Knowing these alternate perspectives helps in understanding how leadership talent emerges as a sub-group of talent in literature and in practice. These perspectives are outlined in the literature review in chapter two and include TM as: Human Resource (HR) practices, strategic talent management, global talent management and multi-disciplinary perspectives.

Together with a lack of definition of TM, there is a corresponding lack of definition of talent (Cappelli 2008; Duttagupta 2005; Pascal 2004) with some authors proclaiming, "no unanimous definition of talent exists" (Thunnissen *et al.* 2013, p.327). In their review of Human Resource Management (HRM) literature Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013, p.291) whilst acknowledging the same, collated the following definitions of talent:

Source	Definition of talent
Bethke-Langenegger (2012, p.3)	"We understand talent to be one of those workers who ensures the competitiveness and future of a company (as specialist or leader) through his organisational/job specific qualification and knowledge, his social and methodical competencies and his characteristic attributes such as eager to learn or achievement oriented."
Ulrich & Smallwood (2012, p.60)	"Talent = competence (knowledge, skills and values required for today's and tomorrow's job; right skills, right place, right job, right now) x commitment (willing to do the job) x contribution (finding meaning and purpose in their job)."
Silzer and Dowell eds. (2010, p.14)	"An individual's skills and abilities (talents) and what the person is capable of doing or contributing to the organisation."
Silzer and Dowell eds. (2010, pp.13-14)	"In groups, talent can refer to a pool of employees who are exceptional in their skills and abilities either in a specific technical area (such as software, graphic skills) or a competency (such as consumer marketing talent), or a more general area (such as general managers or high potential talent). And in some cases, 'the talent' might refer to the entire employee population."
Gonzalez-Cruz <i>et al.</i> (2009, p.22) (translated by Gallardo-Gallardo <i>et al.</i> , 2013)	"A set of competencies that, being developed and applied, allow the person to perform a certain role in an excellent way."
Cheese <i>et al.</i> (2008)	"Essentially, talent means the total of all the experience, knowledge, skills and behaviours that a person has and brings to work."
Ulrich (2007, p.3)	"Talent equals competence (able to do the job) times commitment (willing to do the job) times contribution (finding meaning and purpose in their work)."
Stahl <i>et al.</i> (2007, p.4)	"A select group of employees - those that rank at the top in terms of capability and performance - rather than the entire workforce."
Tansley <i>et al.</i> (2007, p.8)	"Talent consists of those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer-term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential."
Tansley <i>et al.</i> (2006, p.2)	"Talent can be considered as a complex amalgam of employees' skills, knowledge, cognitive ability and potential. Employees' values and work preferences are also of major importance."
Lewis and Heckman (2006, p.141)	"It is essentially a euphemism for 'people'."
Jerico (2001, p.21) (translated by Gallardo-Gallardo <i>et al.</i> 2013)	"The implemented capacity of a committed professional or group of professionals that achieve superior results in a particular environment and organisation."
Michaels <i>et al.</i> (2001, p.xii)	"The sum of a person's abilities – his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character and drive. It also includes his or her ability to learn and grow."
Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001, p.21)	"Talent should refer to a person's recurring patterns of thought, feeling or behaviour that can be productively applied."
Williams (2000, p.35)	"Describe those people who do one or other of the following: regularly demonstrate exceptional ability – and achievement – either over a range of activities and situations or within a specialized and narrow field of expertise; consistently indicate high competence in areas of activity that strongly suggest transferable, comparable ability in situations where they have yet to be tested and proved to be highly effective, i.e., potential."
Gagne (2000, p.67)	"Superior mastery of systematically developed abilities or skills."

Table 2: Definitions of talent. Sourced from Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013, p.291)

The table presents definitions of talent from literature spanning a twelve-year period. It illustrates the diversity with which talent is defined for example, as abilities, competencies, skills or thought patterns. Common with these definitions of talent is a lack of detail with regard to the specific abilities, competencies, skills or thought patterns that might constitute 'talent.' Attention is not drawn to this by the authors however, the table illustrates a curious disconnect in much of the TM literature between definitions of TM and definitions of talent. In those definitions of TM identified by Dries (2013a) talent is referred to as being executives and leaders or those with the potential to be, for example:

- "Managing leadership talent strategically..." (Sloan *et al.* 2003 in Dries 2013a, p.274)
- "...resourcing of senior executives..." (Warren 2006 in Dries 2013a, p.274)
- "...employees who are potentially able to move into leadership roles sometime in the future" (Slan-Jerusalim and Hausdorf 2007 in Dries 2013a, p.274).

In definitions of TM Identifying leaders as a sub-group of talent addresses the 'who' of TM (who is the 'talent' being 'managed'), but fails to identify what these individuals are doing that causes them to be perceived to be talent, i.e., what are their 'talents'? When leaders are identified as a sub-group of employees for TM purposes it raises the question of whether the definition of leadership talent simply describes those already in leadership positions (Reilly 2008). It is unclear if it is simply that they are leaders and therefore 'talent', or if the expectation is that talented leaders demonstrate something different from other leaders and should be further differentiated. These questions are not answered through definitions of talent. The majority of the definitions of talent previously cited alternatively refer to a person, a professional, workers or an employee rather than specifically the 'leaders' talked about in definitions of TM or the 'talents' such leaders are required to have.

There is a need in TM literature to more clearly distinguish between who 'talent' is and what 'talents' are being referred to; between subject and object. This is particularly important when referring to leadership talent and the talents required of such leaders in light of leadership derailment literature. Failing to distinguish between 'who' (leaders) and 'what' (specific talents), has the following important implications:

1. ***The impact on theoretical advancement:*** From an academic perspective, a lack of differentiation between the 'who' and the 'what' of leadership talent constrains theory development on the attributes required of leaders categorised as such. This is important due to the growing body of literature on leadership derailment addressing the puzzle of why some leaders fail to fulfil their potential. A lack of clarity around the attributes required of leadership talent or how these can be identified inhibits the opportunity for multi-disciplinary research and the ability to draw on the evidenced based discipline of psychology to define the attributes of leadership talent more rigorously. It also inhibits the understanding of whether it is a lack of those attributes or something else, which causes derailment. A more rigorous understanding of the attributes of leadership talent and how these are enacted would enable a more effective integration with leadership derailment literature through which authors seek to address the question of why leaders derail.
2. ***The impact on practice:*** From a practitioner perspective, a lack of clear understanding of both the attributes of leadership talent and the reasons talented leaders derail, impedes the ability to identify, attract, retain and develop talented leaders. A better understanding of the attributes of leadership talent and reasons for derailment would help organisations more effectively talent spot and develop their leadership talent. Where consultancy based models are used to identify the attributes of talented leaders or 'derailer' characteristics, these are often reliant on the consultancy's own research, aligned to a specific model. Where an organisation's own definition of talent is used to identify talent, this may be subject to bias (Dries 2013b), lack of knowledge or understanding of the complexities of people, performance and potential or a lack of awareness of how 'derailer' characteristics present.
3. ***The impact on individual leaders:*** Collings *et al.* (2011) identified a lack of recognition in the TM literature of the neglected perspective of the individual. From the perspective of the individual leader conflicting definitions of talent and the attributes of talented leaders do little to help clarify how best to develop leadership capability and a successful leadership career given that talented leaders do derail. Whilst Collings *et al.* (2015) were optimistic that the individual was receiving greater attention, there is still a gap in literature on the perspective of leaders identified as

leadership talent. Given the suggestion in derailment literature that more leaders fail or derail than are successful, a lack of understanding of the attributes of talented and successful leaders limits an understanding of strategies to prevent derailment (Furnham 2010).

In scholarly TM literature, the lack of definition of talent is lamented and there appears a collective call to arms for clarity. However, focus still remains on 'who' talent is rather than 'what' talent comprises, despite criticism of this from within the field (Makela *et al.* 2010; Lewis and Heckman 2006). By comparison, consultancy based literature places a greater emphasis on 'what' indicates someone is talented. Whilst this is commendable, such literature may either, lack the rigour of evidence-based research (Iles *et al.* 2010) or be biased towards proving the consultancy's own methodology. Within such literature, definitions and the attributes of talent as they are operationalised often merge with discussions on the attributes of successful leaders. It becomes unclear if having or being talent and being successful are the same thing. A dictionary definition of success indicates a key distinction between talent as an input and success as an outcome "a favourable outcome of something attempted; the attainment of wealth, fame, etc.; an action, performance, etc., that is characterized by success; a person or thing that is successful," (Collins dictionary 2016, p.1344).

A more rigorous understanding of the attributes of leadership talent and the relationship between having talent and being successful is a greater imperative in the leadership derailment literature. As TM literature has increased in volume over the last ten years, so too has literature on leadership derailment. Interest originates from the fields of HR, business and management and from the discipline of psychology, in particular clinical psychology. The increased interest in leadership derailment has been a response to the leadership and organisational failures in the lead up to and the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis (Inyang 2013). Inyang (2013) argues that historically leadership studies have focused on the positive aspects of leadership. This can be said of TM with its emphasis on talent. Authors on leadership derailment (Inyang 2013; Ross 2013b, Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; McCartney and Campbell 2006) maintain that understanding leadership derailment broadens the perspective on leadership talent, success and failure.

A lack of rigour in defining the attributes of leadership talent hinders understanding of why seemingly talented leaders derail.

1.3 The purpose and aims of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between having talent and being successful as a leader in the context of organisations by identifying the attributes of talented leaders, understanding how leaders enact talent into success and identifying why talented leaders derail. A distinction is made between talent as an 'input' and success as an 'outcome.' The study provides a contribution to both the field of TM and the leadership derailment literature. It provides greater clarity on the attributes of leadership talent, which is currently a significant gap in the literature. This impedes the ability of both academics and practitioners to identify talent effectively, which in turn reinforces the rhetoric that there is a talent shortage. A multidisciplinary approach to the identification of these attributes, which draws on the discipline of psychology to define them more rigorously, provides an evidence base currently lacking in definitions of leadership talent. The study facilitates the integration of TM and leadership derailment literature to understand the reasons why talented leaders derail from their leadership career. By more effectively identifying and developing leadership talent, fewer leaders may derail. The study will be of relevance to academics, practitioners and individual leaders.

The emphasis of the study is on leaders as individuals, rather than the role of leadership. McCartney and Campbell (2006) identified the problem of semantics when the terms leadership and management were used. In academic, consultancy and practitioner literature the term leader and manager are often used synonymously for example, Michaels *et al.* (2001) use managerial talent to mean executive and leader. In leadership derailment literature executive, leader and manager are used interchangeably. In this research 'leader' refers to an individual who is in a senior role in an organisation with strategic leadership responsibilities at the level of functional leadership and upwards (Charan *et al.* 2011). In the study the use of the terms leader and manager are being used synonymously, unless otherwise stated.

Boudreau (2013, p.288) observes that “experience suggests that organisational leaders often find it difficult to distinguish ‘talent’ as the person from ‘talent’ as the attributes of the person.” As a further point of clarity for the reader a distinction will be made in the thesis between ‘talent’ which will be used to refer to an individual or group and ‘talents’ which will be used to refer to the attributes of that individual or group.

There are four aims of this study:

Firstly, to expand theoretical understanding of how leadership talent can be defined by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach. The contribution to knowledge is in defining the ‘what’ of leadership talent, i.e., the attributes which comprise a leader’s talents. This enables a greater distinction between leaders and talented leaders and more effective ‘talent spotting.’

Secondly, to identify how those leaders who are perceived to be successful enact their talents into sustained success. This contributes to knowledge by providing a context for understanding the mechanisms successful leaders use to enact the talents they have into success as a leader.

Thirdly, to extend theoretical understanding of why some talented or successful leaders derail from their career path. Leadership derailment is a relatively new area of research and is currently unreferenced in the TM literature. This contributes to both academia and practice through an understanding of why seemingly talented leaders derail from their career paths. Through this research, it is suggested that derailment is an additional dimension that needs to be considered in the context of understanding leadership talent.

Fourthly, to clarify the meaning both successful and derailed leaders give to success, and the affect this has on their career, placing emphasis on the leader’s perspective. This contributes to knowledge of the motivation and drives of talented leaders.

The following exploratory research questions were constructed from the literature review:

The research questions	
Research Question 1	What attributes differentiate talented and successful leaders?
Research Question 2	How are successful leaders enacting their talents?
Research Question 3	Over time, how do talented and successful leaders sustain their success?
Research Question 4	By comparison, what characterises those leaders who stall, plateau or derail?
Research Question 5	What causes some talented leaders, over time, to involuntarily stall, plateau or derail from their leadership career?
Research Question 6	What effect does the meaning leadership talent gives to success have on their leadership career?

Exhibit 1: The research questions

Both TM and leadership derailment as emerging bodies of literature with a lack of conceptualisation, theory and definition influenced the nature of the study conducted.

1.4 The nature of the study

A subjectivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological philosophy underpins the research. With an inductive approach to the generation of theory, the study is qualitative. A rich volume of data was generated through the interview of 25 senior leaders from both public and private sectors. These leaders were categorised into three types: talented and successful, talented and opted-out and talented and derailed. In hour-long interviews, leaders recounted their 'leadership journey' from their early years making their first decisions on their education to the present day. Through the interview, they were encouraged to consider their talents, what success meant to them, defining moments in their careers and important decisions and choices made. In interpreting this meaning hermeneutical-phenomenology guided the approach to uncover how these leaders interpreted their talent, success or derailment. This created a process of interpreting the interpretations of leadership talent and a "rich textured description of lived experience"

(Kafle 2011, p.182), a strength of hermeneutic phenomenological research. A TM decision maker was interviewed in order to present an organisational case study as an exploratory example of how organisations define and then operationalise definitions of talent. Such a process has implications for the identification and development of talent and represents the 'real world' context within which leaders enact their talents.

1.5 The structure of the thesis

This introduction forms chapter one. The thesis is then structured as follows:

Chapter 2: The literature review

TM is an emerging field with a growing body of academic and practitioner interest. How TM is conceptualised and defined and the effects of this on how leadership talent is defined are explored. Multi-disciplinary research in TM is advancing introducing a complexity to how individuals defined as talent are understood as being active agents in TM practices rather than passive participants. The issues multi-disciplinary research raises in relation to understanding leadership talent are identified and discussed. The review identifies the different approach to defining the attributes of leadership talent and the consequences of these. How definitions of talent are operationalised is considered and a lack of organisational case study material in TM literature is identified as inhibiting an understanding of this process. The review considers how literature references both leadership talent and success and the impact of using the terms interchangeably when one could be considered an input and the other an outcome (Dries 2013a).

Having considered how TM literature defines the 'bright side,' the 'dark side' of leadership derailment is then reviewed. Derailment literature is also an emerging area of literature with a prevalence of practitioner research in the 1980's and 1990's. Since the economic crisis of 2008, there has been a resurgence of interest in leadership derailment however, much of that interest focuses on the more catastrophic failures of leaders rather than the 'sad' leaders who simply fail to fulfil their potential and derail. Definitions of derailment are explored as are the reasons suggested by authors as causes of

derailment. The disconnect between derailment literature and TM literature is highlighted given leadership talent is central to both fields.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and methods

The 'research methodology and methods' chapter outlines the philosophy underpinning the study and the rationale for the appropriateness of that philosophy in the context of the research purpose, aims and exploratory questions. An interpretivist epistemology underpins the research, using hermeneutic-phenomenology to explore the meaning leaders give to their talent, success or derailment. A qualitative approach is used to yield rich data appropriate to the underlying philosophy. Explained in the chapter is the research approach leading to the identification of three leadership talent types and a talent typology and a summary of the participants and the procedures undertaken. Within this section, the approach to the analysis is also described. Thematic analysis was used to distil the data into key themes. These themes are identified prior to the 'findings' chapters.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6: The Findings

The findings of the research are presented throughout chapters four to six. Chapter four builds a bridge between definitions of leadership talent in literature and a real world case study of how an organisation defines leadership talent and then operationalises that definition. The case study provides an opportunity to explore how a lack of rigor in organisational definitions of talent might affect the identification and development of talent. Whilst a single case study does not allow for generalisation, it does make plausible that the definitions of leadership talent organisations are using are not adequate for effectively identifying such talent. As the derailment literature evidences the scale of leadership derailment, greater consideration must be given in academia and in practice to how leadership talent is defined in the first place. Furthermore, how organisations define and operationalise definitions of talent may be contrary to how leaders, as active agents of TM practices, consider their own talent and success.

Chapter five presents the findings from the thematic analysis. Through a review of the themes and corresponding attributes, an understanding of the attributes of the three

different talent types (talented and successful, talented and opted-out and talented and derailed), emerges. A comparison of the talent types enables identification of the attributes that differentiate successful and derailed leaders. Consideration is given to whether the attribute is an 'input,' for example, a trait or attitude or a 'mechanism,' for example, a behaviour or action. This contributes to an understanding of both the attributes that comprise the leader's 'talents', i.e., the 'inputs' and the mechanisms leaders are using to enact those talents into either successful or unsuccessful outcomes.

Chapter six provides a 'deep dive' into success and derailment. The reasons successful leaders gave for leadership derailment are summarised and compared to the results of the thematic analysis providing additional validation to the research. The career decisions across the types are reviewed and how successful and derailed leaders respond to career setbacks, failures and mistakes is explored. Finally, the meanings the leadership talent types give to success are reviewed and the implications of these meanings on career decision-making are considered.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The 'discussion' chapter provides an overview of the significant findings of the research. A theory of leadership talent type profiles is presented which positions talents as inputs, mechanisms and outcomes. The attributes of successful, opted-out and derailed leaders are presented in answer to the research aims and questions. The four key themes of resilience, change, career decision-making and achievement orientation are explored and positioned in the context of literature as is the meaning leaders give to success. Finally, the contribution, implications and limitations of the study are presented.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The conclusion offers a précis of the research in the context of its purpose and aims. It summarises the main findings and the interesting anomalies encountered through the study. The contributions are reiterated and implications for practice stated.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The aims of this literature review are threefold: Firstly, to understand how leadership talent is defined in literature and how these definitions relate to being successful as a leader within the context of organisations. Secondly, to determine what literature identifies as the attributes of those talented leaders. Thirdly, to understand how literature characterises those leaders who derail from their career path or fail to live up to their potential.

TM and leadership derailment literature form the foundations of the review. Exploring the TM literature enables an understanding of how leadership talent is defined and the distinction between being a leader and being a talented leader. This helps in understanding if those leaders who derail were 'talented' leaders in the first place (Ross 2013a). Leadership derailment literature was reviewed in order to understand the notion of derailment and how it is defined and characterised in literature. Whilst the concept of talent is central to TM it is not unique to the field. Furthermore, leadership derailment literature draws on multiple disciplines. A multi-disciplinary approach to the literature was therefore required. Literature was accessed from HRM, organisational psychology, positive psychology, clinical psychology and leadership and business studies, in order to explore talent, success, derailment and related concepts.

Interest in TM literature has grown significantly in the last ten years. Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2015, p.266) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 139 articles noting that 84.8% of articles were published in 2010 or after, indicating TM as a relatively new field. Collings *et al.* (2015, p.233) suggest that TM has become "one of the fastest growing areas of academic work in the management field over recent decades." A number of influential authors have sought to define the concepts of TM and talent through their own comprehensive review and discussion of literature (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2015; Ariss *et al.* 2014; Ross 2013b; Dries 2013a; Dries 2013b; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013; Thunnissen *et al.* 2013; Tansley 2011; Isle *et al.* 2010b; Collings and Mellahi 2009; Lewis and Heckman 2006). Particular attention was given to these papers and the corresponding citations.

Practitioner and consultancy based literature was influential in TM before the field became of interest in academia. One particular group of consultants coining the phrase 'war for talent' (Chambers *et al.* 1998) set the tone for much of the discussion on talent in HR practice before it became of interest to academics (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2015). Some academics believe that research has lagged behind practice in providing vision and leadership in the field (Ariss *et al.* 2014). Given the continued influence of practitioner literature, such literature has been included in the review.

Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2015) in their bibliometric analysis identified that of the 139 articles reviewed, these appeared in 69 journals, evidencing a lack of established outlets for research. Collings *et al.* (2015, p.234) concluded that TM has "yet to gain credibility in the top tier academic journals" whereas publications referencing 'stars' for example, have been. This further evidences a need for a multi-disciplinary approach to reviewing the literature.

In the same way that there has been a growing interest from academics and practitioners in TM, there has also been an increased interest in the 'dark side' of leadership (Inyang 2013; Ross 2013a; Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Furnham 2010). Authors on talented leaders both inside and outside the TM field place an almost single minded emphasis on identifying high potential and exceptional performance, with the purpose of categorising individuals as talented or not. Beyond this, there is little emphasis on the individual as an active participant in the TM process (Thunnissen 2016; Collings and Mellahi 2009). This is beginning to be addressed in global talent management literature through for example, literature on the mutual-benefits perspective of expatriate assignments (Farndale *et al.* 2014). It is also being addressed in TM through the exploration of a pluralistic approach to TM (Thunnissen *et al.* 2013; Tansley *et al.* 2013) and through multi-disciplinary research into the attributes of talent however, such research is still in its infancy. By comparison, the major focus in leadership derailment literature is the individual and the attributes and behaviours of the derailed leader. Some authors (Braddy *et al.* 2014; Inyang 2013; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Glaso *et al.* 2010) are critical of academic studies that have focused solely on the characteristics and competencies of effective leaders. Zhang and Chandrasekar (2011, p.37) argue that there is the assumption that "ineffective leadership is simply the absence of effective

leadership.” This emphasis on competencies of effective leaders they suggest, has led to an overemphasis on strengths to the detriment of identifying and addressing problem behaviours. Furthermore, they argue that effective leaders do fail, affecting the leader, others in the organisation and the organisation. This has significant consequences for TM practise yet is ignored in TM literature. Similarly, leadership derailment literature makes few links to TM literature. There is a failure to consider the process through which these derailed leaders were identified as leadership talent prior to derailing or how they have been developed.

From a review of the literature Zhang and Chandrasekar (2011) and Ross (2013a), appear to be some of the few authors who reference leadership derailment in the context of TM. “Leadership development is a vital component of the TM strategy of any company,” (Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011, p.37) but such development is viewed in terms of expanding a person’s ability to be effective as a leader in leadership roles (McCauley and Van Velsor 2004). Ross (2013a, P.12) suggests that “understanding some of the causes of derailment in leaders and incorporating this thinking into TM practices...enables a more proactive, strategic and robust approach to the development of leadership talent.”

The literature review is structured to explore leadership talent in the broader context of the TM literature. This evidences leadership talent as subject and a sub-set of talent. It provides insight into how wider TM factors, perspectives and approaches affect how leadership talent is conceptualised. Consideration is then given to how definitions of talent are operationalised and the effects of this on the identification of leadership talent. Through a review of the historical definition of talent, insight is gained into the relationship between talent and success. The notion of success is positioned in the context of leadership talent. Success is explored as an outcome of the leader enacting their talents. The review then considers approaches in literature to the identification of the specific attributes of leadership talent; talent as object. Finally, the literature review explores the concept of leadership derailment and the causes of derailment suggested by literature.

2.2 TM factors affecting the identification of leadership talent as subject

Literature presents vague and conflicting views of who and what constitutes talent in an organisational context (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013; CIPD 2011; Tansley *et al.* 2007; Thorne and Pellant 2007; Blanchard 2007; Goffee and Jones 2006; Berger 2004). This has implications for the identification of leadership talent as a sub-group of talent. The ability to attain a clear, unequivocal view of talent is made complicated in a number of ways:

- 1. A focus on TM practices:** There is a prevalence of practitioner and consultancy based literature in the TM field (Ariss *et al.* 2014; Thunnissen *et al.* 2013; Iles *et al.* 2010b). Scullion *et al.* (2010) argue that this is a result of the critical nature of TM to organisational decision makers driving practitioner interest, with academic literature lagging behind. As a result academics argue, there is a focus on TM practices rather than who talent is considered to be and why (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013). This results in a lack of definition of both talent as a whole and leadership talent as a subset of talent.
- 2. Lack of definition of talent in TM:** Emphasis in literature on TM means the term talent is taken for granted and remains undefined (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013; Reilly 2008; Tansley *et al.* 2007). Scholars adopt alternative perspectives and approaches to TM thereby conceptualising it differently (Ariss *et al.* 2014). Alternative approaches to conceptualising TM results in different ways of defining talent. This has implications for identifying leadership talent as a sub-group of talent. Once the sub-group 'leaders' has been identified as being a definition of talent, further explanation on whether this encompasses all leaders or if further differentiation is needed to identify the talented leaders, is lacking. An absence of a distinction between leaders and talented leaders fails to recognise that not all leaders are talented.
- 3. Organisationally specific definitions of talent in TM:** In practice, TM requires TM decision makers to define talent. Organisations then create their own definition of talent, specific to their organisational requirements, rather than accept a prescribed definition (CIPD 2007 cited in Iles *et al.* 2010b). Iles *et al.* (2010b) summarise the interesting research of Towers Watson (2004) which recommended that organisations

should tailor definitions of talent to the organisation. In the research Towers Watson found that of 32 companies they interviewed, 87% had their own definition of talent. Definitions were adopted dependent on organisational strategy and factors. Where definitions of talent are organisationally specific, how well leadership talent is defined is then dependant on the capability within the organisation to determine appropriate criteria for leadership talent beyond those in leadership roles or the potential to move into them. How such definitions are understood and applied across the organisation will then depend on how well they are operationalised.

4. *Interchangeable terminology when referring to talent:* As authors, particularly from practice and consultancy, align to particular definitions of talent, the term talent becomes interchangeable with different terminology. This has implications for the definition of leadership talent for example:

‘A’ players: defined as high performers with high potential (Berglas 2006; Huselid *et al.* 2005) and as “those who set the standard for exceptional performance by consistently delivering results and inspiring and motivating others” (Michaels *et al.* 2001, p.127).

‘High flyers’: used as a word to encompass talented executives (McCall 1998).

‘Superkeepers’TM: defined as superior performers, inspiring others to perform, embodying core competencies and having a disproportionate impact on future organisational performance (Berger and Berger 2004).

As organisations adopt their own specific definitions of talent, the use of consultancy organisations to assist in this may also affect the terminology used to define leadership talent. The consultancy organisation, Korn Ferry for example, has been influential in supporting organisations in defining leadership talent using their ‘learning agility’ model and the nine-box talent model of performance and potential. Learning agility is summarised as attributes of leadership talent later in this chapter.

5. *The impact of differentiating talent on definitions of leadership talent:* There is a link between who talent is perceived to be and the way talent is defined. An emphasis on leaders as talent introduces significant complexity given the extensive and diverse

literature in the leadership domain. The debate then becomes whether for example, being a great leader (Goleman *et al.* 2002; Collins 2001) or an effective leader (Charan *et al.* 2011) is the same as being talented as a leader. Alternatively, others suggest talent are those who demonstrate superior performance in role (Iles *et al.* 2010b; Berger and Berger 2004). This widens the scope of those perceived as having talents to anyone who is a high performer. Where the sub-group 'leaders' is identified as talent, without further differentiation the assumption may be that all leaders are high performers. The literature on leadership derailment disputes this. Similarly, where talent is defined as those who provide a disproportionate contribution to the success of the organisation (CIPD 2011) 'contribution' and 'success' are contextual. A perception of who is or has talent is then influenced by how the organisation defines contribution and success.

The various perspectives on TM and correspondingly different approaches also affect talent and therefore leadership talent, as subject.

2.3 The impact of TM perspectives on leadership talent as subject

The "conceptual confusion" (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013, p.290) surrounding TM results in a corresponding lack of consistent definitions (Thunnissen *et al.* 2013). Some authors argue that this is due to practitioners and consultancies historically leading the way in discussions on TM with academic research and evidenced based theory lagging behind (Ariss *et al.* 2014, Iles *et al.* 2010a). Other authors suggest that this is due to TM as a rapidly growing area of study (Collings *et al.* 2015) which is now maturing (Sparrow and Makram 2015) but lacking in conceptual frameworks and definitions (Vaiman *et al.* 2012; Collings and Mellahi 2009). Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2015, p.264) draws on the work of Dries (2013a) to suggest that TM should be considered a phenomenon as "no currently available theory has enough scope to account for the phenomenon or for relevant cause-and-effect relationships associated with it." Identifying this lack of theory influenced the research approach (see chapter two, research methodology and methods).

Different perspectives on and approaches to TM result in differing interpretations of who or what talent is and the emphasis placed on leaders as talent. Emerging from the

literature are a number of different perspectives on TM (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2015; Sparrow and Makram 2015; Dries 2013b; Collings and Mellahi 2009), these are:

- TM as a set of HR practices
- TM as differentiating human capital
- Strategic talent management
- Global talent management
- Multi-disciplinary approaches

TM as a set of HR practices has received criticism as simply re-badging (Collings and Mellahi 2009) whilst Tatoglu *et al.* (2016) suggest this approach requires a sophisticated suite of practices to be identified. This has led to a debate on TM as simply 'old wine in new bottles' (Cascio and Boudreau 2016; Ariss *et al.* 2014; Iqbal *et al.* 2013; Iles *et al.* 2010b; Chuai and Preece 2008; Adamsky 2003). This debate is out of the scope of this study as of greater influence on how leadership talent is defined are the approaches of differentiating human capital, strategic and global talent management and multi-disciplinary approaches to TM.

2.3.1 Differentiating employees for TM purposes

The differentiation of employees through TM practices was initially a reaction to the cry from a group of McKinsey consultants that there was a 'war for talent' (Michaels *et al.* 2001; Chambers *et al.* 1998). Such individuals were perceived to be in high demand and had to be identified and retained. Employees may be differentiated at an individual level (the 'A' players) or through the creation of 'talent pools.' Talent pools are groups of individuals identified as talent who can fill particular roles (Tansley 2011). These roles are the important roles in the organisation identified as the 'A' positions. 'A' players should fill 'A' positions (Huselid *et al.* 2005).

The emphasis in differentiating individual employees is on identifying those 'A' players that typically make up only 10-20% of the workforce (Beechler and Woodward 2009). Common ways of differentiating these employees are according to the strategic significance of their role, their performance or their potential (Iles *et al.* 2010b). The usual

'targets' of a differentiated approach to TM are leaders (Tansley 2011; McDonnell 2011) who are the focus of the 'war for talent' rhetoric. Where leaders are identified as talent, this definition of talent is typically expanded to include those with the potential to move into leadership roles (Tansley 2011; Iles *et al.* 2010b; Makela *et al.* 2010; Collings and Mellahi 2009). Leaders may then become a key talent pool (Boudreau and Ramstad 2005) crucial to the organisation and a differentiated sub-group of employees for TM purposes. In much of the TM literature however, there is a lack of reference to any requirement to further differentiate leaders for TM purposes, rather there is the assumption that all leaders are talented leaders. One of the few authors to acknowledge a need for further differentiation is Tansley (2011, p.270) who suggests that leaders identified as 'talent' may be further categorised into "exceptional talent for executive-level roles."

A challenge with differentiating leadership talent is that this requires an organisation to have a robust understanding of what it means to be talented as a leader, which needs to be operationalised to ensure clarity, fairness and consistency of application across the leadership population. The McKinsey 'war for talent' rhetoric was a rallying cry for organisations to focus attention on leadership talent with Axelrod *et al.* (2001) arguing that the top 20% of managers (the "A" players) deliver significantly greater results. However, the need for organisations to further differentiate their leadership population into those leaders who are the 'A' players appears to have been largely ignored in TM literature. Furthermore, evidence for how these 20% of managers can be identified is lacking, with McKinsey authors Chambers *et al.* (1998, p.45) merely suggesting that "at senior levels of an organisation, the ability to adapt, to make decisions quickly in situations of high uncertainty, and to steer through wrenching change is critical."

2.3.2 The strategic talent management approach to TM

Central to the strategic talent management perspective, is the view of people as a strategic asset who can help implement the organisation's strategy (Branham 2005; Crain 2009; Collings and Mellahi 2009). Collings and Mellahi (2009, p.304) define strategic talent management as:

“Activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resources architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation.”

Key proponents of strategic talent management Collings and Mellahi (2009), suggest that the competitive advantage for organisations is a result of having high value people in strategic positions. They argue that ‘high value’ people relates to those individuals who are considered high potential and high performers although both these terms are undefined. Emphasis is on identifying the most strategic positions within the organisation and ensuring high potential, high performing individuals fill these roles. The workforce is differentiated according to their potential or ability to perform in roles of strategic importance, thereby matching ‘A’ players to ‘A’ positions. Schuler (2015) argues that this then results in a target population for TM purposes of the top 1-5% of the company whilst Branham (2005) suggests that 20% of the workforce contribute 80% of the value referring to those job roles that are critical to achieving the organisation’s strategy.

Where leadership roles are identified as being of strategic importance, individuals with the capability or potential to perform in these roles are perceived as ‘talent.’ There is then the expectation that this leadership talent will ‘perform.’ One of the challenges of this approach is how performance and potential are defined or evidenced. Such an approach requires an organisation to have an effective, robust and fair performance management process in place in order to be able to assess performance. However, potential then still needs to be defined and measured. The challenges in defining leadership potential are discussed later in the review.

This approach to TM is important in the context of leadership talent as leadership roles are typically identified as ‘key positions’ (Ulrich and Smallwood 2012; Leigh 2005). High potential incumbents are those able to fill these leadership roles. The focus of TM is then the recruitment and selection of the ‘right people’ for the ‘right roles’ using criteria

consistent with the values of the organisation or through performance management linked to strategic goals (Crain 2009).

Schuler (2015, p.47) in one of the few academic papers to draw on the perspective of named organisations, cites organisations such as IKEA, Unilever, Facebook, Toyota and IBM as “taking seriously the concept and practice of managing their people as valuable human capital, as talent, as a high value corporate asset.” This talent is then linked to “leadership, values, company culture, strategies and the external environment of their companies.” The consequence here for definitions of leadership talent, is that they are organisationally specific.

The strategic talent management approach to TM requires TM decision makers to be able to define appropriate criteria for their leadership talent, operationalise this criteria and be able to ‘talent spot’ against this in order to identify ‘the right people’ for leadership roles. There is a lack of organisational case studies in the TM literature, which means that how successfully this process is executed by organisations is unclear. If this process is not executed well, then the foundation on which the organisation bases further strategic talent management practices is fundamentally flawed. Organisationally specific definitions of leadership talent that are linked to values, organisation culture and strategy need TM decision makers to be able to successfully ‘translate’ such values, culture and strategy into the attributes required of talented leaders. Little attention is paid in the strategic talent management literature to the effectiveness with which organisations define talent, operationalise these definitions and benchmark leaders against them to identify their leadership talent. Given the centrality of this to successful strategic talent management practices this is a significant oversight. It fails to consider that organisations may not be identifying and selecting the right leadership talent in the first place, evidenced in the leadership derailment literature. It is remiss of proponents of strategic talent management to fail to consider the effectiveness with which organisations are defining leadership talent and the derailment potential of leaders if organisations get this wrong.

From the perspective of the individual leader, there are significant implications in organisational definitions of talent. How leadership talent is defined in one organisation,

for example Google, may be different from the way such talent is defined in for example, IKEA. How this affects the mobility of leadership talent across organisations is then dependent on the degree to which such attributes are organisationally specific (for example product knowledge) or transferable attributes (for example influencing skills). Whilst there is cross over between the two approaches of differentiating employees and strategic talent management, the starting points are different. The starting point for strategic talent management is in the identification of pivotal positions (Collings and Mellahi 2009) which typically include leadership positions. The starting point of a differentiated approach is to identify the individuals or sub-groups of the employee population to be defined as talent, with a particular focus on leaders as talent. In both approaches, the ability to be able to effectively define and identify leadership talent is however, crucial.

2.3.3 Global talent management

Some authors argue TM is of greater significance for multi-national corporations (MNC's) (McDonnell *et al.* 2010) driven by an increased requirement for international leadership talent, a shortage of such talent and the corresponding effect on the ability of MNC's to address strategic challenges (Makela *et al.* 2010; Beechler and Woodward 2009). However, global talent management also suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity (King 2015; Farndale *et al.* 2010) which affects how the criteria for leadership talent are understood. Scullion *et al.* (2010, p.106) offer this definition:

“all organisational activities for the purpose of attracting, selecting, developing, and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles (those roles necessary to achieve organisational strategic priorities) on a global scale. Global talent management takes into account the differences across national contexts for how talent should be managed in the countries where they operate.”

It is argued global talent management is a response to the need for MNC's to manage talent globally (McDonnell *et al.* 2010; Scullion *et al.* 2010) with talent a “critical agenda item” (Beechler and Woodward 2009, p.273). As with strategic talent management, global talent management requires the attraction and selection of the ‘best’ employees

(‘A’ players) to fill strategic roles. These strategic roles need to be identified as does the criteria by which individuals can be deemed to be the ‘best.’ In global talent management literature leadership and management roles have been identified as strategic roles. Literature in this area is gathering impetus due to a number of key challenges related to sourcing talent to fill these roles including:

- The need to secure the managerial talent necessary for global operations (Farndale *et al.* 2014; Scullion *et al.* 2010; McDonnell *et al.* 2010; Collings *et al.* 2007; Scullion *et al.* 2007).
- Shortages of international management and leadership talent (Tarique and Schuler 2010; McDonnell *et al.* 2010; Farndale *et al.* 2010; Makela *et al.* 2010; Scullion *et al.* 2010; Scullion and Collings 2011; Cohn *et al.* 2005; Sparrow *et al.* 2004; Sloan *et al.* 2003; Suutari 2002; Gregersen *et al.* 1998; Scullion 1994).
- The HR challenges of TM on a global scale and shortages of managerial talent (Schuler *et al.* 2011; Farndale *et al.* 2010; Beechler and Woodward 2009).

Global talent management literature appears more specific than TM literature in citing high-level executives and those with high managerial potential as talent (Schuler *et al.* 2011). Whilst these roles are clearly a key priority for global talent management beyond being ‘leadership’ or ‘managerial’ talent, as with TM literature, the criteria by which individuals are deemed such talent, are lacking. Conger (2014, p.199) concluded, “many firms have not identified a baseline set of global leadership competencies.” This lack of identification of the characteristics required of these talented managers and leaders is significant in light of the suggestion by Vaiman *et al.* (2012, p.928) that when faced with global TM decisions and the selection of appropriate candidates, decision makers choose candidates who are “good enough – based on previous experience and predispositions and biases.” It is questionable in these situations whether the managers and leaders hired as a result of such a process could be considered leadership talent. If candidates are being recruited into leadership roles on the basis that they are ‘good enough,’ that a high proportion of leaders derail, becomes more understandable.

The identification of leadership talent as a requirement for global talent management is evident in the literature. However, global talent management literature appears to

replicate TM literature by failing to adequately define its central concept. Schuler *et al.* (2011, p.507) reviewing the global talent management literature, concluded that highly talented individuals included “high level executives, those with high managerial potential, and those with rare technical skills.” The specific attributes executives were expected to have and how potential needs to be demonstrated were undefined.

Within the global talent management literature, there appears a greater imperative to define the required characteristics of talent. Farndale *et al.* (2010) argue this is driven by increasingly higher skills levels required by organisations of their employees. Tarique and Schuler (2010, p.127) citing Adult Literacy (2008) make some attempt to identify what are considered to be required competencies in global talent management which include: “basic education, communication skills, ability to use sophisticated technology, to interact with demanding customers, to perform under changing conditions, and motivation to adapt to new conditions as needed.” They conclude however that these requirements are the same for most jobs performed in MNC’s. The required attributes of leadership talent in a global context remain undefined. Cascio and Boudreau (2016) completed a 50-year content analysis of International HRM and TM papers published through the Journal of World Business from 1965-2014 in their search for ‘global competence’ which they suggested included managerial, cultural and operational competence. However, the paper neither identified nor proposed a set of attributes that might result in global managerial competence.

The work of Conger (2014, p.198) is interesting as they are one of the few authors to not only distinguish between the required attributes of global leaders compared to leaders, but they also make a distinction between global leaders and successful global leaders. They suggest that successful global leaders should possess a “broader variety of competencies, skills and abilities in order to succeed than their domestic counterparts” and that successful global leaders “have to be perpetually engaged in the process of making sense of ambiguous new situations as well as learning their way through unexpected challenges.” Conger (2014, p.202) concludes that successful global leaders must be “speedy learners” with the “drive and responsiveness needed to learn successfully across multiple cultures, nations and boundaries.” This relates to the argument that it is the ability to learn quickly and apply that learning, which differentiates

successful leaders (Lombardo and Eichinger 2000; McCall 1998). This is discussed further in section 2.8.5 of this chapter.

Whilst there is greater consistency in global talent management literature compared to TM literature in articulating leadership talent as a sub-set of talent for TM purposes there is a similar lack of clarity on the attributes required of such talent. Guthridge and Komm (2008) argue that global consistency in talent evaluation process are important in MNC's to ensure the same standards are maintained across all business units however, how MNC's arrive at this consistency when defining the criteria for leadership talent remains unexplained.

2.3.4 Multi-disciplinary approaches to TM

Over recent years, there has been an increase in multi-disciplinary approaches to TM (Nijs, *et al.* 2014; Thunnissen and Arensbergen (2014); Dries 2013a; Ross 2013b) which have had implications for the way talent is defined. A HR perspective has dominated in the TM literature. However, the perception of people as resources or, in the strategic talent management approach, as a form of capital, "presents employees as passive commodities or assets rather than as active agents...utilising the resources of employing organisations to pursue personal goals," (Inkson 2008, p.70). Greenwood (2002, P.261) argues that "...to call a person a resource is already to tread dangerously close to placing that human in the same category with office furniture and computers." There is a need to draw on the discipline of psychology to better understand the nature of talent and the relationship between talent and performance. This is particularly important where definitions of talent are organisational specific and require an interpretation of values, culture and strategy into desired attributes.

Of influence in incorporating a psychological approach to understanding talent has been the work of Dries (2013a). Reviewing literature across HRM, industrial/organisational (I/O) psychology, educational psychology, vocational psychology, positive psychology and social psychology Dries (2013a, p.275), identified a number of alternate perspectives on talent including:

Talent as individual difference (an I/O psychology perspective): Adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to differentiation of talent based on differences would promote consideration of the significant amount of evidence-based research on individual differences in the psychology domain, including personality, cognitive ability and the reliability and validity of psychometric tools used for assessment.

Talent as giftedness (an educational psychology perspective): From educational psychology Dries (2013a), proposes talent as relating to the concept of giftedness whilst Thunnissen and Arensbergen (2014, P.183) argue that “talent and giftedness have been an area of research in educational psychology for many decades.” However, Gagne (2004, p.120) in their Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), one of the most widely recognised models (Thunnissen and Arensbergen (2014), makes a clear distinction between giftedness and talent. They suggest that giftedness is someone who has “the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities...in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10 per cent of age peers.” By comparison they suggest talent is someone who has “the outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10 per cent of age peers who are or have been active in that field or fields.” Gagne (2004) assumes giftedness to be a natural aptitude and talent as acquired mastery. Meyers *et al.* (2013, p.307) argue that there is no consensus on the meaning of the term giftedness and that “only very accomplished individuals like Mozart have been mentioned as displaying true giftedness.” The majority of research on giftedness has been conducted with children (Dries 2013a). This poses a challenge when exploring giftedness in the context of leadership talent. That much of the research on giftedness centres on children led Gagne (2004) to suggest giftedness relates to potential, as such giftedness may yet be realised whilst talent as it relates to acquired skills has already manifested as achievement.

Talents as identity (a vocational psychology perspective): Dries (2013a), suggests drawing on vocational psychology to consider how such literature operationalises talent as identity. Ibarra (1999, p.764) citing the early work of Schein (1978) suggests that professional identity develops over time and “with varied experiences and meaningful

feedback that allow people to gain insight about their central and enduring preferences, talents, and values.” Dries (2013a, p.277) interpreting the work of Whitty (2002) argues that “there is not one ultimate talent-related identity that a person should strive to fulfil.” Whitty (2002, p. 231) herself suggests that “identity is a life story,” created over time based on our recollections of the past, present understanding and future scenario planning. When considering leadership talent, this perspective implies that a leader’s talents are individualised based on their experiences and promotes talent as something that is dynamic and can be developed over time. This relates to learning agility, and is discussed further in section 2.8.5 of this chapter.

Talents as strength (a positive psychology perspective): Talents as strengths is the operationalising of talent drawn from positive psychology. Wood *et al.* (2011, p.15) define strengths as “the characteristics of a person that allow them to perform well or at their personal best.” This definition of strengths links to the requirement for talent to comprise high performance. Wood *et al.* (2011) highlight a degree of disagreement over what constitutes a strength with some definitions suggesting a strength must allow goal pursuit (Linley and Harrington 2006) and other definitions suggesting strengths are valued intrinsically regardless of outcome (Peterson and Seligman 2004).

Talents as strengths entered practitioner domain through the consultancy organisation Gallup and the product StrengthsFinder (Rath 2007), but has yet to be incorporated into definitions of talent in TM literature. Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001, p.20) argue that rather than perfecting competencies, leaders should be held “accountable for achieving the same outcomes, using whatever behavior or style that fits their strengths.” A challenge with defining talents as strengths however, is that strengths are individual characteristics that enable individuals to perform at their personal best. Individuals need to be motivated to use these strengths in achieving positive outcomes for the organisation. This requires an alignment of personal and organisational goals for strengths to be used effectively. Furthermore, in the derailment literature, reviewed later in this chapter, overplayed strengths are presented as a cause of leadership derailment.

The work of Dries (2013b) begins to address what some authors feel is a lack of focus on the individual within TM literature (Thunnissen 2016; Farndale *et al.* 2014; Collings *et al.*

2011). Dries (2013b) also opens the window to exploring a multi-disciplinary approach to TM using evidence-based concepts from psychology (and in particular positive psychology) to more rigorously define the characteristics of leadership talent. In this way, when considering the leadership derailment literature, there might be greater assurance that leaders were talented leaders in the first instance. This is in contrast to the vague, undefined notions of talent prevalent in TM literature. This multi-disciplinary approach is at its infancy. The gap in current multi-disciplinary TM literature is again in the lack of definitions of the central concept of talent and to whom 'talent' is referring. There is a lack of reference to leadership talent or an acknowledgement of the complexity in defining leadership talent.

2.4 The impact of operationalising definitions of talent

It is through TM practices that definitions of talent become operationalised as theoretical definitions of talent are put into practice within the context of the organisation. In the literature, this process of operationalising definitions of talent for the purpose of practice often changes the way in which talent is referenced throughout the same literature. For example, defining talent in a general sense, Michaels *et al.* (2001, p.xii-xiii), describe this as "the sum of a person's abilities - his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character, and drive." They expanded their definition of managerial talent (where 'managerial' included executive and leader), to suggest that "managerial talent is some combination of a sharp strategic mind, leadership ability, emotional maturity, communications skills, the ability to attract and inspire other talented people, entrepreneurial instincts, functional skills, and the ability to deliver results." They concluded that, "in this book, it (*talent*) is code for the most effective leaders and managers at all levels who can help a company fulfil its aspirations and drive its performance," (Michaels *et al.* 2001, p.xiii).

This definition of talent suggests that it is dependent on the requirement of the organisation; someone who drives organisational performance and is someone who helps the organisation achieve its results, using their own 'intrinsic gifts' to do so. However, when seeking to operationalise the definition of talent for TM purposes, i.e., to differentiate people as part of a TM process, they suggest, "...many would prefer to think

of all colleagues as equally talented...However, in reality, some people perform better than others," (Michaels *et al.* 2001, p.xiii). In this way, being talented becomes synonymous with high performance. They extend this relationship by suggesting that those high performers with high potential are the organisation's 'A players' who "define the standard for exceptional performance by consistently delivering results and inspiring and motivating others" in recognition that "some contribute more than others in terms of performance and impact on the organisation" (Michaels *et al.* 2001, p.126). The original definition was summarised as being dependant on the requirement of the organisation; someone who drives organisational performance and someone who helps the organisation achieve its results, using their own intrinsic gifts to do so. As they seek to operationalise the definition of talent, talent becomes an 'A' Player who is a high performer with high potential. Potential refers to the ability to achieve leadership roles but otherwise remains undefined.

In an attempt to operationalise definitions of leadership talent for the purposes of identifying and developing such talent, some organisations use psychometric tools to benchmark leadership capability and potential. These may or may not be incorporated into the organisation's own definitions of talent. Where they are not incorporated into the organisations definition of talent, they become an additional tool through which to benchmark a leader's 'talents'.

When operationalising definitions of talent, the 'nine-box grid' has become prevalent in organisations. This seeks to position individuals into one of nine cells based on low, medium and high potential compared to low, medium and high performance. Talent is typically categorised as the top three boxes, i.e., high potential-high performance, high potential-mid performance, high performance-mid potential, (Sparrow *et al.* 2014). The role of the TM decision maker is then to populate the grid in order to identify talent. The challenge for organisations when operationalising definitions of talent in this way is that the 'potential' axis must be defined and also operationalised across the organisation. Through the process of operationalising definitions of talent it can be seen that having talent, according to any definition in literature and being defined as talented within the context of an organisation when those definitions have been put into practice, may be different. With an absence of case study material in the academic TM literature it is

difficult to understand the effect of operationalising definitions of talent. This lack of case study material is a gap of knowledge.

2.5 'Tensions' in TM that impact definitions of leadership talent

The work of Dries (2013a) was useful in highlighting 'tensions' within TM approaches. These tensions influence how talent (including leadership talent) is conceptualised (Meyers and Woerkom 2014; Boudreau 2013). Some of those 'tensions' have already been discussed for example, the lack of differentiation between the 'who' and 'what' of talent and the practice of differentiating employees as talent (exclusive practice) rather than assuming the whole workforce is 'talented' (inclusive practice). Other tensions highlighted include talent as innate or acquired, talent as an input or output and talent as being transferable or contextual.

2.5.1 Talents as innate or acquired

Whether talent is considered innate or can be learnt affects how an organisation identifies and develops talent (Meyers *et al.* 2013). When talent is perceived to be innate, the emphasis in TM practice is on identifying the elusive 'magic ingredients' of talented leaders. Where talent is perceived to be acquired, the emphasis for TM practices is on the development of those attributes required of the organisations' talented leaders. A view of talent as innate suggests that talents are largely genetically determined, whereas the acquisition of talent suggests that with deliberate practice anyone can become a prodigy (Meyers *et al.* 2013). This is in conflict with the more evidenced giftedness literature and the argument previously cited by Gagne (2004) that giftedness is innate whereas talent is acquired. In her review of the tension between innate and acquired talent, Dries (2013a) poses the question, 'is talent 'innate?' Posing this question however, assumes talent is singular and is defined, without a definition of what the 'talent' is that is required, the question of whether it is innate or can be acquired becomes a rather circular debate.

2.5.2 Talents as input or output

Dries (2013a) presents the further tension of talent as 'input,' where the focus is on effort, motivation, ambition and career orientation and 'output' where the focus is on performance, achievement and results. However, whereas motivation is positioned as an input, a person's abilities are not positioned as either an input or an output. Furthermore rather than being a 'tension' inputs and outputs could be seen as complimentary when identifying leadership talent for example, the input of increased effort resulting in the output of increased performance, where performance is considered to be the starting point for selection as talent (Thunnissen and Arensbergen (2014). What this 'tension' does draw attention to is the need for TM decision makers to understand the correlation between specific inputs (for example, motivation and effort of leaders) and improved outputs (for example, higher levels of performance).

2.5.3 Talents as transferable or contextual

The final tension presented by Dries (2013a) is one of context. This relates to whether talents are transferable across organisations or are specific to the organisation. Whilst this is not identified as such by Dries (2013a) 'talent' as specific to the organisation is a key feature of the strategic talent management approach to TM. The 'talents' such individuals need to have are then also specific to the organisation. It is debatable however, if this is really a 'tension.' It is more realistic to assume that rather than having one single 'talent,' talented leaders have a collection attributes that comprise their collective talents. Some of these may be organisationally specific; others may be transferable. Rather than a 'tension' there is a requirement for TM decision makers to determine which are the organisationally specific 'talents' required of leaders in order to be identified as leadership talent, and which are transferable talents. For practitioners, this affects the recruitment, identification and development of talent and for leaders this affects the transferability of their talents across organisations.

The challenge with the presentation of these tensions is the degree to which they are actually tensions. Whilst it may be necessary in TM practices for talent identification and developmental purposes, to make distinctions between for example, attributes which are

innate or acquired and organisationally specific or contextual, it is more realistic to consider that in an organisational context a talented leader's collective 'talents' comprise a combination of these things. Talents as a collection of attributes is discussed in sub-section 2.8.3. Furthermore whilst Dries (2013a) raises a useful challenge to talent as either an input or an output, this again assumes an either/or dichotomy and ignores the possibility that in organisations, definitions of leadership talent may comprise both inputs (specific attributes) which result in outputs (for example, high performance).

The preceding sub-sections reviewed how definitions of and approaches to TM affect definitions of talent and consequently leadership talent. The following sub-sections explore in more detail, what literature suggests comprises talent and the consequences of this for leadership talent.

2.6 The influence of historical definitions of talent

There is a significant history attached to the definition of the term 'talent.' Historically a 'talent' was a unit of currency. In the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25: 14-30 (Biblegateway.com 2017), god gave three servants a number of talents, each according to his ability. The two servants who had the greater number of talents worked hard, invested and doubled their talents. The servant who received one talent, buried this in the ground to protect his only asset and so retained a single talent. An interpretation of this parable is that everyone is given talents and that god wants people to use these gifts (Biblegateway.com 2017). This positions talent as being an innate ability, which is supported by dictionary definitions. For example, Collins' dictionary (2016, p.1375) summarises talent as an "innate ability, aptitude or faculty, above average ability." This definition can also be found in TM literature (Tansley, 2011).

An alternative interpretation is that where talent was a unit of currency the increase in currency was a result of the mechanisms servants used to facilitate this. In this case, the mechanisms used by those servants who were successful in doubling their talents, were hard work and investment. It is the mechanisms used by the two servants to double their units of currency that is the focus of attention in this interpretation of the parable, not the talents (*unit of currency*). By comparison, the third servant was either not using these

mechanisms or using different mechanisms, thus causing the attainment of a lesser outcome. In this alternative view, the implication for TM practice is that emphasis shifts from trying to define leadership talent to understanding the mechanisms talented and successful leaders use that facilitate the achievement of greater outcomes. This also opens an area of inquiry when exploring leadership derailment. Derailment may be caused by not only the presence or absence of attributes of talent but also by the mechanisms derailed leaders do or do not use and the outcomes obtained.

The interpretation of the Parable of the Talents creates an early distinction between having innate 'God given' ability and the achievement of a result (success through increased wealth and monetary reward). This relates to the tensions previously identified by Dries (2013a) of talent as innate or acquired and as input or output. However, the distinction being made here is whether having talent (whether innate or acquired) yields a result. The important implication is that having talent is no guarantee of success as a leader. Rather, success is about having the ability to leverage effectively those talents a leader does have. In this historical definition, talent (currency) is an 'input' and success (wealth) is an 'output,' which is a result of the effective application of those talents. Relating this back to the tensions identified by Dries (2013a), it illustrates again that rather than being a 'tension,' both the inputs and the outputs need to be understood in the context of definitions of leadership talent where the underlying premise in identifying talent is that such people provide a greater competitive advantage through their contribution. The distinction between inputs (attributes of talent) and outcomes (for example, performance or success) is important as it implies the enacting of talent. The puzzle is then how these talents are enacted into success. A failure to enact talents into a beneficial outcome could result in talented leaders derailing. Whether this is the case, needs to be explored in this study.

The conclusion from historical definitions of talent is that talent is innate and that it is comparative; whereby an individual is perceived to have a greater ability when compared to others, including peers and that there is some form of outcome (performance, success or reward) for the application of these talents. This can be seen to be reflected in present day definitions of talent, firstly through the debate on talent as innate or acquired (Dries, 2013a); secondly through the practice of differentiating talent and thirdly through the

emphasis on talent as high performance. However, even in the comparison of the early biblical definition of talent with later dictionary definitions, there is a subtle discrepancy. Dictionary definitions focus on talent simply as the demonstration of a superior ability without any reference to outcomes from the demonstration of these talents. By comparison as identified in the introduction to the thesis, definitions of success focus on favourable outcomes.

2.7 Defining leadership talent and the notion of success

The use of alternate terminology when defining talent introduces the dilemma of whether these terms mean the same thing. This is particularly the case when exploring literature outside of the TM field where referring to the characteristics of leaders who are successful is more commonplace than referring to the term talented. At times the terms success and talent are used interchangeably for example, McCall (1998, p.ix) alternately references how to identify executive talent with “how successful executives get to be that way.” Similarly, the definition of SuperkeepersTM as being talented, is extended to suggest SuperkeepersTM are “role models for success” (Berger and Berger 2004, p.ix). What success means in this context, if success is at the individual or organisational level and if success is in part a definition of talent or is an outcome of being talented is unclear. One suggestion is that the definition of a SuperkeeperTM is organisationally specific and is based on “whatever it takes to be successful in your company” (Zingheim 2004, p.366). This relates to the strategic talent management approach to TM that emphasises organisationally specific definitions of talent linked to the strategy of the organisation. The suggestion that talent is organisationally specific and is based on what it means to be successful in your company raises some fundamental questions on the relationship between having talent and being successful as a leader. Firstly, is having, being or doing ‘whatever it takes to be successful in your company’ the same as being talented? Secondly, is success an outcome of enacted talents or can leaders be successful in an organisation without necessarily having ‘talents’? Thirdly, should the focus for organisations, authors, academics and practitioners continue to be on defining talent or should more attention be given to the meaning and measure of success and identifying the mechanisms leaders can use to enact the talents they do have into success as a

leader? Finally, for leaders developing their leadership career the implication is that they should focus more on understanding what it means to be successful in their current organisation than benchmarking themselves against theoretical or operationalised definitions of talent. To sustain their success across organisations there would be a requirement to understand the new definition of success and to focus on enacting their talents into that new definition. How an organisation defines success however, may not be how the individual leader defines or gives meaning to success. Although there have been calls to better integrate the individual's perspective in TM approaches, this consideration is absent from TM literature and the success of a leader remains largely defined from an organisational perspective. This lack of consideration is a significant gap in literature.

2.8 Defining leadership talent as object

The emphasis in TM literature on the practices of TM rather than who talent is considered to be and why (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013) has hindered an understanding of the attributes of talented individuals that is, talent as object. Thorne and Pellant (2007) go so far as to suggest that talent is indefinable; we simply know it when we see it. The challenge with this approach is whether those who see talent, recognise that is what they are seeing (Edenborough and Edenborough 2012). Dries (2013a, p.280) suggests, "a surprising amount of HR practitioners believe that valid identification of talented employees does not require formal assessment policies or even a formal definition of talent." Where the leadership population has been identified as 'talent' a lack of further differentiation between leaders and talented leaders could result in the erroneous assumption that all leaders are talented. This is exacerbated by a lack of literature in the TM field on the attributes of talented leaders and a lack of case study material to understand the criteria by which organisations are identifying their leadership talent.

Having reviewed the literature on TM and corresponding definitions of talent, it was found that whilst some authors define talent as a disparate collection of attributes (Micheals *et al.* 2001; Thorne and Pellant 2007) other authors focus on more specific characteristics, attributes or tendencies as being indicators of talents. Many combine the presence of these characteristics with a demonstration of personal high performance or a

superior contribution to organisational performance or the potential to achieve this, as indicators of talents (Edenborough and Edenborough 2012; CIPD 2011; Huselid *et al.* 2005; Michaels *et al.* 2001; Lombardo and Eichinger 2000).

The definitions of talent provided by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013, p.291) and tabled in the introduction to the thesis on page 7 provide an example of the range of required characteristics of talent presented by authors. Extrapolated these include:

Source	Attributes of talent
Bethke-Langenegger (2012)	Organisational/job specific qualification and knowledge, social and methodical competencies, characteristic attributes such as eager to learn or achievement oriented which ensure the competitiveness of the company.
Silzer and Dowell eds. (2010)	Exceptional skills and abilities.
Gonzalez-Cruz <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Competencies developed and applied to perform with excellence.
Cheese <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Experience, knowledge, skills and behaviours.
Ulrich (2007)	Competence, knowledge, skills, values, commitment and contribution through finding meaning and purpose in their work.
Tansley <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Making a difference to organisational performance, through immediate contribution or long-term potential.
Tansley <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Skills, knowledge, cognitive ability, potential, values and work preferences.
Michaels <i>et al.</i> (2001)	Abilities, intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character, drive and ability to learn and grow.
Jerico (2001)	Superior results in a particular context.
Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001)	Recurring patterns of thought, feeling or behaviour applied productively.
Williams (2000)	Exceptional ability, achievement, high competence, potential.
Gagne (2000)	Abilities or skills.

Table 3: Attributes of talent extrapolated from definitions of talent. Sourced from Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013, p.291)

This table illustrates the diversity with which various authors perceive the attributes of talent as a combination of skills, knowledge, abilities, behaviours, competence, competencies, attributes, characteristics, cognitive ability, intelligence, qualifications, thoughts, feelings, experience, attitudes and character. This complex cocktail needs to be demonstrated at an exceptional level of achievement, productively and to a level of high performance with the potential to do more, all of which should enable the competitiveness of the company. There is no distinction made in terms of what this cocktail might look like across the different sub-groups of talent, including leadership talent or attempts made to define the attributes specifically. This is prevalent in TM

literature. It is unsurprising that when organisations seek to operationalise an eclectic cocktail of attributes and use the resulting definition to identify leadership talent that this talent spotting exercise might prove ineffective. The leadership derailment literature suggests this is the case.

Influenced by practitioners various popular approaches have emerged to defining the 'what' of talent, these include competencies, emotional intelligence, learning agility, diverse characteristics and creativity. These are explored next in the context of leadership talent.

2.8.1 Competencies as talents

Pre-dating much of the literature in the TM field, and providing an example of the use of the term talent outside of the TM field, competencies as talents evolved from the influential work of McClelland (1973) who challenged the view that cognitive intelligence alone adequately accounted for people's effectiveness (Boyatzis 2011). McClelland (1973, p.7) proposed a need to test for competence in order for a "wider array of talents" to be assessed than those identified through intelligence tests. He perceived intelligence tests to be fundamentally flawed (McClelland 1973) and failing to account for success, in particular in executive roles (McClelland 1998; McClelland 1973). This was contested by Barrett and Depinet (1991, p.1021) who argued, "evidence has not shown that competencies can surpass cognitive ability tests in predicting any important occupational behaviour." Regardless of the assertions of Barrett and Depinet (1991) the concept of competencies proposed by McClelland (1973) gained attention and amongst practitioners competency testing has become common practice in organisations (Vazirani 2010) with scholarly research continuing to trail behind (Boyatzis 2008).

McClelland (1973, p.9) suggested competency testing of job roles using criteria sampling based on job analysis which would enable the identification of the skills, behaviours and "personality variables" that "predict proficiency" and were required for excellence in role. As an individual became more competent in these, excellence would ensue. In recognition that such analysis could result in the identification of hundreds of criteria McClelland (1973) suggested these criteria should be clustered. Clusters would comprise

both occupational and social competencies and should reflect important life outcomes (McClelland 1998). The work of McClelland (1998; 1973) is interesting in the context of this research as he considered the notion of executive success to include success in life outcomes that encompassed “occupations, health, family and social life, education” (McClelland 1998, p.331). Success in these life outcomes was a result of superior demonstration of occupational and social competencies. In his later work, McClelland (1998) suggested that competency assessment for high-level executives and managers should begin with an exploration of the thoughts and actions associated with success in such positions and with success in life outcomes. In identifying these competencies, a distinction was made between the top 5% to 10% of executives and the next 11% to 25% of executives. It is unclear what criterion was applied in order to identify the top 5% to 10% of executives.

Barrett and Depinet (1991) argued that a significant flaw in the work of McClelland (1973) was his failure to define adequately the concept of competency. Within literature definitions of competency and competencies are almost as wide ranging as definitions of talent with Vazirani (2010, p.123) suggesting, “people using these terms shape their meaning to fit their own convenience.” Mirabile (1997, p.5) defines competencies as “a knowledge, skill, ability or characteristic associated with high performance on the job” whilst Boyatzis (2011, p.91) defines them as “a set of related but different sets of behaviours organized around an underlying construct called the ‘intent’.” Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003, p.78) introduce competencies as differentiating effective and ineffective managers suggesting “a competency is a performance capability that distinguishes effective from ineffective managers in a particular organisation.” In seeking to define the term more explicitly Madell and Michalak (2004) associate competencies not only with individual proficiency but also with organisational success. They suggest competencies are “the observable and measurable skills, knowledge and behaviours that contribute to enhanced employee performance and organisational success” (Madell and Michalak 2004, p.384). This relationship between competency, individual performance and organisational success is particularly relevant in the context of strategic talent management where it is suggested that definitions of talent should be organisationally specific and focus on strategic roles that should be filled by ‘A’ players. Talents would

comprise the competencies required for these strategic roles and 'A' players would be those individuals who demonstrated these competencies at a superior level. Given that leadership roles are typically identified as strategic roles in strategic talent management, understanding the competencies required in these roles goes some way to identifying talent as object for leadership talent. Briscoe and Hall (1999, p.38) argue that competencies are perceived by organisations as "an important tool in helping to define and improve superior executive performance," and provide a common 'language' through which the requirements of executive performance can be understood. In their discussion of competencies, they refer to competencies as providing a roadmap for executives to understand "what I have to do" rather than "what talents I have" (Briscoe and Hall 1999, p.39).

In their research of 31 organisations, Briscoe and Hall (1999) found that 29 of these were using some form of competency-based approach to both executive selection and development. They identified three approaches to the creation of competency frameworks used by their research organisations, a research-based approach, a strategy-based approach and a values-based approach. The research-based approach was the predominant approach used by participating organisations. Competencies were identified through the behavioural-event interviewing of high-performing executives. Executives were asked to give examples of critical incidents in order to identify the behaviours "that exemplified the keys to their success" (Briscoe and Hall 1999, pp.40-43). McClelland (1998, p.331) argued, "coding competencies from behavioural-event interviews ...produces assessments that are reliable and validly associated with success as an executive." However, the approach does require that those executives interviewed have been identified as outstanding (McClelland 1998). If the purpose of the interviews was to identify the competencies of outstanding executives, it is unclear what criteria was used in the first instance, to identify these executives as outstanding.

The strategy-based approach links required competencies to the strategic needs of the organisation. The challenge with this approach is how the organisation aligns competencies where the strategy is poorly defined, executed or changes. Where competencies are used to define talent as object, there is a need for the TM decision makers to be able to accurately identify the competencies required to achieve the

strategy. The third approach to competency identification used by participants in the research of Briscoe and Hall (1999) was the values-based approach. This links required competencies to the values of the organisations. Research showed however, that often the competencies were reflective not of the values of the organisation but of the CEO (Briscoe and Hall 1999, p.43). This was exemplified through a participant observation that following the creation of a competency framework through a review of literature and benchmarking “he looked at them for about ten seconds and changed them using his own words and phrases.” The success of this approach assumes an appropriate interpretation of values into competencies. TM approaches that advocate definitions of talent as being aligned to strategy and values are open to the same challenges.

The most significant challenge in using a competency-based approach to the definition of leadership talent is a lack of consensus and evidence-based research on which competencies are indicative of such talent. This is further complicated by the levels of detail used to describe the resulting competencies (Mirabile 1997). McClelland (1998) identified twelve competencies that he argued were most frequently associated with outstanding executives. These included achievement orientation, analytical thinking, conceptual thinking, developing others and flexibility. By comparison, Berger (2004) suggests there are no more than 30 institutional competencies including action orientation, communication, creativity/Innovation, critical judgement, customer orientation, interpersonal skill, leadership, teamwork and technical or functional expertise. They argue that organisations typically choose 9-11 in their competency assessment process. Employees (including leaders) are benchmarked against these competencies, with a high correlation to the competencies being indicative of ‘talent.’ Boyatzis (2011 and 2008) differentiated between ‘threshold’ clusters of competencies required of the leaders and managers and clusters of competencies that were indicators of outstanding performance. Threshold competencies comprised expertise and experience, knowledge and basic cognitive competencies including memory and reasoning. Boyatzis (2011) cites a persuasive number of scholars across a 40-year period to argue that three clusters of competencies differentiate outstanding performers in managerial and leadership roles. These are complex cognitive competencies including systems thinking and pattern recognition, emotional intelligence competencies and social

intelligence competencies. Competencies were therefore “a behavioural approach to emotional, social and cognitive intelligence” (Boyatzis 2008, p.7). Boyatzis (2011 and 2008) argued that emotional and social intelligence competencies accounted substantially for variances in people’s performance. This is explored further in sub-section 2.8.2.

Boyatzis, *et al.* (2004) combine the use of competencies with other attributes to define talent, including leadership talent, as object. They suggest that knowledge, competency and motivation are the ‘what,’ ‘how’ and ‘why’ of capability and ‘greatness’. Knowledge is the “threshold talent for greatness,” competency is how talented people use that knowledge to make things happen and motivation is why talented individuals are motivated to use their talents (Boyatzis *et al.* 2004, p.338). Competencies, they argue are therefore a “behavioural manifestation of talent” (Boyatzis 2011, p.8).

The competency approach and competencies as talents, appears to provide significant insight into the attributes required of leadership talent, particularly given the emphasis on success as an outcome of these competencies. However, the competencies that might comprise leadership talent are rarely referenced in TM literature. Tarique and Schuler (2010) for example, whilst citing the need for required competencies in global talent management, provide only a cursory summary of what these may be and despite an emphasis on leadership and managerial talent in global talent management, relate these competencies to all employees rather than leaders.

There are significant challenges to adopting a competency-based definition of leadership talent despite their popularity. Because of their research Briscoe and Hall (1999, p.48) sound a cautionary note that competency models can become overly complicated and descriptive, therefore difficult to implement (Mirabile 1997). An ‘industry’ has evolved around competency assessment with consultancies providing a range of tools, and models to support organisations in the creation of their competency frameworks (Vazirani 2010). If competencies are the behaviours and skills vital for “the success of each employee and to the success of the organisation” (Berger 2004, p.7) then ‘having talent’ is less about the unique attributes of an individual and more about the best fit between their behaviours and skills and the organisations’ defined competencies. It is this best fit that results in personal and organisational success, rather than the demonstration

of any specific definition of talent. For organisations, this shifts the focus from understanding definitions of leadership talent to identifying what leaders need to demonstrate to be successful in their current job role, any future job roles and within the organisation. Competency frameworks need to be an accurate assessment of role requirements and account for variations in the responsibilities and expertise needed in different leadership roles. This relies on the capability within the organisation to effectively define and operationalise these competencies. For individual leaders, this is less about their own unique talents and more about the role or organisational competencies they need to demonstrate in order to be successful within their specific organisation. If they seek to move across organisations, they need to distinguish between transferable and organisationally specific competencies and identify which new competencies they need to develop in order to maintain success in their next organisation. For TM researchers it shifts the focus from definitions of leadership talent to identifying those specific competencies that result in success in role and within the organisation.

A further challenge of the competency approach to defining leadership talent is that there is a sense that lists of competencies are an attempt to clone the characteristics of those who have previously demonstrated success without recognising the diversity of human nature. Some authors (Goffee and Jones 2006; McCall 1998) are particularly scathing in their dismissal of competency models in defining leadership talent suggesting, “beleaguered executives are invited to compare themselves with lists of leadership competencies and characteristics - against which they always find themselves wanting. Attempts to imitate others, even the most successful leaders are doomed to failure” (Goffee and Jones 2006, p.10). Furthermore, there are “no universal characteristics. What works for one leader will not work for another” (Goffee & Jones 2006, p.10). McCall (1998, p.5) argue that in the context of leadership talent “it is not the demonstration of acquired assets that is key, but rather it is the ability to acquire assets needed for future situations” and that “no single set of characteristics or competencies can be meaningfully applied to all leaders.” Nevertheless, the use of competencies to benchmark leadership talent remains a popular choice for organisations seeking to identify and develop their leaders. Despite the common usage of competency models in organisations for the

identification and development of leadership talent, TM literature and literature on competencies are disconnected. This inhibits a greater understanding of which competencies may be most relevant to the identification of leadership talent.

2.8.2 Emotional intelligence as talents

Emotional Intelligence (EI) gained prominence through the competency movement with some proponents of emotional intelligence (Boyatzis 2011; Bar-On 2010; Seal *et al.* 2006; Goleman 1996) suggesting that emotional and social competency rather than cognitive ability accounted for leadership success. As discussed previously, competency frameworks that included emotional and social competencies gathered momentum in organisations as ways of identifying leadership talent. Following the analysis of nearly 500 competency models of global organisations (Goleman *et al.* 2002, p.325) concluded that the more senior the leader “the more EI competencies emerged as the reason for their effectiveness.” They argued that “EI contributes 80 to 90 percent of the competencies that distinguish outstanding from average leaders” (Goleman *et al.* 2002, p.325) and that IQ failed to account for the variance (Emmerling and Goleman 2005). Whilst such figures have been contested (Antonakis and Dietz 2010; Antonakis *et al.* 2009), there is a compelling evidence to demonstrate EI distinguishes the ‘stars’ amongst top executives and results in the superior performance of leaders (Cherniss 1999).

A common definition of EI is that of Salovey and Mayer (1990, p.186) who define EI as a “subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” However, leading proponents of EI (Bar-On 1997; Goleman 1996; Salovey and Mayer 1990) define and conceptualise EI differently. They also operationalise EI differently through test instruments. This has implications for how the EI of leaders is benchmarked when such tests are administered in organisations. Mayer *et al.* (2003, p.267) argue that for EI to be considered an intelligence it must be “capable of being operationalised as a set of abilities.” These abilities include reflectively regulating emotions, understanding emotions, assimilating emotion in thought and perceiving and expressing emotion (Mayer and Salovey 1997). Their model of EI has been operationalised as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer *et al.*

2003). Emphasis in their research has been on the scoring and reliability of this ability based model, which has gained greater support within academia.

Goleman (1996) is considered to have popularised EI during the evolution of competencies as an indicator of leadership success (Boyatzis 2011). Goleman (2000) proposed a competency-based model of EI comprising four capabilities, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social skill. Each of these comprised a set of competencies with 20 competencies in total including self-confidence, adaptability, achievement drive, organisational awareness, leadership and building bonds. This has since been revised to comprise 12 competencies and is operationalised as the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) in conjunction with Korn Ferry Hay Group consultancy firm (Goleman and Boyatzis 2017). This model is commonly referred to as a mixed model of EI (Walter *et al.* 2012; Mayer *et al.* 2003) as it includes attributes other than those that relate to the understanding and regulation of emotion in self and others. Bar-On who is credited with introducing the term emotional quotient (EQ) as a measure of EI and with promoting the link between emotional and social competency (Seal *et al.* 2006) also proposes a mixed model of EI. His Emotional Quotient Inventory, a self-assessed test of EI, measures 15 competencies grouped into five categories: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Stress Management, Adaptability and General Mood (Bar-On 2006).

Mayer *et al.* (2003) are critical of mixed models of EI arguing that they combine competencies, traits and personal and social functioning and as such do not adhere to the criteria required of an 'intelligence.' This broader conceptualisation creates ambiguity over what EI includes (Walter *et al.* 2012). Regardless of this and the criticism of some authors (Antonakis *et al.* 2009) that EI research lacks rigour, the popularity of EI as a measure to predict leadership success has not abated. Walter *et al.* (2012, p.217) conclude from their review of EI research that whilst empirical evidence does not support "exaggerated claims," EI does relate to leadership performance and success, supporting the review of research by Cherniss (1999). Walter (2012, p.215) argue, "effective leaders skilfully manage their own and followers' feelings – leadership roles are ripe with intense emotional demands." It follows therefore, that EI would be a pre-requisite for effective, successful leadership (Walter 2012; McCleskey, 2012).

Regardless of the popularity of EI amongst practitioners, there are challenges in including EI as a definition of leadership talent. Evidenced based research on EI and the relationship between EI and leadership success is still in its infancy. Such research is crucial given the ambiguity caused by different approaches to EI, some of which call into question whether EI is actually an 'intelligence.' EI has gathered significant criticism from the academic community due to conflicting models, the validity of measure and controversy over the significance of EI in leadership effectiveness (Cherniss 2010). Cherniss (2010, p.7) cites Matthews *et al.* (2005, p.428) as arguing that "the label 'emotional intelligence' has been rather haphazardly used to refer to a multitude of distinct constructs that may or may not be interrelated."

Different approaches to EI comprise different sets of attributes. When operationalised, leadership talent are benchmarked against these and encouraged to develop them. This raises questions with regard to which of the many EI attributes across all the models are more significant in ensuring leadership success. Whilst models share similarities each includes unique attributes. If a leader has high scores in one EI model, this does not necessarily mean they will have high scores in another. This is an important consideration for leadership development in light of Emmerling and Goleman's (2005, p.9) suggestion that "without sustained effort and attention, people are unlikely to improve their emotional intelligence."

Whilst EI competencies have been incorporated into competency based definitions of talent, in literature the application of EI is in the context of superior performance and leadership and 'life' success rather than EI as a 'talent.' This implies EI is a mechanism for achieving the outcome of performance and success rather than of talent.

2.8.3 Talents as a collection of attributes

Some authors propose talents to be a collection of different attributes for example, "the sum of a person's abilities - his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character, and drive" (Michaels *et al.* 2001, p.xii). When attributes are elaborated on or substantiated this causes a shift in emphasis to either specific attributes, the uniqueness of the attributes or the comparative level to which the

skills and attributes are demonstrated such as having a higher degree of skill in a specific area when compared to others. In seeking to operationalise their definition of talent by creating a working definition, Thorne and Pellant (2007, p.6) use the concept of “an extraordinary person.” These people are “creative, self-confident, self-starters, edgy, resilient, entrepreneurial, intellectually flexible, opportunistic, unique and different” as well as; “inspiring, driven to succeed, a natural leader, having self-belief, passionate, adaptable, committed, perceptive, emotionally resilient and optimistic.” The authors do not support these lists of attributes as comprising talent with empirical research. There is therefore a sense they are arbitrary reinforcing the observation of Ulrich (2011) that talent can mean anything the author wants it to mean. A further challenge with the lists of attributes presented is that they are applied to ‘talent.’ We are left to infer that as leadership talent is frequently a sub-set of talent for TM purposes that such attributes do in fact encompass leadership talent.

2.8.4 Talents as creativity and innovation

Some authors suggest that talent as subject (who is talent) includes creative innovators (Tansley 2011; Goffee and Jones 2009; Kets de Vries 1995). Thorne and Pellant (2007) relate definitions of talent to the work of Gardner (1997) on ‘extraordinary’ individuals as being innovators, whilst Kets de Vries (1995) suggests that “skills can be improved, talent developed. Real creativity however, necessitates special gifts.” Goffee and Jones (2009, pp.21-34) refer to such creative talent as “clever people,” suggesting that clever people are “individuals who make a disproportionate contribution to what the organisation does” and who are “extremely smart and highly creative.” In this definition of talent, creativity and the ability to innovate comprise talent as object; the talents the individuals have. Disproportionate contribution however, represents an outcome. The evidence that supports the assertion that creativity and innovation results in a disproportionate contribution is not presented. Goffee and Jones (2009, pp.21-34) go on to identify the following characteristics of clever people:

<p>Characteristics of clever people</p>	<p>Their cleverness is central to their identity They know their worth They ask difficult questions They are organisationally savvy They are not impressed by corporate hierarchy (and they don't want to be led) They expect instant access (to influential people) They want to be connected to other clever people They won't thank you (they resist being led)</p>
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Exhibit 2: Characteristics of clever people (talent). Sourced from Goffee and Jones (2009, pp.21:34)

This list provides an interesting example of the propensity in practitioner and consultancy based literature to present rather emotive descriptors of talent that are not evidenced or research based. Such research would be crucial here in understanding the outcome of some of these seemingly negative attributes of talent for example, not thanking people. Whilst the emphasis here is on talent as 'clever people,' it is unclear if leaders could also be 'clever people' who were creative and innovative. If these characteristics of talent might also apply to leaders, research is needed to identify the manifestation of these talents as success or derailment. This list of characteristics is interesting as it provides an insight into the 'darker' side of talent for example, clever people not wanting to be led. This 'darker side' is not considered in academic TM literature but is a significant feature of leadership derailment literature.

2.8.5 Talents as the ability to learn

For some authors (McCall 1998) talent is less about competencies, collections of attributes, or specific skills and is more about the development of skills and competencies through experience and according to organisational requirements. Talented individuals are those that have the capacity to continually learn and grow in the context of the environment (Lombardo and Eichinger 2000; McCall 1998). Critical of a competency based approach to the definition of talent McCall (1998, p.5) argues that "if executive leadership is mostly learned and the school from which it is learned is mostly experience, then the competencies that differentiate leaders from followers are the result of accumulated experience, not their antecedents." He goes on to suggest that leadership

potential is “the demonstration of the ability to acquire the assets needed for future situations” (McCall 1998, p.5).

Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) support the argument that talented executives are those that have the capacity to learn continually. Whilst they agree that it makes sense to include attributes that are stable over time such as intelligence and some personality traits on the ‘success’ profiles for current or future executives, they argue “what evidence exists that a promising 25 year old looks like a younger version of a 50 year old successful executive?” (Lombardo and Eichinger 2000, p.321). They go on to suggest that selection and identification of talent, “should be a combination of ...those characteristics that don’t change much and can be detected early (such as intelligence) and those that flower across time as the person learns to deal with fresh situations” Lombardo and Eichinger 2000, p.321). In this way, “learning from experience is how a person demonstrates what is termed high potential” (Lombardo & Eichinger 2000, p.321). They termed this process ‘learning agility.’

In operationalising their definition of learning agility, Eichinger *et al.* (2010) created an assessment tool called Choices Architecture™. This characterises learning agility as comprising 27 dimensions that individuals demonstrating learning agility are supposed to have, do or be for example, drive, light touch, essence, inspire others, taking the heat, critical thinker and experimenter. These dimensions are grouped into the four categories of mental agility, people agility, change agility and results agility. Through the creation of such tools, the definition of high potentials (those in either leadership roles or aspiring to be leaders) shifts from one of “learning from experience” (Lominger and Eichinger 2000, p.321) to being centred around a complex set of ambiguously labelled characteristics. Given that the operationalising of learning agility creates a set of ‘dimensions’ which leaders and aspiring leaders (high potential and therefore talent) are benchmarked against, it is difficult to determine how learning agility differs from the principle of competencies as a definition of talent which McCall (1998) and Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) were so critical of.

In their work, Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) appear to use greater reference to ‘success’ than ‘talent’, for example reference to ‘success profiles’ and ‘successful executives.’ In a

way similar to competency as a definition of talent, this raises the question of whether learning agility is less a definition of talent and more about understanding how to achieve success, what it means to be successful in an organisation, how to sustain that success and how that success is defined. This is inherent in their underlying premise of talent as being a track record of superior performance alongside the demonstration of the ability to acquire those skills and competencies needed to sustain superior performance and retain executive success.

2.9 Revisiting the notion of talent and success: are they the same or different?

Using concepts such as competencies, learning agility and emotional intelligence do not bring greater clarity when seeking to define leadership talent as object, particularly as these concepts reference leadership success more than the term talent. Alternately referencing talented leaders and successful leaders causes a lack of clarity, ambiguity, misconception and inability to reach any form of consensus with regard to either a definition of talent or an understanding of leadership success. Having talent and being successful are distinct and different concepts and it is unhelpful to amalgamate the two and attribute them the same meaning. Organisational definitions of success and the meaning leaders attribute to success may be very different or even in conflict. Whereas success from an organisational perspective when referring to the outcome of talent appears to be 'high performance' or 'significant contribution,' research into how executives define success indicates it is family, wealth, work, career, recognition, fame, power, winning, overcoming challenges, friendships and meaning which are perceived to be the major indicators of success by leaders themselves (Kets de Vries 2010).

Anecdotally: popularity, leaving a legacy, being an inspirational role model and creating a great company are also indicators for leaders, of personal and professional success (Goldsmith 2008). How talent and success are differentiated and how leaders themselves perceive success is a crucial part of the puzzle the study seeks to address.

Attributing talent and success the same meaning or referencing them interchangeably fails to address how factors potentially outside of a leader's control influence their success, regardless of their own individual talents for example, the economic or political climate or strategic decisions made at the collective organisational level. When defining

success for externally recruited leaders Charan *et al.* (2011, p.xiii) suggested that “the success rate is low...cultural mismatches, lack of relationship network, resentment by current employees who wanted or expected the job and new hires focused on the next promotion ...are just some of the problems.”

The tendency in literature to amalgamate notions of talent and success in the context of leaders as well as the failure to separate personal attributes of talent from factors which effect leadership success, contributes to the inability to adequately define leadership talent as object. It also creates definitions of talent that are unrealistic in their expectations. Rather than explore additional factors that may affect a leader’s success in the organisation (Russell 2001) the emphasis in TM appears to be on creating a definition of talent that requires the individual to successfully navigate these factors for example, through competencies which stress the need for leaders to have interpersonal skills, be politically astute and culturally aware. Failure to navigate the political, economic or organisational climate or culture is then perceived as an indication of a lack of talent, rather than being perceived as contextual factors that affect the success of leaders and that may be outside of their control. This suggests that in order to be successful, talented leaders must have or be perceived to have, significant control over and ability to navigate potential obstacles to success. This relates to a persons perceived locus of control. When a person holds a belief that events are contingent on their own behaviour or attributes this indicates a belief in internal control. When events are interpreted as being the result of luck, chance, fate, under the control of others or due to complex forces, this represents a belief in external control (Wang and Anderson 1994; Rotter 1966). It would appear the assumption in TM literature is that leadership talent has internal locus of control.

Having talent and being successful are different concepts and should not be used interchangeably. By doing so, definitions of talent become over complicated, attempting to incorporate both all the ways an individual could be perceived to be talented as well as all the circumstances through which leaders become successful, yet still not answering why some talented leaders fail to achieve or sustain success or why less talented leaders do. It is suggested that a more helpful approach to understanding the nature of both talent and success is to consider talent to be largely an input; what a person has in terms of their unique ability, aptitude, skill or technical/specialist competency. This may or may

not be greater when compared to others. Success is then the consequence of effectively leveraging this talent. The puzzle is then understanding what are the inputs; the attributes that differentiate talented and successful leaders and what are the mechanisms that help them sustain their success. For the organisation this success may mean the achievement of a result, high performance or a significantly greater contribution. For the individual this may mean personal wealth, recognition or overcoming personal challenges. As a result, academic study and practitioner effort would shift from continually trying to define talent to understanding how successful leaders leverage the talents they do have into success. Rather than attempting to benchmark leaders against inaccurate, complex or aspirational definitions of talent that fail to capture the uniqueness of individual talent or, attempting to replicate the unique talents of others, attention can be given to understanding and enabling the mechanisms at both a personal and organisational level through which individuals could enact their own unique talent into success.

This shift in focus from defining leadership talent to understanding the mechanisms for translating talent to success has significant consequences for practitioners and leaders. Firstly, whilst there is debate over whether talent is innate, the mechanisms for translating the talents individual leaders do have into success can be developed. Rather than compete with other organisations for scarce talent that then needs to prove successful within the organisation, the focus can be on helping each leader to convert their unique talents into success. Secondly, this approach helps to address some of the anomalies inherent in operationalised definitions of talents for example, why some talented leaders with significant potential fail to realise this potential or derail from their career paths and why some leaders become highly successful who, when compared to their peers may not be perceived to be as talented.

The relevance of the approach that knowledge, competency and motivation become the threshold for greatness, where knowledge is the talent, competency is how talented people use that knowledge to make things happen and motivation is why talented individuals are motivated to use their talents (Boyatzis *et al.* 2004) becomes more significant. This approach can be illustrated through the review of EI competencies as definitions of talent. Whilst aspects of EI have been incorporated into competency based

definitions of talent, the concept itself remains largely focused on providing a framework through which individuals, regardless of their profession, role or status can become more successful personally and professionally. This encourages the question of whether in this scenario EI is a mechanism through which individuals translate the talents they do have into success, rather than a definition of talent itself. Of importance to the research would be understanding the characteristics of talented and successful leaders and how they are enacting these into success, i.e., what mechanisms are they using? This forms the first part of the puzzle. The next part of the puzzle would be to understand why some talented leaders with high potential derail.

2.10 Leadership derailment

In the same way that 'war for talent' has been a rallying cry for practitioners and academics to focus on TM and talent as the key to organisational success, 'the elephant in the boardroom' (Furnham 2010) and 'snakes in suits: when psychopaths go to work' (Babiak and Hare 2007) have been a call to explore the darker side of leadership. The increased interest in leadership derailment is seen to be a response to the corporate and leadership failures leading up to and beyond the economic crisis of 2008 (Inyang 2013; Zhang and Chandrasekhar 2011; Furnham 2010). Whilst the scale, scope and consequences of leadership derailment has become of greater interest to practitioners and academics there is a lack of empirical research in the field (Carson *et al.* 2012; Inyang 2013). Inyang (2013, p.84) argues that this lack of research is "despite the fact that leadership failure is ubiquitous and the current wave of corporate failures, scandals and bankruptcies in the different parts of the world were directly associated with failed corporate leadership." Carson *et al.* (2012) suggest a practical reason for the lack of research, which is the inability to gain access to samples of derailed leaders, who have typically left organisations.

Influential in providing greater understanding of the pervasiveness of leadership derailment has been the early work of Lombardo and Eichinger (1989, p.4) who suggested that, "30%-50% of managers and executives derail." They argued that these individuals were different from the general management population indicating that there were particular reasons why these individuals derailed. Whilst this research is somewhat dated,

research that is more recent evidences a similar message. Korn Ferry's (2014) research based on 40,000 360-degree feedback assessments and 9000 self-assessments identified that 26% of executives were seen as being at a high risk of derailment. Furnham (2015) suggests that between 20%-50% of executives cause chaos and mayhem and Hogan *et al.* (2009, p.3), when reviewing published estimates of managerial failure, suggested "two-thirds of existing managers are insufferable and at least half will eventually be fired." The high potential for leadership derailment has significant implications for the identification, recruitment and development of talented leaders, yet the literature on TM and the literature on derailment are surprisingly disconnected. If TM is about the 'management' of 'talent' in order to 'win the war' for talent to secure competitive advantage and organisational success then it seems nonsensical to fail to consider that 30%-50% of leaders derail and that that TM practices may have a part to play in the identification and prevention of derailment. It can be argued that the TM field with its emphasis on the 'bright side' of talent and the 'best of the best' is naive in failing to consider the shadow side of leadership talent, given the high incidence of derailment and the "mounting discontent with managerial behaviour among shareholders, employees, regulators, and citizens" (Khurama 2008, p.12). Following their empirical research into the relationship between dysfunctional behaviour, derailment and turnover Carson *et al.* (2012, p.291) argue, "managerial derailment, which includes failure in the form of organisational exit, poses costly consequences for organisations." Research by Lombardo *et al.* (1988) estimated the cost of a failed manager to be \$500,000 per manager. Accounting for inflation, Hogan *et al.* (2009) estimated this figure increased to \$1 million in 2009. Others present the higher cost of between one and two million dollars (Furnham 2010; Smart 1999) again rising to account for inflation. Furnham (2010) argues that whilst such figures are 'guesstimates' they are realistic given the associated costs. Costs include the recruiting, selecting and transitioning of a new leader, any severance package required of the exiting leader and any costs associated with the recruitment of staff who left as a result of a derailing leader. There is also a 'hidden' cost to derailing leaders represented by interference with organisational results, missed objectives, an impact on production, lost intellectual capital, inhibited growth and innovation and disengaged employees (Carson *et al.* 2012; Hogan *et al.* 2009).

The overarching message from the leadership derailment literature is that “more leaders fail and derail than become great successes” (Furnham 2010, p.4) and that the organisational cost of such failure is high. Despite this, there is lack of research outside the USA on the causes of leadership derailment. Similar to the TM literature, there is also a lack of emphasis on the perspective of the individual leader within literature and a requirement for more suggestions to come out of research to support leaders before they have derailed (Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011). Ready (2005, p.78) suggests practitioners should “ask not why leaders fail their companies; why do organisations repeatedly fail their leaders?”

2.10.1 Defining leadership derailment

Whilst there is a lack of consensus over the definition of talent, Ross (2013b) argues that there is a greater consensus over the term derailment in leadership derailment literature. This following table provides an example of such definitions:

Source	Definition
Ross (2013b, pp.12-13)	“A derailed manager or executive is perceived to be one that, whilst previously successful in their career, has failed to live up to their full potential. This has resulted in failure in role, often with the consequent exit from this role.”
Furnham (2010, pp.5-6)	“Leaders set fair in a particular direction deviate from the path, unable to move forward.”
Irwin, (2009:6)	“Derailment in our job means we are off the rails – we cannot proceed in our present jobs; just as a derailed train cannot continue on its intended path.”
Burke, (2006:92)	“Derailment in a leadership to executive role is defined as being involuntarily plateaued, demoted or fired below the level of expected achievement or reaching that level but unexpectedly failing.”
Van Velsor and Leslie (1995, p.62)	“A derailed executive is one who, having reached the general manager level, finds that there is little chance of future advancement due to a misfit between job requirements and personal skills.”
Lombardo <i>et al.</i> (1988, p.199)	“Involuntarily plateaued, demoted, or fired below the level of anticipated achievement or reaching that level only to fail unexpectedly.”

Table 4: Definitions of leadership derailment identified in literature

These definitions indicate a common and shared understanding that derailed leaders are successful up to a point, yet for some reason, go off track. The consequence of this is that future advancement is not possible so they effectively plateau, or such leaders leave the company voluntarily or involuntarily. Common to these definitions of leadership derailment is a sense that ‘something has gone wrong’ and the consequence of something going wrong, is that the leader’s career has derailed. Often derailment is presented as the metaphor of a train coming off its track (Furnham 2015; Inyang 2013). This illustrates two crucial components to leadership derailment, firstly that leaders were successful up to a point and secondly that the derailment process is involuntary (Brown 2011). That derailed leaders are successful up to a point has significant consequences for TM practices. Furnham (2010, p.viii) argue that such leaders were often “initially fated

and feted to be high flyers, talented or those who get noticed and promoted.” This indicates that not only has something gone wrong for the individual, but that something has ‘gone wrong’ in the TM practices of the organisation either during the identification or the development of leadership talent especially as such derailment may not happen until the leader becomes a CEO (Kets de Vries 1989). Even at the level of a CEO where such people “are almost always smart, savvy, hard working and experienced business leaders with track records of success...CEO tenure is shortening; many talented leaders are failing” (Burke 2006, p.92).

In the same way that introducing the idea of ‘what it takes to be successful as a leader’ expands the talent debate, introducing the notion of leadership ‘failure’ similarly expands the interpretation of derailment. Furnham (2010, pp.5-6) a leading scholar in leadership derailment, identifies what he calls “an incomplete list from an ever-growing group of words used in this area,” words which he then uses to categorise ‘sad’, ‘mad’ and ‘bad’ leaders. ‘Sad’ leaders are those who are incompetent or lacking in the skills needed for the role. ‘Mad’ are those leaders who are aberrant, anti-social or derailed. ‘Bad’ leaders are ‘dark-side’ leaders, despotic, destructive, malignant and toxic. Literature on leadership failure encompasses destructive leaders (Krasikova *et al.* 2013; Schyns and Schilling 2013; Shaw *et al.* 2011; Einarsen *et al.* 2007; Padilla *et al.* 2007); toxic leaders (Pelletier 2012; Walton 2007; Goldman 2006); psychopathic leaders (Boddy 2014; Boddy 2011a; Boddy 2011b) and the ‘dark triad’ of narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy (Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006; Lee and Ashton 2005; Paulhus and Williams 2002, Wilson et al 1996). Literature on these forms of leadership failure was deemed out of scope of the study as such literature is concerned primarily with the investigation of personality disorders more relevant in clinical psychology.

Whereas Furnham (2010) categorises ‘bad’ leaders as despots who are toxic and destructive and derailed leaders as ‘deranged’ hence ‘mad,’ Hogan *et al.* (2009), seen as pioneers in leadership derailment (Furnham 2010), use the term ‘bad’ manager as being the opposite of a good manager, someone who ‘gets things wrong’ and hence derails. There is relative consensus on the definition and conceptualisation of leadership derailment and that it results in leadership failure, emphasis in literature is on the causes and extent of that derailment as there is greater disparity in this area.

2.10.2 Getting it wrong: Derailing flaws, factors and behaviours

Different authors use different terms to describe characteristics of derailment for example 'flaws' (Harms *et al.* 2011), derailment factors (Van Velsor and Leslie 1995) and derailment potential behaviours (Carson *et al.* 2012). The latter term represents the retrospective nature of derailment research where, after the event, researchers identify the potential causes of derailment and present a range of diverse characteristics as contributing. Harms *et al.* (2011, p.495) suggest that scholars have started to recognise the importance of character 'flaws' as "determinants of both leader performance and responsiveness to developmental interventions," albeit empirical research is still lacking and their own research does not identify what such flaws may be. Furnham (2010) refers to 'sad' leaders suggesting such leaders fail due to for example: poor selection, lack of experience, short-term orientation, an inability to get things done, lack of understanding of office politics, being conflict averse, micro managing, lack of emotional insightfulness and an inability to make decisions. He sums these leaders up as incompetent quoting the Peter Principle named after Laurence Peter, by suggesting that "in any hierarchy individuals tend to rise to their level of incompetence" (Furnham 2010, p.9). Hogan *et al.* (2009) cite a 30-year study of failed managers at Sears Roebuck & Co by Bentz (1985) as identifying a number of reasons leaders derailed. These include lack of business skills, inability to deal with complexity, being reactive and tactical, unable to delegate, unable to build a team, unable to maintain relationships with a network of contacts, allowing emotion to cloud judgement, being slow to learn and personality defects.

Previously in this review it was identified that long lists of seemingly random characteristics talented leaders are supposed to demonstrate, make it difficult to understand the notion of talent. There is a similar challenge in derailment literature with long lists presented of unrelated characteristics often not defined or contextualised making it difficult to understand common causes. Hogan *et al.* (2009) argued that numerous studies using alternate methodologies and across different cultures and organisations, are consistent in identifying key themes. These include poor judgement, an inability to build teams, poor relationships, poor self-management and an inability to learn from mistakes. This list does little however, to aid an understanding of cause and

effect that is, what causes for example, poor self-management and how does that effect a leader to the extent that they derail?

Successive research by the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL) conducted during the 1980's and 1990's saw derailment factors grouped into five core themes (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Van Velsor and Leslie 1995):

1. Problems with interpersonal relationships
2. Failure to meet business objectives
3. Inability to build and lead a team
4. Inability to develop or adapt
5. Narrow functional orientation

Derailment literature does not reference literature in the TM field however, some of these factors appear to be the 'opposite' of those attributes previously discussed as being definitions of talent as object for example, problems with interpersonal relationships and an inability to lead a team appear the antithesis to the emotional and social competencies indicative of successful leaders. Similarly, the inability to develop and adapt is the 'opposite' of talented, 'learning agile,' leaders. Derailed leaders who fail to meet business objectives could be perceived to be underperforming, again the opposite of their high performing talented counterparts. However, Van Velsor and Leslie (1995, p.65) make the interesting observation that "a track record of performance has been a typical reason given for derailed managers' initial success." Derailed leaders were therefore high performers early in their careers and could have been perceived as 'talent.'

Later research by Ready (2005) across 32 organisations identified seven reasons why leaders derail:

1. Poor stakeholder management
2. Failing to balance diversity and alignment among the top team
3. Flawed execution of articulated strategy
4. An insufficient mass of followership
5. A poor capacity for listening

6. An inability to reinvent themselves and their leadership style during large-scale change.
7. A poor fit with the company's core values

Most of these can be grouped into the five themes previously identified. However, an interesting finding is 'poor fit with the company's core values.' Given the prevalence for approaches to TM to suggest that definitions of talent should be aligned to the organisation's strategy and values, that leaders later derail due to a 'poor fit' raises questions on how successful this process of alignment is carried out in organisations and how well leaders are benchmarked against the resulting definition of talent.

In a further attempt to structure existing research into key themes, Hogan *et al.* (2009) adopt a competency based approach with four domains which they argue can be used to categorise every competency model. These domains are intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills and business skills (Hogan and Warrenfeltz 2003). Hogan *et al.* (2009) use these domains to categorise derailment characteristics presented in influential research studies completed during the period of 1985 to 2008, see table overleaf:

Skill Domain <i>Definition</i>	McCall & Lombardo (1983)	Bentz (1985)	Morrison <i>et al.</i> (1987)	McCauley and Lombardo (1990)	Lombardo and Eichinger (2006)	Rasch <i>et al.</i> (2008)
Leadership <i>ability to build and maintain a team, and lead through others</i>	Over-managing – failing to delegate Unable to staff effectively	Unable to build a team Unable to delegate	Can't build a team Can't manage subordinates	Difficulty molding a staff	Failure to build a team	Over-controlling Failure to nurture or manage talent
Business <i>ability to plan, organize, monitor, and use resources</i>	Unable to think strategically Specific business problems	Unable to deal with complexity Reactive and tactical Lacked business skills	Not Strategic Poor results Limited business experience	Difficulty in making strategic transition Strategic differences with management	Lack of strategic thinking Difficulty making tough choices Poor administrative skills	Poor planning, organisation, and/or communication Poor task performance
Interpersonal <i>special skill, empathy, and maintaining relationships</i>	Insensitive (abrasive, intimidating, bully) Cold, aloof, arrogant	Unable to maintain relationships	Poor relationships	Relationship problems	Unable to deal with conflict No interpersonal savvy Poor political skills	Avoiding conflict and people problems Failure to consider human needs
Intrapersonal <i>self-awareness and self-control, emotional maturity, integrity</i>	Too ambitious Unable to adapt Too dependent on an advocate Betrayal of trust	Lets emotions cloud judgment Slow learner An “overriding personality defect”	Too ambitious Unable to adapt (to a new boss, to change) Having a “poor image”	Lack of follow-through Too dependent on an advocate	Questionable integrity Low self-awareness	Procrastination, time delays Poor emotional control Rumor-mongering, inappropriate use of information

Table 5: Comparison summary of research on characteristics of derailed leaders: Source Hogan *et al.* (2009, p.11)

The table provides a useful summary of the proposed derailment characteristics across the six studies, highlighting trends. However, whilst Hogan *et al.* (2009) define each of the four domains some of these definitions lack clarity for example; it is unclear what 'special skill' refers to in the interpersonal domain. The rationale for some of categorisation of factors into respective skills domains is unclear for example, 'too dependent on an advocate' (McCall and Lombardo 1983; McCauley and Lombardo 1990) is categorised under intrapersonal skills but could also be an interpersonal skill. Whilst the use of the four competency domains to categorise the research findings allows for easy identification of trends, the categories are so broad they become meaningless. It becomes difficult to distinguish between what is for example, a skill, trait, behaviour, character 'flaw' or aspect of personality, the degree to which each is present or which if any, had a greater significance in the leader's derailment. Furthermore, much of the research referred to by Van Velsor and Leslie (1995) and Hogan *et al.* (2009) is dated, typically US focused and quantitative. The research referred to is predominately the work of McCall, Lombardo, McCauley and Eichinger, all of whom share common links with CCL and propose a similar approach to leadership derailment. There is a need for current and diverse research.

Derailment flaws, factors and behaviours have implications for practice in the way organisations define their talent. Identification of talent is typically through positive correlation. If leaders demonstrate the characteristics that comprise an organisation's definition of talent, they are categorised as such. Little thought is given to the point at which such 'talents' could become potential derailing characteristics. An understanding of leadership derailment would enable TM decision makers to make better decisions on the organisational definition of their leadership talent. Some leaders for example, may be successful in spite of some behaviour. This can cause leaders (and potentially others within the organisation) to attribute a degree of superstitious belief that such a flaw has in fact contributed to their success and is therefore acceptable. It is not only the flaw itself that is the derailing factor, but it is also the unwillingness to change and the failure to see the reality of the consequences of the flaw (Goldsmith, 2008).

2.10.3 Overplayed strengths

As outlined in the review of definitions of talent, talents as strengths has been identified in the TM literature as an approach used to define talent. However, in leadership derailment literature, overplayed strengths have been identified as a potential derail, together with a mismatch between the strengths of the leaders and those required by the organisation (Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011). Potentially however, the latter would preclude the identification of the leader as talent, dependant on the practices used by the organisation to identify their talent.

An over-reliance on those technical strengths that have enabled a leader to be successful to date is especially prevalent in derailment (Charan *et al.* 2011; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Goldsmith 2008). This relates to the previously identified theme of 'too narrow a functional orientation' (Van Velsor and Leslie 1995; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Carson *et al.* 2012). Past successes can reduce the attention derailed leaders pay to the acquisition of new skills (Grant *et al.* 2008 in Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011) which may cause an over-reliance on specific strengths. Burke (2006) raises the interesting question of whether some combinations of strengths and weaknesses are acceptable while others prove fatal. The need to consider over-played strengths as characteristics of derailment has implications for TM practices when TM decision makers use a strengths-based approach to defining talent. Such practices and definitions should incorporate mechanisms for identifying when a strength may become a weakness.

2.10.4 Dysfunctional characteristics, tendencies and behaviours

Hogan and Hogan (2001, p.41) maintain, "failure is more related to having undesirable qualities than lacking desirable ones. They have been influential in identifying eleven seemingly positive characteristics that result in potentially dysfunctional, destructive or 'dark side' behaviours when over-used or which intensify when under stress. These characteristics include for example being bold, which can manifest as overly confident, sceptical which can manifest as cynical and dutiful which can manifest as a reluctance to take independent action (Hogan *et al.* 2009; Hogan and Hogan 2001). Interestingly Furnham *et al.* (2012) explored the possibility that these 'dark side' behaviours could be

associated with work success. They identified that whilst the 'dark side' of excitable, sceptical, cautious, colourful and leisurely were negatively correlated to success, the 'dark side' of bold, mischievous and imaginative could be positively correlated with success in some roles. Boldness has been associated with narcissist tendencies with some researchers suggesting that in leadership roles aspects of narcissism may be beneficial (Chatterjee and Hambrick 2007; Rosenthal and Pittinsky 2006).

By comparison, Carson *et al.* (2012) sought to test the suggestion that dysfunctional interpersonal tendencies might over time, debilitate a leader and increase the risk of derailment (Hogan and Hogan 2001). They sought to do this by extending the work of Hogan and Hogan (2001) and Furnham (2008) and empirically testing "dysfunctional interpersonal tendencies as antecedents to derailment" (Carson *et al.* 2012, p.292). Whilst this is commendable, the 'Hogan derailers' form the product and service of the Hogan organisation, as such research is focused on proving the validity and reliability of the model and the identified characteristics for commercial gain.

In one of the few empirical studies independent of a practitioner model of derailment, Robie *et al.* (2008) conducted research on 144 executives. They investigated the effects of 'derailer' traits on the relationship between the 'big 5' personality traits of: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability and their managers' rating of their overall performance, advancement potential and career difficulty risk. The derailer traits measured were ego-centred, intimidating, manipulating, micro managing and passive-aggressive. Through their research, they evidenced that intimidating was positively correlated to visionary thinking, financial acumen and entrepreneurial risk taking. Manipulation was positively correlated to 360 feedback ratings and was linked to Machiavellianism. The research highlights that where organisations are creating their own definitions of talent, as proposed by authors advocating strategic talent management, TM decision makers may be inadvertently identifying as positive traits, those personality traits that may ultimately lead to derailment.

2.10.5 Managing leadership transitions

George and McLean (2007) suggest that dysfunctional behaviours in failed leaders manifest in their 'leadership journey.' They summarise the results of 125 interviews with successful leaders, which were compared to a study of failed leaders identifying 'behaviours' that manifested as failed leaders developed their careers. They suggest that successful leaders recount their early career years "as if it were the quest of an all-conquering hero" (George and McLean 2007, p.4) with a primary focus on their own skills, performance and rewards. Thereafter successful leaders moved to a more 'authentic' style of leadership. By comparison, George and McClean (2007) identified patterns in the careers of those that failed and derailed which were not present in the careers of successful leaders:

Career pattern	Defined as:
Being an imposter	Lacking self-awareness, self-esteem and self-reflection; being cunning, aggressive, competitive and political. Such leaders acquire power which they are not confident in using, doubting their ability and unable to act decisively, affecting performance, results and their ability to manage a team.
Rationalising	Being unable to admit or take responsibility for mistakes, setbacks or failures; blaming external factors or subordinates; covering up or denying mistakes; pressurising subordinates and relying on short-term strategies.
Glory seeking	Needing external reinforcement for self-worth. Glory seekers focused on material rewards to provide re-enforcement and on their own position rather than their business.
Playing the loner	Avoiding forming close relationships; failing to acquire a mentor; lacking support networks; being cut off from feedback; retreating under criticism and rigid goal pursuit.
Being a shooting star	Failing to integrate their lives; operating at a fast pace; progressing rapidly; failing to take time to learn from mistakes. Their career is characterised by continuous moves with a lack of focus on the long-term consequences of decisions. Such leaders are prone to impulsiveness, irrational decisions and lacking the grounding of an integrated life.

Exhibit 3: Career patterns in failed leaders. Adapted from George and McClean (2007)

The research behind the categorising of stages in the ‘leadership’ journey of successful and derailed leaders was not published. As a result it is difficult to assess the validity of the findings however, the pattern of ‘being an imposter’ is supported by the work of Kets de Vries. He suggests that one reason successful leaders fail to sustain success is a result of neurotic imposture which he describes as “the flip side of giftedness and causes many talented, hardworking, and capable leaders...who have achieved great things – to believe that they don’t deserve their success” (Kets de Vries 2005, p.1). Such leaders perceive themselves to be ‘fakes’ and may sabotage their success or suffer anxiety and stress as a result of their perception that they will be ‘found out’ as not being capable. ‘Glory seeking’ is supported by the work of Furnham (2015) who suggests that success can cause leaders to see themselves as infallible, needing no-ones help. This can occur at just the

time such leaders do need support. In TM 'being a shooting star' is characteristic of the rapid progression of 'high flyers' and illustrates some of the challenges inherent in fast tracking talented leaders.

Charan *et al.* (2011) have been influential in identifying the challenges faced by leaders as they transition through leadership roles. They suggest leaders move through the levels of: managing self to managing others; managing others to managing managers; managing managers to functional manager; functional manager to business manager; business manager to group manager; group manager to enterprise manager. They argue leaders derail because they do not learn what is needed for the level they are operating at which is both a failure at the individual and the organisational level. The latter is due to a lack of clarity prevalent in organisations over the content of roles. Charan *et al.* (2011) suggest that as leaders transition through the levels, each is a passage that requires leaving 'the old ways behind' and focussing on the capabilities required for the new role, the time-frame needed to conduct the new responsibilities in and adopting new values.

Goldsmith's (2008) premise that 'what got you here won't get you there' suggests that leaders derail because they don't recognise that the skills, knowledge and capabilities that enabled them to get to one level of the organisation, will not be enough to get to the next level. Furthermore, strengths at lower levels of the leadership 'pipeline' may become weaknesses at higher levels.

McCartney and Campbell (2006), make a distinction between leadership skills and management skills, suggesting that an appropriate combination of these is required to ensure leadership success and avoid derailment. The optimal combination may change however, as a leader progresses up the organisation. Drawing on research McCartney and Campbell (2006) summarise the management and leadership skills that contribute to success or derailment.

Factors influencing success and failure				
	Factors related to management skills		Factors related to leadership skills	
	Management skill	Source	Leadership skill	Source
Factors related to success in organisations	Resources problem solving skills Specialized knowledge Achievement orientation Directing subordinates Goal achievement Implementing a vision	Russell (2001) Boyatzis (1982) Spencer and Spencer (1993) Posier and Kouser (1993) Boyatzis (1982) Hitt (1988)	Interpersonal skills Idealism in the form of vision Challenging processes Strategic vision Synergistic thinking Emotional maturity Nurturing growth and development	Richards and Inskeep (1974); Lombardo and McCauley (1988); Russell (2001) Bennis and Nanus (1985); Kouzes and Posner (1993) Kouzes and Posner (1993; 1988) Lombardo and McCauley (1988) Kotter (1990) Lombardo and McCauley (1988) Wheatley (1999)
Factors related to failure in organisations	Failure to meet objectives Over managing Lack of follow through Inability to prioritize	Hogan and Hogan (2001); Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) McCall and Lombardo (1983) Lombardo and McCall (1988) Hogan and Hogan (2001)	Poor interpersonal relationship Abrasive behaviour Appearing cold, aloof and arrogant Inability to build a team and resolve conflict Inability to adapt and change Inability to adapt to boss' style or cultural change Reactive rather than proactive	Hogan and Hogan (2001); Leslie and Van Velsor (1996); McNally and Parry (2002) Lombardo and McCauley (1988) McCall and Lombardo (1983) Hogan and Hogan (2001); Leslie and Van Velsor (1996; 1995); Lombardo and McCauley (1988); McNally and Parry (2002) Van Velsor and Leslie (1995) Hogan and Hogan (2001); Leslie and Van Velsor (1996); McCall and Lombardo (1983); Morrison <i>et al.</i> (1987) Hogan and Hogan (2001)

Table 6: Summary of the effects of management skills and leadership skills in leadership success and failure. Sourced from McCartney and Campbell (2006, p.194)

In this table McCartney and Campbell (2006) summarise characteristics of successful and derailed leaders proposed in literature from 1974 to 2002 which they categorise as either leadership or management skills. Combinations of low or moderate in management or leadership skills indicate derailment potential, whereas high management and leadership skills are indicators of success. The process through which skills are categorised is unclear for example, they categorise 'failing to meet objectives' as 'management skills.' Failing to meet objectives is an outcome rather than a skill, whilst Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) whose research they refer to suggested this was a 'derailment factor.' Nevertheless, ongoing reflection on the combination of management and leadership skills required as leaders progress through leadership roles is important for academics, practitioners and the leaders themselves, to develop awareness of derailment potential.

Rather than lack of skills, Walton (2011) suggests unrealistic expectations of leaders as they progress through their leadership career can lead them to demonstrate dysfunctional or dishonest behaviours causing derailment. Walton (2011, p.4) argues that "all this hype about excellence and personal aggrandisement creates unrealistic expectations for many and can generate unintended tensions and consequences such as avoidable personal trauma, profound aspirational disappointments and failure, loss of esteem, envy, exploitation and greed." This suggests that the practice inherent in TM and the focus on identifying 'stars,' 'high potentials' and "'A' players' can have a detrimental impact on the well-being of leaders. This theme is reinforced by Kovach (1986, p.45) who suggests that rapid promotions of high achievers may "hinder the development of skills and relationships that will be needed at higher levels."

2.10.6 How success contributes to derailment

Contrary to the positive and inspiring view of success prevalent when defining talent, derailment literature provides evidence of the uneasy relationship leaders can have with their success with some authors suggesting that leaders can become 'victims' of success (Furnham 2015, Berglas 1986). Success then becomes a leadership derailer. As previously cited Kets de Vries (2005) suggests leaders may harbour a belief that they do not deserve their success and as a result suffer from 'imposter syndrome.' This can cause leaders to sabotage their success or develop anxiety as a result of the perception they will be 'found

out' as not being capable. He suggests that neurotic imposters can function well at lower levels in the organisation but at more senior levels leaders are more visible. He attributes imposter syndrome to perfectionist traits and the setting of goals that are unrealistic. When these goals cannot be reached, self-defeating thoughts are experienced and corresponding behaviours demonstrated. Neurotic imposters often become 'workaholics' as they work harder to achieve to avoid being discovered as a 'fraud.' Kets de Vries (2005, p.113) suggests that "the heart of the problem is the fear that success and fame will hurt them in some way – that family, friends, and others will ...like them much better if they remain 'small.' Failure begins to seem an acceptable 'way out' as success becomes something "both desired and feared" (Kets de Vries (2006, p.163).

Other authors suggest, "many managers are poorly prepared to deal with success," (Ludwig and Longnecker 1993, p.265) and that some managers can become complacent and lose focus. Others can be tempted into unethical behaviour as a results of privileged access to information and people; unstrained access to organisational resources and a belief that they can control outcomes. Ludwig and Longnecker, 1993, p.266) cite examples from the news at the time of successful and well-respected leaders who "seemingly self-destruct as they reach the apex of their careers." Whilst the examples they cite are over twenty years old, as previously identified, leadership derailment literature has increased over the last 10 years partly in response to the number of high profile leadership failures during the 2008 economic crisis, which suggests their proposition still has validity.

Berglas (2001) uses the terms 'success depression' and 'encore anxiety' to describe the potential for 'burnout' in those continually striving for success, whilst Ciaramicoli (2004) refers to the incidence of 'performance addiction' in 'high achievers.' Those unable to cope with their success can resort to 'self-handicapping' (Higgins et al. 1990; Berglas 1986) a form of self-defeating behaviour. There is a lack of reference in TM literature to the impact of success on leaders beyond the assumption it is a positive realisation of potential. This can be linked to the emphasis of success as being organisationally defined with little attention paid to how leaders define it.

2.10.7 Bridging the gap between leadership derailment literature and TM literature

Although there has been a growing interest in leadership derailment, much of that has focused on destructive, unethical, toxic leadership and the dark triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. This emphasis on the 'mad' and 'bad' has been a result of the catastrophic failures in leadership up to and after 2008. Less has been written of the 'sad' leaders who fail to achieve their potential and derail. This is despite the scale, scope and cost of such derailment. Of significance is that definitions of leadership derailment are unanimous in suggesting that derailed leaders were previously successful up to a point. This 'point' however, can be at the level of a CEO indicating that all layers of leadership are at potential risk of derailment. This has significant implications for TM practices in terms of how they define talent and success and how they account for derailment factors in such definitions. This will influence the identification, selection and development of leadership talent. Through TM practices, TM decision makers have a role to play in preventing the significant personal and organisational cost of derailment. The emphasis in TM literature on high potential, high performance and aligning definitions of talent to potentially short-term changing strategies could create a corresponding short-term view of talent. High flying, high potential, 'A' players and the 'stars' of the talent pools, fast tracked through strategic leadership roles without adequate definition of the talents required in these contexts, may be inadequately prepared for the requirements of senior leadership roles. Seemingly successful at first, any combination of lack of skills, knowledge, capability, fatal flaws, overplayed strengths, personality traits manifesting as dysfunctional behaviours, vulnerability during career transitions and an uneasy 'relationship' with success, presents the very image of derailment; a train wreck about to happen.

Authors of leadership derailment are expressing concern about the consequences of the 'hype' surrounding stars, 'A' players, and high potentials, suggesting it generates unrealistic expectations on leaders and has a detrimental impact on their wellbeing and that of the organisation (Carson *et al.* 2012; Walton, 2011). Talented leaders appear particularly vulnerable when they are transitioning through leadership roles into higher levels of leadership. Ross (2013a) suggests such transitions often mean leaders are left to 'sink or swim,' with failure in more senior roles leading to the assumption, they were not

talented in the first place. In TM literature, leadership derailment is assumed to be caused by the absence of the attributes of talented and successful leadership, yet leadership derailment literature presents reasons for derailment that are not simply the opposite of talent attributes.

The increased interest in TM and talent centres on a strategic imperative that given the often-assumed current talent shortage, there is a need for organisations to secure competitive advantage by ensuring they have 'A' players in strategic roles. This requires effective 'talent spotting' against accurate definitions of talent as object aligned to the strategy and values of the organisation. The strategic imperative for authors of leadership derailment literature is to investigate the causes of leadership derailment given that up to 50% of leaders derail at a significant cost to the organisation. However, leadership derailment literature fails to consider how definitions of talent in TM practices might influence the selection of leaders in the first instance. Both fields of literature share common goals and have leaders as the central concept, yet the literature is curiously disconnected which is a puzzle.

2.11 Conclusion

TM is identified as a strategic imperative in literature, even more so in global talent management where the scarcity of leadership talent is identified as a major challenge in achieving organisational strategy. There is an overall lack of clarity on the conceptualisation and definition of both TM and the central concept of talent. This has implications for the way in which leadership talent is defined. It has also led to the TM field being identified as phenomenon-driven rather than theory-driven. Whilst there are different perspectives on TM, which influence who talent is perceived to be (talent as subject), leaders are most often included as a sub-category of talent. Beyond differentiating leaders as talent, there is a lack of reference in TM literature to what attributes leadership talent are expected to possess (talent as object).

Gaining increased interest is the strategic talent management perspective of TM. This approach requires the identification of 'A' positions with 'A' players to fill these positions. These 'A' players are then the target of TM practices. There is an emphasis on definitions

of talent then needing to be organisationally specific, linked to the values and strategy of the organisation. Research by Towers Perrin (2004 in Iles *et al.* 2010a) found that 87% of the 32 organisations interviewed had their own definition of talent. This has implications for both theory and practice. With an absence of case study material in the TM literature it is difficult to understand how these organisationally specific definitions of talent are constructed, communicated and operationalised and the consequences of this for leaders in terms of the 'talents' they are expected to have and demonstrate. A lack of case study examples contributes to a 'vicious circle' in TM literature: definitions of talent are not forthcoming because they are predominantly organisationally specific; a lack of case study material in the TM literature means a lack of understanding of the definition of talent and a consequent lack of theory through which to understand attributes of leadership talent. Available literature presents numerous approaches to understanding the attributes of talent, which when operationalised generate complex and conflicting lists of characteristics. Furthermore, these approaches including competencies, strengths learning agility and emotional intelligence are not without detractors.

The leadership derailment literature provides an imperative to understand the attributes of talent. Talented leaders are derailing at a significant rate and at great cost to their organisations and to their own careers. The disconnect between leadership derailment and TM literature represents a significant gap in understanding how talented and successful leaders achieve and sustain success and why others derail. Drawing on both TM literature and derailment literature enables a better understanding of the attributes of leadership talent and the causes of leadership derailment. It is remiss to assume one is the opposite of the other.

Whilst TM is a relatively new area of academic interest talent under different guises for example, individual difference, giftedness, strengths and competency has been the debate of literature in leadership, business and management studies and psychology for much longer; as has the debate over leadership performance, effectiveness and success. Yet as Thunnissen *et al.* (2013) argue in the field of TM there is little integration of other academic traditions or consideration of this broader perspective. Multi-disciplinary research in TM is in its infancy already however, a number of influential authors have emerged. Multi-disciplinary research brings the evidence-based rigour of research in

psychology to provide a better understanding of the perspectives and tensions within TM, and the attributes of leadership talent. This approach also facilitates a greater emphasis on understanding talented leaders as active agents in their own careers. The assumption of much of the literature in TM that talent are passive participants in TM practices is curious. Given such individuals are identified as: the 'A' players, who are high performers, with high potential who contribute most to organisational results, have high emotional intelligence, strengths and competencies that make them highly effective with high learning agility, it seems likely that they would be more proactive in the pursuit of their careers and personal success. Literature on leadership derailment identifies the uneasy 'relationship' some leaders can have with their success. This brings to light a lack of understanding in TM literature of the meaning leadership talent might give to success and whether it is their own definition of success that influences their actions or the definition of the organisation. That the voice of leadership talent is not heard in the TM literature seems a significant gap.

In TM literature, definitions of talent are often interspersed with references to success; implying that having talent and being successful as a leader are the same however, having talent and being successful as a leader are different and distinct. Failure to separate the two contributes to the confusion, complexity and contradictions prevalent in definitions of talent. It also creates a gap in the understanding of why some talented leaders go on to be successful and other talented leaders derail. The contribution of concepts such as competencies, emotional intelligence and learning agility to define talent, shifts the emphasis from understanding what talents are required for leadership to understanding how leaders leverage the talents they do have in order to achieve success.

2.11.1 Formulating the research questions

Throughout the literature review a series of 'gaps' were identified. These were gaps in both knowledge and methodology. Reviewing both the TM literature and the literature on leadership derailment identified a need to better understand the attributes of leadership talent given the propensity for talented leaders to derail. The gaps in knowledge related to the attributes of leadership talent and how these attributes were enacted into success or derailment.

Definitions of the attributes of leadership talent are lacking in TM literature. They emerge either as complex inconsistent lists of vaguely defined characteristics, traits, behaviours and strengths, or as the result of consultancy-based models. A predominance of the approach of strategic talent management in TM literature results in a focus on 'pivotal positions' ('A' positions) and identifying the talented individuals or talent pools to fill these positions ('A' players). The definition of what it means to be an 'A' player is identified as needing to be organisationally specific and aligned to strategy and values however, being effective, having high potential and being a high performer are presented as being central to such definitions. The assumptions here are that a) organisations have clear values and a long-term strategy and b) TM decision makers are able to accurately 'translate' these into attributes of leadership talent that can then be effectively operationalised in order to identify and develop the 'right' leaders. As the literature on derailment indicates that over 25% of leaders derail, this suggests this process poses challenges for organisations and the 'war for talent' has too many 'casualties.' A lack of research on leadership derailment however, means that whilst the problem has been identified, the solution has not.

Understanding both the attributes of talented leaders and how these are enacted into success or derailment would contribute to knowledge in both the TM literature and the leadership derailment literature. These two are currently curiously disconnected. Such understanding would also help practitioners seeking to define their talent and operationalise these definitions. As TM literature emphasised organisationally specific definitions of talent, any lists of attributes proposed as defining talent, lacked rigour. Multi-disciplinary approaches to defining such attributes, in particular drawing on the evidence-based research inherent in the discipline of psychology would provide such rigour.

In lists of attributes that are proposed by authors, there is a failure to distinguish between the attributes a talented leader should have for example, traits, drives and personality preferences and things they should do for example, actions, responses, ways of behaving. These latter attributes, appear to be the mechanisms talented and successful leaders use to enact their talents. There is a gap in the literature in separating out personal attributes and mechanisms. This has implications for practice when identifying who is talent, how

talent can be developed and how leaders can translate their talents into success through the use of effective mechanisms.

There was a focus in the derailment literature on the more extreme forms of leadership derailment, in particular narcissistic, Machiavellian and psychopathic tendencies and the 'dark side' traits. Where other forms of derailment were proposed, such research was predominantly practitioner or consultancy based. There was a gap in literature with regard to evidence-based theory on the characteristics of derailed leaders when compared to successful leaders and in the mechanisms derailed leaders were using or failing to use.

A number of exploratory research questions emerged from the gaps identified in the literature. These were:

The research questions	
Research Question 1	What attributes differentiate talented and successful leaders?
Research Question 2	How are successful leaders enacting their talents?
Research Question 3	Over time, how do talented and successful leaders sustain their success?
Research Question 4	By comparison, what characterises those leaders who stall, plateau or derail?
Research Question 5	What causes some talented leaders, over time, to involuntarily stall, plateau or derail from their leadership career?
Research Question 6	What effect does the meaning leadership talent gives to success have on their leadership career?

Exhibit 1 (repeated): The research questions

Together with the research questions, a number of methodological implications were identified from the literature review.

2.11.2 Implications for methodology and research methods

A number of methodological considerations and implications emerged from the literature review. Both TM and leadership derailment were identified as emerging areas of interest for academics and practitioners, fuelled by similar imperatives but from different perspectives. A lack of consensus on the conceptualisation and definition of the central concepts of TM and talent have caused leading scholars to suggest the TM field is phenomenon-driven with a lack of theory which is hampering efforts to develop new knowledge. A research methodology that generated new theory on how leadership talent enacts success, would contribute knowledge to the field and provide a platform for future research. Any conceptual framework derived from such theory would also be of value to practitioners responsible for identifying and developing leadership talent and for leaders seeking a greater understanding of how to enact talent into success without derailing. Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013) in their bibliometric review of TM literature identified a predominance of qualitative research appropriate to an emerging field (Von Krogh *et al.* 2012). This methodological approach typically comprised semi-structured interviews with analysis of secondary data in the form of either a single case study or a comparative analysis. Primary data from case studies was not referenced by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013) and was not apparent in the literature. The use of case studies as a research method would help academics to understand how practitioners were operationalising definitions of talent in their organisations and the implications of this for how leadership talent was identified. Through the review of the TM literature, a lack of consideration of leadership talent as an active agent in TM practices was identified. Multi-disciplinary research emphasising the individual and the psychology of talent and TM is new and the work of a small number of authors. A methodological approach which put leadership talent 'at the heart' of the research would give such talent a voice that has been lacking in TM research. This would contribute new knowledge to academia and practice and provide leaders with a greater opportunity to reflect on how they enact their 'talents' and the meaning they give to success.

Leadership derailment literature has increased over the last 10 years. Much of that literature has focused on the 'mad' and 'bad' of leadership failures, however there is a growing body of academic and practitioner interest in the 'sad' leaders who stall, plateau

and derail. The early yet still influential research of the 1980's and 1990's was reviewed together with research that is more recent. Whilst research is limited, the proposed percentages of leaders who derail remains consistent across all the research, as do the estimates of the high cost of that derailment. Much of the research is USA based and the product of consultancy and practitioner research. Whilst there appears no lack of willing participants to share their success stories, access to derailed leaders who have left their organisation appears to be a 'stumbling block' for empirical research.

The impact of these implications for the research methodology are discussed more fully in the next chapter which provides an overview of the methodology and methods used in the research, together with a rationale for the use of these.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and methods

3.1 Introduction

Any research approach and resulting strategy is under-pinned by a research philosophy (Duberley *et al.* 2012; Saunders *et al.* 2009). This philosophy holds our assumptions on the nature of knowledge, the methods that can be used to gain that knowledge and the phenomena to be investigated (Cunliffe 2011; Morgan and Smircich 1980). This philosophy influences our research paradigm which Collis and Hussey (2009, p.55) define as “a philosophical framework that guides how scientific research should be conducted.” Research philosophy is part of our methodology incorporating data collection methods and analysis (Duberley *et al.* (2012).

It was identified in the literature review that TM is a phenomenon-driven field and that “no research design or methodology is superior to others in exploring the different aspects of the phenomenon” (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2015, p.264). However, Saunders *et al.* (2009) argue that whilst no research philosophy is better than another, philosophies may be ‘better’ at doing different things depending on the research questions.

The overall purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between having talent and being successful as a leader in the context of organisations by identifying the attributes of talented leaders, understanding how leaders enact talent into success and identifying why talented leaders derail. The corresponding aims and research questions are summarised as follows:

Aim	Research question(s)
Expand theoretical understanding of how leadership talent can be defined by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach.	1. What attributes differentiate talented and successful leaders?
Identify how those leaders who are successful, enact their talents into sustained success.	2. How are successful leaders enacting their talents? 3. Over time, how do talented and successful leaders sustain their success?
Extend theoretical understanding of why some talented and successful leaders derail from their career path.	4. By comparison, what characterises those leaders who stall, plateau or derail? 5. What causes some talented leaders, over time, to involuntarily stall, plateau or derail from their leadership career?
Clarify the meaning both successful and derailed leaders give to success, and the impact this has on their career.	6. What effect does the meaning leadership talent gives to success have on their leadership career?

Exhibit 4: A summary of the aims of the research and research questions

A number of considerations influenced the research methodology. Firstly, in the TM literature a gap in understanding the leader as an active agent and a central character in TM practices was identified. Furthermore, leadership talent as ‘A’ players in ‘A’ positions who were effective high performers with potential, adding value to the organisation, placed the emphasis on such talent as contributing to organisational ‘success.’ Lacking from TM literature was an understanding of the meaning leaders gave to success. By comparison, the leadership derailment literature identified that a leader’s ‘relationship’ with their success could potentially derail them. An approach that placed the leader at the heart of the research to understand their lived, meaningful experiences as talented leaders was a priority and an overarching consideration when choosing the research methodology.

Secondly, in the leadership derailment literature there was a lack of qualitative research on the experiences of derailed leaders. Much of the derailment research originates from the field of psychology and is quantitative. By comparison, the research methodology most used in the TM field was qualitative. A qualitative approach to the research would contribute knowledge to the TM field in a form that was methodologically accepted. It would also contribute to both knowledge and a methodological approach to research in the leadership derailment field.

A third consideration was the perceived merit of incorporating a case study in the research methods. A lack of clarity on the attributes of leadership talent is in part due to an emphasis in the literature on the strategic talent management approach to TM that advocates organisationally specific definitions of talent aligned to the values and strategy of the organisation. However, there is lack of research presenting the findings from organisational case studies on effectiveness of definitions of leadership talent as object. There is therefore a gap in knowledge of how organisations define leadership talent and the effectiveness with which these definitions are operationalised to identify and develop such talent. Assumptions are made in the TM literature that definitions are appropriate, the process of operationalising these definitions is effective and the 'right' leadership talent is identified. This is disputed through the leadership derailment literature and the statistics evidencing the high percentage of leaders who derail. A research methodology that incorporated a case study would contribute to knowledge of how organisations define and operationalise their definition of leadership talent in the first instance and the consequences of this for the leader.

Finally, there was a lack of conceptualisation and definition of TM, talent and leadership talent in the TM literature. As a result, there was a lack of widely accepted theory. A research methodology that enabled theory building would provide a significant contribution to knowledge.

The purpose of this chapter is to make explicit the research philosophy underpinning this research. The chapter provides a justification and overview of the research framework, the methodology and the methods adopted. Carter and Little (2007) argue that good quality qualitative research needs to address all three of these elements and demonstrate

consistency between them. In recognition of the complexity in describing the various considerations and decisions that need to be made when deciding on an appropriate research methodology, Saunders *et al.* (2009), use the analogy of an onion. The outer layer describes the overall research philosophy. Beyond that, decisions need to be made on the research approach, the research strategy, the time horizons and the data collection methods. This provides a useful analogy when considering the sequence with which these decisions should be made. Research methodology and research methods including initial analysis, have been combined in this chapter as, referring to the analogy of the 'onion,' research methods (including the analytical approach) are located within rather than apart from our research methodology (Carter and Little 2007; Duberley *et al.* 2012).

3.2 A qualitative approach to the research

Qualitative research with its reliance on non-numerical data (Carter and Little 2007) is used to emphasise people's lived experience and the meaning they place on events in their lives (Hennink *et al.* 2011; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008; Miles and Huberman 1994). It provides a focus on "naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what 'real life' is like" (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.10). Hennink *et al.* (2011) identified a number of opportunities provided by qualitative research that evidence this approach as appropriate in the context of the research questions. Firstly, they suggest that qualitative research identifies issues from the perspective of the participants in the study. A qualitative approach to the research would therefore give leaders a voice through which to express their lived experience. This would enable a better understanding of the experiences of talented leaders; how they made sense of their own talents, success and derailment and the meaning they gave to that. Qualitative data would enable an exploration of the 'talents' leaders were demonstrating and how they were enacting these talents into success or derailment as they developed their leadership careers. Secondly, a qualitative approach to research means that people are studied in their own environment providing the context within which to explore experiences and behaviours. Such an approach would therefore enable leaders to be studied in the context of the organisations within which they had worked or were

working. This would enable organisational factors influencing the leader's success or derailment to be understood.

Thirdly, Hennink *et al.* (2011) suggest that qualitative research is useful when exploring new or complex issues. Both TM and leadership derailment are emerging fields, the former identified as phenomenon-driven. Leadership talent, success and derailment are complex concepts characterised by a lack of common theory and practice and drawing on multiple disciplines. A qualitative approach to the study would enable an exploration of these complex topics. Finally, they suggest that qualitative research is useful for understanding processes. It was identified in the literature review that talent could be perceived to be an 'input,' with success and derailment an 'outcome.' The 'mechanisms,' through which leaders enact their talent into success, could be perceived to be a 'process.' A qualitative approach to the study would allow for the exploration of this. Underpinning this qualitative research, a subjective ontological and interpretivist epistemological research philosophy was adopted using an inductive approach supporting the generation of new theory.

3.3 The research philosophy

Ontology and epistemology are central to discussions on research philosophy. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) suggest that ontology, epistemology and methodology form a research framework or paradigm. Duberley *et al.* (2012, p.15) identify ontology as dealing with "the essence of phenomenon and the nature of their existence" and whether the phenomenon exists independently of our knowledge and perception or if it is an outcome of these. Saunders *et al.* (2009, p.110) summarise this as being concerned with the "nature of reality" and our perception of it.

Duberley *et al.* (2012, p.15) define epistemology as "the study of the criteria by which we can know what does and does not constitute warranted or scientific knowledge." Bryman and Bell (2011, p.15) summarise this as relating to issues regarding "what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline." Epistemology relates to how we justify claims to knowledge and has been the subject of dispute within social sciences which, Duberley *et al.* (2012, p.17) argue, has influenced the "evolution" of qualitative research.

The following table summarises the key terms used when making decisions on the research methodology to be adopted and summarises the position taken in this research:

Research term	Definition	Research position taken
Ontology	Assumptions that we make about the nature of reality and what exists in the world	Subjectivist
Epistemology	Acceptable knowledge and the sources of that knowledge	Hermeneutical phenomenological interpretivist
Methodology	Combination of techniques used to enquire into a specific situation	Qualitative
Methods	Individual techniques for data collection and analysis	Data collection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews - Case study Data analysis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thematic analysis

Table 7: Ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al. (2002, p.31) and Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008).

The research framework including the ontological, epistemological and methodological decisions are discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.3.1 Ontological considerations

Ontological considerations are philosophical assumptions concerned with the nature and existence of reality (Collis and Hussey 2009). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) more specifically suggest it is about the relationships between people, society and the world generally. Ontology raises the philosophical questions of whether social entities exist in reality outside of the social actors who are concerned with their existence or if they are created by those social actors based on perception. Duberley et al. (2012, p.17) expand this to suggest that ontological considerations concern the question of “whether or not the phenomenon that we are interested in actually exists independent of our knowing

and perceiving it – or is what we see and usually take to be real, instead, an outcome of these acts of knowing, and perceiving?” Ontological assumptions form the basis of all methodological positions (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008).

There are two main ontological assumptions: objectivism and subjectivism (Duberley *et al.* 2012; Saunders *et al.* 2009; Collis and Hussey 2009; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). It is assumed through objectivism that social phenomena are facts that exist beyond people and their perception of these facts. These phenomena are real, there is one ‘reality’ and it can be measured. Through subjectivism it is assumed that reality is constructed through our perceptions, the meaning we give to our perceptions and our actions because of that. In subjectivism, as each individual constructs their own reality, there are multiple versions of reality (Collis and Hussey 2009).

This research uses a subjectivist ontological approach. The assumption is that neither talent, success nor derailment exists outside of social actors. They are social constructs defined and interpreted by social actors. Such social actors include TM decision makers and the leaders themselves. As social actors, leaders will interpret their talent, their success or their derailment according to their own values, beliefs, life experiences and overarching ‘view of the world.’ Each leader will hold their own different view of the world and will therefore interpret and communicate their own experiences in light of their ‘reality.’ Saunders *et al.* (2009, p.111), suggest it is necessary to “explore the subjective meanings motivating the actions of social actors in order for the researcher to be able to understand these actions.” This research seeks to understand how leaders have enacted their talents into success or derailment. The meaning leaders give to this success may not exist as a reality but rather as their perception of reality, based on what it means to them to be successful. Similarly, leaders are interpreting their talents as a result of their lived, meaningful experience. Where the leader’s talents are benchmarked against organisational definitions of talent or measures of high performance, TM decision makers who are also social actors, themselves interpreting talent and performance through their own ‘view of the world,’ interpret these.

3.3.2 Epistemological considerations

Epistemology relates to what is regarded as acceptable knowledge in a particular field (Saunders *et al.* 2009). Carter and Little (2007, p.1319) argue that epistemological considerations are theoretical but “inescapable.” They suggest that research methodologies justify methods which in turn generate knowledge, therefore methodologies will contain epistemic content illustrated below:

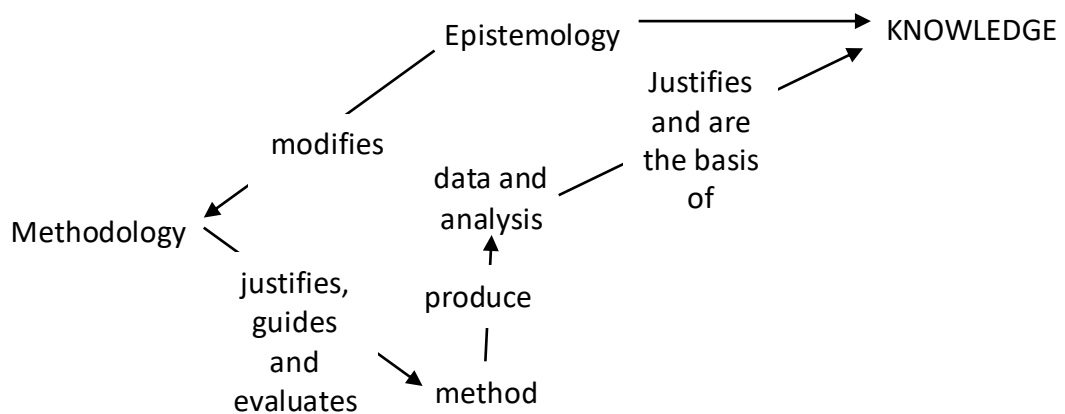


Figure 1: The relationship between epistemology, methodology and method.
Sourced from Carter and Little (2007, p.1317)

Carter and Little (2007, p.1322) suggest epistemology influences research in three fundamental ways: Firstly, it influences the relationship between the researcher and the participant and the perception of participants as contributors or subjects under study. Secondly, it influences the way in which the quality of methods is demonstrated as knowledge and finally it influences form, voice and representation in the method, in particular through communication of the research. There are three main epistemological philosophies, positivism, realism and interpretivism. This research assumes an interpretivist approach that is underpinned by a subjectivist ontological philosophy.

Interpretivism requires that the researcher understands the subjective meaning inherent in social interactions (Collis and Hussey 2014). Denzin (1989, p.12) defines interpretivism as “to explain the meaning of; the act of interpreting, or conferring meaning,” and the interpreter as “one who interprets, or translates meaning from others.” Eriksson and

Kovalainen (2008) argues that as much of qualitative research is focused on human action, interpretation is therefore necessary for the analysis of qualitative data. Bryman (2004) summarises interpretivism as deriving from Weber's (1947) *Verstehen*, hermeneutic-phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Bryman (2004, p.13) describes *Verstehen* as an approach advocated by Weber as "the interpretivist understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects." Here causal explanation is the result of interpretation of social action. Phenomenology relates to the study of phenomena and the way in which we make sense of the world. 'Talent', 'success' and 'derailment' are phenomena to be made sense of through the perceptions of leaders. Inherent in the research purpose, aims and constructed questions was a required understanding of how leadership talent interacted with their environment and enacted their talents into success or derailment.

A phenomenological methodological approach was important to understand how successful and derailed leaders made sense of their world and adapted their strategies accordingly. In particular, how did they perceive their success or derailment and how it had occurred? The phenomenological methodology is discussed in section 3.5. Saunders *et al.* (2009) propose symbolic interactionism as the "social process through which the individual derives a sense of identity from interaction and communication with others." Talent, success and derailment are both comparative and contextual for example, talented compared to whom and in what context? Whether leaders perceived their talent, success or derailment to be comparative or contextual was important to the research.

A hermeneutical phenomenological interpretivist approach to the research was taken. Hermeneutics is discussed further in section 3.5. This was perceived to be more appropriate in the context of a field of study where 'talent,' 'success' and 'derailment' are subjective social constructs rather than scientifically proven facts. These terms may have different meanings dependent on each individual leader's perceptions, view of the world and lived experiences. Even where an organisation has a definition of talent, when operationalised such a definition is open to the subjective interpretation of the TM decision makers, as identified in the literature review.

Inherent in the research purpose, aims and constructed questions was a required understanding of how leadership talent interacted with their environment and leveraged their talents into success or derailment. A phenomenological approach was important to understand how successful and derailed leaders made sense of their world and adapted their strategies accordingly. In particular, how did they perceive their success or derailment? How did they perceive this success or derailment had occurred? The phenomenological methodology is discussed further in section 3.5.

In evidencing the appropriateness of the interpretivist approach to the research, it is relevant to propose why positivism and realism were considered inappropriate. Positivism reflects the ontological approach of observable reality, widely used in natural sciences (Bryman and Bell 2011). In positivism the researcher is independent of the subject of the research, maintaining neutrality. The results of data provide the basis of “law-like generalisations” (Saunders *et al.* 2009, p.113). Existing theory is used to generate hypotheses, which are tested through the gathering of observable facts to test and support or refute the original hypotheses. The gathering of facts provides knowledge that contributes to new theory, which is tested by further hypotheses. This process of generating hypotheses from existing theory, testing these by gathering data to support or disprove these, and creating law-like generalisations that can be tested by hypotheses, is known as deductivism.

There are a number of criticisms of the positivist approach. Collis and Hussey (2009, p.56) argue that it is “impossible to separate people from the social contexts in which they exist” and that to understand the activities of people, their perception of those activities must be understood. Neither can the researcher be wholly objective as they bring their own interests and values to the interactions. As with positivism, realism assumes a scientific approach to knowledge that objects can exist independently of social actors and that there is an external reality. The positivist and realist approaches were inappropriate for the research given the fundamental purpose was to put the leader ‘at the heart of the research’ and understand the perceptions of leaders in relation to their talents; how they enacted these talents into success; how they gave meaning to success and how they perceived their derailment. This by implication required a subjective ontological

approach, together with a requirement to 'interpret the interpretations' of the experiences of leaders as they communicated these.

Identifying the ontological and epistemological assumptions provides clarity on the philosophical approach adopted for the study. Once the philosophical assumptions have been decided an appropriate research approach needs to be selected. The research approach identifies the relationship of theory to the research.

3.4 Theory in the context of the research: deduction and induction

Two approaches describe the relationship between research and theory: deductive and inductive. Deduction involves the testing of theory and is prevalent in scientific and positivist research (Saunders *et al.* 2009). A deductive approach begins with a theory tested using hypotheses. By comparison induction necessitates the building of theory with theory the outcome of the research rather than the starting point. In inductive research, observation is the starting point through qualitative research, findings are a result of those observations and new theory is proposed (Saunders *et al.* 2009). However, Bryman and Bell (2011) offer a word of caution that often the outcome of an inductive approach is instead an 'interesting' empirical generalisation rather than a new theory. They suggest that deductive approaches can use elements of induction and induction elements of deduction to create a more iterative process, however key to differentiating the two approaches is that either existing theory is tested, (deduction) or new theory is generated (induction).

The literature review identified the TM field was phenomenon-driven rather than theory driven. This was reflective of TM as an emerging field. Collings and Mellahi (2009, p.304) cited an "alarming lack of theoretical development in the area" of TM. Iles *et al.* (2010a) also commented on the lack of legitimacy provided by research and theory. In the absence of theory to explain how talented leaders enact success and an identified lack of theory with regard to why some leaders derailed, an inductive approach was deemed most appropriate for the study. New theory generated would provide both a contribution to knowledge and a theoretical contribution that could form the basis of future research.

3.5 The research methodology

It was identified that a qualitative, subjective, interpretivist, inductive approach to the research was most appropriate given the purpose, aims and questions to be addressed by the research. Identifying interpretivism as the epistemological approach had further implications for the research methodology. Small samples of successful and derailed leaders were interviewed to understand their lived meaningful experience. This was supplemented by a case study to understand how organisations defined and operationalised their definitions of talent and the effects of this on the identification of leadership talent. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section. A qualitative approach using interview techniques raised the question of how the interviews would be interpreted. A hermeneutical-phenomenological approach was adopted. Hermeneutical-phenomenology “puts effort to get beneath the subjective experience and find the genuine objective nature of the things as realized by an individual” (Kafle 2011, p.6). Phenomenology is the description of the lived experience and hermeneutics is the interpretation of the experience (Van Manen 1990). By focusing on individuals and groups, hermeneutical-phenomenology “attempts to unveil the world as experienced through their life world stories.” Description of that world is itself an interpretive process (Kafle 2011, p.6). In phenomenological research, the researcher points to an understanding of the essential meaning of the phenomena (Kafle 2011). This formed the approach to understanding the life stories of successful and derailed leaders, through their recounting of stories in the context of their leadership career. In phenomenological research, new meanings emerge from the data. In this respect, induction is a requirement of phenomenological research, as is text drawn from the transcripts of qualitative research. Through interpretation of these texts, the researcher “aims to create a rich and deep account of a phenomenon...while focusing on uncovering rather than accuracy and amplification with avoidance of prior knowledge” (Kafle 2011 p.10). In hermeneutic-phenomenology, the focus is on the lived experience of the individual and through a detailed understanding of that experience, creating meaning. Small samples, providing a richness of data are a feature of hermeneutical-phenomenological research, analytical rigour of such accounts is an imperative to counter criticisms of small samples sizes.

The preceding sections outlined the ontological, epistemological and methodological choices and the position of theory within the research process, together with a rationale for these. The following sections outline the research methods adopted.

3.6 Research methods

As previously identified, the research methods should be located within the ontological, epistemological and methodological framework, or as Saunders *et al.* (2009) suggest, at the heart of the onion. At this point decisions are made on for example, the strategies, time horizons and techniques and procedures in order to design the research. This section describes the research design, how the participants were selected and the procedures carried out.

3.6.1 The research strategy and design

The nature of the research is an exploratory, subjective, hermeneutical-phenomenological interpretivist study, with an intended inductive approach to theory generation. This philosophy and corresponding approach required the collection of qualitative data. Data was to be derived from a combination of two sources: Firstly from organisational case studies and secondly from interviews with successful and derailed leaders accessed independently of their organisations.

Case studies

Eisenhardt (1989) in Rowley (2002, p.16), suggests that case studies are well suited to new areas of research where “existing theory seems inadequate” and are useful for incremental theory building. As well as an overall lack of conceptual and theoretical clarity, the TM literature review identified a lack of organisational case studies through which to understand how definitions of talent were being operationalised in organisations in order to identify and develop leadership talent. Gillham (2005, p.1) suggests that in case studies “you do not start out with *a priori* theoretical notions (whether derived from literature or not) – because until you get in there and get hold of your data, get to understand the context, you won’t know what theories (explanations) work best or can make most sense.” As no theory was being tested, the case studies

would provide an initial exploration into how successful leaders were enacting organisationally specific definitions of talent and success. The case studies would be a useful tool to explore (Rowley 2002): the operationalising of definitions of talent; the meaning leadership talent gave to those definitions and if talented and successful leaders were demonstrating attributes over and above or different from the organisation's definition of talent. Challenges were however, encountered in gaining access to organisations, which affected the use of case studies in the research project. These challenges are identified in the next section.

Interviews with senior leaders

A semi-structured interview format was designed for use by the researcher to facilitate the interviews. This would allow flexibility for leaders to 'tell their story' whilst also providing a simple framework through which that story could be recounted. The interview was structured to encourage participants to talk about their early years, as they were making their first educational choices; their mid-career years as they were developing their leadership career; their present situation and future aspirations. The interview schedule acted as a 'crib sheet' for the researcher, providing open-ended questions if required. However, the intent was for the participants to recount their experiences without the intervention of the researcher. Participants could select for themselves the experiences that held meaning. The interview schedule used by the researcher is in Appendix 2.

3.6.2 Ethical considerations

Prior to the commencement of the project ethics approval needed to be obtained for the research. The ethics submission was made according to Nottingham Trent University regulations and included details of the research, its aims and objectives, confidentiality, security and retention of data and risk assessment and mitigation. The submission also included copies of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, to be forwarded to participants prior to interview. Ethics approval was particularly important given the context of the research and the population to be interviewed. Derailment as a leader can be particularly stressful for the individual. It was important for the well-being of

participants that the full scope of the research was explained and that any participants with diagnosed mental health issues were excluded from the research to prevent a re-lived experience. Given the population being interviewed were senior executives confidentiality of personal and organisational data was of paramount importance. Specific attention was given to the ethical considerations in relation to two of the sample populations, namely:

1. Successful leaders accessed via their organisations and the right of those individuals to choose not to take part in the research
2. Derailed leaders and their well-being when recounting experiences that may have caused that derailment.

Ethical considerations for leaders accessed through their organisations

Where leaders were to be accessed through their organisation it was important, from an ethics perspective, to ensure that leaders retained the option of not taking part in the research, even where their organisation had nominated them as talented and successful leaders. The participant information sheet was adapted (see Appendix 1 for Sample Participant Information Sheet). This information sheet was then provided to both the participating TM decision maker and the nominated leaders. Once the leaders had been nominated their contact details were forwarded to the researcher. Consent forms were sent directly to the leaders and all remaining discussion was solely between the leader and the researcher, including the decision to participate or not. The TM decision maker was not informed with regard to whether leaders had taken part in the research and the Consent Form stressed the confidentiality of the leader's decision to participate or not.

Ensuring the well-being of derailed leaders

As derailment is an involuntary process, it is possible that recounting experiences that resulted in derailment could have a detrimental impact on a derailed leader's well-being. As a result, the following steps were taken:

- Leaders were only directly approached to take part in the research as derailed leaders, either when they had previously acknowledged to others as having derailed

or where they had made themselves known to the researcher as considering themselves to have derailed.

- A consent form was created which would be used for both successful and derailed leaders. This consent form required confirmation that the leader, regardless of the sample they were part of, was not currently suffering from any diagnosed mental health condition.
- The researcher is a qualified executive coach, with counselling and therapy certifications. If at any stage of the interview, regardless of informed consent, the researcher in their professional judgement had cause for concern with regard to the well-being of the leader, then the interview would be terminated.

The researcher, at any point of the interview, was able to provide the participant with appropriate contact details to access professional counselling should they wish to discuss their experiences further in a therapeutic setting.

3.6.3 The research participants

The criterion for three samples was identified. Two samples were to comprise talented and successful leaders and one sample was to comprise derailed leaders. Talented and successful leaders were executive and senior leader talent in large FTSE100 or equivalent organisations who had:

1. Been identified as or were perceived to be, leadership talent within their organisation as defined through their organisations' TM practices. These leaders were to be accessed through their organisation and interviewed together with a TM decision maker nominated by the organisation also being interviewed. This sample would form the basis for the organisational case studies.
2. Demonstrated a 'track-record' of success, in roles of increasing seniority and responsibility, across a number of organisations.

The third sample were leaders who had deviated or derailed from their expected career paths or felt that personally or professionally they had not achieved their potential. These leaders were to be approached independently.

The case studies: operationalising definitions of talent.

The intent was to interview a nominated TM decision maker to understand how the organisation defined leadership talent and how that definition was operationalised. By interviewing nominated leaders who were the target of those TM practices, the intent was to understand the individual leader's own 'path to success.' This would help to understand if the definition of talent used by the organisation did indeed reflect the attributes of successful leaders within that organisation, or if successful leaders were doing something different.

FTSE 100 organisations were targeted as firstly, such organisations were more likely to have defined TM practices and secondly, leaders within such organisations would be required to have a significant set of skills, knowledge and capabilities in order to achieve senior roles compared to leaders in small or medium sized organisations. Through the researchers personal contacts four FTSE 100 organisations were identified as research sites and discussions with Senior HR professionals began. However, protracted conversations failed to convert the organisations into research sites. The primary reasons given which were common across all sites were:

- Changes to the senior leadership team meant that during the period of change, the HR Leader was unwilling to approach the team with details of a research project requiring some of those leaders to participate.
- Revision of TM practices as a result of economic uncertainty, which might result in changes to either the way in which leadership talent was defined within the organisation or the process used to benchmark talent against this definition. Until changes to the processes had been finalised decision makers were unwilling to commit to the research project.

Each of the four organisations eventually declined to take part in the research project. At the same time, following an appeal for research sites previously posted within a LinkedIn Talent Management Group, a TM decision maker from a fifth organisation approached the researcher. The TM decision maker gained approval from their leadership team to be interviewed in order to understand how the organisation defined their leadership talent.

Interview access to three ‘talented and successful’ senior leaders was also granted for inclusion in that sample. Access to the TM decision maker and the definitions of leadership talent used, provided a valuable case study example of how organisationally specific definitions of leadership talent are operationalised. The findings of this case study are presented in chapter four.

Successful leaders accessed independently

As a result of the inability to secure a number of research sites as case studies the focus became accessing senior leaders independently of their organisations. With no consensus definition of talent or success in TM literature; to assist in the benchmarking of appropriate participants, ‘talented and successful’ was defined as: leaders who held the role of Director, Managing Director, CEO (or other C+ Suite role, for example COO, CTO), Chairman/woman in large FTSE100, PLC or equivalent sized organisations. Such leaders would likely have been exposed to TM practices during their careers and so would have some understanding of how talent is defined.

There was a requirement for participants to have transitioned across multiple organisations to avoid the scenario where success was the result of being able to sustain a career within a single organisation, where the context of that organisation may be a significant contributory factor to success. Leaders in small or medium organisations or at lower levels of organisations with many ‘career years’ ahead of them were discounted. Unless a longitudinal study was carried out future derailment was a possibility if they transitioned into more senior roles or into larger organisations.

Purposive (Saunders *et al.* 2009) rather than random sampling was used to identify participants that matched the required criteria, these leaders were identified through:

- The researcher’s own network of contacts as the career histories of potential participants were known by those contacts and appropriate in the context of the research. This is known as ‘snowball’ sampling (Berg 1988).
- The researchers’ extended network of contacts including those within the academic executive education community and the practitioner HR community.

- The researchers' extended network of senior leaders who were prepared to introduce the researcher to their colleagues. This was particularly effective as it meant that participants were introduced to the researcher through a trusted source (Hall and Stevens 1991 cited in Long and Johnson 2000).
- The identification of appropriate LinkedIn profiles as career histories could be viewed prior to the use of LinkedIn's In Mail direct messaging service to instigate an initial conversation. LinkedIn was considered the most appropriate social network for this research as firstly, it is a professional business network and secondly, career histories posted on line by users enable selectivity. The site provides the ability to join professional groups comprised HR and Talent Management professionals and Senior Leaders, up to an including those in Executive roles.
- Prior participants nominated future participants. This enabled future participants to be introduced to the research through a trusted source.

Incorporating public sector leaders into the sample criteria

As the researcher identified potential participants, it became apparent that there were public sector leaders who matched the profile of successful or derailed leaders and that for the purposes of this research, there was not a requirement to be sector specific. Public sector leaders were therefore identified for interview in the same way as private sector leaders. It was important that public sector leaders were in roles that were comparable to the seniority, scope and complexity of the leadership roles held by participating leaders from the private sector. The roles of CEO of a substantial Local Authority or national public sector organisation were identified as appropriate for inclusion in the research. As with private sector leaders, successful CEO's needed to have demonstrated a track record of roles of increasing responsibility across multiple organisations to avoid the scenario of success as a by-product of being with an organisation a long time rather than specific attributes of the leader. It is not the intent of the research however, to provide a detailed comparison of public and private sector leadership. The inclusion of public sector leaders was to enable the development of theory that could potentially be more widely applied across all sectors.

Derailed leaders accessed independently

Leaders who were categorised as talented and successful were approached directly with a request to take part in the research as ‘talented and successful’ leaders. A different approach was adopted for derailed leaders given the potentially sensitive nature of their derailment. Whilst within literature derailment is defined, conceptualised and discussed, it became apparent early on in the process of identifying derailed participants that the term ‘derailment’ was not one with which derailed leaders would readily associate. An early participant of the research whilst volunteering to interview, and having self-selected as derailed, observed at the end of the interview that:

“I haven’t derailed. I am energised to be doing what I am doing now as I’ve ever been. The corporate language needs a shake out, it’s so aggressive, so anti-human. I don’t know if in your PhD you should look at some of the language that’s used. It is almost forcing people to be leaders in a certain way. Certainly I’ve left company x because I couldn’t carry on being myself ...” (Aaron).

Derailed leaders were therefore approached a number of ways. Firstly, through the researcher’s own network where leaders were no longer in significant roles and their own conscious perception was that ‘something had gone wrong.’ In these cases, the research project was discussed and the leader self-selected as derailed. Secondly, through the researcher’s extended network of academics, practitioners and senior leaders who knew of leaders who considered themselves to have derailed. Finally, through carefully worded posts on LinkedIn requesting for leaders take part in the research. These requests avoided the use of the term ‘derailed’ and instead eluded to leaders ‘perhaps not being where they would like to be’ at this stage in their career; see the following example post:

Putting out another call for help with my Doctoral research. I am interested in talking to talented senior leaders who feel that, for whatever reason, they are just not where they hoped they would be in their careers.

Exhibit 5: Example LinkedIn post used to recruit derailed leaders

Phrasing requests in this way caused a new category of leader to emerge. These leaders had opted-out of leadership roles.

The discovery of the opted-out leadership type

During the process of identifying derailed leaders for interview, the researcher spoke to two leaders who were suggesting that rather than involuntarily derailing, they had voluntarily left leadership roles to pursue alternate career or life choices. These leaders felt strongly that the term 'derailed' did not apply to that voluntary decision to 'opt out' of senior organisational leadership roles. As the research focus was on how leaders sustain successful leadership careers, it was important to understand why some leaders voluntarily chose no longer to pursue such careers. The literature provides an 'either / or' view of leadership success and derailment. The inclusion of those leaders who voluntarily opt out would enable a greater understanding of sustained leadership success and was identified as a valuable contribution of the research. Four senior leaders who had previously been interviewed as talented and successful for the researchers Masters Dissertation but who had gone on to 'opt out' of leadership roles were identified as leaders of this type and approached for interview. This would provide a valuable insight into the dynamic nature of talent, success and derailment as it enabled the interviewing of those same individuals some five years later.

Identifying a typology

As the participant selection progressed, a typology was created. This typology consisted of three types of leaders who were relevant to the research:

Type	Definition
Talented and successful	Leaders demonstrating a successful track record in roles of increasing seniority and responsibility across a number of organisations, culminating in Senior Leadership roles of, for example Chairman/Chairwoman, CEO, Managing Director/Partner, Board Director and equivalents.
Talented and opted-out	Leaders who voluntarily left senior leadership roles in organisations in order to pursue alternate career or life choices.
Talented and derailed	Leaders who involuntarily deviated or derailed from their career paths and feel that personally or professionally they have not achieved their potential.

Table 8: Definition of the three leadership talent types

As leaders were invited to participate in the research, they were allocated to a type within this typology.

Profile summary of the types

Twenty-six participants were interviewed across the three talent types. Twenty-five of these were leaders and one participant was a talent management decision-maker from the case study organisation. Whilst one derailed leader was 40 years and one successful leader was 70 years old, all remaining twenty-three leaders were aged between 42 and 56 with no significant differences in age ranges across the talent types.

Of the twenty-five leaders interviewed, four were female and twenty-one were male. No women self-selected as having derailed in answer to messages posted on LinkedIn or made themselves known through the researchers own or extended network. A greater gender balance across all the samples could only have been achieved by making gender a characteristic of the purposive sampling. However, whilst the gender identity of the participants has been preserved, it should be noted that the study is not a study on gender differences in leadership. Gender differences in leadership derailment has been identified as an opportunity for future research in section 7.8.

The following tables provide a role profile summary of the participants comprising the three talent types:

Talented and successful

The following table summarises the participants within the talented and successful type:

Participant	Gender	Role at time of interview	Sector at time of interview
Sebastian	Male	Managing Director	Global Private
Andrew	Male	Multiple roles: Chairman Executive Director Non-Executive Director	UK Private and Public Sectors
Clarissa	Female	CEO	Public
Deepak	Male	CEO	US Based Global Private
Grant	Male	CEO	Public
Alfred	Male	Multiple roles: Chairman Managing Director Prior CEO roles	Professional body Private
Marcus	Male	Managing Director Previously CEO	Private Public
Dominic	Male	CEO	Public
Adam	Male	Partner Previous roles: Prior CEO roles	Private
Rakesh	Male	Group COO	Global Private

Table 9: Participants within the talented and successful leadership talent type

The following table summarises the participants within the talented and successful type recruited to the study through their company, together with the TM decision maker:

Participant	Gender	Role at time of interview	Sector at time of interview
Stacey	Female	Director	Private FTSE 100
Samuel	Male	Director	Private FTSE 100
Nigel	Male	Director	Private FTSE100
Johann	Male	HR Director: Talent Management	Private FTSE100

Table 10: Participants within the talented and successful leadership talent type accessed through their company

Talented and derailed

The following table summarises the participants within the talented and derailed leader type:

Participant	Gender	Leadership role at time of derailment	Role at time of interview	Sector at time of interview
Craig	Male	Sales Director FTSE100	Sales Manager	Private
Derek	Male	Director US based company	Senior Leader US based company	Private
Peter	Male	Senior Manager FTSE 100	Service manager	Private
Aaron	Male	Senior Manager Global FTSE 100	Independent consultant	Private
James	Male	CEO	Independent consultant	Public
Richard	Male	CEO	Independent consultant	Public

Table 11: Participants within the talented and derailed leadership talent type.

Talented and opted-out

The following table summarises the participants within the talented and opted-out leader type:

Participant	Gender	Leadership role at time of opt out	Role at time of interview	Sector at time of interview
Alex	Male	Partner Law Firm Private Sector	Independent consultant	Private
Susan	Female	Director FTSE100 Global Private Sector	Entrepreneur	Private
Sean	Male	CEO Public Sector	Independent consultant	Private
Thibaut	Male	Senior Leader FTSE 100	Investor	Private
Leonardo	Male	Director FTSE100	Investor	Private
Joyce	Female	Senior Leader	Portfolio roles	Private and Public
Paul	Male	Board Director FTSE 100 Company	Independent consultant	Private

Table 12: Participants within the talented and opted-out leadership talent type.

3.6.4 Research procedure

Prior to the interview, participants were provided with a consent form to sign and the summary of the research. Participants were offered the opportunity to ask questions at the start of the interview. Each participant took part in an interview of at least one hour. This was carried out either in person or by telephone. In some cases the one hour time frame was extended at the request of the participant. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The starting point of the interview was an encouraged recounting of their early years as they were making their first educational choices. Participants were then asked to recount their career as a leader through consideration of defining moments, decisions made, choices taken and the reasons for those choices as well as being asked, at various points during the interview, what success meant for them. Open-ended questions were asked where clarification was needed and to encourage a reflection on how their talents, decisions, actions and behaviours were influencing their success as a leader.

This same format was used for all participants with two exceptions. Firstly, at the end of the interview those participants accessed through their organisation were asked to share their thoughts on their organisations' definition of talent. Secondly, the TM decision maker was asked to discuss the organisation's operationalised definition of talent. Following completion of the interviews, each interview was transcribed and analysed.

3.7 Research analysis

Qualitative research through interview generates a rich volume of data that needs to be transcribed and synthesised to extract meaning. Following the transcribing of interviews, these were reviewed to understand how participants were talking about their experiences and to extract the meaning they were giving to those experiences. Thematic analysis was used to synthesise the data. The process of analysis of qualitative data allows for the generation of theory from that data (Saunders *et al.* 2009).

3.7.1 Transcribing the interviews

Transcribing involves reproducing as a written account, the words spoken at interview (Saunders *et al.* 2009). In adherence to the information provided to participants and the research ethics approval, individual and company names were removed from the transcripts to ensure confidentiality of the information. Transcripts were then checked for accuracy. The participants' syntax was retained and the transcripts were typed verbatim. They were not edited for grammatical accuracy.

3.7.2 Using thematic analysis to code the transcripts

Thematic analysis was used as a method for identifying, analysing and considering patterns across the resulting data. Thematic analysis is a "process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit 'code'. This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators and qualifications that are casually related; or something in between these two forms" (Boyatzis 1998, p.vi-vii). A challenge in analysing large volumes of qualitative data is in segmenting the data to identify meaningful patterns (Dapkus 1985). The underpinning philosophy of the research was that of interpretivist hermeneutical-phenomenology, in order to explore how leadership talent enacts success or derails. In order to address the research questions, the lived meaning that participants gave to their experiences needed to be understood, distilled and communicated in a way that addressed the research questions. Each participant would have a different 'reality' of what it meant to be a talented leader enacting success or derailment. Thematic analysis would allow for the exploration of meaning and the categorisation of those meanings into broad themes (Van Manen 1990) to which codes could be allocated. Such themes allow for systematic review in hermeneutical-phenomenology (Van Manen 1990).

Transcripts were reviewed line by line. As the first transcript was analysed, unique numeric codes were allocated to each occurrence of relevant qualitative data. Relevancy was considered in the context of the purpose of the research and the research questions and deemed to be anything which could be perceived to be:

- An attribute of the individual for example, a trait, skill, competency, preference, attitude, perception.
- A behaviour of the individual for example, an action or a response
- An experience of the individual for example, an incident, an event or an action by a third party
- Meanings they attribute to any of the above

These unique codes were noted both on the transcript and in a master list to enable cross-referencing at a later stage. As these first codes were generated they were allocated to an 'attribute descriptor' for example, 'confidence,' 'ambitious,' 'promotion' and 'networking.' These attribute descriptors encompassed traits, characteristics, behaviours, motivations and events. The attribute descriptors were generated from the leader's own use of terminology and from recognised commonly used dictionary definitions of terms. The use of terms that required substantial definition could, at this stage of the analysis, distort the meaning the participants were giving to their experiences and lead to making too early an assumption with regard to the meaning of the data, in effect over-interpreting the data.

The second transcript coded was a talented and successful leader approached through the organisation. The third transcript coded was from the talented and opted-out population and the fourth from the talented and derailed population. This sequence of coding allowed for the emergence of any sample specific codes. As the coding continued codes were allocated to existing attribute descriptors, or where appropriate attribute descriptors did not exist, new ones were created and codes added. Transcripts were coded in 'batches' with each batch containing one transcript from each of the different samples. In this way, any significant differences in attributes within each sample could begin to be identified. Following the coding of the first twelve transcripts few if any new attribute descriptors were identified.

After this initial coding, a master list of 232 attribute descriptions was created. However, themes began to emerge across the attribute descriptors. At this stage, the attribute descriptors were grouped into a number of themes summarised below:

Theme	Number of attribute descriptors within the theme
Personal characteristics	22
Career management	22
Relationship with others	19
Behaviours	17
Motivation	16
How leaders learn	15
Early years influence	12
Achievement orientation	12
Knowledge and skills	11
Relationship with Senior Leaders	10
Life factors	9
Resilience	9
Talent Management	8
Self-awareness and self-perception	8
Attitudes and beliefs	7
Emotions and feelings	7
Why leaders leave roles	7
Critical incidents and defining moments	7
Change	6
Education and the perception of education	4
Personal values	2
Team and social context	2
Total number of attribute descriptors	232

Table 13: Initial themes identified through coding.

The label in the left hand column relates to the overarching theme. The number in the right hand column relates to the number of attributes within that theme for example, a theme was labelled 'personal characteristics' and within this theme were 22 attributes each with an attribute descriptor. As the remaining transcripts were coded, these codes were allocated to their corresponding attribute descriptor now listed within a theme. On completion of the coding, it became apparent that:

- Many attribute descriptors and themes were not significantly populated with codes.
- Some descriptors were the converse of each other, for example confidence and lack of confidence.
- Some descriptors were so similar they were merged for example, curious and inquisitive.
- Other descriptors were better listed under different themes, for example, descriptors listed under the theme of 'behaviours' were better listed under the theme within which the behaviour manifested itself.

As a result, the list of themes and attributes was revised. Prior to concluding whether attribute descriptors were for example, traits, behaviours, competencies, motivations or concepts, many attribute descriptors were allocated to the theme of 'personal characteristics.' As codes were refined, de-duplicated and listed within themes that were more relevant, few attribute descriptors remained listed under the more general theme of 'personal characteristics.' Furthermore, few consistent patterns emerged across those attribute descriptors that did remain listed. Following a refinement of the codes, only four personal characteristics were retained independent of any theme other than the theme of 'personal characteristics.' These were 'confident,' 'ethical,' 'realistic' and 'independent.' As well as specifically referencing the term 'resilience,' leaders were alluding to characteristics they felt exemplified resilience or which could reasonably be perceived to be aspects or examples of the concept of resilience, including: bouncing back, optimism, learning from mistakes, working well under pressure, stress management and adaptive responses to trauma. It was therefore appropriate to use the term 'resilience' as both an attribute descriptor and a theme.

Through the process of removing descriptors which were not significantly populated, de-duplicating descriptors, refining the allocation of descriptors to themes and considering the contribution to theory building each theme presented, a revised lists of important themes was created.

3.7.3 Key themes identified from the thematic analysis

The following table presents a revised list of themes. These themes and their corresponding codes when analysed, contributed to theory building in the context of understanding the attributes of the leadership talent types.

Theme Number	Theme	Number of attribute descriptors within the theme	Number of codes within the theme
1	Attitudes	3	142
2	Achievement orientation	6	117
3	Resilience	2	100
4	Personal characteristics	4	88
5	Self-awareness	3	64
6	Change	3	62
7	Relationship with senior leaders	3	56
8	Skills, knowledge and capabilities	3	40
9	Relationship with others	1	33

Table 14: The key themes of the leadership talent types.

The codes were not assigned weightings and not all codes are equal in weight. The breakdown of codes per theme provides a broad overview of the relative importance of attributes and themes in the context of constructing theory. Banister *et al.* (1994) argue that qualitative and quantitative research does not need to be set in opposition to each other and that qualitative research can be summarised in numerical form. Throughout chapter five (findings from the thematic analysis) these numerical summaries provide an indication of the emphasis given to particular attributes and themes. Commentary is provided to support the presentation of the coding information together with quotations from the interview transcripts. This commentary provides a sense of the meaning participants were giving to their experiences. The coding summaries, commentary and indicative quotations need to be considered holistically to fully understand the importance of certain attributes and themes over others and how these contribute to success or derailment. In order to maintain confidentiality in accordance with ethics procedures outlined previously in this chapter, words or phrases that could identify a participant are omitted. In some instances, this may affect grammatical structure.

The following table provides a summary of both the theme and the attribute descriptors within that theme:

Ranking	Theme	Corresponding attribute descriptors
1	Attitudes	1 Attitude to learning 2 Attitude to work 3 Attitude to risk
2	Achievement orientation	1 Delivering results 2 Ambitious 3 Driven 4 Setting high standards 5 Working hard 6 Decisive
3	Resilience	1 Resilience 2 Adaptable
4	Personal characteristics	1 Confidence 2 Ethical 3 Realistic 4 Independent
5	Self awareness	1 Awareness of strengths and weaknesses 2 Understanding how they are perceived by others 3 Understanding of own capabilities compared to others
6	Change	1 Breaking new ground 2 Leading strategic or culture change 3 Being part of something big
7	Relationships with senior leaders	1 Relationship with line manager 2 Relationship with senior executives 3 Relationship with CEO
8	Skills, knowledge and capabilities	1 Business management skills 2 Strategic thinking 3 Expert knowledge
9	Relationships with others	1 Building relationships

Table 15: Summary of the key themes and corresponding attribute descriptors

The attribute descriptors were a combination of traits, behaviours, actions, skills and knowledge, and the outcomes of these. An example of the latter is the theme 'relationships with senior leaders.' The quality of these relationships was an outcome of a leader's behaviours, actions and responses towards their senior leaders. The findings are presented as a comparative analysis of the three leadership talent types.

3.7.4 Reliability, validity and credibility in qualitative research

All research must be open to critique and evaluation, as evaluation is a pre-requisite of the application of the findings (Long and Johnson 2000). There are two aspects to the credibility of findings in research; these are reliability and validity (Collis and Hussey 2014; Bryman and Bell 2011; Saunders *et al.* 2009; Long and Johnson 2000). Collis and Hussey (2014, p.52) define reliability as referring to “the accuracy and precision of the measurement and the absence of differences if the research was repeated.” Reliability is concerned with the stability of the data over time (Esterby-Smith *et al.* 2002). Validity is the extent to which the research measures what it is supposed to measure and the findings represent the phenomena under study (Collis and Hussey 2014; Hair *et al.* 2007; Esterby-Smith *et al.* 2002).

Long and Johnson (2000) suggest that whilst those concepts relate well to the positivist paradigm, their use in qualitative research has been called into question, with the result that a variety of positions have been adopted. They summarise these positions as including dismissing the application of reliability and validity in qualitative research, attempting to apply them in the traditional manner, using such terms whilst modifying their interpretation or substituting new criteria. To ensure credibility and rigour in this study, the concepts and application of reliability and validity were seen as important. There was recognition however, that in a qualitative, interpretivist, inductive study reliability and validity might hold a different meaning than for example, reliability and validity in a positivist and quantitative, deductive study.

Reliability

Reliability is about consistency. Saunders *et al.* (2009, p.600) define reliability as “the extent to which data collection technique or techniques will yield consistent findings, similar observations would be made or conclusions reached by other researchers.”

Banister *et al.* (1994, p.143) argue that in qualitative interpretivist research the concept of reliability is inappropriate as knowledge is “accepted as constructed” and is “understanding in process, which is open to multiple interpretations.” They argue that in qualitative research rather than consistency, the emphasis is on replication through

“reinterpreting the findings from a different standpoint or exploring the same issues in different contexts rather than expecting or desiring consistent accounts” (Banister *et al.* 1994, p.143). Other scholars disagree that reliability is inappropriate and instead modify the meaning of the term in order for reliability to apply in the context of qualitative research. This was the approach taken in this study. Saunders *et al.* (2009) suggest that in qualitative research reliability is the extent to which there is transparency in how sense was made from the raw data. Emphasis should be placed on establishing protocols and procedures that ensure authentic findings and that “findings are accurate and reliable through verification” (Collis and Hussey 2014, p.47). The reporting of the coding process and thematic analysis and a review of the process of refining the themes provide transparency in this study, on how sense was made of the interview data. The defining of attributes and themes provide clarity for future comparative studies.

Hair *et al.* (2007, p.297) suggest that in qualitative research, reliability is the “degree of consistency in assignment of similar words, phrases or other kinds of data to the same pattern or theme by different researchers.” They refer to this as inter-rater reliability. As there was only one researcher analysing and coding the interviews inconsistency of assignment by different researchers was not an issue. However, reliability in qualitative research can also mean the degree to which a single researcher is consistent in their interpretations over time (Collis and Hussey 2014; Hair *et al.* 2007). Rigorous thematic analysis ensured consistency in the meaning given to the data and that dominant patterns of data were identified. Whilst the study is not a longitudinal study, the interviews took place over a number of years. Consistency of approach was maintained throughout that time and the same questions were asked of participants.

Validity

Validity is concerned with whether or not the measure of a concept actually measures that concept (Bryman and Bell 2011). Saunders *et al.* (2009, p.603) in addition suggest it is the “extent to which research findings are really about what they profess to be about.” There are numerous ways to ensure validity in qualitative studies: content validity, criterion-related validity, construct validity, face validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, convergent validity, ecological validity, internal validity and measurement validity (Bryman and Bell 2011; Saunders *et al.* 2009; Long and Johnson 2000). At the very least

research should have face validity and the findings should reflect the concepts under investigation (Bryman and Bell 2011). Through the literature review, the concepts of talent, success and derailment were explored with gaps in the literature identified. The interview schedule and findings of the research were plausible in addressing these gaps in the context of those concepts. In applying other forms of validity Long and Johnson (2000) argue that as with reliability, some scholars suggest that validity is more applicable to positivist research and that in qualitative research the issue is one of credibility.

Hair *et al.* (2007) recommend that where analysis requires the allocation of codes and identification of patterns, then a number of methods can be used to assess validity including, the rapport between the researcher and the participants, the procedures used during the coding process and the association of data to dominant patterns. Banister *et al.* (1994) argue that validity in qualitative research is centred on the ability of the researcher to understand and properly represent the meaning people give to their experiences. A number of methods were used to ensure the validity of the data in this study. A good rapport was formed between the researcher and the participants. This ensured leaders were comfortable sharing their experiences and providing a candid account of these. Leaders were provided with sufficient information prior to the interview through participant information sheets ensuring leaders were prepared for the nature of the research. Where possible leaders were approached via their trusted networks, ensuring leaders were comfortable sharing personal information (Hall and Stevens 1991 cited in Long and Johnson 2000). Strict enforcement of confidentiality was maintained so leaders were confident in how the data would be used.

Easterby-Smith (2002) suggest that tests for validity should be made at the pilot stage of the research. Derailed leaders 'self-selected' as having derailed. At the early stages of the research this protocol identified inconsistencies in the way that some leaders were defining themselves with the result that a new category of 'opted-out' leaders emerged. This ensured the validity of the derailment data, ensuring 'derailment' was the concept being measured.

Triangulation

Triangulation in research takes the form of using different vantage points to ensure greater validity in the interpretations (Banister *et al.* 1994). Put simply, triangulation “is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or at least do not contradict it” (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.266). There are four types of triangulation: Firstly, by data source which involves collecting data from different sources. Secondly, by method which involves the use of different methods and a comparison of findings. Thirdly, by researcher which compares the methods, analysis and interpretations of different researchers on the same topic. Finally, by theory using multiple theories and perspectives to explain the data (Collin and Hussey 2014; Miles and Huberman 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that triangulation becomes a form of analytic induction using multiple instances, sources and methods to verify data collection. In this study, triangulation was by data. Data on the attributes of derailed leaders was not only collected from derailed leaders but also from successful leaders who expressed their opinions on the reasons leaders derailed. These were categorised and compared to the results of the thematic analysis verifying the findings. Triangulation by data was particularly important given the interpretivist nature of the research verifying and validating these interpretations through the lens of multiple successful leaders.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity relates to the role of the researcher as part of the research process, particularly when interpreting the research. It “is an essential part of qualitative research” as the researcher is implicated in the construction of knowledge through their own values, beliefs and interests therefore researchers must consider how these may inform or bias the research process (Long and Johnson 2000, p.33). Bryman and Bell (2011, p.543) define reflexivity as “reflectiveness among social researchers about the implications for the knowledge of the social world they generate of their methods, values, biases, decisions, and mere presence in the very situations they investigate.” Banister *et al.* (1994) suggest a more dynamic interaction between the researcher and the research subject as the way the researcher characterises a phenomenon changes the way it presents itself therefore changing their perception of it. Macbeth (2001, p.35) suggests

there are two forms of reflexivity that must be considered, positional reflexivity and textual reflexivity. Positional reflexivity encourages the researcher to consider how they shape the analytic exercise. Textual reflexivity encourages the researcher to consider how they examine and reflect back the text. The researcher, as a qualified and experienced Executive Coach was mindful of the potential influence of the researcher, as Coach development encourages a similar reflection on the influence of the Coach in the coaching engagement. In interviews a neutral position was taken in order to provide a confidential and empathetic environment conducive to the leaders sharing their lived experience, without the imposition of the researcher's own values, belief and interests. The researcher utilised both their researcher and coaching skills to ensure impartiality during the interview process, particularly when interviewing derailed leaders who might find recounting their experiences of that time difficult. A neutral stance was perceived particularly important following a review of the work of George and McLean (2007, p.4) who described successful leaders as recounting their early success as if they were "an all-conquering hero." They also suggested a tendency of derailed leaders to rationalise their experience as a way of absolving themselves of responsibility for their derailment. As an Executive Coach, the researcher was aware that a less neutral approach to the interview might result in inadvertently colluding with the participants in that process. Textual reflexivity took place during the transcribing, coding and the emergence of attributes and themes. The iterative process of thematic analysis during which themes were defined, reviewed, cross-referenced and in the case of 'derailer' characteristics, triangulated with those provided by successful leaders, ensured rigour in the analysis and reflection on how the text was being consistently interpreted for meaning without bias and the imposition of the researcher's own values and beliefs.

3.8 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to make explicit the research philosophy that underpins the research and to provide a rationale for this approach. The philosophical approach was considered in the context of the research questions, identified following the literature review. The overall purpose of the study is one of exploration given both TM literature and leadership derailment literature are emerging areas of academic and practitioner

interest, lacking in widely accepted theory. A subjectivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological philosophy underpins the research. Interpretivism encompasses the phenomenon to be understood. The methodology used here is hermeneutical phenomenology, which enables an exploration of the lived meaningful experience of leadership talent. Using a qualitative approach to interviewing talented, successful and derailed leaders provides rich data that is then transcribed and coded using thematic analysis. This analysis generated key themes, which will be explored in the 'findings' chapters. An inductive approach to theory construction is used and through a presentation of the findings, theory and a conceptual framework begin to emerge of how talented leaders enact their talent to success or derail. Throughout the research attention was given to the reliability, validity and credibility of the research to ensure rigour in the findings. These next three chapters provide a presentation of these findings.

Chapter 4: Findings: Defining leadership talent - an organisational case study

4.1 Positioning the case study in the research

During the literature review, a common consensus that there was a lack of conceptualisation, theory and definition of TM, talent and leadership talent, was identified amongst academics. The popular strategic talent management approach to TM reinforces the importance of organisations using their own organisationally specific definitions of talent linked to the values and culture of the organisation (Schuler 2015). That organisations were creating such definitions was evidenced by practitioner research. Due to a lack of organisational case studies however, there was a gap in knowledge in how organisations were defining the attributes of leadership talent and then how they were operationalising these definitions, influencing the identification, selection and development of that talent. Operationalised definitions of talent create the 'real world' through which a leader is defined as 'talented'. The case study organisation provided an opportunity to explore the operationalising of definitions of leadership talent at an early stage of the research.

A review of the leadership derailment literature evidenced that talented leaders are derailing. A better understanding of how organisations defined and then operationalised those definitions of talent would contribute to knowledge, providing an insight into how rigorously an organisation defined the attributes of talent that leaders were then benchmarked against for identification and selection purposes. It was identified in the review, that derailment should not be assumed to be caused by a lack of the attributes of talent. A lack of rigour in the definition of the attributes of leadership talent and a lack of provision for the identification of potential 'derailer' characteristics may influence the effectiveness with which leaders are identified as talent in the first place. A single case does not allow for generalisation however, it "provides an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon that few have considered before" (Saunders *et al.* 2009, p.148). The case study would provide an indication of how plausible it was that organisationally specific definitions of leadership talent may not be adequate in effectively identifying leadership talent, which would make leadership derailment a more likely occurrence. The

case study would therefore contribute to future research into that relationship as well as providing an exploratory opportunity for this research. The case study forms a 'bridge' between the literature review which considered the different theoretical approaches to how the attributes of leadership talent can be defined and a 'real world' example of how an organisation defines leadership talent and then operationalises that definition.

4.2 The Case Study

The case study organisation is a global, market leading, financial services provider, with over 120,000 employees worldwide. This organisation uses formal TM practices to identify and develop its leadership talent. The case study organisation allowed access to a TM decision maker who could provide an overview of the organisation's approach to defining their leadership talent. The organisation also provided access to three talented and successful leaders to be interviewed as part of that sample population.

4.3 How the organisation defined talent

The TM decision maker (*Johann*) identified a number of challenges in defining talent. Of particular concern was the necessity to differentiate between managerial talent, general management (leadership) talent and technical talent:

"Talent is viewed by different people in different ways. In terms of the wider definition of talent; the question should be 'talent for what?' and looking for talent, specific talent and talent pools, for specific purposes. We have to somehow be more specific and say...to differentiate between say the management of people, the general management and then to look at the more technical areas - to look at their technical ability in particular...Moving a step back we need to look at how we do define talent" (*Johann*).

The distinction was made between leadership and 'technical' talent, where 'technical' talent related to the organisation's sector expertise. This distinction was thought by the participant, to create challenges for the organisation with regard to the relationship between technical and leadership talent as the organisation was "primarily a technical organisation" (*Johann*).

4.4 How leadership talent was defined in the organisation

The organisation was described as having two 'talent pools.' One talent pool comprised those leaders with the potential for Senior Management positions. The other comprised those leaders with leadership capability. In this organisation, a talent pool was a group of people identified as having leadership potential. This links to the strategic talent management approach in the literature review where talent pools are a way of ensuring 'A' players can be developed for 'A' positions (Sparrow and Makram 2015; Collings and Mellahi 2009; Sparrow *et al.* 2004).

Leadership capability was defined as comprising four areas of competency with behavioural indicators. These behaviours needed to be demonstrated by leaders in order to be considered 'talented.' The organisation also referenced the performance appraisals of individuals. In addition to the competencies, behavioural indicators and performance appraisals, the organisation also used the 'nine-box grid,' outlined in the literature review, to indicate performance and potential. Leadership talent was therefore identified using a set of leadership competencies, a definition of potential, a nine-box grid of performance and potential and additional required attributes.

Leadership competencies

The TM decision maker outlined the leadership competencies used by the organisation to define their leadership talent. These competencies were:

Competency	Associated behaviours
1. Setting direction	a. Scanning the big picture b. Focusing on success
2. Organising people	a. Influencing with confidence and style b. Raising professional talent
3. Making decisions	a. Making commercial judgements b. Thinking company wide
4. Drive improvements	a. Innovating commercially b. Delivery with dynamism and pace

Exhibit 6: Competencies and behaviours used to define leadership talent in the case study organisation

On listing these, the TM decision maker referred to 4b as “an odd one” (Joahnn), admitting that this was “not really defined anywhere” but was reflective of the organisation’s values. Although this was not defined leaders were benchmarked against it in practice. Similarly it was not clear what ‘influencing...with style’ comprised. This points to the dangers of linking definitions of talent to the values and culture of an organisation as proposed through the strategic talent management approach, which can lead to the use of ‘buzz words’ and jargon which may be recognised in the organisation but open to misinterpretation.

Defining leadership potential

Together with the competencies, leaders were assessed as ‘high potential’ against three ‘agilities’ namely ‘strategic,’ ‘emotion’ and ‘learning’ agilities. The TM decision maker explained that:

“These are looking at the intellectual, the interpersonal, the ability to learn and change and the ability to learn from experience. We are using these to define potential; to pick out potential” (Johann).

Whilst potential was defined as a list of three agilities, it was not clear how the explanation provided by the TM decision maker related to these agilities. The ability to learn and change and the ability to learn from experience could be linked to ‘learning agility’ described in the literature as a definition of high potential (Lombardo and Eichinger 2000). However, it was not clear how the three agilities linked to the comment that the organisation was looking at potential as “the intellectual, the interpersonal.” Neither was it clear to what the agility of ‘emotion’ related. As a result, the definition of potential using these three agilities appeared vague and ambiguous. This linked to the literature review where references to potential were made but potential was undefined apart from the notion that it signified the ability to move into more senior roles (Iles *et al.* 2010a; Collings and Mellahi 2009; Makela *et al.* 2010).

Using the nine-box grid to assess potential

The organisation used the 'nine-box grid' identified in the literature review to define talent where performance and potential were used as the x and y-axis. The corresponding nine cells were defined by the organisation in the context of high, mid and low performance and high, mid and low potential. The definitions within the cells related to the degree to which the individual "was performing," "delivered in role," "showed potential" and "was an expert" (Johann).

Neither performance nor potential were defined on the nine-box grid. The words 'some,' 'fair,' 'average' and 'strong' were used to specify the degree of performance or potential required. These were not defined further and were used inconsistently throughout the nine-box grid. The TM decision maker explained:

"We have ranked performance and we have ranked potential but we don't have a consistent definition of potential. This is a weakness. Those with the highest performance end up in the 'high' boxes. High potential is overshadowed by performance in their current role. Someone not performing in their current role wouldn't be considered high potential" (Johann).

Given that there was an inconsistent definition of potential, it was unclear how or if the three agilities previously identified as defining potential were used in the context of categorising leaders using the nine-box grid. Having 'future potential' as a definition of talent was superseded by 'current performance in role' when operationalised. This raised the interesting puzzle of whether, in this organisation someone could be a high performer, not meet the admittedly vague definition of potential, and still be considered 'talent.' This has implications for how those individuals identified as leadership talent by nature of being a high performer enact the talents they do have into success or if they are a derailment risk. It is possible that such leaders are 'set up to fail.'

Additional attributes of high potential leaders

Together with the three agilities of 'strategic,' 'emotion' and 'learning' that were cited as defining potential, a further definition of what constituted high potential was provided by the TM decision maker, comprising the following attributes:

Attributes of high potential leaders in the case study organisation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bright 2. Intellectual - Intellectually capable 3. Well informed in their area 4. On the top of their game 5. Adjusts quickly to new roles 6. Good relationship management 7. Delivers on their promises

Exhibit 7: Attributes required of leadership talent in the case study organisation

The TM decision maker also stated that the ‘perfect’ individual was someone who:

“Also manages to make a name for themselves to manage stakeholders; who speaks up and gets known” (Johann).

These attributes did not appear in the definition of the cells on the nine-box grid and were not explicit in the organisations’ definition of talent. The TM decision maker implied that these required attributes manifested through conversations within the organisation.

The following table summarises the definition of a talented leader within the case study organisation:

Case study organisation definition of talent as: a high performer with 'strong' potential who demonstrates the following:		
Leadership competencies	Agilities	Characteristics of high potential
1. Setting direction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Scanning the big picture b. Focusing on success 2. Organising People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Influencing with confidence and style b. Raising professional talent 3. Making decisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Making commercial judgements b. Thinking company wide 4. Drive Improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Innovating commercially b. Delivery with dynamism and pace 	1. Strategic 2. Emotion 3. Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bright, intellectual - Intellectually capable • Well informed in their area • On the top of their game • Adjusts quickly to new roles • Good relationship management. • Delivers on their promises • Makes a name for themselves • Speaks up and gets known • Manages stake holders

*Exhibit 8: Summary of the case study organisation's definition of leadership talent.
Sourced from the case study organisation*

The overriding definition of talent, for the case study organisation, is someone who is a high performer. Consideration is then given to the demonstration of the leadership competencies and the characteristics of high potential comprising three agilities and a number of attributes. Of the listed attributes of potential, only strategic, emotion and learning agility were an explicit part of the organisation's definition of potential. In the absence of a consistent application or definition of the meaning of these three attributes, the remaining attributes were used informally to define potential when the definition of talent was operationalised.

4.5 Causes of leadership derailment in the organisation

The TM decision maker made a distinction between lack of leadership success and derailment with the suggestion that:

“Maybe they haven't derailed but they have just not been successful in our organisation” (Johann).

The TM decision maker cited six reasons for leaders derailing in the case study organisation:

Reasons for leadership derailment in the case study organisation
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The inability to make 'tough' decisions2. Pursuing goals that were not adding value3. A lack of 'relationship building' in the context of their relationship with their immediate line manager and stakeholders4. Not wanting to 'give in' to the 'powers that be.'5. Being too trusting6. Wanting too much visible change

Exhibit 9: Reasons for leadership derailment in the case study organisation

Not wanting to 'give in' to the 'powers that be' related to an unwillingness to adopt the leadership style of senior executives of influence. This list is interesting when compared to the list of competencies required by the case study organisation of their talented leaders. It reinforces the view of authors of leadership derailment that it cannot be assumed that derailment is caused simply by the absence of effective leadership characteristics (Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011) nor are derailment characteristics simply the converse of successful attributes. Being too trusting and failure to adopt the leadership style of senior executives for example, are distinct and different from the organisations definition of talent, rather than the opposite of any of the attributes.

4.6 The leader's perception of the organisation's TM process

The case study organisation granted access to interview three Senior Leaders for the wider study and as part of the talented and successful sample of leaders. These leaders were interviewed using the same procedure as all other talented and successful leaders. The single exception to the interview procedure was to ask the leaders for their perception of the case study organisation's approach to defining leadership talent given they had been identified as such once this definition was operationalised. Comments made by the leaders indicated that the TM practices were not transparent and that whilst the leaders were identified as leadership talent, further information was not forthcoming on why this was the case and they were not informed of where they were placed on the

nine-box grid. The following quotations illustrate how the leader's perceived the classification of themselves as talent:

"I don't think I've ever consciously known that I was in any sort of talent pool. I've had some great feedback and some great benefits along the way, but I don't think anyone's ever said 'you're in box 9 or 8 or 4 at any stage.' I'd rather not know actually. I'm reasonably laid back. I do think I ask quite a lot of myself and I'd be disappointed if I was ever in anything other than box 9. I know that's completely irrational but I think that's how I would feel about it; I'd rather not know. I'll deliver and keep ...adding value and making a difference hopefully and that will be enough. I'm lucky enough that it has been recognised and picked up on by people" (Stacy).

"I certainly wouldn't ...beat myself up if I wasn't top right hand corner you know – exceptional talent whatever. I can't even remember what the terminology is. You know the normal sort of thing: high potential, high performer or high performer with potential, you know all that sort of stuff. I'd be disappointed if it wasn't reasonably good but...I have a view now, particularly at this stage in my career that it will be what it will be and actually my biggest fear here is finding myself in a job I can't actually do" (Samuel).

One participant alluded to the same point made by the TM decision maker that talent appeared to be more about performance:

"I knew I was on the talent list. It became more transparent later on. I have less talent conversations now, it's more about how you perform on the day" (Nigel).

These quotes are indicative of an overall lack of awareness by the participants of where they had been placed on the nine-box performance and potential grid and how they met the competencies, agilities and attributes used to define leadership talent. This was not communicated to them as part of the organisation's TM practices. This illustrates the lack of emphasis on talent as active agents in TM practices identified in the review of TM literature. Instead, TM appears to be something 'done to them.' The case study also

highlighted that when leadership talent were aware of the TM practice of defining talent, they do not always engage with this practice for example, one participant suggested:

“If I’m honest I tend not to read them (*definitions of talent*)... I would say it’s pretty light touch, but then I did come in at a very senior level, where most of the generic talent management programmes don’t necessarily apply to me or just not obviously so” (Samuel)

Interestingly, here is a talented and successful leader who is the target of the organisation’s definition of talent yet does not consider those definitions to apply to them. This finding from the case study highlighted the imperative for a methodology that placed the talented leader at the ‘heart’ of the study.

4.7 Implications of the organisation’s definition of leadership talent

The emphasis in the strategic talent management approach to TM suggests that definitions of talent should be organisationally specific. This appears to be mooted as the most effective approach to defining talent and was evidenced as the most prevalent. To be effective as an approach the TM decision makers in organisations need to understand what talents are aligned to the organisations values; what talents will enable the delivery of the organisation’s strategy and be able to define these. The constructions of such definitions of leadership talent are therefore dependent on the skills, knowledge and capabilities of the TM decision makers to be able to differentiate between talents as:

1. ‘Inputs;’ what ‘talents’ an individual needs to ‘have’ for example, influencing skills
2. ‘Mechanisms;’ how they enact the talents they have for example through ‘speaking up and getting known’
3. ‘Outcomes;’ the result of the enactment of the talents they have for example, high performance.

In the absence of any distinction between inputs, mechanisms and outcomes, it was identified in the literature review that ‘definitions’ of leadership talent as object become vague, ill-defined ‘wish lists’ of attributes. The case study provides an example of such a definition operationalised within an organisation. When the definition of talent was

operationalised, neither the TM decision makers nor the leadership talent understood it. It is plausible therefore, that leaders identified as talent using such definitions are not in effect, talent. Furthermore, a failure to consider derailment characteristics and if these are present in leaders who have been identified as talent, makes plausible that such talent could derail.

4.8 Summary

The case study organisation provided an opportunity to explore the operationalising of definitions of leadership talent at an early stage of the research, given the lack of case study material in the literature. Whilst the strategic talent management approach to TM emphasises the importance of organisations using organisationally specific definitions of talent, the case study provides an example of the limitations of that approach. 'Buzz words' and organisational jargon for example, 'delivering with dynamism and pace' were ill defined and subjective as attributes of talent. Where TM decision makers were not able to distinguish between for example, skills, traits, competencies, behaviours and actions, a list of vague characteristics emerged with no evidence base to support the conclusion those 'talents' when enacted, would align to the strategy and values of the organisation. Given the evidence that a high number of leaders derail, how organisations define and operationalise their definitions of talent in order to identify talented leaders becomes significant. The case study made plausible that this process was ineffective, thereby calling into question the identification of the 'right' talent in the first place. The case study organisation also provided an example of the lack of emphasis on the leader as an active agent of TM practices with the result that leaders appeared detached from the definitions of talent that directly pertained to them.

The following chapter provides an overview of the main findings from the thematic analysis that provides insight into the attributes of the three leadership talent types and how they are enacting their talents into success or derailment. This enables the construction of theory that goes beyond simply listing characteristics.

Chapter 5: Findings from the thematic analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the findings from the thematic analysis. As outlined in chapter three, the research methodology and methods chapter, a further leadership talent type was identified during the participant selection and interview stage. This type was labelled 'talented and opted-out.' Participants allocated to this leadership talent type did not appear either to have been wholly successful in the context of their organisational leadership career, or to have derailed. Each participant was allocated to one of the types in the leadership talent typology. Presented in the findings are comparisons of the themes across the talent types. These talent types are:

1. Talented and successful
2. Talented and opted-out
3. Talented and derailed

The tables on pages 105 and 106 provide detail of the leaders in each leadership talent type. The opted-out talent type is a major contribution of the research, providing a more rigorous lens through which to explore the dynamic nature of success or derailment of leadership talent that is not present in the literature. As a contribution, this will be discussed further in chapter seven, the 'Discussion' chapter.

In this chapter, the nine key themes and corresponding attributes identified through the coding of the three talent types are examined. The table overleaf (*also appearing in Chapter 3 page 113*) summarises the nine key themes and their corresponding attributes:

Ranking	Theme	Corresponding attribute descriptors
1	Attitudes	1 Attitude to learning 2 Attitude to work 3 Attitude to risk
2	Achievement orientation	1 Delivering results 2 Ambitious 3 Driven 4 Setting high standards 5 Working hard 6 Decisive
3	Resilience	1 Resilience 2 Adaptable
4	Personal characteristics	1 Confidence 2 Ethical 3 Realistic 4 Independent
5	Self-awareness	1 Awareness of strengths and weaknesses 2 Understanding how they are perceived by others 3 Understanding of own capabilities compared to others
6	Change	1 Breaking new ground 2 Leading strategic or culture change 3 Being part of something big
7	Relationships with senior leaders	1 Relationship with line manager 2 Relationships with senior executives 3 Relationship with CEO
8	Skills, knowledge and capabilities	1 Business management skills 2 Strategic thinking 3 Expert knowledge
9	Relationships with others	1 Building relationships

Table 15 (repeated): Summary of the key themes and corresponding attribute descriptors

The purpose of this chapter is to review the themes and propose the attributes of the different talent types, how the different types are differentiated and the mechanisms being used by the talent types to enact talent into success or derailment. Through this process, the research questions can be addressed and theory constructed. Re-iterated these research questions are:

The research questions	
Research Question 1	What attributes differentiate talented and successful leaders?
Research Question 2	How are successful leaders enacting their talents?
Research Question 3	Over time, how do talented and successful leaders sustain their success?
Research Question 4	By comparison, what characterises those leaders who stall, plateau or derail?
Research Question 5	What causes some talented leaders, over time, to involuntarily stall, plateau or derail from their leadership career?
Research Question 6	What effect does the meaning leadership talent gives to success have on their leadership career?

Exhibit 1 (repeated): The research questions

Van Manen (1990, p.168) argues that in hermeneutical-phenomenological research when organising the writing of themes “one must resist the temptation to take a stab at meaning here, and then there, and then drift to another theme, thus producing a description that has no overall structure. Every phenomenological description has in some sense a forced quality to it...the challenge becomes how to treat each of the themes systematically, even though one theme always implicates the meaning dimensions of other themes.” The themes are presented in a systematic and structured way. Each theme and its corresponding attribute(s) is reviewed and the differences across the three talent types are explored. Consideration is given to whether the attribute is an ‘input’ for example, a trait or attitude; a ‘mechanism’, for example, a behaviour or action, or an ‘output’ for example, a result or performance. A positive input can be perceived as a ‘talent,’ the ‘mechanism,’ the enactment of talent, and the ‘output’ the outcome of that enactment. At the end of each theme a summary is provided. This summary concludes whether the theme or any of the attributes within it differentiates one talent type from another. These differentiated themes or attributes are used to build up a profile for each talent types, providing insight into the differences in attributes across the types and beginning to construct a theory of talent type attributes and the enactment of these.

Working definitions of the attributes are presented. These are derived either by encapsulating the general meaning given by the participants or using a dictionary definition. Dictionary definitions provided a more commonly understood use of a term in everyday language more comparable to the way in which participants spoke of such terms.

5.2 The theme of ‘attitudes’

The working definition of an ‘attitude’ was “a frame of mind, way of thinking, way of looking at things...” (Oxford Dictionaries 2016).

Early in the interview stage, a number of consistencies began to emerge in how participants expressed what they thought or how they felt about specific things that then appeared to influence their behaviours. These codes were allocated to descriptors that were grouped under a theme identified as ‘attitudes.’ Three attitudes of significance emerged:

Attribute	Working definition
Attitude to learning	Attitudes towards education and ongoing personal and professional development
Attitude to work	Attitudes towards the work participants were engaged in as a result of how they felt about that work
Attitude to risk	Attitudes towards taking risks personally and professionally

Table 16: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘attitudes’ theme

The leader’s attitude to learning influenced their engagement in ongoing personal development; their application of learning; the importance they placed on continuous learning and development and their career decisions. Attitudes towards their work and to risk influenced decisions leaders made with regard to their careers. Attitudes in the context of career decisions are explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

5.2.1 Comparison across the types

Both positive and negative attitudes were communicated, however whilst some of the attitudes appeared negative, it could not be assumed that negative attitudes produced negative consequences. In some cases, successful leaders used the emergence of a negative attitude as a catalyst for change for example; being bored with work was used as a catalyst for seeking alternative roles. Statements on attitudes to learning, work and risk were made more frequently by the successful leadership talent type; with 70% of codes generated by this type compared to 15% by the derailed leaders and 15% by opted-out leaders. The following table provides a comparison of the distribution of codes for each attribute descriptor across the types:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Attitude to learning	50	10	14	74
Attitude to work	35	9	7	51
Attitude to risk	15	3	0	18
Total	100	22	21	143

Table 17: 'Attitudes' theme: comparison of number of codes

There were significant differences across the three types in attitudes to learning, work and risk, such that 'attitudes' was a key differentiator of the talented and successful leaders.

5.2.2 Attitude to learning

Attitudes to learning were influenced by a perception of formal education and the value placed on learning. These attitudes influenced the learning strategies and styles leaders adopted in their ongoing development. All leaders apart from one had attended university and all of those attending university apart from one, had attained a degree. Four leaders mentioned having a postgraduate degree and one leader had a PhD.

Achievement in, and experiences of, education varied considerably within and across the types. Educational institutions attended varied from inner city Polytechnics to Harvard Business School and Oxford University. Some leaders cited high achievement in education and others suggested they were 'average' academically. The following illustrates this contrast within the successful leadership talent type, where one talented and successful leader cites high academic achievement and another cites being 'mediocre,' yet both retained a positive attitude to learning:

"I started to think, well actually maybe I've got something more about me, so I got the four highest 'A' levels in the school; the first ever first class honours degree that *Polytechnic x* had awarded for that degree and getting good career reports during that period..." (Grant).

This compares to:

"I know they would look at it and say 'that guy is going to do well' regardless of academic qualifications' and actually my academic qualifications really have only been mediocre" (Sebastian).

What was consistent across all the types was the perceived positive experience of attending university and the life enhancing opportunities a university education provided. For some leaders, again across all types, attending university can be linked to their desire to 'break new ground' (documented in the 'change' theme later in this chapter), as they were the first in their family to attend university. Attending university was also seen by some leaders as an opportunity to create a more financially secure lifestyle because of childhood poverty. Their attitude to learning and their education choices were therefore influenced by their life experience. This was a shared theme across all types:

Talented and successful	“I grew up on a council estate...and then I went to university and...these people had...fabulous homes that they could go to, which were lovely for their kids and the kids were much more self-confident than I ever remember because they had an assured background ... I mean, some of this perception turned out to be inaccurate but you know, that’s not what influenced me at the time. At the time, I thought these guys go back to nice houses and mums and dads and dinner on the table and all that sort of thing. Everybody seems to be smartly dressed and what have you, so I’d quite like to give that to the next generation if I have one” (Marcus).
Talented and opted-out	“I was born and raised on a large council estate. Nobody went to university. You left school, a tiny percentage did ‘A’ levels somewhere, like me, and the whole driver was getting from a very working class family into a paid job...what was driving me at that point, I think, because I was highly ambitious as a young person, was to certainly break out” (Sean).
Talented and derailed	“I grew up in Northern Ireland in the middle of the troubles and so education was my way out and I sort of identified that was my only way out...” (Aaron).

Exhibit 10: Comparison of statements on ‘attitude to education’

The talented and successful leaders were more likely to cite the holistic opportunities university life presented for example:

“Pretty much everything flowed from being in *University x*. It was eye opening in many, many respects... It showed me a very different world... from provincial England. *University x* changed everything in a major way. It was a time of huge change and conflict internationally and it sort of felt, certainly in the University scene at the time; it was a huge change that was going on...” (Andrew).

This may also link to the theme of ‘breaking new ground’ described later in this section, indicating a positive attitude to learning because of a desire to be involved in novel experiences. Whilst there were no differences between the talent types with regard to motivation to attend university and perception of the value of university education, successful leaders were more likely to describe themselves as “not the brightest”

(Samuel, Sebastian, Alfred, Rakesh) in the context of their performance at university, with one successful leader noting that:

“Obviously a prerequisite to entering an institution like x is very strong academic skills and a very strong academic record, but in addition to that, the selectivity is very high. So they are looking for people that have the ability to demonstrate that they have other interests and other talents alongside the academic as well, and probably more so today” (Deepak).

Whilst there were few differences in attitudes to formal education, greater differences emerged on the emphasis participants placed on the value of learning and ongoing development. Successful leaders spoke more frequently about the value of learning, their ongoing development and learning strategies than those who had opted-out or derailed with 70% of codes derived from the successful talent type compared to 15% each from the opted-out and derailed leaders. Successful leaders focused on development gained through ‘stretching themselves’ (i.e., challenging themselves) through the work they undertook:

“I was headhunted by company x, to do a very different role. I’d never thought of that company...they gave me a very big job...I was having a good time, being stretched, being challenged” (Rakesh).

Even where the outcome was not successful, successful leaders enjoyed the learning opportunity:

“Oh I was actually feeling invigorated rather than disappointed, so I thought actually getting that close I should be thinking about looking for those sort of jobs...” (Grant).

This provides an example of a growth mindset and links to the concept of growth and fixed mindsets (Dweck 2006) identified in the literature. Dweck (2006) suggested that those with a growth mindset are prepared to stretch themselves and perceive that success comes through learning from the experience and from others regardless of the outcome. Those with a fixed mindset are more focused on proving their capability and

may avoid situations and people that may challenge their perception of that capability. This latter point was supported by an observation by one successful participant commenting on his derailed manager that:

“...he liked to surround himself with bright people, but as soon as he does he worries that they might be a threat to him...” (George).

Those leaders who were successful cited greater diversity in learning strategies and styles, describing learning from role models, mentors, experience and from their mistakes. By comparison, only one code could be attributed to learning strategies for those leaders who had opted-out or derailed. For the leader who had opted-out, this related to learning from a mentor and for the leader who derailed, this related to learning from an inspirational but not personally known role model on the social media site, Twitter.

All leadership talent types demonstrated a positive attitude to learning. The difference across the three types was in how this manifested. Successful leaders developed by ‘stretching themselves,’ learning through others, experience and by mistakes. This links to a growth mindset (Dweck 2006). It also links to the work of McCall (1998) and Lombardo and Eichinger (2000, p.321) in identifying that “learning from experience is how a person demonstrates...high potential” that forms the basis of their model of learning agility. Here ‘positive attitude to learning’ is an ‘input’ common to all types however, the successful leaders are using the mechanisms of ‘growth mindset,’ ‘diverse learning strategies’ and ‘challenging themselves’ to enact this positive attitude. The opted-out and derailed types demonstrated a positive attitude to learning, in particular through formal education. However, they were not using the mechanisms demonstrated by the successful leadership talent type to enact this.

5.2.3 Attitude to work

‘Attitude to work’ was linked to feelings about work. Successful leaders had a positive attitude to their work. They liked to feel excited about their work and find their work interesting. Boredom, disinterest and lack of enjoyment, creating a negative attitude to

work, were the catalyst for a career move. Two opted-out leaders also cited boredom as a catalyst for action for example:

“When it became business as usual I got bored. I get disruptive when I get bored. I want to light the ‘touch paper,’ in a fun way. I want to create energy” (Susan).

That ‘business as usual’ results in boredom can be linked to the desire to ‘break new ground’ (discussed in the ‘change’ sub-section 5.7, in this chapter).

Fear of failure was, for a significant number of successful leaders, a motivating factor in achieving success in roles. By comparison, those leaders who had derailed, typically stayed in roles longer, even where they cited a lack of enjoyment, engagement or interest. Attitudes to work had mixed consequences for opted-out leaders with some remaining in roles even when they were not enjoying their work and others using negative attitudes to work as a catalyst to leave organisations.

Attitudes to work were impacted by a fear of failure that for a number of successful leaders was a motivating factor in achieving success in roles. Those leaders who opted-out did not cite ‘fear of failure.’ Derailed leaders only cited this twice. Successful leaders cited ‘fear of failure’ seven times. This fear appeared to influence attitudes to work in particular acting as a motivating factor in achieving success:

“The biggest fear I have is that as you become more senior and more people are dependent on you to be able to do your job, not being able to do that would involve quite a major impact on an awful lot of people’s lives not just my own... Ultimately I suppose it could potentially lead me to being out of a job and you know, not able to necessarily provide for my family which would be you know, a major concern for me” (Stanley).

“I was very ambitious to move to the next job but...I was scared of failure and I think that is partly face, partly pride to friends and family, so pride and fear of failure, but I was also very scared of not being able to produce enough money...my perspective, my responsibilities ...well I would fret” (Simon).

'Fear of failure' for successful leaders appeared to be linked to that failure resulting in an inability to satisfy perceived responsibilities. This fear of failure demonstrated by successful leaders is almost the antithesis of definitions of talented and successful leaders identified through the literature. In this study successful leaders appeared to be leveraging their fear and negative attitudes to work to achieve greater results or a change of role.

Derailed leaders did not give emphasis to failure. When they did make reference to failure it was in the context of not wanting to fail, rather than 'fearing' failure. This subtle difference in emphasis produced significantly different results. For derailed leaders not wanting to fail caused them to stay in roles longer than was perhaps beneficial for their career for example:

"I always felt compelled to stay in the...environment when really I probably should have tried harder to leave...I think it was a feeling of not wanting to ever fail at it so this feeling that I didn't want to let it beat me" (Alex).

That a 'fear of failure' was cited only by successful leaders, with one citing success at a particular point in their career as being in part, "managing the terror" (Melbourne) is an interesting dichotomy and raises the possibility that rather than talented and successful leaders sustaining success through strengths alone, such leaders sustain success through leveraging their weaknesses too. This will be considered further in the 'Discussion' chapter, chapter seven. Negative attitudes to work for example, boredom, provided a catalyst for successful participants to change roles. This was not the case with derailed or opted-out leaders.

5.2.4 Attitude to risk

Successful leaders more frequently cited risk-taking decisions based on an attitude of the acceptance of calculated or controlled risk than the opted-out and derailed leaders. Only two opted-out leaders mentioned risk, both in the context of personal risks:

“I created my career and studies...I went to study in the US. My father laughed ‘that’s for rich people; you can’t do that,’ so I paid for it myself, running a high risk; as an alien student I couldn’t work” (Leonardo).

‘Attitude to risk’ was demonstrated by successful leaders in the context of career choices, business decisions or decisions to challenge unethical behaviour of superiors. Successful leaders calculated risk and made decisions accordingly. These decisions may be to ‘go ahead’ or to refrain from taking further action for example:

“Going from £15,000 per month times nine months to £30,000 was really challenging...and everything was geared around hitting that 100% and actually I was looking at that and thinking this is chancy...it was too far” (Sebastian).

This is interpreted in the context of inputs and mechanisms where ‘positive attitude to risk’ is the input (the talent) and decision-making and taking calculated risks are the mechanisms used to enact that talent.

5.2.5 Summary of the theme of ‘attitudes’

Interpretation of the codes related to ‘attitude to learning’ showed that attitudes to formal education were similar across all the leadership talent types. Differences emerged in attitudes to the value of ongoing learning and development, such that this differentiated successful leaders. Successful leaders enacted positive attitudes to learning through the demonstration of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), diverse learning strategies and challenging themselves through stretch experiences. By comparison, the positive attitude to learning of those that opted-out or ‘derailed,’ was enacted through formal education. Paradoxically whilst successful leaders cited a desire to challenge themselves, they were more likely than those leaders who had derailed to have an attitude of fear towards these stretch opportunities. This fear related to a fear of failure, the consequence of which may affect their ability to meet their personal or professional responsibilities. In the context of their work, those leaders that had derailed did not include a reference to fear of failure in this context. Only two codes related to ‘fear of failure’ and these were in the context of not wanting to ‘give up’.

Positive attitudes to work for example, enjoying work, finding work exciting and interesting, were similar across all the leadership talent types however, only those leaders who were 'talented and successful' cited boredom and disinterest as a catalyst for leaving roles. Derailed leaders typically stayed in roles longer even when they did not enjoy the role. This is interesting in the context of theory development as it indicates negative as well as positive aspects to the attributes may contribute to a leader's success. The finding that a 'fear of failure' can be a catalyst for successful leaders to achieve challenging goals and that boredom and disinterest were a catalyst for changing roles, is at odds with the general findings of the literature. The emphasis in literature is on the positive traits, characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of talented and successful leaders. That 'fear of failure,' boredom and disinterest contribute to their success presents a more human side to successful leaders.

Successful leaders, whilst 'battling' their fear of failure, were perversely more likely to be accepting of controlled and calculated risks than those that opted-out or derailed. Being prepared to take calculated risks is identified as a mechanism successful leaders used to enact their talents. By comparison those that opted-out or derailed did not emphasise broader aspects of learning such as learning from mistakes, using mentors, role models, taking stretching opportunities, instead focusing on academic achievement. Positive attitudes to work were identified, however fear of failure was not referenced by those leaders who derailed or opted-out. Neither did these types demonstrate a positive attitude to controlled or calculated risk. As the talent type profiles for the attributes comprising the 'attitudes' theme were different, 'attitudes' was considered a differentiating theme.

5.3 The theme of 'achievement orientation'

The working definition of 'achievement orientation' encapsulates the descriptions given by participants. *Achievement orientation includes those traits, skills, competencies or behaviours that enabled a leader to accomplish their personal and professional goals successfully.* This emerged as a theme from the descriptions leaders were providing with regard to goal achievement and accomplishment.

The following attribute descriptors comprise the theme of ‘achievement orientation’ in order of most cited across all the leadership talent types, together with their working definitions:

Attribute	Working definition
Delivering results	To produce an outcome as expected
Ambitious	“A strong desire to do or achieve something” (Oxford dictionary 2016)
Driven	“Being under compulsion as to succeed or excel” (Business dictionary.com 2016)
Setting high standards	Holding self and others accountable for high standards of performance
Working hard	Putting considerable effort into or working long hours in order to achieve a result
Decisive	“Having or showing the ability to make decisions quickly and effectively” (Oxford dictionary 2016)

Table 18: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘achievement orientation’ theme

The working definitions for ‘delivering results’ and ‘setting high standards’ are inferred from participant’s narrative.

5.3.1 Comparison across the types

The majority (60%) of the total number of the codes for this theme were generated from the successful leaders followed by 29% from those who opted-out. Derailed leaders generated only 11% of the codes for ‘achievement orientation.’ The following table provides a comparison of the distribution of codes for each attribute descriptor across the talent types:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Delivering results	17	8	7	32
Ambitious	16	9	3	28
Driven	13	6	0	19
Setting high standards	12	2	1	15
Working hard	3	8	1	12
Decisive	9	1	1	11
Total	70	34	13	117

Table 19: 'Achievement orientation' theme: comparison of number of codes

There were differences between the talent types in relation to the distribution of codes across the six attribute descriptors. The attributes in this theme differentiated the talent types in a number of ways: Higher numbers of codes related to 'setting high standards' and 'decisive' with lower codes for 'working hard' differentiated successful leaders from opted-out leaders. Furthermore, successful leaders gave an alternative meaning to the outcome of the results they delivered compared to both other talent types. 'Working hard' differentiated opted-out leaders from both derailed and successful leaders. In addition, both a positive and negative lens was applied to 'delivering results,' identifying that in some cases results were not delivered therefore creating an inconsistent demonstration of this attribute. Lack of codes across all attributes apart from 'delivering results' differentiated derailed leaders.

5.3.2 Delivering results

'Delivering results' was a common term used by successful and opted-out leaders, whereas, derailed leaders were more likely to discuss 'achieving' in more general terms as the following comparison illustrates:

Talented and successful	"...successfully delivering...you know, proving that I could deliver results and deliver more" (Deepak).
Talented and opted-out	"...in company x, I was delivering a result and I was respected and admired..." (Susan).
Talented and derailed	"I probably fit into the mould where they didn't achieve what they could or should have done" (Derek).

Exhibit 11: Comparison of statements on 'delivering results'

Whilst the distribution of codes was similar across all leadership talent types accounting for sample sizes successful leaders placed a different emphasis on the results they delivered compared to the other talent types. Those who were successful positioned the results they achieved in a wider context for example as, 'adding value,' or 'making a difference.' This links to their desire to 'break new ground' identified in the 'change' theme documented later in this chapter. By comparison, the derailed leaders focused on the facts surrounding the achievement. The following quotations provide examples of this fundamental difference:

Talented and successful	"I'll deliver and...keep adding value... I'm lucky in that it has been recognised and picked up on by people" (Stacy).
Talented and derailed	"...it was a good enterprise, I was able to sort of turn it around...reduce the subsidy by nearly £3million in that period, there were a number of things that I could put on the CV that were good" (James).

Exhibit 12: Differences in meaning given to 'delivering results'

In comparison to those who were 'successful,' those who had opted-out demonstrated an inconsistency in the results they delivered:

"...well delivering you know, on the bottom line of what the job was about, so in any roles you have half a dozen deliverables, whether you are delivering on them or going beyond them you know, 'are you getting positive feedback from peers and seniors?' My key error of course, was in that one case...I didn't" (Sean).

Contrary to research cited in the literature review (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011) leaders who derailed were delivering results. However, inconsistency of results was a key differentiator of the opted-out type when compared to those that were successful and those that ‘derailed.’ This raised the interesting consideration of whether leaders who opted-out could have been considered at various points in their careers to have been both ‘talented and successful’ leaders and ‘talented and derailed’ leaders. This is explored further in chapter six (a ‘deep’ dive into talent and success). ‘Delivering results’ can be perceived as an ‘output’ of talent (Dries 2013) and of the mechanisms used in enacting talent. The successful, inconsistent or failed delivery of results is then a differentiator across the talent types.

5.3.3 Ambitious

‘Ambitious’ was referenced more frequently by the successful leaders, with 57% of the codes allocated to the attribute generated by this talent type. There are comparatively fewer codes (32%) generated by the opted-out leaders, as the sample size was smaller. The derailed leaders generated only 11% of codes. Even accounting for differences in samples size, ‘ambitious’ was not a key attribute in those that had derailed.

All leaders referenced ‘ambitious’ in relation to the achievement of particular roles. This indicated a common meaning was given to the term:

Talented and successful	“I was very ambitious to move to the next job” (Sebastian).
Talented and opted-out	“I was always quite ambitious...I thought that going to that big a x firm, would give me something and would also be good for the CV” (Alex).
Talented and derailed	“I wanted to be a Chief Executive and I was very ambitious around that...” (James).

Exhibit 13: Comparison of statements on ‘ambitious’

‘Ambitious’ did not manifest differently across the talent types, but was less prevalent amongst the derailed leaders. Lack of codes allocated to ‘ambitious’ is a key differentiator of derailed leaders.

5.3.4 Driven

Being driven was a key attribute for the successful leaders and was moderately referenced by those who had opted-out. The derailed leaders did not reference 'driven.' The successful and opted-out leaders talked about being driven in the context of a desire to achieve, excel or succeed. Often ambitious and driven were used together in the same sentence indicating that these terms were perceived differently for example, "the four of us were young, ambitious, driven" (Samuel). The use of the word 'compulsion' in the working definition best encapsulates the meaning given the term by both successful and opted-out leaders:

Talented and successful	"I was interested. I naturally wanted to be the best. I was driven" (Clarissa).
Talented and opted-out	"...my growing up on a council estate and just being driven to...prove ...I was something more than the other 'herberts' that were on the council estate. I just had a very strong drive...for quite a lot of my career...to demonstrate that I was something other than just that" (Sean).

Exhibit 14: Comparison of statements on 'driven'

For both successful and opted-out leaders, being driven was seen as a key strength however, there was recognition that others might not be so driven for example, "I was very driven, very passionate, but conscious that not everyone is like that" (Susan). As with the attribute 'ambitious,' lack of reference to being driven was a key differentiator of the derailed talent type when compared to both the successful and opted-out talent types. Whilst derailed leaders referenced 'ambitious' in relation to wanting to achieve senior roles, this was not accompanied with a reference to being 'driven' in the same way this was referenced by both the successful and opted-out leaders.

5.3.5 Setting high standards

'Setting high standards' manifested for leaders in two ways, firstly setting high standards for their own work and secondly, setting high standards for the work of others either through setting high targets or, through addressing under performance. 'Setting high

standards’ was a key differentiator of the successful talent type. Their emphasis was however, on setting high standards for themselves with only two codes referencing setting high standards for others through addressing under performance. By comparison, only two codes were generated from opted-out leaders. These were from the same leader who cited both setting high standards for self and referencing high standards set as part of a group. Only one code was generated from a derailed leader that related to addressing underperformance in others. The following statements illustrate the distinction between how the successful leaders talked about the high standards they set for themselves and how the opted-out leader spoke about the standards that were set as part of a group:

Talented and successful	“Although ...I’m reasonably laid back I do think I ask quite a lot of myself ...” (Stacy).
Talented and opted-out	“We were able to keep the bar high and keep the EBIT results which we were measured on” (Leonardo).

Exhibit 15: Comparison of statements on ‘setting high standards’

A lack of reference to ‘setting high standards’ and to being ‘driven’ could be linked to the inconsistent delivery of results identified in the opted-out talent type however, this would not apply to derailed leaders who, whilst not making reference to being ‘driven’ or to ‘setting high standards’ of performance, were still citing achievement of results. Whether they were actually achieving those results is unknown.

5.3.6 Working hard

Working hard was only emphasised by the opted-out leadership talent type and equated to working long hours. Only three codes were generated from those leaders who were successful and one from a derailed leader. When working hard was cited, a similar narrative was expressed across all types as follows:

Talented and successful	"If there was a job to be done, I'd make sure I did it ...I would take work home in order to finish it...I wasn't tight on the time..." (Grant).
Talented and opted-out	"I wasn't home at all, I was working 18 hours a day, seven days a week" (Susan).
Talented and derailed	"I was working harder and as a result, I was doing stuff way way outside of my curriculum as it were..." (Marcus).

Exhibit 16: Comparison of statements on 'working hard'

This finding can be compared to the attribute of 'delivering results' to create an interesting dichotomy whereby successful leaders are delivering results, but not citing working hard as the contributing factor to that. Opted-out leaders are citing working hard but appeared to be generating inconsistent results.

5.3.7 Decisive

There was a difference in the number of codes generated across the talent types in relation to the attribute 'decisive.' Only one code each was generated for the opted-out and derailed types. There was also a difference in the decisions made and the meaning given to being decisive. Those who were successful talked about making business decisions compared to the opted-out leader who talked about being decisive and making decisions in relation to their career. The following illustrates this difference:

Talented and successful	"When it comes time to make a decision I can...understand the drivers, the impacts on the various parts of our business quickly, so that I can make decisions... The way I describe it to my team...we've just made a large acquisition and we are integrating...that's 'war time.' In a 'war time' I think quantity of decisions is very important, where in 'peace' time I think quality trumps quantity..." (Deepak).
Talented and opted-out	"...yes I mean, I have been and probably am still quite a decisive person... Whenever I've gone for roles, you know, I have made a very decisive pitch..." (Sean).

Exhibit 17: Comparison of statements on 'decisive'

Successful leaders made distinctions on when it was necessary to be decisive and recognised the importance and consequences of this. They and the opted-out leader spoke in positive terms of being decisive. The derailed leader stated that it could be perceived his decisiveness was instead recklessness:

“Well I think what happened was, the team which had been dealing with it ...thought, my goodness, at least we’ve got somebody here who is prepared to take decisive action. We present him with the information about you know, and it’s done... I was taking decisive action and I think from the department’s point of view, they thought probably, he had been reckless... ‘He wants to show you he can do something and he has been reckless’ ” (James).

This links to the notion of overplayed strengths outlined in the literature (page 67) as a perceived cause of derailment, albeit recklessness as decisiveness overplayed was not referenced. As only one derailed leader cited decisiveness as a possible overplayed strength leading to recklessness, generalisations cannot be made with regard to this however, it does make this plausible. Sufficient successful leaders discussed being ‘decisive’ for that attribute to be considered as differentiating successful leaders from opted-out and derailed leaders.

5.3.8 Summary of the theme ‘achievement orientation’

Key differences emerged across the talent types in relation to the individual attributes comprising ‘achievement orientation.’ All leadership talent types delivered results. However, the opted-out leaders delivered these inconsistently. Successful leaders looked for a broader sense of purpose through the results they delivered wanting to ‘add value’ and ‘make a difference.’ Derailed leaders by comparison, focused on the facts related to the result. These differences are significant to the research as delivering a result can be seen as an ‘output’ of talent and the enactment of talents, through mechanisms. Successful leaders were demonstrating the attributes of ‘ambitious,’ being ‘driven’ and ‘setting high standards.’ These attributes differentiated successful leaders from opted-out and derailed leaders. A lack of emphasis on ‘decisive’ and ‘setting high standards’ differentiated opted-out leaders from successful leaders. Derailed leaders only

emphasised delivering results. This is an important finding for the research. The table summarises these key distinctions:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed
Delivering results	Cited in a broad context for example, adding value; making a difference	Demonstrated inconsistency in achieving results	Cited factually, giving the specifics of the result
Ambitious	An important attribute	An important attribute	Lack of reference
Driven	An important attribute	An important attribute	Lack of reference
Setting high standards	An important attribute and output of the enactment of talent. Cited in the context of setting high standards for self	Lack of reference	Lack of reference
Working hard	Lack of reference	An important attribute	Lack of reference
Decisive	An important attribute. Typically cited in the context of business decisions	Lack of reference	Lack of reference - cited once as an overplayed strength leading to recklessness

Table 20: Summary of the differences across the types for the 'achievement orientation' theme

These findings indicate that those who were successful in part achieved and sustained that success through being ambitious; setting high standards for themselves; being driven to and delivering a result in the broader context of adding value or making a difference; decisiveness in the context of business related decision making.

This links to the literature that suggests that talented leaders are high performers, where it is assumed that both setting high standards and delivering results for the organisation leads to higher performance. However, the findings indicate that the more generic references to talented leaders as 'high performers' ignores potentially important nuances in the manner in which talented and successful leaders achieve. As a key theme,

'achievement orientation' will be discussed further in chapter seven, the Discussion Chapter.

5.4 The theme of 'resilience'

The theme 'resilience' comprises the following attribute descriptors:

1. Resilience, defined as: *the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness and the ability ...to spring back,*" (Oxford Dictionary 2016).
2. Adaptable, defined as: *"able to adjust to new conditions"* (Oxford Dictionary 2016)

'Resilience' began to emerge as an important theme early in the interview process.

Leaders specifically referenced the term resilience, for example:

"...resilience definitely played a part in that, it was part and parcel of getting through it; it was the most challenging job" (Clarissa).

Leaders also referred to characteristics that could be perceived to be aspects of resilience, including bouncing back, optimism during difficulties, working well under pressure, stress management and adaptive responses to trauma. 'Resilience' was the most significant theme identified and is expanded on in Chapter Seven, where the findings are positioned in the context of the body of research and literature on the concept of resilience. Here the purpose is to summarise the findings with regard to the coding.

5.4.1 Comparison across the types

Of the total number of codes relating to the theme of ‘resilience,’ 78% were generated from the successful leadership talent type compared to 18% from those leaders who had ‘opted-out.’ Those leaders who had derailed generated only 4% of codes relating to the theme of ‘resilience’. The following table provides a comparison of the distribution of codes:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Resilience	58	15	3	76
Adaptable	20	3	1	24
Total codes	78	18	4	100

Table 21: ‘Resilience’ theme: comparison of number of codes

These findings were significant in the context of the research indicating that resilience is an important differentiator between those leaders who are successful and those who derail. However, resilience was not identified in TM literature as an attribute of leadership talent. There is a significant body of literature on the concept of resilience, particularly within positive psychology. The findings for this theme are set in the context of the concept of resilience in Chapter Seven and discussed as a contribution of the research, positioning resilience within the field of TM and leadership derailment. In presenting the findings here, the intent is to provide a summary of the differences across the types.

5.4.2 Resilience

The greatest number of codes within any of the themes was allocated to the attribute descriptor of ‘resilience.’ As identified during the interviews, leaders were asked to provide a chronology of their lives and career, beginning with their early education and career choices. They were also encouraged to consider critical incidents and defining moments. In the process of doing this, 60% of successful leaders cited either an early

year's trauma or events in their early years that required adaptation. Resilience was often a perceived response to that trauma and, in many cases, remained an attribute leaders could continue to draw on through challenging careers. This pattern was not present in the derailed type. Furthermore, those that 'derailed,' compared to 58 times by successful leaders and 15 times by opted-out leaders, only cited 'resilience' three times.

Whilst two of those who opted-out also suffered early years' trauma, this was not common across this talent type. For the opted-out type 'resilience' appeared to emerge at a later stage in their career. However, it was not explicitly referenced in the context of leadership success. Even where early years trauma had not been present, those who were successful referred to resilience and aspects of resilience as important to their success. Interestingly, those who were successful referenced a lack of resilience as a reason for possible derailment, illustrated by the following quote:

"The interesting thing for me is why, if you like, there has been what I call bounce back ability in some of the successful people you're talking to and why there was less bounce back ability in some of the, as it were, less successful people you are talking to. So it's not, if you like, a simple dichotomy of some succeed and others fail but it's that, at the point of challenge, why some people emerge reinvented, reenergised, re-launched and others don't" (Marcus).

The findings illustrate that resilience is an important differentiator in those leaders who were successful when compared to those that have 'derailed.' However, what is less clear is the impact resilience or lack of, has on the long-term careers of those leaders who 'opted-out.' As mentioned previously, in the absence of a longitudinal study, it is not known whether those leaders who opted-out might at some point re-establish their leadership career. Should they choose to do so, their high emphasis on resilience may be a supporting attribute. This is explored further in chapter six, which provides a more detailed summary of the career decisions of the three talent types.

5.4.3 Adaptable

The number of codes generated indicated important differences across the talent types in terms of demonstrating or referencing ‘adaptable.’ Twenty codes came from the transcripts of those that were successful compared to only three codes from the opted-out talent type and one from the derailed type. Although opted-out leaders were emphasising ‘resilience,’ ‘adaptable’ was not a key attribute.

‘Adaptable’ appeared in the context of careers for example, in reference to changing roles, or industries or sectors, as well as in the context of decision making and life choices. Where ‘adaptable’ was referenced, this was in a similar context across all types and is illustrated by the following quote from a successful leader:

“Where you go round every three or four months working in different parts of the business and I think what I learnt there was how adaptable I was and how I could make a difference quickly and add value quickly and you know, I was quite good at what I did and pretty confidence at that” (Stacy).

‘Adaptable’ could by some definitions be considered to be part of being resilient. This will be explored further in the ‘Discussion’ chapter, chapter seven.

5.4.4 Summary of the theme of ‘resilience’

‘Resilience’ was the greatest single differentiator between those leaders who were successful or opted-out and those that had derailed. This is a distinctive finding of the research as resilience had not been identified in the TM literature as being indicative of talent. Given the importance of this theme, a more in depth exploration is provided in chapter seven where the theme is positioned within the context of resilience literature.

5.5 The theme of ‘personal characteristics’

Following a refinement of the coding, only four attribute descriptors were retained independent of any theme other than a generic theme of ‘personal characteristics’.

These were as follows:

Attribute	Working definition
Confidence	“Feeling or showing confidence in oneself or ones abilities or qualities” (Oxford dictionary 2016)
Ethical	“Acting in ways consistent with what society and individuals typically think are good values” (Business dictionary 2016)
Realistic	“Having or showing a sensible or practical idea of what can be achieved or expected” (Oxford dictionary 2016)
Independent	“Capable of acting for oneself or on one’s own” (Oxford dictionary 2016)

Table 22: Working definitions: attributes of the ‘personal characteristics’ theme

That only four attributes remained listed as ‘personal characteristics’ was an important research finding when compared to the review of literature. In contrast to the disparate collection of attributes cited by some authors (Davies *et al.* (2011) in Cascio and Boudreau 2016; Gallardo-Gallardo 2015; Goffee and Jones 2009; Michaels *et al.* 2001) the findings of this research identified a number of clear themes, which could be categorised as inputs, mechanisms or outputs. There were few other personal characteristics consistently contributing to the overall composite of a talented and successful leader.

5.5.1 Comparison across the types

The four attributes within the theme of ‘personal characteristics’ were most demonstrated by those leaders who were talented and successful, with 73% of codes derived from this type. Only 18% were derived from the opted-out type and 9% from the derailed talent type. The following table provides a summary of the distribution of codes across the four attributes:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Confidence	25	4	2	31
Ethical	16	6	3	25
Realistic	15	4	3	22
Independent	8	2	0	10
Total	64	16	8	88

Table 23: 'Personal characteristics' theme: comparison of number of codes

'Ethical' received greater emphasis from those leaders who were talented and successful, than those that had opted-out or derailed however, the consequences of ethics and ethical behaviour had a significant impact on the careers of leaders of all types (explored further in Chapter Six). Whilst all talent types referenced ethics and ethical behaviour, of the three codes attributed to those that derailed, one referenced the leader's own unethical behaviour. 'Confidence,' 'realistic' and 'independent' are interpreted as differentiating characteristics in that these were positively demonstrated by the talented and successful type.

5.5.2 Confidence

Of the references to confidence, 81% of those were attributed to the talented and successful talent type. Confidence was cited in the context of three core areas:

1. Confidence manifesting from being comfortable with who they were
2. Confidence based on prior knowledge enabling perception of competency
3. Confidence attained as a result of early years experiences and that confidence enabling these leaders to engage with and be perceived as credible, by leaders much more senior to themselves

The first category may be linked to the higher levels of self-awareness (see self-awareness theme later in this chapter) demonstrated by successful leaders. The latter category is exemplified by the following:

”I kept bumping into some old successful business guys. I found it quite easy to be with them; to play golf with them, mix with them and I knew that I could... easily impress them as a young man because of the experiences I was able to draw on, the confidence I had and the ability to interact with them. I had something to say, had an opinion and was able to back it up with life experiences at that age and have fun and get on with them” (Sebastian).

‘Confidence’ was less referenced by opted-out and derailed leaders. In the majority of cases, confidence was referenced as a crisis in confidence and in all cases; this crisis of confidence appeared to be in relation to perceived lack of competency.

In comparison to those who were talented and successful, those that had opted-out or derailed viewed their confidence with a negative lens. All those that had derailed referenced having a crisis of confidence:

“That wasn’t what I had signed up for in effect, so I had a bit of a crises of confidence and as a result and my father’s intervention, I drifted into x sector” (James).

Those that had opted-out cited similar crises of confidence for example:

“They still weren’t impressed that I wasn’t academic but they could see the value I was adding to them as individuals. That was uncomfortable for me at company B and it really knocked my confidence” (Susan).

It was during an interview with one of the talented and successful leaders that the notion of confidence as an overplayed strength was raised:

“I’m probably not good at anything, is that paranoia? It is probably not arrogance, it’s confidence, self-confidence and paranoia, rather than arrogance. Some people would say confidence is arrogance. I don’t know if I thought that. To be perfectly honest with you, I don’t think I was” (Andrew).

This notion of confidence as an overplayed strength was again raised, this time by a leader who had opted-out.

“I was able to compete and I would have been...precocious and, you know, a pain in the arse... We’ve all worked alongside these people who... are young and inexperienced but they’re desperate to get that experience and move on and I was described quite a bit in my early career as someone who was arrogant. But I think that just went with the territory. I think if you’ve got ambitions and drive beyond the people around you, you know, you can often be labelled as arrogant. I was very confident, I guess...” (Sean).

Overplayed strengths were referenced in the literature and in the theme ‘achievement orientation’ where decisiveness overplayed was cited as becoming recklessness. Confidence as an overplayed strength could be linked to the trait of ‘bold’ (Hogan *et al*, 2009). As an overplayed strength ‘bold’ manifests as “unusually self-confident and, as a result, unwilling to admit mistakes or listen to advice, and unable to learn from experience” (Hogan *et al*. 2009, p.3). However, in the context of this research insufficient codes were generated to support that theory. Instead, leaders who opted-out or derailed referenced crisis of confidence. A comment from one successful leader adds context to this, where on-going success helps to build confidence:

“You can’t be a leader without confidence, built from successes...” (Rakesh).

This then became a significant differentiating attribute for the successful leaders compared to those that opted-out or derailed. When considering the emerging theory of inputs, mechanisms and outputs, confidence can be described as an ‘input’, something a leader ‘has’ or ‘is’.

5.5.3 Ethical

Listed under the attribute descriptor of 'ethical' were statements that related to the requirement of leaders to be fair, have integrity, be honest and demonstrate positive values. These were grouped under the attribute descriptor 'ethical,' as leaders discussed these attributes in the context of demonstrating ethical behaviour. The caveat during the introduction to the findings stated that, as this is qualitative and interpretive research rather than quantitative research the breakdown of codes per theme provides an overview of the relative importance of attributes and themes. However, as the codes have no assigned weighting, they cannot be taken in isolation and must be considered in the context of the leader's complete interview to determine the overall impact of the attribute or theme. 'Ethical' is an attribute that whilst having few codes allocated, had a significant impact on the careers of a number of leaders across the leadership talent types, particularly the opted-out and derailed. Being ethical oneself and the need to be ethical tended to manifest for leaders in response to the behaviours of others. This was a similar finding across all types as these example quotes illustrate:

Talented and successful	"I've got quite a strong moral compass... I realised it was possible to have business people who you could be close colleagues with who were total shits... I think every business has an ethical requirement, it has an obligation... business has a responsibility and every business has a responsibility to be able to justify what they earn, what they get in trade, how much profit they make, how they treat their customers... How would you feel about doing this if it appeared on the front page of a newspaper? If you wouldn't feel good then definitely you shouldn't do it" (Andrew).
Talented and opted-out	"If you're open and honest good things come your way... I blew the whistle on the branch. My managers didn't want me to raise the flag; didn't want the fly in the ointment...I was bucking the system against people that were highly regarded. I went to a manager I knew I could trust. I found myself with him and a senior director investigating what was going on... He was making money for himself. As long as he made a sale, he didn't care. I felt uncomfortable but couldn't let it go by. I can't let things go by. I think 'what's the right thing for me to do?' ... My mantra; the only thing you have is your reputation. If I stay here I am a dead man walking. It's a core value; can you hold your head up?" (Paul).
Talented and derailed	"She brought with her a document and slid it across the table to me and said 'here is why you will never be safe or move up here' and it read, under positives, it talked about leadership, motivational skills, process efficiencies and client relationships. Under the negatives that remove me from advancement it read: 'x will stand by what he believes is right and will defend the underdog even when it puts himself at risk.' I'll never forget it. In other words, upholding ethical values is frowned upon above the Director level; at least here" (Dominic).

Exhibit 18: Perception of the importance of ethical behaviour across the types

What appears to differentiate both the successful and opted-out leaders from those that derail is that where unethical behaviour was identified and challenged, in all cases the leader then left the organisation. Where derailed leaders cited behaviour that was unethical, this was challenged, however the leader remained with the organisation for some time. It is possible that this links with the personal characteristic of 'confidence' and this will be reviewed further in chapter six. A talented and opted-out leader made an interesting observation, suggesting that:

"Sometimes if you have a set of values which is, you know, too strong and embedded, you don't achieve success, and again, I have worked with a lot of people who, you know, stand rigidly by their set of values and then can't understand why organisations don't love them. I would say, it's because you know, they don't share your values" (Sean).

Those leaders that were successful or had opted-out were more likely, on recognising they did not share the values of the organisation, to leave. Those that derailed remained with the organisation. Furthermore, whilst one derailed leader cited the importance of ethical behaviour, he also cited “sticking the knife in” (Craig) to undermine a new manager.

Overall, ethics, ethical behaviour and responses to unethical behaviour had a significant impact on a leader’s success regardless of talent type. Ethical behaviour can be seen to be a mechanism that talent uses to enact success, or potentially derailment where individual values and organisational values are misaligned.

5.5.4 Realistic

Realistic, practical and pragmatic were used interchangeably and given the same meaning by participants. There was no real difference across the types with regard to how being realistic was valued or the impact it had, nor was emphasis placed on the meaning or consequence of being realistic. Whilst there were greater numbers of codes generated from transcripts of successful leaders, it was perceived this was solely due to this being a larger sample. Therefore, whilst realistic (practical or pragmatic) was considered an ‘input’, it was not perceived to be a differentiating characteristic of success or derailment.

5.5.5 Independent

‘Independent’ was only emphasised by those who were successful and related to:

1. A desire for financial independence at an early age enabling independent living and decision-making
2. Early upbringing requiring higher levels of independence and self sufficiency
3. Independence in decision making

Whilst ‘independent’ was retained as a separate attribute listed under ‘personal characteristics,’ it linked to motivation and drives (for financial independence) and resilience (as a result of early year’s trauma). This is discussed further in chapter seven in

the context of the concept of resilience. Where 'independent' related to decision-making, this was highlighted as a potentially overplayed strength:

"You need to rely on people who had the judgement to know when actually respecting other people's opinions is a good thing to have and is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength... I think asking for help is regarded in many places as sort of a suggestion that you're not up to the job and so many people take part in decisions that they really shouldn't or should go and get a different perspective on" (Andrew).

Another successful leader referenced this balance between independent decision-making and knowing when to enlist the help of others:

"The key is to find the right person to talk to... the only way you can build your credibility is to ask... to go and talk to people" (Clarissa).

Independence was not cited by those that derailed and only twice by those who opted-out. The presence of this characteristic is therefore a differentiator for the successful leadership talent type.

5.5.6 Summary of the theme of 'personal characteristics'

Regardless of the extensive lists of attributes, found in literature, that are used to describe leadership talent the findings illustrate that there were few personal characteristics, apart from those allocated to themes, which consistently emerged. Of the four that did emerge 'confidence' is a differentiating characteristic of those leaders that were successful compared to those that had opted-out or derailed. Where those leaders who had opted-out or derailed cited 'confidence,' this was more likely in the context of having a 'crisis of confidence.' 'Realistic' was cited by all types and attributed the same meaning. All talent types demonstrated ethics and ethical behaviour. This tended to manifest as a response to the dysfunctional behaviour of others. Whilst leaders across all types challenged inappropriate behaviours often to the detriment of their careers, those who were successful or had opted-out were more likely to leave roles as a result. Those that derailed remained with the organisation following a challenge of dysfunctional

behaviour and suffered a lack of career progression as a result. This unwillingness to leave the organisation will be discussed further in chapter six.

For successful leaders 'independent' related to motivation to achieve financial independence or self-sufficiency as a response to adversity and so related to the theme of resilience. Where 'independent' related to decision-making, this was identified as potentially an overplayed strength. The absence of the attribute 'independent' was seen as a differentiator of the derailed type.

Research on overplayed strengths as a cause of derailment was supported by the findings for the theme of 'personal characteristics.' Two examples of overplayed strengths were identified, firstly confidence leading to arrogance. Secondly, being overly independent leading to an unwillingness to ask for help where necessary. A consequence of which was perceived to be poor decision making. Whilst the potential for confidence and independence to be overplayed was identified by those leaders who were successful, derailed leaders demonstrated these. This was not however, with sufficient frequency to generalise at a theoretical level.

5.6 The theme of 'self-awareness'

The theme 'self-awareness' incorporated those attributes relating to a *leader's sense of self and sense of self in relation to others*. The following attributes comprise the theme of 'self-awareness' in order of most cited across the leadership talent types, together with their working definitions:

Attribute	Working definition
Awareness of strengths and weaknesses	Demonstrating an awareness of what they did well, their 'talents' and areas in which they felt less competent.
Understanding how they are perceived by others	An awareness of how others, including seniors, peers, direct reports, stakeholders and decisions makers, perceived them; image consciousness.
Understanding of own capabilities, compared to others	An awareness of their own skills, knowledge and capabilities compared to peers.

Table 24: Working definitions: attributes of the 'self-awareness' theme

The term 'strengths' was used to indicate those things that a leader felt that they did well, rather than the definition of strengths used in the literature review. There were significant differences between the successful leaders and those that opted-out or derailed across the 'self-awareness' theme.

5.6.1 Comparison across the types

When comparing the number of codes across the types, there were differences between successful leaders and those that opted-out or derailed. The following table provides a summary of the distribution of codes across the three attributes:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Awareness of strengths and weaknesses	23	6	1	30
Understanding how they are perceived by others	9	2	10	21
Understanding of own capability compared to others	10	3	0	13
Total	42	11	11	64

Table 25: 'Self-awareness' theme: comparison of number of codes

Successful leaders appeared to demonstrate during their interviews, higher levels of self-awareness than leaders who had opted-out. This was a differentiating attribute of successful leaders. By comparison, derailed leaders appeared to demonstrate lower self-awareness of either their strengths or their weaknesses but did emphasise on how they were perceived by others. Whilst successful leaders were aware of the perception of others and of their capabilities compared to others, they did not attach significant meaning to these two attributes. Of the codes generated for self-awareness, 66% were from the successful leaders compared to 17% from those who had opted-out and 17% from those that had derailed.

5.6.2 Awareness of strengths and weaknesses

This attribute descriptor included codes that related to:

- General self-awareness
- Awareness of weaknesses
- Awareness of strengths

Whilst those that were successful made greater references to their self-awareness, of interest was that this tended to be in relation to their strengths, rather than their weaknesses. Accounting for sample size, both the successful leaders and the opted-out leaders made the same number of references to weaknesses. However, successful leaders typically set their weaknesses in a context and used them as a catalyst for either personal improvement or enhancing career opportunities for example, this successful leader used their restlessness as a catalyst for leaving an organisation:

“I think that the good support from my parents, that I had at that time, that they realised I was building life experiences and probably I wasn’t very suited to working in the x, I was too restless I suppose” (Sebastian).

Here there was acknowledgement of being someone who was ‘restless’ and a perception that that characteristic was not suited to the industry within which he began his career. A further successful leader cited ‘impatience’ as a weakness that he then used in the context of asserting control over ‘what could be controlled.’

“I’m impatient... my impatience is when I see an opportunity, I want to exploit it immediately... Maybe earlier in my career, maybe now still I can tend to be a bit hot headed...To me two things bother me dramatically; one we work in a world where we don’t control many variables, and I believe that we must control the variables that are within our control, at a minimum and then manage the rest. So I tend to be a bit impatient and hot headed when it comes to us failing to control what is within our walls” (Deepak).

This leveraging of weaknesses is interesting for the research as it illustrates that successful leaders are actively using their weaknesses as well as strengths, to achieve. This links to the discovery that successful leaders were also using negative attitudes to work as a catalyst to change roles. The above quotation is also indicative of the internal locus of control referenced in the literature (Rotter 1966) that was prevalent in successful leaders. Overall however, those that were successful were more likely to cite their strengths. This could be linked to the attribute of ‘confidence’ which related to showing confidence in ones abilities or qualities. Differences were demonstrated within the opted-

out type. During the analysis of the coding, it began to emerge that three opted-out leaders appeared to demonstrate similar coding results to successful leaders for some attributes, whilst the others appeared more closely aligned to derailed leaders. Some opted-out leaders concentrated on their strengths in the same way as successful leaders; others, who had previously cited having a 'crisis of confidence,' emphasised weaknesses.

The following is indicative of how successful leaders talked about their core strengths:

"I think I have tremendous drive to understand the facts and circumstances of the landscape and probably most importantly in that aspect, to be able to simultaneously hold some rather conflicting and vague information which is normal in the business environment, and so make decisions with those, I think I am a good communicator and a good leader" (Deepak).

Compared to this from an opted-out leader:

"I found I was excellent at this stuff; how to manage a business...I enjoyed it, the people, the customers..." (Paul).

Only one code was generated from one leader who derailed demonstrating an overall lack of focus or attention in their interview to self-awareness. This attribute was identified as an 'input' and a differentiating attribute for successful leaders. These leaders had an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses however, tended to focus on their strengths and used weaknesses to their advantage. Opted-out leaders were polarised with some demonstrating the same awareness as successful leaders and others not giving their attention to their strengths or weaknesses in the interview. Derailed leaders did not refer to their strengths or weaknesses, demonstrating a lack of self-awareness. This was a differentiating attribute for derailed leaders.

5.6.3 Understanding how they are perceived by others

Both successful and derailed leaders demonstrated a greater emphasis on how they were perceived by others than leaders who had opted-out. What is not known is whether this was an accurate perception. However, successful leaders tended to have some basis on

which to validate how others perceived them. This was usually in the form of past feedback, or being told that was how they were perceived for example:

Researcher: “As you think about the criticism or praise that people give you, what do they say about you?”

Deepak: “In terms of the praise? I think the same things I’ve said; that I’m intelligent, I’m smart-thinking, grasp problems very quickly, come up with workable solutions, that I’m confident and that I am fair with people, and that as tough and impatient as I can be, that I have a fairness when I deal with people; looking at all different perspectives.”

What was of interest was that those leaders who had derailed cited either a negative perception people may have of them, or in several instances, that other people were ‘jealous,’ as the following example illustrates:

“I was very much somebody on the fast track; a go getter, some degree of professional jealousy... I was very young for the role I was on, and I was managing people in their fifties, sixties even, so initially always have to get over that bit of a hurdle, that you know, who’s this whipper snapper, you know, you can’t tell me what to do” (James).

Again, it is not known if this was an accurate perception. Those that were successful portrayed a conceivably more balanced view of how they were perceived sharing both negative and positive perceptions. Those leaders who had opted-out generated only two codes. One cited how they liked to be perceived, again it is not clear if that perception was accurate.

“I liked the fact that I had a reputation of getting things done and could be trusted...” (Paul).

The other code alluded to a deliberate attempt to create a ‘leadership brand.’

“I was focused on creating brand ‘Susan’...” (Susan).

This latter comment was unusual across the talent types. The conscious creation of a personal leadership brand was not something to which other leaders alluded. There was an awareness on the part of the researcher however, that a number of successful leaders had a public profile and were aware of their public image and management of that. Perception of others was a differentiating attribute across the leadership talent types. Those that were successful offered a balanced view of how they were perceived by others. Those that had derailed tended to believe that others held a negative view or were jealous. Those that had opted-out generally did not emphasise how others perceived them.

5.6.4 Understanding of own capabilities compared to others

There was an awareness by successful leaders of their abilities compared to others. This related to rationalising their skills, knowledge or capabilities compared to others. However, it should be noted that this view was usually expressed when the researcher was asking for clarification regarding the reason decision makers were allocating work or roles to the successful leader over others, or the reason for their success compared to others. The remainder of the codes related to a 'competitive edge' that caused successful leaders to consider their skill set in relation to others, for example:

“Ok, this is going to sound awful. I knew I was quite clever and I knew I could deal with people... In meeting senior people, yes they were older than me, but I didn't think they had anything other than a bit of experience in the job and credibility from being good at that, good at this... So I felt it was entirely achievable...” (Sebastian).

Whilst successful leaders did demonstrate an awareness of their capabilities compared to others this was more because of clarification questions asked during the interview rather than a self-initiated focus.

5.6.5 Summary of the theme of 'self-awareness'

Successful leaders demonstrated a focus in the interview on understanding their strengths and weaknesses. This differentiated successful from derailed leaders and is seen as an 'input,' something talented and successful leaders 'have' or 'are.' This could be linked to higher levels of confidence in successful leaders. What was interesting from the data is that successful leaders are using their weaknesses to improve or achieve in situations rather than solely focussing on their strengths for example, the use of impatience to maximise opportunities. This links to attitudes to work where leaders were using negative attitudes to work for example, boredom, as catalysts to change roles. This was not identified in either the TM literature or the leadership derailment literature. Both fields present a 'black or white' view of attributes i.e., talented leaders demonstrate positive attributes; derailed leaders either overplay their strengths, fail to demonstrate positive attributes or demonstrate dysfunctional attributes. The TM literature did not address the notion of the 'human side' of talented leaders, whereby successful leaders demonstrated both strengths and weaknesses, and used those weaknesses as catalysts.

The 'self-awareness' attribute was identified as an 'input' and was a differentiating attribute of successful leaders. Some opted-out leaders were demonstrating the same level of self-awareness as successful leaders whilst derailed leaders did not demonstrate self-awareness. This latter finding was interesting as derailed leaders did not demonstrate introspection with regard to their own strengths or weaknesses in the context of their derailment. This lack of self-awareness differentiated derailed leaders.

5.7 The theme of 'Change'

Leaders talked about change in very specific ways; as a result the meanings they were attributing to aspects of change have been interpreted and summarised in the working definitions. These are positioned in a theoretical context in chapter seven, the 'Discussion' Chapter:

Attribute	Working definition
Breaking new ground	Doing something not done before, being original.
Leading strategic or culture change	Leading a change of significance within an organisation
Being part of something big	Actively engaging in or leading change that had an impact on the industry, sector or on a national level

Table 26: Working definitions: attributes of the 'change' theme

'Breaking new ground,' personally or professionally related to a personal desire of the leader to 'do something different' rather than being related to innovation or creativity for example. It could be perceived as non-conformist behaviour that manifested in change. In leading strategic or culture change, the caveat of strategic or culture change highlights the engagement of leaders in a change of significance to the organisation. 'Being part of something big,' described being actively engaged in or leading change on a national, sector or industry level, rather than organisational level.

'Change' as a theme emerged in the early stages of the research when interviewing successful leaders. The impact for the leader of the change they were making, leading or engaged in had a greater significance than a single code could represent. Whilst the number of codes is numerically less than for example, those allocated to 'personal characteristics,' change was having a significant impact on the leader's career.

5.7.1 Comparison across the types

Of significance when analysing the theme of 'change' was the scale and scope of change successful leaders engaged in. Successful leaders generated 75% of the codes allocated to this attribute. This compares to 13% from the derailed leaders and 12% from the opted-out leaders:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Breaking new ground	28	5	4	37
Leading strategic or culture change	14	2	4	20
Being part of something big	4	0	0	4
Total	46	7	8	61

Table 27: 'Change' theme: comparison of number of codes

The theme and attributes of 'change' are important in differentiating successful from opted-out and derailed leaders. They are also important for the construction of theory as they represent 'mechanisms' things leaders are doing to enact their talents. For successful leaders, higher levels of engagement in change may be linked to higher levels of the attributes 'adaptable' and 'resilience.' This will be considered further in chapter seven.

5.7.2 Breaking new ground

'Breaking new ground' related to a personal desire of the leader to 'do something different'. It could be perceived as non-conformist behaviour that manifested in change, as indicated in this quotation from a successful leader in answer to the question: 'what would you say at that point you were good at?'

"Being original" (Stacy).

It could also indicate an enjoyment of change:

"My focus is on getting things done; 'change' is the thing that turns me on"
(Dominic).

Many of the leaders across all the talent types were 'breaking new ground' personally by being the first in their families to go to university however, this formed the predominance of the codes for derailed leaders, typified as:

“University education was a complete novelty; I was the first in my family to ever go to university...” (Richard).

For successful leaders, ‘breaking new ground,’ was relevant throughout their career. The following quote illustrates how this mindset of wanting to do things differently manifested as change. This quote was from a successful leader in answer to the question ‘what was the reputation you were creating?’

“It was about dynamic change, so not just sitting back and saying ‘ok’ that’s what we do, let’s get on with it, but saying how do we improve that, how do we make it different?” (Grant).

Those leaders that derailed devoted less focus in their interview to highlighting change than their successful counterparts and gave less attention to the role they played in the change for example:

“I was in a managerial role again, in that I was managing an area and then moving on to manage the setting up and the creation of a new service and again by mentoring and persuasion by this guy who was my senior manager, I went to x Polytechnic as it was and did a BA” (James).

In this example, the derailed leader established a new service however, did not emphasise this in the interview or the consequence of the success or failure of this. Opted-out leaders appeared to be divided, with some opted-out leaders emphasising breaking new ground and others not. As highlighted in the ‘self-awareness’ theme, it became apparent that an interesting pattern was emerging which illustrated that three of the opted-out leaders were sharing similarities in attributes to successful leaders. An example from one opted-out leader, in relation to change, illustrates this similarity:

“I left to be with a more progressive company; I was the first into that kind of role. It was a new culture and I wanted to get into it” (Susan).

‘Breaking new ground’ was considered a ‘mechanism’ through which leaders enact their talents; it is something they are doing. This attribute was a key differentiator of successful leaders and typically presented as wanting to do things differently, potentially with

aspects of non-conformist behaviour. The opted-out leaders were polarised with some not giving attention to this attribute, whilst others demonstrated similarities with successful leaders. By comparison to successful and opted-out leaders, derailed leaders focused on ‘breaking new ground’ in relation to early years and being the first in the family to go to university.

5.7.3 Leading strategic or culture change

The caveat of strategic or culture change highlights the engagement of leaders in a change of significance to the organisation. This attribute differentiated successful leaders from those that opted-out or derailed. The role they played in leading change was only mentioned by one opted-out leader in the context of a functional change and was only mentioned four times by those that derailed. The following illustrates how the different talent types referred to strategic and cultural change:

Talented and successful leaders	“Our growth which has been dramatic...has come about half via acquisition and half organically. As a result, there is a lot of cultural integration that we have done over the years” (Deepak).
Talented and opted-out leaders	“It was a fantastic role to get, the second highlight of my career...I had a whole division under my control...to counter the culture I did a lot of work with an external...if culture change isn’t driven top down its difficult” (Paul).
Talented and derailed leaders	“I also developed and led a major strategic change for the <i>company</i> ...it isn’t the most dynamic area” (James).

Exhibit 19: Comparison of statements on leading strategic or culture change

As with the previous attribute, derailed leaders did not emphasise their role in the change. Not only did those who were successful highlight leading change as important but also the skills required to lead change were acknowledged:

“Every successful CEO has to manage change. He has to understand first of all when there is a need for change. He has to understand the pace at which he must make that change. He must plan it like a...military operation. He must make sure he has got people, because change is not him, it is done by a team. He has to lead it, he has to persuade and convince them that change is necessary and change is good. He has to get them to buy into it... You might have to be brutal at that stage. You might recognise that in managing that change there are certain people who are actually going to lose out. So you’ve got to do that very quickly and very fairly, and be seen to have done it fairly and for the other people who have stayed to understand why you did it and you did it for everybody’s interest and you were not unfair to those who lost out” (Alfred).

Successful leaders felt they had these skills, which appeared to contribute to their confidence in leading such change. This can be linked to ‘attitude to learning’ and the finding that successful leaders actively seek challenging and stretching experiences that will enable them to develop. Related to this, the role successfully leading change played in the career advancement of successful leaders is illustrated by the following quote:

“That was seeing a big ...service changing... Then I went on to something else I had not really done before. They wanted somebody to run all the... services in an area, and do that alongside a...programme, so I applied for that, got that job, and so suddenly I was doing sort of everything” (Grant).

Leading strategic or culture change can be seen to be a ‘mechanism,’ something successful leaders are doing that enables them to develop their capabilities and their careers. By comparison, opted-out and derailed leaders were not giving focus to leading change. ‘Breaking new ground’ and ‘leading strategic or culture change’ links to the third attribute of ‘change,’ which was ‘being part of something big.’ This was only possible due to the ‘track record’ of change that successful leaders had already established.

5.7.4 Being part of something big

'Being part of something big' related to the desire for some successful leaders to want to be part of a significant change at national, sector or industry level and to influence that.

Examples of this are as follows:

"The Prime Minister announced this major initiative called x... It was very innovative... I didn't invent the x but I was, sort of, in the room when it was invented and, you know, at the time, it was cutting edge" (Dominic).

"So I made a proposal ... and it sort of escalated from there and ...I spent a huge part of that period, endlessly and increasingly getting people onto my side and lobbying the government endlessly ... and that of course raised my standing hugely. We had to hire everybody from technology specialists through to advertising agencies, security companies and we had to do this; we had to build a business from a plan on the back of a piece of paper... So I suddenly found myself literally drawing up a complete blueprint ... from scratch on a blank piece of paper and I guess that was a pretty seminal moment..." (Andrew).

The above quote is important for highlighting the consequences on the careers of successful leaders of leading change at this level. Andrew makes the point that engaging in change at this national level "raised my standing hugely." Change at this level was significant in elevating the careers of successful leaders and is discussed further in chapter seven. This desire to be part of something bigger than the organisation they were in was not cited by any of the leaders who opted-out or derailed and so provides a sense of the scale at which these successful leaders were now operating that they could influence at national, sector or industry level. This is an important differentiator of successful leaders.

5.7.5 Summary of the theme of 'change'

A desire to break new ground; to be original, a positive attitude to change, an ability and enthusiasm for strategic and cultural change and taking a leading role in change at a national, sector or industry level differentiated the successful leaders from those that

opted-out or derailed. As indicated in the literature, some authors have argued (Goffee and Jones 2009) that talent could be defined as a creative innovator. This correlates loosely to the attribute of 'breaking new ground.' Eichinger *et al.* (2000) however, in operationalising their definitions of talent, identified 'change agility' as a differentiator of talent. Change agility included the attributes of: curious, passion for ideas and experiments and engages in skills-building. Again 'curious' and 'experiments' could be mapped to 'breaking new ground' however, neither the term 'creative innovator' or 'change agility' appear to fully explain how successful leaders are engaging in and leading change and the impact this is having on their careers compared to those that opt-out or derail.

A 'track record' of successful change enabled career progression for successful leaders into roles that required the implementation of more significant change. This appeared to provide both the visibility and the platform through which they could engage in change being implemented at a national, sector or industry level, further raising their visibility and career opportunities. Some of those leaders that opted-out demonstrated a desire to break new ground in similar ways to successful leaders, however leading strategic or culture change was not prevalent in this type, consequently neither was 'being part of something big.' It can be inferred that by not building significant visibility through leading strategic or culture change, opted-out or derailed leaders were not in a position to be able to lead change at a national, sector or industry level. 'Change' is an important theme for differentiating successful leaders. It illustrates a core 'mechanism' through which they are enacting their talents. This is significant in the context of the research purpose and questions and will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

5.8 The theme of 'relationships with senior leaders'

The working definition of relationships with senior leaders was 'professional, supportive and productive relationships with line managers and individuals in senior leadership roles within the organisation.'

The attribute descriptors listed under this theme were:

- Relationship with line manager
- Relationships with senior executives
- Relationship with CEO

This theme is reported separately from the theme of 'relationships with others' as different meanings were attached to relationships with senior leaders and line managers. These relationships had a greater impact on the ability of participants to achieve their goals and on their career progression. There is a link between the two themes as the ability to form good relations generally is likely to impact on an ability to form relationships with senior leaders specifically. However, it is inappropriate to assume a direct correlation, as the finding indicated that in some cases, good relationships with seniors were a product of politically astute behaviour.

Important trends emerged in the relationships leaders across the leadership talent types had throughout their careers, with their line managers, those leaders senior to them and the CEO of their organisation. After codes were allocated to the respective attributes, a positive or negative lens was applied. Some leaders cited good relationships with senior leaders and line managers whilst others alluded to relationships that were not good.

5.8.1 Comparison across the types

Successful leaders cited the relationships they had with their line manager, senior executives and CEO more frequently than those leaders who had opted-out or derailed. Codes derived from successful leaders comprised 68% of the total number of codes compared to 18% from those who derailed and 14% from those who had opted-out:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Relationship with line manager	12	3	3	18
Relationships with senior executives	16	5	7	28
Relationship with CEO	10	0	0	10
Total	38	8	10	56

Table 28: 'Relationships with senior leaders' theme: comparison of number of codes

When a positive or negative lens was applied to the codes, successful leaders were more likely to cite the positive nature of the relationships they had developed compared to the derailed type, with the exception of their relationships with senior executives.

Relationships with senior executives became negative for successful leaders when there was a perception that senior executives were behaving unethically or lacked competence.

These differences are illustrated in the following table:

Attribute	Relationship status	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Relationship with line manager	Positive	12	1	1	14
	Negative	0	2	2	4
Relationships with senior executives	Positive	8	0	0	8
	Negative	8	5	7	20
Relationship with CEO	Positive	8	0	0	8
	Negative	2	0	0	2
Total		38	8	10	56

Table 29: Summary of positive and negative relationship status

Derailed and opted-out leaders were more likely to cite ineffective relationships with their senior leaders, relationship 'breakdowns' or no relationship. This differentiated

these types from successful leaders. In the literature review, problems with interpersonal relationships were cited as a contributing factor to leadership derailment (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Hogan *et al.* 2009). By comparison, successful leaders cited positive relationships with line managers and were more likely to cite positive relationships with senior leaders and their CEO. Negative relationships were typically the result of relationship ‘breakdowns.’ The overall positive relationships successful leaders had with senior leaders within the organisation is a differentiating characteristic and a significant one given the influence such individuals have within organisations. Relationships with senior leaders is a ‘mechanism;’ building productive and supportive relationships with senior leaders is something successful leaders did in order to enact success.

5.8.2 Relationship with line manager

Successful leaders consistently cited the importance of the positive relationships they had with line managers in the context of their career progression. The following quotation illustrates how one successful leader perceived the importance of that relationship:

“I’ve always been pretty good at getting on with my boss... In the beginning I think I would have, not necessarily said I chose my bosses but I always found a way to get on with them and even the people that, you know the rest of the business might have thought were, I don’t know, idiots for want of a better word. I usually found a way of understanding them and getting on with them ... in the main, with possibly one exception, everybody I’ve worked for has had something to offer me to learn from... and I think the best career decisions you make are about who you want your boss to be...” (Samuel).

In this instance, wanting to learn from a line manager is linked to the previously cited work of Dweck (2006) on growth mindsets and the demonstration of a willingness to learn from others. This also links to ‘attitude to learning’ and the desire for successful leaders to ‘stretch’ themselves through challenging roles. In such instances the support of a line manager would be important. The idea of choosing a role based on who your line

manager would be reinforced in the following dialogue with another successful leader:

Alfred: "I backed out the day before I was supposed to go to sign the contract because I really, I just felt uncomfortable both with the people and the industry."

Researcher: "What was it that made you feel uncomfortable?"

Alfred: "I did not trust the guy really who I would be working for. I had a kind of gut feeling, I had about his ethics. I don't know why it was, you know, it was something intangible. I couldn't quite put my finger on; and I talked to my wife about it the night before, and she was very quick. She said if you think you don't trust him you don't go."

What was interesting is what constituted a 'good boss' to successful leaders:

"I worked for that company for eight or nine years and never had a personal review with her; never had a development session with her and I think that suited her and that suited me. She left me completely alone to do the job and she just, every year she would give me an extended job... She allowed and gave me responsibilities on a constant basis but never managed me... I now needed to go forward and run a business. She then facilitated the move ...so how important has my line manager been? In that case really important because she opened the doors and delivered responsibility and growth on a constant basis" (Sebastian).

"The first line manager, I remember specifically was when I was at company A actually and he was a very hands off motivational and you know; if I wanted to go and do it - go and do it" (Stacy).

The emphasis on a 'good boss' being someone who would facilitate opportunities and then leave successful leaders to 'get on with it,' again links to the desire of successful leaders to learn through 'stretching' themselves. It also links to the greater demonstration of the attributes of 'confidence' and 'independent.' By comparison, those

that opted-out or derailed rarely mentioned the role of their line manager with only three codes from each of these talent types allocated to this attribute. When they did mention the relationship however, they shared a similar definition of how a good manager behaved as illustrated by this derailed leader:

“I was working for a guy called person B who was a very good leader... He wasn’t anybody who studied leadership; I just found him really easy to work for and he just let me get on with it. He didn’t spend all his time looking over my shoulder. He just let me get on with it; but he was always there to help” (Craig).

What was also interesting in the dynamic between the participants and their line managers were the behaviours leaders engaged in when building and maintaining that relationship, for example:

Talented and successful	“I’d say: ‘Person C, I know how to run a ...company and so do you, but you go away and do that, and I will get on and run the day to day’. ... I knew I had enough confidence in my own business experience and ‘track-record’ to meet him face to face. I mean, I was never disrespectful, I had the greatest respect for him and I still...bump into him and worked with him in later life, and he and I get on famously, but actually to work with the guy was very stressful’ (Alfred).
Talented and opted-out	“I wanted Person F’s job. Consciously I wanted to position myself as a successor. I would regularly ask him if he needed anything doing, so he could stretch ‘above and beyond.’ When he moved on, I got the job. I created a dynamic. I was now boss of peers. It was awkward for others but not for me” (Paul).
Talented and derailed	“The way I got the top job...Person B recruited someone....he was a senior guy ...he came in as my boss and I was a bit upset about this because person B never said to me, I’m going to recruit someone as your boss. He just brought him in and said ‘here we are, here he is, you report into him.’ So I was really annoyed about it and he was a sales person, good at relationships, who had good relationships with senior people, but didn’t know much about our products really...So I undermined him...I stuck the knife in and ended up reporting to Person B again alongside this guy and he left in the end and went back to company E” (Craig).

Exhibit 20: Comparison of statements on ‘relationship with line manager’

Here both the successful and opted-out leaders created a dynamic through which they were able to achieve their objectives and enhance their career progression through taking responsibility for the completion of tasks valued by their line manager. By comparison, the behaviour engaged in by the derailed leader could be considered dysfunctional.

5.8.3 Relationships with senior executives

Those leaders who were successful cited the relationship they had with their senior executives more frequently than those who opted-out or derailed did. A total of 57% of the codes for this attribute were generated by successful leaders. An interesting dichotomy emerged with regard to the potential cause of this. A successful leader raised the link of building good relationships with seniors to the personal characteristic of 'confidence' stating that:

"I found it quite easy to be with them, to play golf with them, mix with them...I knew I could easily impress them as a young man because of the experiences I was able to draw on, the confidence I had and the ability to interact with them"
(Sebastian).

However, it cannot be discounted that successful leaders may be being politically astute rather than confident, with regard to the cultivation of their relationships with senior leaders, in particular the CEO of their organisation. A derailed leader alluded to this:

"...the new Managing Director...he's a very successful guy; he's got lots of relationships and you know he's very strong; he drinks whiskey with his clients and he goes to lunch with them...but he's not as I see it - clever. He's not someone I want to work for just because he's got relationships...I want to work with the clever people. I'm not too fussed about the other" (Craig).

This quote illustrates the lack of emphasis derailed leaders placed on the importance of relationships. The reasons for a failure of derailed leaders to cultivate good relationships with senior leaders are unclear; however, the lack of cultivation of these relationships differentiated derailed and opted-out leaders from those who were successful. There was

a perception from those that were successful, that in the same way a line manager can be crucial to success, so too was the backing of your senior leaders, evidenced below:

“She’ll give me some back up to say ‘go and do this, I’m sure you’ll – I’ll be supportive of you doing it.’ Or person B says ‘I want you to go off to Munich for 6 months and run a project in Germany....and I’m pretty sure you could do it.’ So you have that personal backing of people around you and I think that gives you that sense of security” (Samuel).

An opted-out leader referred to this lack of backing:

“There were aspects of the...vision that I found hard to front...and this was recognised and criticised by more senior management...” (Joyce).

In the absence of these good relationships with senior executives, derailed and opted-out leaders appear to be at a disadvantage in terms of achieving their goals and career progression.

Managing relationship breakdowns with senior executives

Derailed and opted-out leaders cited relationship breakdowns with senior executives rather than positive relationships. Successful leaders referred equally to both positive relationships and relationship breakdowns with senior executives. The reasons for relationship breakdowns with senior executives were different across the leadership talent types. For derailed leaders these breakdowns appeared to be caused by senior executives responding to the behaviours of the derailed leaders for example:

“I no longer fit with a belt and suspenders leader who took over, he and several others of the same style became embedded at the corporate level” (Derek).

“You could cut the atmosphere in some of the senior teams with a knife when I was honest like that, you know there would be nervous coughing” (Aaron).

The former quote links to the observation of Hogan (2001) that leaders derail due to an inability to adapt to the style of their leader. This was also mentioned in the case study organisation as a reason for derailment. For successful leaders these breakdowns were a

response of the successful leader to the perceived unethical behaviours of those senior executives whether they were new into the organisation or existing leaders, for example:

“There was no animosity; there was no friction between the senior people and no jealousies. It began to fall apart when one of that group, one of the American guys moved into another organisation, and his replacement...he was everything that we weren't. He was not particularly intelligence. He had an animal cunning. He was manipulative; he was defensive and he broke that team ethic and...every one of that group...all left that organisation within two years' (Alfred).

This links to the attribute 'ethical' within the 'personal characteristics,' theme encompassing not only the successful leaders own ethical behaviour but their response to the ethical or unethical behaviour of others. In nearly all cases, where a significant breakdown in relationships occurred with senior executives, successful or opted-out leaders left the organisation. By comparison, where relationships broke down with senior executives, those leaders that had derailed were more likely to remain with the organisation for some time after the breakdown. This will be expanded on further in chapter seven.

There are significant differences in how successful, derailed and opted-out leaders manage their relationships with senior executives. Successful leaders appear to use an element of political awareness in the effective management of these relationships and recognise the importance of the support of senior executives. By comparison, derailed and opted-out leaders more frequently cited relationships breakdowns. Problems with interpersonal relationships were cited in the literature review as a cause of leadership derailment. However, no distinctions were made regarding who those relationships were with. A lack of support or dysfunctional relationships with senior executives as typically influential decision makers in organisations, would affect the leader's ability to achieve results. This appears to be a further gap in the literature, with the research contributing a more nuanced understanding of the interpersonal relationships of derailed leaders.

5.8.4 Relationship with CEO

Only successful leaders explicitly referenced the relationship they had with their CEO as they were developing their career. Of the ten codes allocated to relationships with CEO's eight referenced positive relationships whilst two referenced negative relationships. Positive relationships were seen by successful leaders to be highly influential in their careers in particular in respect of the impact of having the support of the CEO for example; a successful leader who became embroiled in a situation that could have derailed his career gave this response:

“...x was very supportive, as Chief Executive, you know actually while he was very supportive, he also had to go and look at the report and see if I needed to be saved or not” (Grant).

Of the two successful leaders who cited negative relationships with their CEO, both left the organisation as a result:

“.....x (*a CEO*) who had sort of recruited me and who I had a very good relationship with and an awful lot of respect for... he was very important to my development...had to leave ...and we had a reorganisation and I got promoted and so on. But it became a very difficult working environment where I think my contribution wasn't being fully valued by other officers... So you know, when you get into those situations, you go, 'right, now, you know, you can either try and change it or you can't change it, you need to move on' so I choose the latter” (Dominic).

This latter quotation illustrates the importance those successful leaders placed on their relationships with their CEO in terms of both their careers and their ability to achieve what they wanted to achieve within the organisation. When these relationships deteriorated there appeared to be a realism with regard to how they would be able to progress their career or achieve results without the backing of the CEO. This links to the attribute 'realistic' within the theme of 'personal characteristics' that was demonstrated by successful leaders.

Neither the opted-out or derailed leaders mentioned relationships with their CEO. This may be because these leaders opted-out or derailed at lower levels of the organisation and their relationships tended to be with senior executives, rather than with the CEO. It may also indicate a lack of political astuteness in recognising the importance of that relationship. That a lack of political astuteness in building good relationships with senior executives could cause derailment was eluded to by a successful leader who said that:

“In my opinion...because of the rivalries and the politics that go on in any big company, they were not up to the job...” (Alfred).

This observation both recognises a political aspect to senior levels in organisations and the requirement to ‘manage’ that effectively. The ability of successful leaders to build good relationships with their CEO differentiated them from derailed and opted-out leaders. This was considered significant in the context of achieving results in the organisation given the seniority with which successful leaders were operating. It is likely that without the support of their CEO, they would have been less able to achieve results, particularly when leading strategic and cultural change. Positive relationships with their CEO also increased the visibility of these successful leaders both within and outside of their organisation.

5.8.5 Summary of the theme of ‘relationships with senior leaders’

Leaders across all of the talent types acknowledged the importance of good relationships with their line manager, going so far as to accept or reject roles based on who their line manager would be. Those leaders who were successful were more likely to build and sustain good relationships with their line manager, senior executives and their CEO. Their own confidence facilitated those relationships and so linked to the attribute of ‘confidence.’ Those leaders who had opted-out or derailed did not cite having any kind of relationship with their CEO, positive or negative, therefore lacking the CEO support that successful leaders perceived as important to their careers.

Those who derailed cited a breakdown in relationships with their line manager or senior executives more often. In some cases, this was because of their own manipulative

behaviour. Where line managers and senior executives were perceived to be either incompetent or unethical, relationships for all the leadership talent types broke down. Where relationships did break down because of this dysfunctional behaviour successful leaders and those leaders who opted-out, left the organisation. This can be linked to the attribute 'realistic' for successful leaders as without the support of senior executives it was recognised that goals would be difficult to achieve. It can also be linked to the attribute 'ethical' as successful and opted-out leaders left organisations when senior leaders engaged in unethical or dysfunctional behaviour. Those leaders who derailed tended to stay with the organisation for some time after the relationship break down. The impact of relationship break downs with line managers, senior executives and CEO's was significant across all the types and was, in many instances, a critical incident within a leaders' career and a catalyst for leaders leaving organisations. This will be expanded on further in chapter seven.

Political astuteness was interpreted through the findings as a characteristic of successful leaders who recognised the necessity of cultivating good relationships with senior executives and their CEO. This again suggests a more human side to successful leaders where that success is not solely gained through their positive traits and the application of positive behaviours. This theme was a differentiator between successful leaders and those that opted-out or derailed and is identified in the context of theory building as a 'mechanism' that enables successful leaders to enact their talents.

5.9 The theme of skills, knowledge and capabilities

Only three attributes were significant across the talent types with regard to skills, knowledge or capabilities. These were:

Attribute	Working definition
Business management skills	Acquiring a breadth of skills across the core functions of a business, which collectively enables an understanding of how a business operates and practically applying these skills.
Strategic thinking	Being able to identify and consider the long-term or overall aims and interests of the organisation, and the means of achieving them (Oxford dictionaries, 2016).
Expert knowledge	Expertise related to any specific discipline or specialisation developed early in the leader's career.

Table 30: Working definitions: attributes of the 'skills, knowledge and capabilities' theme

As with the theme of 'personal characteristics,' the finding that only a core set of skills, knowledge and capabilities were referenced by leaders, contradicts the literature where talented leaders were considered to have a plethora of these (Gallardo-Gallardo 2015; Goffee and Jones 2009; Davies *et al.* (2011) in Cascio and Boudreau 2016; Michaels *et al.* 2001). This may be due to a more rigorous allocation of attributes to themes.

5.9.1 Comparison across the types

The three attributes within the theme of skills, knowledge and capabilities were most demonstrated by those leaders who were talented and successful, with 70% of codes derived from this talent type. This compared to 21% from the opted-out leaders and 9% from the derailed leaders. When comparing the codes and emphasis given to these attributes during interview, there were important differences across the types. These are summarised in the following:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Business management skills	16	4	5	25
Strategic thinking	9	0	0	9
Expert knowledge	5	0	4	9
Total	30	4	9	43

Table 31: 'Skills, knowledge and capabilities' theme: comparison of number of codes

Whilst the table provides an accurate summary of the allocation of the codes, the following table depicts a more detailed breakdown once a positive or negative lens is applied. A positive lens indicated a leader cited having the skill, knowledge or capability whilst a negative lens indicated the leader thought they did not:

Attribute	Level	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Business management skills	Good at this skill	16	3	1	20
	Not good at this skill	0	1	4	5
Strategic thinking	Good at this capability	9	0	0	9
	Not good at this capability	0	0	0	0
Expert knowledge	The best expert	1	0	4	5
	Not the best expert	4	0	0	4
Total		30	4	9	43

Table 32: Summary of the positive or negative demonstration of the 'skills, knowledge and capabilities' attributes

Successful leaders cited good business management and strategic thinking as important skills and capabilities whilst confirming that they did not perceive themselves to have been, through their career, the 'best expert.' Successful leaders were suggesting that they

did not have the greatest level of expertise that at the time was relevant to their role, compared to peers. Derailed leaders by comparison, cited that they were not good at managing a business. This appeared to be because it was not something they enjoyed doing, but rather their preference was for their early career area of expertise. Derailed leaders were therefore more likely than successful leaders to cite that they were the best expert compared to their peers.

5.9.2 Business management skills

The attribute descriptor ‘business management skills’ comprised codes related to:

- Business start up
- Developing and growing a business
- Breadth of functional skills related to running a business
- Knowing how a business operates, and translating this knowledge into successful business management practices

‘Business management skills’ were a differentiating attribute for successful leaders. Successful leaders cited managing a business as something that they were good at and enjoyed. By comparison derailed leaders who referenced managing a business, were more likely to do so in the context of it not being something they enjoyed or in the context of generating sales, rather than in the context of developing a sustainable business through breath of experience and capability. This links to the derailment literature where lack of business skills was cited as a core theme in failed managers (Bentz 1985 cited in Hogan *et al.* 2009).

Opted-out leaders rarely discussed business management skills however, when they did they eluded to a similar breadth of skills to successful leaders. The following dialogue illustrates the breadth of knowledge with which successful leaders talked about ‘running a business:’

Researcher: “You said you were thought of as a successful executive; what does that mean?”

Alfred: “I knew how to run a global, good business; I knew the product issues, I knew the distribution issues; I knew the manufacturing issues and I knew financial issues...I was experienced in international business. I worked and understood Europe; I understood North America and I understood Australasia and South East Asia and Japan and so, I had those experiences, so I could go in and hit the ground running.”

Successful leaders cited examples of where they had started and grown a business for example:

“So since then I’ve been growing the business, we started out with about one site, with a small amount of people, and today we are a global company” (Deepak).

Opted-out leaders cited business management skills less frequently and in less detail, but in similar terms:

“It was difficult, I made the business run more smoothly; I turned the business around...” (Thibaut).

This ability to acquire and successfully apply in practice a breadth of business skills is in comparison to those derailed leaders who cited business management in the context of either not enjoying it or not having the right skills at the right level, as this example from a derailed leader illustrates:

“There are a lot of managers like myself who helped build the company and we all felt part of a close knit team but none of us could point to running a business as big as...a typical problem for growth companies. We helped deliver the growth but we couldn’t point at how we managed an organisation as big as the organisation we ended up with. So every time they started recruiting we used to compete for the role but they kept bringing external people in...” (Aaron).

Here the derailed leader cites not being able to acquire or apply business management skills at the level required of the organisation during its growth. As a result the

organisation recruited external leaders for senior roles. This leader spoke numerous times of wanting to return to a previous role that was a specialist role.

5.9.3 Strategic Thinking

The attribute descriptor 'strategic thinking' was allocated to those codes that related to instances where leaders were citing examples of the need to focus on the broader, long term organisation strategy rather than tactical operational issues. Only successful leaders referenced strategic thinking either directly or indirectly, for example:

"I was still trying to tie in the strategic part and trying to tie it in with regeneration, because x on it's own isn't the answer, but actually in the context of regeneration it is a vital ingredient. So I was trying to play that wider, how do we improve the 400,000 ...rather than just improve the 100,000 and I tried to get that broader agenda, and I think that worked" (Grant).

That the opted-out and derailed leaders did not reference strategic thinking links to the literature on leadership derailment which suggested that being too tactical was one of the flaws identified in failed leaders (Bentz 1985 in Hogan *et al.* 2009). The attribute 'strategic thinking' therefore differentiated the successful leaders from those who derailed or opted-out. That successful leaders made greater reference to strategic thinking is related to the theme of 'change' discussed previously. That successful leaders were engaged in strategic change more frequently than opted-out or derailed leaders, may be a consequence of their ability to think strategically.

5.9.4 Expert knowledge

'Expert knowledge' in the context of this research, related to how leaders perceived their early career years expertise in their specialisation. Those who were successful tended to state that they had not been, in their early career and when compared to their peers at the time, the best expert. This appears to be linked to their preference to acquire a breadth of skills in business management. By comparison, those that derailed cited

themselves as having been an expert in their niche and appeared, in their later career years, to have maintained this preference. This comparison is illustrated below:

Talented and successful	<p><i>On discussing sales expertise:</i></p> <p>“All had had five years quite successful sales careers with (the company x), and four of us were young, ambitious, driven and four of them were old hand professional sales guys that were interested in trying to earn 6 figures again. The four younger ones, two of them are now MD’s of reasonably large companies and, myself and the other she had a successful career in another route so actually we weren’t the four top sales people but I think we all realised that this was a good training ground but we would need to move on...” (Sebastian)</p>
Talented and derailed	<p>Richard: “Expertise was a key drive, always, you will find this crops up again and again,”</p> <p>Researcher: “Why was that so important to you?”</p> <p>Richard: “Because that was what I was good at from day one, I was the academic, the analytical...I am the bringer of the narrative really to the organisation...”</p>

Exhibit 21: Comparison statements on ‘expert knowledge’

Those that opted-out neither cited a lack of expertise or being the expert. When reviewing this in the context of their complete transcripts, this appeared to be due to those leaders who opted-out having a more pragmatic attitude towards their expertise in that, their expertise enabled them to perform in their role at a high level, however they did not make comparisons with others, or seek to position themselves as a better expert. Expert knowledge was a differentiating characteristic of successful and derailed leaders, with successful leaders citing they were not the best experts and derailed leaders emphasising their expertise. Whilst this links to the literature that suggests that leaders derail due to too narrow a functional expertise (Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011) as so few codes were cited it is clearly not the only contributing factor of derailment.

5.9.5 Summary of the ‘skills, knowledge and capabilities’ theme

In the literature, numerous skills and capabilities were cited as being indicators of talent, often without supporting evidence. Other than business management, expert knowledge and strategic thinking however, there were no other significant trends within or across the talent types. This finding does not support the literature where, as with the theme of personal characteristics, many skills and capabilities were implied or listed. The findings of this research indicate there is a set of core skills, knowledge and capabilities that significantly differentiate the types; these are then enacted. This will be reviewed further in chapter seven.

The theme ‘skills, knowledge and capabilities’ differentiated successful leaders. Successful leaders acquired and applied a broad range of business management skills and enjoyed running a business. By comparison those who derailed either did not acquire or did not enjoy applying such skills, instead their focus was on their core expertise. This has significant implications for those leaders as they progress into senior leadership roles requiring a broader view of the organisation. On comparing the narrative of those leaders who were successful with those that derailed, with regard to these three attributes, a positive or negative lens was applied. Generally those who were successful cited business management as one of their skills, strategic thinking as a capability and did not perceive themselves at any point in their career as ‘being the best expert’ when compared to their peers at the time. Those leaders who derailed, by comparison, either did not enjoy ‘running a business’ or did not express this as a skill. Neither did they focus on strategic thinking. They did however allude to their greater expertise in their specialist area compared to their peers. Those that opted-out did not focus on any of these attributes. This links to the literature on leadership derailment where a number of studies suggest that narrow functional skills, being tactical and lacking business skills are some of the causes of leadership derailment, (Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Hogan *et al.* 2009).

5.10 The theme of ‘relationships with others’

The working definition of ‘relationships with others’ was ‘developing and maintaining cordial, productive relationships with others in the organisation.’

The traits, skills and behaviours leaders indirectly or directly referenced in the context of this theme included interpersonal skills, influencing others through understanding their needs, developing relationships, liking people, being straightforward with others in order to build a relationship, empathy and social awareness. A single attribute of ‘building relationships’ was used to encompass these.

5.10.1 Comparison across the types

Successful and opted-out leaders were more likely to cite their relationships with others or to refer to how they engage with others. Derailed leaders did not emphasize their relationship with others, apart from the relationships they had with senior leaders, discussed previously, as the following indicates:

Attribute	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed	Total
Building relationships	18	11	4	33

Table 33: ‘Relationships with others’ theme: comparison of number of codes

A total of 55% of codes were generated from those leaders who were successful, compared to 33% from those who opted-out and only 12% from those who had derailed. A lack of emphasis on building relationships was a differentiator of derailed leaders and links to the literature indicating an inability to build, or problems building, interpersonal relationship. Building relationships in the context of theory construction is considered a ‘mechanism’ that enables leaders to enact success. Successful and opted-out leaders are leveraging this mechanism, whereas derailed leaders are not.

5.10.2 Building relationships

The predominance of codes generated by the successful and opted-out leadership talent types related to interpersonal skills, empathising and wanting to put people at their ease originating from a genuine liking of people:

Talented and successful leaders	"I like people and so I've always had a lot of enjoyment from being around people..." (Deepak).
Talented and opted-out leaders	"I like people, I enjoy working with people... I respect people; everyone is important in the organisation..." (Thibaut).

Exhibit 22: Comparison statements on 'building relationships'

Empathising, liking people, a desire to put people at their ease and interpersonal skills were not emphasised by derailed leaders. Other than their relationships with line managers and senior executives, derailed leaders did not pay attention in the interview to their relationships with others. When derailed leaders talked about their relationships with others this was more likely to be in the context of seeking to influence them:

"...my approach, rather than a hard managerial approach...helped me to get people on my side..." (James).

This lack of emphasis on the way in which they built relationships is interesting when compared to the derailed leader's view of how they were perceived by others, discussed in the theme of 'self-awareness.' Derailed leaders suggested that people were 'jealous' and tended to view the perception of others negatively. They also demonstrated low self-awareness. This dynamic of: lack of focus on building relationships, problems in relationships with senior executives, low self-awareness and crisis in confidence (discussed in the 'confidence' attribute in the 'personal characteristics' theme) can be attributed to lower emotional intelligence, discussed in the literature review. Whereas high self-awareness, an emphasis on building relationships through empathy, interpersonal skills and putting people at their ease together with their ability to maintain good working relationships with line managers, senior executives and their CEO and confidence is indicative of high levels of emotional intelligence. Those that opted-out demonstrated aspects of emotional intelligence to a greater degree than those leaders who derailed, but a lesser degree than those who were successful.

5.10.3 Summary of the theme of 'relationships with others'

This theme contained a diverse number of references to the approaches leaders took to building relationships. Successful and opted-out leaders cited building productive and cordial relationships with others that appeared to be motivated from a genuine liking of and empathy for others. The findings from this theme indicated that together with attributes previously discussed for example, self-awareness, confidence and relationships with senior leaders, indicated that successful leaders were demonstrating high emotional intelligence previously discussed in the literature review. By comparison, derailed leaders did not emphasise their relationships with others or focus on the building of productive relationships. When compared to a lack of self-awareness, greater instances of relationship breakdowns with senior leaders and crisis of confidence it makes plausible that derailed leaders were demonstrating lower levels of emotional intelligence. Opted-out leaders were 'somewhere in the middle.' The lack of emphasis on relationship building was a significant differentiator of derailed leaders. Building good relationships and demonstrating greater degrees of emotional intelligence are 'mechanisms' successful leaders were using to enact success.

5.11 Summary of the findings from the thematic analysis

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the thematic analysis. Through a comparison of the three leadership talent types, the attributes that differentiated them were identified. Distinctions were made between 'inputs' for example, skills, attitudes and traits, and 'mechanisms,' for example, behaviours, actions and responses. Identifying the attributes and beginning to identify the mechanisms, presents a major theoretical development addressing the purpose of the research and beginning to address the research questions, in particular the first four, namely:

Research Question 1	What attributes differentiate talented and successful leaders?
Research Question 2	How are successful leaders enacting their talents?
Research Question 3	Over time, how do talented and successful leaders sustain their success?
Research Question 4	By comparison, what characterises those leaders who stall, plateau or derail?

Throughout this section, a summary was provided for each theme. The following two tables provide an overall summary, highlighting the importance to the research of each attribute:

Theme	Attributes	Importance to the research
Attitudes	Attitude to learning	Differentiated successful leaders from opted-out and derailed leaders through the value placed on ongoing learning and development.
	Attitude to work	Successful leaders demonstrated a 'human' side by using negative attitudes as a catalyst for changing roles and fear of failure as motivation to achieve
	Attitude to risk	Successful leaders were more accepting of risk and more likely to take calculated risks
Achievement orientation	Delivering results	Both successful and derailed leaders cited delivering results; opted-out leaders cited inconsistent results. Successful leaders emphasised adding value and making a difference through the results they delivered
	Ambitious	Only successful and opted-out leaders emphasised ambitious
	Driven	Only successful and opted-out leaders emphasised being driven
	Setting high standards	Only successful leaders emphasised setting high standards for themselves
	Working hard	Only opted-out leaders emphasised working hard
	Decisive	Only successful leaders emphasised being decisive and the importance of making decisions
Resilience	Resilience	The most significant attribute for successful leaders and emphasised by opted-out leaders. Not emphasised by derailed leaders
	Adaptable	An important attribute for successful leaders
Personal Characteristics	Confidence	A significant differentiator for successful leaders. Both opted-out and derailed leaders cited having a crisis of confidence
	Ethical	Ethics, ethical behaviour and responses to unethical behaviour had a significant impact on leadership success regardless of type. Successful and opted-out leaders were more likely to leave organisations as a result of unethical behaviour compared to derailed leaders who remained in role
	Realistic	Referenced by all; not a differentiating attribute
	Independent	Only emphasised by successful leaders
Self-awareness	Awareness of strengths and weaknesses	An important attribute for successful leaders who demonstrated a 'human side' by considering the impact of their weaknesses and leveraging those weaknesses. Of moderate importance to opted-out leaders. Derailed leaders demonstrated a lack of awareness of their strengths and weaknesses
	Understanding how they are perceived by others	Only successful and derailed leaders emphasised understanding the perception of others. Derailed leaders understood those perceptions to be negative. Successful leaders demonstrated a balanced awareness
	Understanding of own capability compared to others	Not a differentiating attribute

Table 34: Summary of the importance of the themes for the research, part 1 of 2

Theme	Attributes	Importance to the research
Change	Breaking new ground	Of significance in differentiating successful leaders who demonstrated a desire to be original and an enthusiasm for change. This was demonstrated by some opted-out leaders but not others and only marginally demonstrated by derailed leaders
	Leading strategic or culture change	Of significance in differentiating successful leaders. Marginally emphasised by derailed leaders. Not emphasised by opted-out leaders
	Being part of something big	Of significance in differentiating successful leaders. Not cited by derailed or opted-out leaders
Relationships with senior leaders	Relationship with line manager	Successful leaders cited positive relationships with line managers. Opted-out and derailed leaders were more likely to cite relationship breakdowns. When relationships broke down, both successful and opted-out leaders left the organisation
	Relationships with senior executives	Successful leaders cited both positive relationships and relationship breakdowns. Political astuteness may influence these relationships. When relationships with senior leaders broke down, successful leaders left the organisation. Opted-out and derailed leaders only cited relationship breakdowns with senior leaders which disadvantaged achievement of goals and career progression
	Relationship with CEO	Only successful leaders cited building a relationship with their CEO
Skills, knowledge and capabilities	Business management skills	A significant differentiator of successful leaders compared to derailed leaders who did not focus on the acquisition of these skills or enjoy 'running a business'. Some opted-out leaders acquired the skills and enjoyed their practical implementation
	Strategic thinking	This differentiated successful leaders from derailed and opted-out leaders who did not emphasise strategic thinking
	Expert knowledge	A differentiator of derailed leaders who emphasised their expert knowledge. Opted-out leaders did not reference expert knowledge. Successful leaders cited they were not the best experts
Relationships with others	Building relationships	Successful and opted-out leaders emphasised building good relationships and cited a genuine liking of people. Derailed leaders did not emphasise relationships

Table 35: Summary of the importance of the themes for the research, part 2 of 2

Through the detailed comparison of all of the attributes across the three talent types, a theoretical profile of the three types was constructed.

5.11.1 The emergence of theory: Leadership talent type profiles

The findings were presented in order of the number of codes allocated to the themes. However, some attributes within these themes relate to attributes a leader has for example, skills, attitudes and traits. Other attributes relate to what the leader does for example, their behaviour, responses and actions. This distinction has been made

throughout the findings using the terms 'inputs' and 'mechanisms.' These are important distinctions and the foundation for emerging theory. The research questions require the identification of the attributes of successful and derailed leaders; how these leaders sustain their success and what causes them to derail. To effectively address these questions it is important to distinguish between the inputs which could be considered to be their 'talents' and how they are enacting these through the mechanisms they use.

Using the findings a theory of talent profiles has been constructed for each leadership talent type. These profiles provide insight into the inputs and mechanisms the talent types are using and which are contributing to either their success or derailment. Negative inputs relate to where a lack of an attribute or a negatively demonstrated attribute was a significant differentiator.

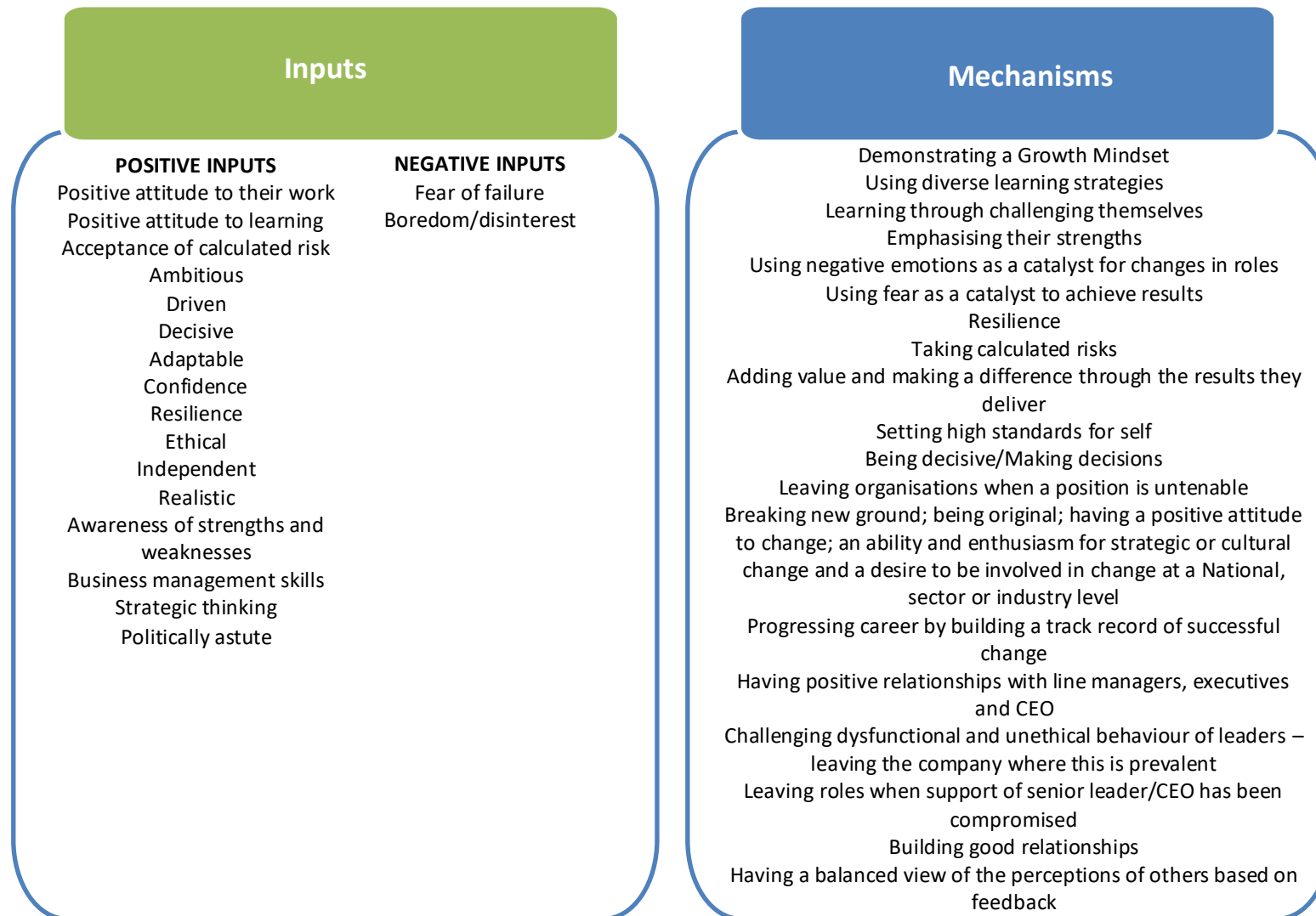


Figure 2: Summary profile of the talented and successful leadership talent type

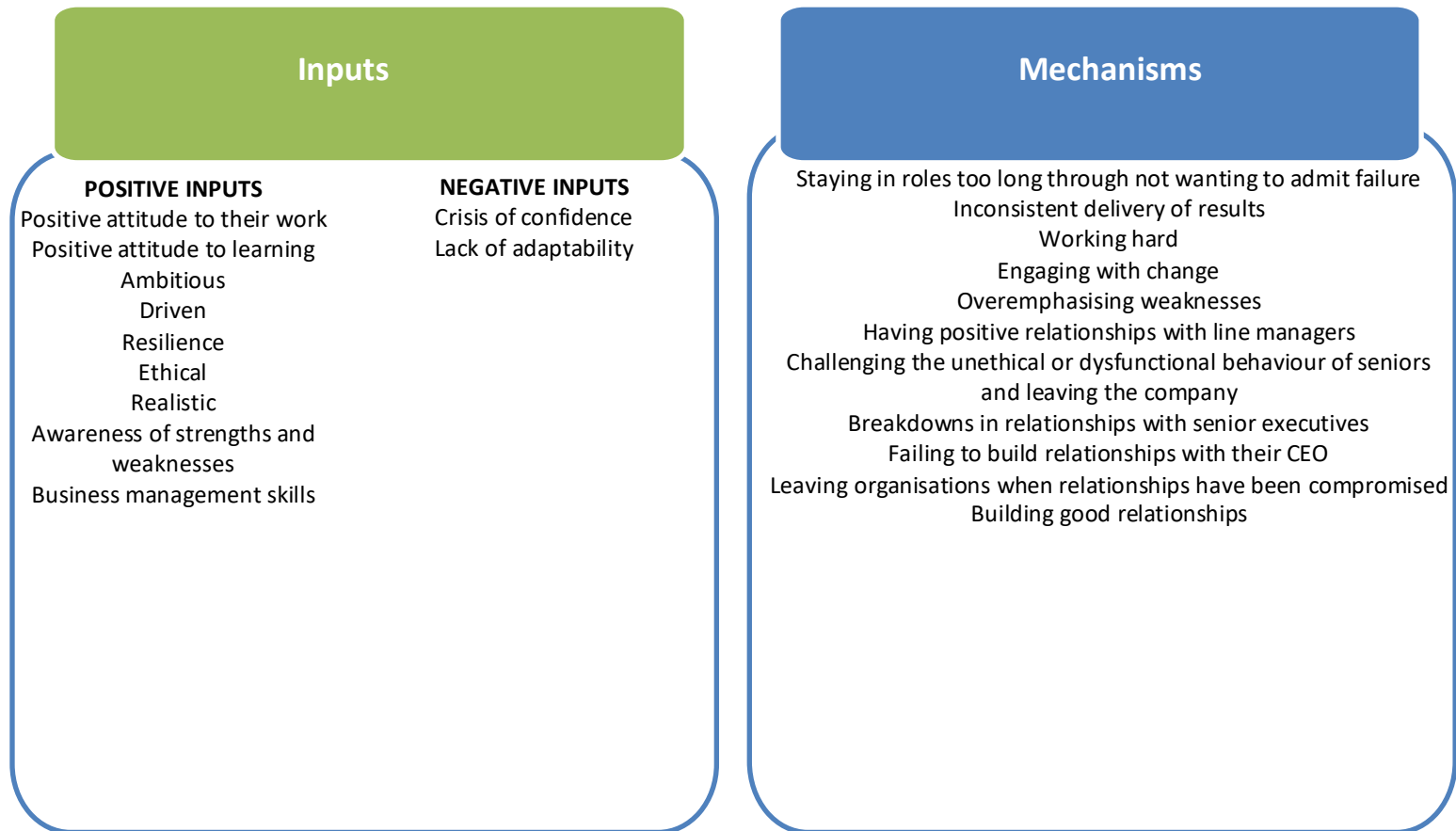


Figure 3: Summary profile of the talented and opted-out leadership talent type

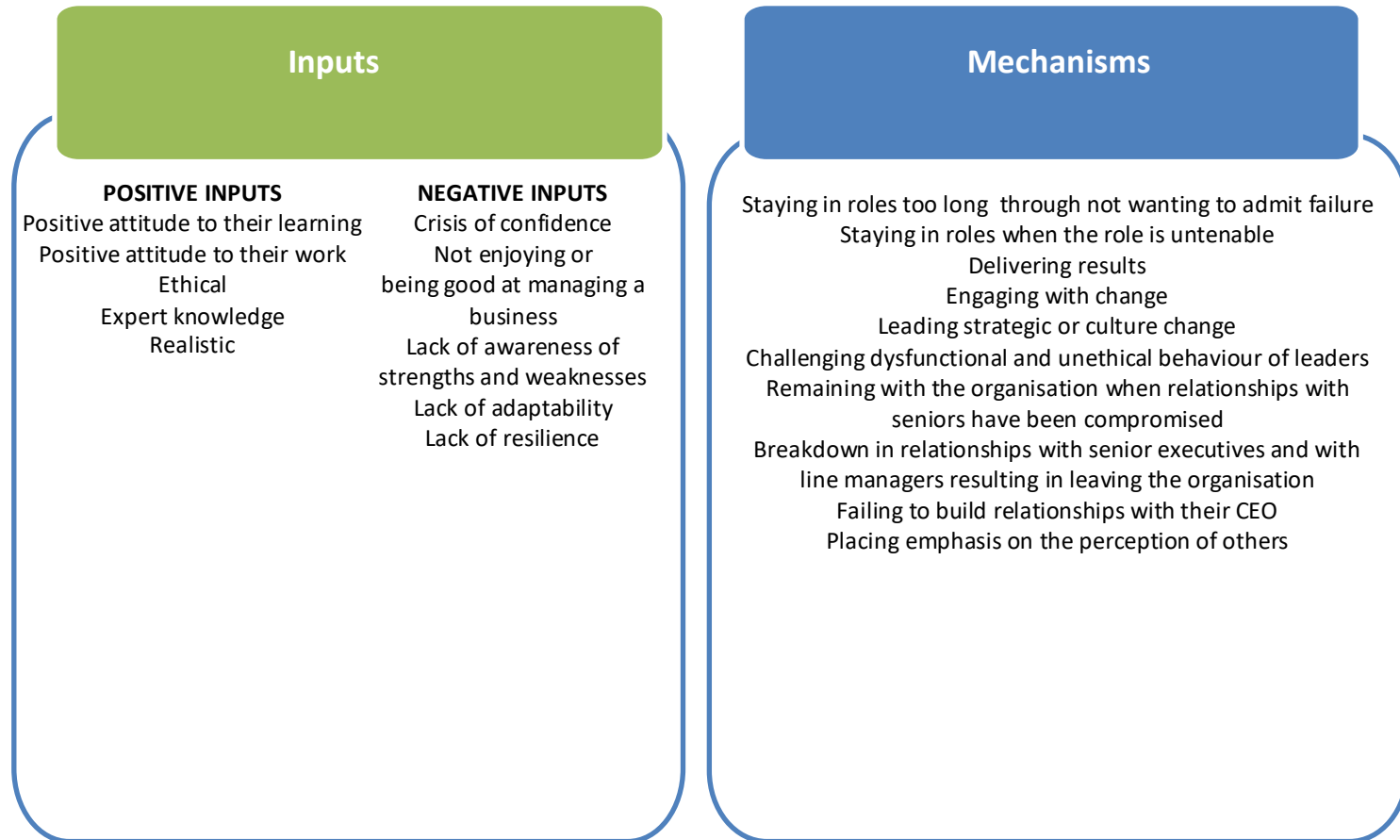


Figure 4: Summary profile of the talented and derailed leadership talent type

Opted-out leaders are shown to be neither fully demonstrating the inputs and mechanisms of successful leaders nor to be demonstrating the inputs and mechanisms of derailed leaders. This was indicative of opted-out leaders throughout the review of the findings. This curiosity will be explored further in the next chapter, which provides a 'deep dive' into success and derailment, and in the Discussion Chapter. The implications for theory of the talent profiles will be reviewed further in the Discussion chapter.

5.11.2 The emergence of theory: The key themes and attributes

Emerging from the findings of the thematic analysis were three themes which were of greatest significance in differentiating successful, opted-out and derailed leaders in this study. In order of significance these were:

1. Resilience
2. Change
3. Achievement orientation

Together with these three themes, the following three attributes were of greatest significance:

1. Confidence
2. Business management skills
3. Expert knowledge

These three core themes together with the three attributes collectively had the most significant impact on a leader's success or derailment. Identification of these provides an important contribution to theory. That resilience is a key differentiator is an important empirical finding as this was not identified in the TM literature as an attribute of talent, neither was lack of resilience cited in the leadership derailment literature. The effects of resilience on leadership success and derailment are a major contribution of the research and will be positioned in the context of the resilience literature in the Discussion Chapter. Whilst aspects of change were identified in the TM literature as being indicative of talent, the nuances of this in terms of 'breaking new ground' and 'being part of something big,' were not identified as contributing to success. Collectively these three themes and three

attributes create a dynamic that was not identified in literature. This will be explored further in the 'deep dive' into success and derailment and in the 'Discussion' chapter.

Chapter 6: Findings: A deep dive into success and derailment

6.1 Introduction

Chapter four provided a bridge between the literature review and the empirical research by offering, through a case study organisation, an insight into how organisations defined leadership talent and how those definitions were operationalised. The case study made plausible that definitions of talent, when operationalised, result in vague lists of attributes that are not understood by TM decision makers or leaders in the organisation, questioning the effectiveness of such definitions. Chapter five provided a comprehensive review of the important findings from the thematic analysis related to the attributes of leadership talent presented as themes and attributes. Comparisons were made across the three leadership talent types and theoretical talent type profiles emerged. Identified through the thematic analysis were three significant themes: resilience, change and achievement orientation, which together with the attributes of confidence, business management skills and expert knowledge significantly differentiated successful and derailed leaders. Opted-out leaders emerged as ‘somewhere in between’ the profiles of successful and derailed leaders.

This final chapter of findings offers a ‘deep dive’ into success and derailment, presenting findings from the empirical research on:

- The participants’ perceptions of the causes of leadership derailment
- Career choices and decisions, and the impact of these
- The meaning participants gave to ‘success’ and the impact of this on their career

The interviews yielded rich data that contributes to a deeper dive into success and derailment in three ways. Firstly, participants contributed their own opinion of the causes of leadership derailment. This opinion offers a useful triangulation of the themes and attributes, in the context of derailed leaders. It also provides an insight into how successful and derailed leaders view derailment. Secondly, throughout the interviews, participants spoke about defining moments and critical incidents in their personal and professional lives, and important decisions they were making in their careers. These had a

substantial effect on their leadership success. An understanding of these enables a dynamic view of their ‘leadership journey’ and helps to address two of the research questions, namely:

Research Question 3	Over time, how do talented and successful leaders sustain their success?
Research Question 5	What causes some talented leaders, over time, to involuntarily stall, plateau or derail from their leadership career?

Finally, participants provided insights into the meaning they gave to success. For some leaders this had consequences for the decisions they made in relation to their career. Understanding the meaning leaders attribute to success helps to address the final research question:

Research Question 6	What effect does the meaning leadership talent gives to success have on their leadership career?
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In literature what it means to be ‘successful’ as a leader considers ‘success’ to be from an organisational perspective, most frequently relating to high performance. Understanding the meaning leaders gave to success would again, give a voice to leaders as active agents in their own ‘success.’

6.2 Causes of leadership derailment: The view of successful leaders

During the interviews, many leaders offered their own view on why leaders derail. This provided a valuable lens through which to triangulate the findings of the thematic analysis. Interestingly, only the talented and successful leadership talent type offered this view. This could have been because of the broader perspective of successful leaders. Derailed and opted-out leaders did not offer a view on the reasons for leadership derailment. For derailed leaders this could have been linked to lower levels of self-awareness.

The following is a summary of the eleven reasons for leadership derailment cited by successful leaders:

1. Lack of resilience
2. Failure to manage or adapt to change
3. Over-identifying with the role
4. Complex personal lives
5. Failure to respect the basics / not being up to the job
6. Anxiety
7. Lack of integration
8. Inability to work with or get the support of others
9. Failure to deliver results
10. Not asking enough questions
11. Dysfunctional characteristics and behaviours

There appeared to be degrees of perceived 'derailment' that linked to the 'sad,' 'mad' and 'bad' categorisation of Furnham (2015). Degrees of derailment were summarised by one successful leader as:

“Well obviously we’ve seen some derail in quite spectacular fashion and some in a less spectacular fashion....” (Andrew).

The perceived reasons leaders derail, outlined by the successful leaders are summarised in the following subsections.

6.2.1 Lack of resilience

Successful leaders cited the lack of 'bounce back ability' in leaders that derailed suggesting that:

“The interesting thing for me is why...there has been what I call 'bounce back ability' in some of the successful people you're talking to and why there was less bounce back ability in some of the, as it were, less successful people you are talking to. So it's not...a simple dichotomy of some succeed and others fail but it's

that, at the point of challenge, why some people emerge reinvented, reenergised, re-launched and others don't" (Marcus).

One successful leader related this inability to bounce back to an inability to learn from failure together with a sense of 'infallibility':

"If you begin to believe your own infallibility...you learn more from your failures than you do from your success" (Alfred).

This inability to bounce back links to the lack of resilience in derailed leaders identified in the findings of the thematic analysis as one of the three key themes to emerge and will be discussed in chapter seven.

6.2.2 Failure to manage or adapt to change

Two successful leaders cited 'change' as derailing leaders. This was either due to an inability on the part of these derailed leaders to manage change or to adapt during change. Change was seen as a crucial part of a senior leader's role; "every successful CEO has to manage change" (Alfred). Leaders who derailed were seen as unable to recognise what needed to be changed, manage the pace of change or inspire people to adopt the change. This was summarised as:

"They drive their business in the knowledge that...what they did was right and therefore must continue to be right, so failure to acknowledge a changing world and actually believe that what they are doing is correct when it's incorrect" (Adam).

This links to the findings of the thematic analysis that derailed leaders and those that opted-out did not engage in change or build a 'track record' of leading strategic change to the same extent as successful leaders. Change was identified as one of the three key themes to emerge and will be discussed in chapter seven.

6.2.3 Over identifying with the role

Two successful leaders considered that an important factor in derailment was with regard to how derailed leaders defined themselves. The perception was that derailed leaders identified too much with their role or job title. If something happened which destabilised their role, this influenced the self-perception of derailed leaders. This was to their detriment. One successful leader summarised this phenomena:

“I served on a number of bodies and ...too many people around those sort of tables are defined or define themselves by virtue of how many Boards they sit on. It is the single most important thing to them... If you allow yourself to get defined by the job then if the job is taken away from you or if you lose the job or if it gets derailed the impact on you is gigantic... I think too many people have...become defined to the outside world...by virtue of a job and they have become too wedded to the cars. They become very wedded to titles and the structures, and if you take that away then they become completely lost and disoriented because their life is totally defined by this job, this role and it's very hard to function if it's all ripped away from you... I think that most corporate problems come out of people over defining themselves by their relationship to that one job” (Andrew).

This also links to the findings related to the theme of ‘skills, knowledge and capabilities’. Derailed leaders perceived themselves as experts in their discipline, in some cases failing to value a broader set of skills relating to business management or strategic thinking. Derailed leaders tended to perceive their expertise to be greater than that of their peers during their early career years. They also perceived their expertise to be a contributor to success in their role. Where either the role changed, such that they could no longer rely on their expertise or, if they had cause to doubt the level of their expertise in their role, derailed leaders sought to re-establish themselves in roles that required their expertise even where this meant returning to a prior role, in effect taking a backward career move.

This links to the findings of the thematic analysis that derailed leaders emphasised their expert knowledge in the pursuit of career opportunities.

One successful leader made a correlation between derailed leaders over identifying with a role and finding it difficult to 'bounce back' if there were challenges in performing that role:

"You know your self-efficacy can go down the pan. If you struggle in the role and you associate yourself with the role, then you are going to find it harder to bounce back" (Marcus).

He then suggested that:

"Successful people ...remain partly detached from what they are doing so it never gets hold of them in such a way that it can be destructive...if you are a very rationally focused individual, you do stay slightly one step removed ..." (Marcus).

This individual linked this ability to be removed from the role to resilience suggesting that:

"You are in the moment but not dominated by the moment, at any one time...some...who have bounced back might be able to tell you some stories about that" (Marcus).

Given derailed leaders identified with their expert knowledge to a greater extent than successful or opted-out leaders, and did not cite being resilient this may potentially indicate why they were less able to bounce back in challenging situations. Derailed leaders were more likely to cite early career aspirations as being the attainment of specific roles, and to link success to the attainment of a specific role or job title. They were also more likely to make career decisions based on the attainment of a role. By comparison, successful leaders linked success to other factors and were more likely to make career decisions related to the development of skills and to achieving greater impact. Career decision-making across the three leadership talent types and the meanings they attributed to success are reviewed in detail in the next sections.

6.2.4 Complex personal lives

All the successful leaders were in long-term stable marriages with teenage or adult children. Successful leaders accessed the support of their partners when making crucial career decisions and made these decisions after considering their family circumstances. Successful leaders perceived that a cause of derailment of some leaders was the complexity of their personal lives, in particular their relationships:

“A lot of folk in my line of work have been distracted by...complications in their personal lives which...are interesting but enormously consuming of time and energy, both physically and emotionally...What happens in that side of people’s lives is their business and I am no arbiter on that...but I’m lucky I haven’t had any of that” (Marcus).

By this definition it could be perceived that three of the derailed leaders had ‘complex personal lives’ interestingly however those derailed leaders did not reflect on that complexity having a negative impact on their careers, for example:

“I moved to x which wasn’t very nice so then I moved again to a place called y which was much nicer. It’s why I’ve got an ex-wife, moving around the country. I was buying houses on credit cards... I’ve ended up with four kids, things happen” (Craig).

Derailed leaders were ‘matter of fact’ about the effects of relationship breakdowns in their personal lives and were less likely to cite the support of partners in their careers decisions. By comparison, successful leaders paid attention in the interviews to their positive relationships with partners and children and were more likely to cite family support in career decision-making, outlined in the later section on career decision-making.

6.2.5 Failure to respect the basics / not being up to the job

Failure to respect the basics related to a successful leader's perception that derailed leaders did not take sufficient time in the early stages of their career to develop basic skills that would be required in more senior leadership roles. This was explained as:

“They believed that ...they should have more responsibility than they did at the time and therefore, treat their roles as somewhat menial but because of their talent, they are still very successful...at them. As they grew to the next level, they found very quickly that they did not understand the basics... More importantly they forgot how to understand the basics and therefore found themselves failing in an organisation they should have been successful at, and for me it's more of an individual mindset than it is an organisational mindset that causes failure” (Deepak).

This links again to skills, knowledge and capabilities and potentially an over reliance of derailed leaders on the expertise that enabled them to develop their early career whilst neglecting to focus on a development of or interest in, business management skills. This in turn links to the literature on leadership transitions (Charan *et al.* 2011) suggesting a failure to recognise the transition required to move into more senior levels of leadership for example:

“You see with a lot of young entrepreneurs who come in...they get to the stage where the business...outgrows their skills; it moves into a new phase and it doesn't mean to say that person is in anyway diminished, it means...he's in the wrong place at the wrong time and has to go somewhere else” (Alfred).

This inability to develop the broader skills needed for senior leadership roles was also cited by another successful leader:

“They don't know how to run a business...they know how to play around with the numbers...to be in that kind of international business which is dependent on new products, distribution, exchange rates, etc., that is not an environment they

understand very well...you might as well be talking to the man in the moon..."
(Alfred).

In the literature review this can be likened to the suggestion that individuals "rise to their level of incompetence" (Furnham 2010, p.9).

6.2.6 Anxiety

One successful leader suggested that anxiety was "...a big driver of unpredictable behaviour" (Adam). Anxiety most closely links to the attribute of confidence, only cited by derailed leaders and in the context of a crisis of confidence. It may also link to the theme and attribute of resilience depending on the context within which anxiety was expressed. Anxiety was identified in the literature in the context of 'imposter syndrome' (Kets de Vries 2007) however, 'imposter syndrome' was not identified in this study.

6.2.7 Lack of integration

One successful leader cited 'lack of integration,' as a reason for leadership derailment that he explained as:

"...any organisation is a collective...you can have a brilliant strong leader who has been successful in other roles that emphasis individual success but when it comes down to being part of the entire organisation, you have to be able to balance strategies, tactics, actions ...and make sure they are all relevant to your organisation. I've seen a lot of leaders fail to recognise the importance of integration with their peers, their teams within their organisation that has caused them to fail" (Grant).

Derailed leaders did not cite building relationships to the same extent as successful leaders which may impact their ability to integrate with peers and teams. In the literature, this links to: inability to build and lead a team (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011) and poor stakeholder management (Ready 2005). Derailed leaders also did not demonstrate a desire to develop their business management skills and cited not enjoying 'running a business.' This may have affected their understanding of and

integration into the organisation. This also links to the pattern of a 'shooting star' identified by George and McClean (2007) characterised by a lack of an integrated life.

6.2.8 Inability to work with or get support of others

One leader suggested that leaders derail due to an inability to gain the support of their direct reports. This was explained as:

"I've seen people who cannot...work with other people. I've seen people who really really enjoy control...but as they've grown have not figured out how to effectively lead as opposed to manage...you have to have the support of your people" (Deepak).

This links to the attribute of 'relationships with others' and to the literature suggesting leaders derail due to their insufficient mass of followership (Ready 2005). This also links to an inability to build and lead a team (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011).

6.2.9 Failure to deliver results

One successful leader suggested that leaders derailed due to a failure to deliver results, described as:

"Your job is delivering results and many leaders fail to make that connection" (Deepak).

This links to the attribute of 'delivering results.' Derailed leaders cited the delivery of a result as achieving a task or specific outcome, whilst successful leaders cited delivering a result in the broader context of adding value or 'making a difference.' This may be linked to the greater capability of successful leaders to think strategically and therefore position the results they deliver. In the absence of data on the results derailed leaders in the sample did deliver, it cannot be concluded if they did or did not deliver the results required.

6.2.10 Not asking enough questions

One successful leader cited an inability of derailed leaders to recognise when they needed to admit a lack of knowledge and ask questions, interpreted as a lack of confidence in their own intelligence:

“I’ve always had a challenge understanding why people simply don’t ask questions and I guess my internalisation of that is...to ask many more questions and tell people I don’t understand I don’t get it. I’m confident in my own intelligence... asking for help is regarded in many places as being almost a sort of a suggestion that you’re not up to the job and so many people take part in decisions that they really shouldn’t or should go and get a different perspective on” (Andrew).

This links to a number of different attributes from the findings, including:

- ‘Attitude to learning:’ Successful leaders learn from a wider range of experiences, learning from others and demonstrate a growth mindset (Dweck 2006). Comparatively derailed leaders were more likely to cite learning from formal education and cited fewer learning strategies.
- ‘Decisive:’ Derailed leaders did not cite being decisive. Gaining a different perspective may have enabled more effective decision making
- ‘Confidence:’ Derailed leaders cited having a ‘crisis of confidence’
- ‘Expert knowledge:’ Derailed leaders placed emphasis on being the best expert. This may have affected their willingness to seek advice or knowledge.

That derailed leaders placed less emphasis on building relationships and had less positive relationships with senior leaders, may also indicate a smaller network of contacts derailed leaders could approach for trusted information or advice.

6.2.11 Dysfunctional characteristics and behaviours

Successful leaders cited dysfunctional characteristics and corresponding behaviours of derailed leaders as a cause of their derailment. One successful leader stressed the importance of not engaging in these behaviours:

“The journey is about keeping the vehicle on the road. There are lots of things you have to do but there are also some very key... things that you shouldn’t do and so it is a case of how do you keep the car on the road by doing but also by not doing... As leaders there are things that you can do that can either create or increase toxicity for yourself and for others. I suppose that, you know, some of that is about your kind of looping type behaviour as well...how do you avoid getting into those loops of behaviour, which you can’t get out of terribly easily” (Marcus).

The following are examples of dysfunctional characteristics and behaviours, cited by a successful leader:

Dysfunctional characteristic or behaviour	Example statement
Egotistical	“He was giving me some bullshit about how brilliant he was, as many CEO’s do; his favourite subject was himself...they were losing a lot of money. He told me how wonderful he was and all that. I just looked at him and said, ‘you know, I listen to you and I see my mum and dad. They make money and you don’t’ and I said ‘they do it because they made sure they spend less every week than they earn’ ...and he looked at me as if I was from another planet” (Alfred).
Manipulative	“He had animal cunning; he was manipulative; he was defensive and he broke that team ethic...everyone of that group...all left that organisation...and the organisation went backwards” (Alfred).
Paying too much attention to detail	“He couldn’t sleep...he was just a maniac for detail; you know he would keep himself up all night...I was always looking for an escape out of what was a highly stressful situation, made stressful by ...his own mania” (Alfred).

Exhibit 23: Examples of dysfunctional behaviours cited by successful leaders

By comparison, another successful leader put the effects of ego into the context of his success:

“I’ve always taken the view...that you’ve got to take your ego out of the equation. This story is not about me and it’s not about me when it comes to doing things for the company as a Chairman. It’s about doing what’s best for the company...we all have quite large ego’s ...I’m quite good at putting my ego behind the interests of whatever I’m doing at the time” (Andrew).

This may link to the lower self-awareness of derailed leaders and of their perception of themselves compared to others. Successful leaders by comparison had higher self-awareness.

One successful leader made the point that toxic behaviours may not denote dysfunctional personal behaviours rather a toxic behaviour may be any behaviour that is detrimental to the company:

“I think if you just change the CEO it’s a recipe for disaster...it sends out terrible messages; even when you change a bad leader...You see bad leaders and customers love them; you see bad leaders and the staff love them. You know a toxic manager is not always an unpopular one...I’ve seen... failing management who is actually very popular...they are giving people what they want. Toxic to me...is not all aggression and bullying...they were very nice but they were hugely toxic” (Adam).

This raises an interesting observation that ‘toxic’ in the context of dysfunctional leadership may be related to the impact of behaviours and decisions on the organisation rather than aggressive behaviours that affect people within the organisation. This related to the research on toxic leadership that was identified in the literature review as out of the scope of this research. When completing the thematic analysis, ‘paying attention to detail’ was one of the few ‘dysfunctional’ behaviours cited by derailed leaders. Only one derailed leader cited attention to detail which resulted in the perceived dysfunctional behaviour of ‘micro managing’ others. Only one other derailed leader cited engaging in dysfunctional behaviours. This behaviour related to deliberately undermining their line manager (as previously cited in the ‘relationship with line manager’ attribute).

This suggests that derailed leaders either:

- are unaware of their dysfunctional behaviours
- are unprepared to cite dysfunctional behaviours
- do not demonstrate dysfunctional behaviours
- are not derailed as a result of dysfunctional behaviours

Literature emphasises the role of 'toxic' behaviours in leadership derailment, however successful leaders did not emphasise 'toxicity' as reasons for derailment. Neither did derailed leaders appear to derail because of such behaviours. This is important for the research and will be explored further in the 'Discussion' chapter.

6.2.12 Summary of the view of derailment by successful leaders

Successful leaders identified eleven reasons why leaders derailed. These observations were based on their collective experiences throughout their leadership careers. In summary, these link to the themes and attributes in the findings as follows:

Reason for derailment	Link to findings
Lack of resilience	Links to the theme and attribute of 'resilience'
Failure to manage or adapt to change	Links to the attribute of 'adaptability' and to the theme of 'change'
Over-identifying with the role	Links to the attributes of 'expert knowledge,' 'resilience,' 'confidence' and to 'career decision-making'
Failure to respect the basics/not being up to the job	Links to the theme of 'skills, knowledge and capabilities'
Anxiety	Links to the attributes of 'confidence' and 'resilience'
Lack of integration	Links to the attribute of 'business management skills,' 'strategic thinking' and 'relationships with others'
Inability to work with or get the support of others	Links to the theme of 'relationship with others'
Failure to deliver results	Links to the attributes of 'delivering a result' and 'strategic thinking'
Not asking enough questions	Links to the attributes of 'attitude to learning,' 'decisiveness,' 'confidence,' 'expert knowledge' and the themes of 'relationships with others' and 'relationships with senior leaders'
Dysfunctional characteristics and behaviours	Links to the themes of 'self-awareness' and 'relationships with senior leaders'

Table 36: Summary of the reasons successful leaders gave for derailment linked to the findings

With the exception of 'complex personal lives' all of the reasons successful leaders gave for derailment can be linked to the findings of the thematic analysis. This provides some validation of the themes and attributes identified and how these are differentiated for derailed leaders. 'Complex personal lives' was not identified in the thematic analysis as an attribute of derailed leaders. The collective view of successful leaders implies that leaders derail due to reasons that are 'sad' rather than 'mad' or 'bad' as defined by Furnham (2015).

6.3 Causes of leadership derailment: A view from the derailed

Whilst successful leaders collectively cited many reasons for leadership derailment, none of the derailed leaders offered insights into the causes of leadership derailment. Only three derailed leaders cited their perception of the cause of their own eventual derailment and in all cases, they attributed that derailment to others, as the following quotations illustrate:

“Why I derailed was that the guy who hired me was a leader and the guy who buried me was a manager” (Derek).

“There was a real...smear campaign in that...a campaign to find a reason...you know none of this was proved...to take me down” (Peter).

“Basically, if I just say politics” (Aaron).

This is indicative of an external locus of control. Wang and Anderson (1994, p.296) suggest that those with external locus of control are “more prone than internals to use excuses to reduce blame to themselves when things go wrong.” The findings from the thematic analysis do however, indicate a more complex picture of leadership derailment. The demonstration of certain attributes and the failure to demonstrate others enabled the generation of a profile of those leaders that derailed (presented in the previous chapter). It cannot be discounted that the unethical behaviour of others contributed to the derailment of these leaders however, successful leaders were also on the receiving end of such behaviour. Successful leaders were able to navigate these potential leadership career ‘derailers’ and attain senior roles in other organisations as a result. This illustrates the internal locus of control that was prevalent in successful leaders. This also links to the resilience of successful leaders and lack of resilience in derailed leaders which will be reviewed further in this section in the context of career decision making. This lack of demonstrated insight into their own derailment could also be linked to lack of awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses in the thematic analysis. Interestingly it also links to the work of George and McClean (2007) who describe the pattern of ‘rationalising’ by failed leaders that manifest in their leadership journey. This results in such leaders being unable to admit or failing to take responsibility for their mistakes. This

next section provides greater insight into ‘the leader’s journey’ taken by both successful and derailed leaders in the context of their careers.

6.4 Comparing careers across the types

Presented through the thematic analysis was a review of the attributes of successful, derailed and opted-out leaders. This provided a leadership talent type profile for each of the leadership talent types that identified some of the mechanisms leaders were using to enact their talents into success or derailment. Complimenting these findings, an exploration of the career histories of the leadership talent types depicts their ‘leadership journey’ and provides a dynamic view of their career decisions, successes and failures.

As the interview process did not require leaders to discuss their complete career history, it needs to be recognised that career information might be incomplete. However, in recounting their leadership careers, leaders were asked to identify their most critical career experiences. Statements regarding careers were categorised as follows:

1. Career aspirations
2. Career planning
3. Geographical mobility
4. Career decisions
5. Career failures and mistakes

These will be reviewed in the following subsections.

6.4.1 Career aspirations

‘Career aspirations’ relate to any career aspirations leaders may have had as teenagers or young adults, in particular as they were making decisions with regard to qualifications to be gained or higher education, or as they were developing their careers. Early career aspirations reflect answers to the proverbial question of ‘what do you want to be when you grow up?’ The 21 leaders who discussed their early year’s career aspirations comprised 11 successful leaders, five derailed leaders and five opted-out leaders.

The successful and opted-out leaders either had:

1. No specific career aspirations
2. Aspirations relating to the alleviation of circumstances for example, poverty or abuse, rather than to the attainment of specific roles
3. Aspirations relating to preferred subjects rather than roles for example maths, economics, engineering
4. Aspirations as teenagers that were not pursued into adulthood as they were deemed childhood aspirations.

By comparison, to the lack of aspirations with regard to specific roles demonstrated by the successful and opted-out leaders, four of the five derailed leaders when discussing early aspirations cited a desire to attain a specific role. In all instances, this was the role of an expert requiring specialist knowledge:

“I applied to x, and applied to y... I didn’t get anywhere. It was a bit of a knock back...for me...and partly it was that I had such a strong view about what I wanted to be, that I thought I would be able to get a job without difficulty” (Richard).

“I decided very early on that I wanted to do x...so I ended up at company y. It was like, a ten-year journey, but I got there and was pleased with that” (Aaron).

The ten-year journey eluded to in the latter statement, related to the time taken to attain the qualifications needed for the role. This early desire of some of the derailed leaders for an expert role was a continuing theme as they planned their careers. By comparison, that successful and opted-out leaders were less prescriptive in their career aspirations was also reflected in their career planning.

6.4.2 Career planning

‘Career planning’ related to how leaders reflected on their career and made short, medium or long-term plans with regard to career choices. The following statement from one successful leader provides a useful categorisation of the approaches leaders took to planning their careers:

“There are three views about careers. There are some people who know exactly from an early age what they want to do. They want to become a surgeon, they want to become a university professor... I think life is relatively simple for those sort of people; they know what they want to do and they just sort of get on and do it, if they’re lucky. I think the second group are similar; they start with a blank sheet of paper and they sort of map out their career in a staged fashion, a bit like some of my friends did at *university*. By the age of X I want to be Y. I think the others are more in the pot three category and I’m definitely the pot three category which is that if you’re too didactic about what you think your career is going to be then you’re going to miss out on a lot of opportunities. I couldn’t possible have started with a blank piece of paper ...and printed out the sort of career that I have enjoyed. And I think if something comes up and it looks like it could be fun and you think ‘oh, that looks quite interesting, what have I got to lose’ ...the old adage never regret the things you do, regret the things you don’t ...I’ve always thought is right” (Andrew).

The careers of successful and opted-out leaders typified the fluidity of the ‘pot three’ category cited above. Successful and opted-out leaders were opportunistic in the projects and roles they decided to pursue. Typically, they chose roles that would enable them to develop themselves, that would challenge them or that were interesting. This links to the theme of ‘attitudes’ in the thematic analysis and provides an example of the ‘attitude to learning’ and ‘attitude to work’ prevalent in successful leaders:

“I wouldn’t say that I’d done much planning in my career at all really and I sometimes wonder how much planning other people do, or maybe I’m just not as premeditate as others...I’ve tended to do whatever seems like a good idea at the time...” (Marcus).

Using the ‘pot’ analogy by comparison derailed leaders could be categorised as being in ‘pots’ one or two. Throughout the careers of four of these derailed leaders there appeared to be a continuous tension between a desire for a role as an expert and the broader capabilities required of them in a leadership role. This links to the attribute of expert knowledge previously documented within the theme of skills, knowledge and

capabilities where those leaders who derailed valued and demonstrated expert knowledge compared to successful leaders who demonstrated a greater emphasis on business knowledge and strategic thinking.

This emphasis of derailed leaders on expertise and the desire for expert roles links to the literature on derailment and the suggestion that derailed leaders demonstrate too narrow a functional orientation (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Van Velsor and Leslie 1995).

The following provides an example of the impact this desire to be an expert had on the career of a derailed leader:

“I didn’t really want to have another job...that was the job I had always wanted...I never want to be a business man...I was told ‘you can’t hold onto this (*expert role*) for 10 years. What you are going to have to do is to go off and do something sideways, prove you can do business and then justify yourself coming back to do what you really want to do’...I had always been very clear that that was the job I wanted to do” (Aaron).

A successful leader alluded to this emphasis on expert knowledge during career development and continued pursuit of expert roles by derailed leaders as a factor in derailment. This also relates to the previously cited perception by successful leaders that derailed leaders over identify with specific roles allowing their expertise and role to define who they are; when they were no longer the expert, or no longer in that role, they derailed.

6.4.3 Geographical Mobility

All leaders evidenced geographical mobility during their careers. Derailed leaders mostly moved to different offices within the same area and to different areas in their own country. Successful leaders were more likely to be internationally mobile. Geographical mobility was identified as an important feature in the careers of eight successful leaders, six opted-out leaders and three derailed leaders. For one successful leader, being

geographically mobile was a conscious decision during the early development of their career:

“I deliberately made myself mobile; visible in that context” (Samuel).

For other successful leaders being mobile was not necessarily a deliberate choice. Changes of location were a consequence of taking advantage of a new career opportunity that emerged or the result of actively seeking a new opportunity. Successful leaders demonstrated greater geographical mobility than those leaders who derailed or opted-out:

“I was running the x business on a global basis and I was travelling the world and so I was spending a lot of time in Australia. I was also spending a lot of time in Asia but I was also commuting to New York pretty much weekly so it became routine. I’d fly out on Monday morning on the first flight and fly back overnight on the Wednesday” (Andrew).

The above example is one of the extreme examples of the geographical mobility of the successful leaders. One successful leader cited this willingness to be mobile as contributing to their resilience and ability to relate to others:

“I’ve usually got a relationship to someone based on where they are from, so I can break the ice very quickly...and getting myself at ease with new situations and people...a very important skill or ability to have in business...” (Sebastian).

In this interview, the successful leader later attributed their resilience to this ability to be at ease quickly in new situations as a result of their geographical mobility. Another leader also suggested that mobility contributed to their resilience:

“They knew I had already worked overseas and therefore was reasonably resilient...” (Stacey)

That resilience can be acquired through positive career experiences will be discussed in chapter seven. Being mobile, particularly in their early career years, appears to have been a feature in the careers of all leaders, with successful leaders demonstrating a greater

degree of international mobility. Given that many of these successful leaders were employed at times by global organisations, the willingness to be mobile internationally was important for the development of their early careers.

6.4.4 Career decision-making

Career decisions were characterised in the following way:

- Proactivity in career decision making
- The decision to engage with head hunters
- How the acquisition of new skills influenced decisions
- The decision to select high impact change roles or projects
- The decision to select challenging roles
- Choosing roles because of the people they would be working with
- The importance of family in decision-making

Overall, career decision making was found to be linked to the attributes of ‘confidence,’ ‘resilience’ and ‘decisive.’ Successful leaders demonstrated greater confidence in their decision-making.

Proactive in career decision-making

Being ‘proactive’ in their career decision-making related to leaders actively seeking new opportunities to enhance their careers. Leaders from the ‘successful’ leadership talent type were proactive in identifying career opportunities. Unlike those leaders who derailed however, these opportunities did not always involve career progression but rather were centred on the acquisition of skills and knowledge or the ability to engage in a novel or challenging experience. This links to the attributes of ‘attitude to work’ and ‘attitude to learning.’

Proactive behaviour included approaching senior executives within the organisation with regard to developmental opportunities for example:

“...made a decision then to write to one of the directors within the business to say ‘well I’m here, I’ve done reasonably well and I’m interested in working in other

areas of the business, have you got anything?’ Which was an unsolicited email I sent through to the director...I got a very good response...got put into some key strategic projects...” (Samuel).

‘Proactivity’ also manifested when managing transitions following secondments.

Successful leaders managed this process to ensure beneficial arrangements before or after their secondment for example:

“...before I went there I’d made a point of writing to the director who’d given me the opportunity on these other projects... so when I came back from that role I was offered a director’s job...” (Samuel).

Derailed leaders were less proactive in identifying opportunities and in ‘masterminding’ roles, instead seemingly ‘finding’ themselves in roles. Interestingly the opted-out leaders were polarised with half of the opted-out leaders being proactive in engineering opportunities whilst the others were less proactive.

Engaging with ‘head-hunters’

Whilst successful leaders were proactive in seeking career opportunities, they were also approached by head-hunters (recruiters) for example:

“I got approached by a head-hunter to go and become managing director”
(Alfred).

Whether they engaged with the head-hunter appeared dependant on if the opportunity presented was a role with greater impact, challenge or interest than the role they were currently in. A higher salary was not, for successful leaders, a reason to engage with a head-hunter. Only one derailed leader and no opted-out leaders cited being approached by head-hunters. This indicates successful leaders were more visible outside of the organisations they currently worked in. This could be a result of their greater tendency to build relationships or to the greater visibility of the roles they selected for example as cited in the ‘change’ theme, successful leaders engaged in change at an industry, sector and national level which would result in a more visible public profile.

Gaining skills, knowledge and experience

All successful leaders and 80% of the opted-out leaders, identified at the early stages of their career, a need to develop a broad range of business related skills and experience. Deliberate choices were made with regard to which roles would enable this. One leader summed up this approach as:

“I deliberately tried to create a breadth, a base...” (Samuel).

Another leader provided an example of how successful leaders navigated roles in order to achieve this breadth of business related skills:

“I did not want to be a finance director...I was actually looking for an opportunity through finance that I could get into broader general management” (Alfred).

Typically, successful leaders, in the early stages of their career, had amassed a set of skills related to the following roles:

- People management
- Finance
- Operations
- Business Development
- Sales and marketing

In comparison derailed leaders by choice, had amassed a narrower set of skills related primarily to their area of expertise. At times, decisions linked to this were to the detriment of their career progression, for example:

“I just wanted to get on with the sales side, I wasn’t interested in managing teams of people...I was never very good as a manager...I just wanted to work with clever people... I manage one person...there is no need for me to manage big teams of people...I’m not as successful here” (Craig).

It appears that derailed leaders reluctantly broadened their skills, knowledge and experience, particularly in business management, which they evidently did not enjoy. This significantly differentiated derailed leaders from successful leaders.

The decision to select high impact change roles or projects

Successful leaders identified early on in their careers, roles that would enable them to get involved in critical change initiatives or projects therefore increasing the impact of their work, for example:

“...got involved in projects that were critical, albeit at the time in a relatively small part of the business, and so I probably did that for the first four or five years” (Samuel).

This theme of ‘change’ was discussed in depth in Chapter Five. Successful leaders accelerated their careers through engagement in strategic change initiatives. The success of which enabled them to acquire roles which enabled the implementation of change at industry, sector or national level. This was not a feature of the careers of opted-out or derailed leaders.

Selecting challenging roles

Successful leaders had a pattern of deliberately choosing challenging roles throughout their careers. One leader summarised this as:

“Half of it in my view...is about facing up to it, to work out challenges, to work out where you sit in it all” (Andrew).

This view was re-enforced by another successful leader who described this need for challenging roles as a reaction against ‘playing it safe:’

“You could end up sort of playing it safe... hanging onto your pension or something... I’m the sort of person that if I was scared of heights, the first thing that I would want to do is get on the top of a mountain... If something is in your way, you’ve got to deal with it and if there aren’t many things to deal with, I’d be very bored, so even though they scare me...there is some personality element for me” (Marcus).

In the interviews, successful leaders often ‘downplayed’ the nature of the challenge, describing such challenging roles as for example, ‘interesting:’

“I’d just become Chairman of Company A and that needs some real danger money and as I said I’m Chairman of Company B and I’m Chairman of Company C. I made the probably slightly crazy decision of actually Chairing an X which was in trouble and to see if one could actually get it out of trouble would be actually quite an interesting experience which is why I went and did it” (Andrew).

When asked to expand on why he had chosen the roles he had chosen, this leader suggested it was about wanting to be “right at the heart of it” (Andrew). This view was shared by other successful leaders and again relates to the theme of ‘change’ and ‘breaking new ground:’

“It’s about not being scared of doing something different or something new and actually being excited by it and not the opposite because some people are very much the opposite aren’t they? They like the norm and maybe if I go back to my roots; it’s me needing to do something off my own back and me needing to do that for my sanity” (Stacey).

As with geographical mobility, this latter statement also relates to the theme of resilience, and building that resilience through positive, challenging experiences. This will be discussed further in chapter seven. Successful leaders regularly applied for roles that were significantly above the level in which they were currently operating. Whilst leaders failed to secure such roles, the application process was seen as a learning experience and an opportunity for feedback. Characteristic of successful leaders was their propensity to change not just organisations but industries and sectors. Derailed leaders did not transition into other sectors or industries, tending to remain within industries and sectors related to their specific area of expertise. For successful leaders, decisions in relation to these transitions and the resulting success of them could be linked to a number of themes and attributes including:

- the theme of ‘change’
- the theme of ‘resilience’
- the attribute of ‘confidence’
- the theme of ‘skills, knowledge and experience’

- the theme of 'self awareness'
- the attribute of 'delivering results'

Successful leaders liked to 'break new ground' and be engaged in activity that was new and innovative. They also demonstrated adaptability in adjusting and confidence in their capability even when they transitioned into new and challenging roles. This relates to learning agility highlighted in the literature review as a definition of 'talent,' whereby talented and successful leaders demonstrate the ability to learn quickly from their experiences and apply new learning to new situations:

"It's interesting because you should be clear, going through that kind of change, so that you can re-launch yourself and be effective and useful again in a different way" (Marcus).

The need for a leader to re-launch themselves as they transition roles was re-iterated by another successful leader who emphasised the need to transition quickly:

"You can't rely on anything. You don't come with any credit in the bank; you come with a reputation, but you have no credit in the bank...You're playing on a completely different stage and you've got to get through that change very quickly, but you are confronting something that is culturally very different from anything I'd ever done before," (Andrew).

Emerging from this propensity for successful leaders to apply for challenging roles, are links to the attributes of 'attitude to learning,' 'breaking new ground' and 'being part of something big.' These attributes inspired these leaders to want to acquire roles that provided developmental and novel opportunities enabling them to have a greater impact within the organisation, industry or sector. Their greater demonstration of the attributes of 'confidence' and 'resilience' enables them to, as one successful leader described it, "feel the fear and do it anyway" (Andrew).

Confidence and resilience in relation to career decision making is important in the construction of theory and will be discussed further in chapter seven in the context of career self-efficacy.

Choosing roles because of the people they would be working with

Leaders across all types stated making a decision to join an organisation based on either the line manager or the team they would be working with. Successful leaders wanted to work with people who were “high performing” (Samuel), “clever” (Craig) and who they could learn from. However, what differentiated successful leaders is that these leaders also explicitly cited declining roles due to their perception of the executives within the organisation. This was discussed in depth through the attribute of ‘relationship with line manager’ in the findings of the thematic analysis.

The importance of family

All successful leaders cited the importance of family to their career decision-making during their mid-career years as they were developing their career. This related primarily to decisions with regard to relocating as well as which roles to accept or decline.

“As you get a bit older, you make choices for other reasons, so by the time I was in my mid 30’s, I and my wife had a couple of children and her view was, she didn’t want to continue bringing up the children in x...so when a Chief Executive job came up...I applied for that...” (Marcus).

“My family were still growing up and it was placing quite a strain... So I went to the x and said ‘look guys I’ve had enough, I’ve done my time’...I’d made a decision not to live in New York, because educationally for the kids and I made a decision not to get an apartment in New York because you end up staying an extra night” (Andrew).

Where their partners were averse to a location, leaders stated that they would not have accepted the role. One female leader cited taking a senior role that enabled greater flexibility of working practices, following the birth of her child. Considering their family in their career decisions appeared to be an extension of the quality of the relationships successful leaders had with their partners and any children, as this ‘tongue-in-cheek’ comment illustrates:

“We are a very close family...they adore their mother, and they seem to quite like me...we are very close” (Marcus).

As well as considering their family when relocating, successful leaders took counsel from their partners on important career decisions for example:

“I did not trust the guy really who I would be working for...I talked to my wife the night before, and she was very quick, she said if you think you don't trust him you don't go” (Alfred).

Family was a major contributor to the decision of some opted-out leaders to leave their leadership roles. This raises the interesting question of whether these leaders would have derailed or gone on to be successful if they had stayed in leadership roles.

“So I talked about that to my wife... She was on the upward spiral... We'd got two young boys... We had a good discussion about what both of us were looking for... So I put all those circumstances into the pot...I had achieved incredibly high office and now there was the opportunity to do things differently, support my wife, spend some time with my boys...all my life I have been chasing big jobs...” (Sean).

“I wanted to make the best of my fifties; to enjoy my children whilst they still want me...to discover what else there is for me” (Joyce).

In comparison to successful and opted-out leaders, only one derailed leader referred to family, the quality of his relationships and the need to make career decisions in consideration of family.

6.4.5 Career setbacks, mistakes and failures

During their careers leaders experienced a variety of 'setbacks,' made mistakes and experienced failures, these included redundancy, the failure of a highly visible project of national significance, making a wrong career choice, the impact of the unethical behaviour of others and whistleblowing.

Whilst all leaders encountered setbacks, successful leaders responded differently to these setback compared to derailed leaders.

Managing setbacks

One of the 'setbacks' experienced by leaders was redundancy. Successful leaders used redundancy as an opportunity to re-evaluate their strengths and career preferences, post-redundancy moving into either a different type of role or a different sector. Some successful leaders, during redundancy situations, took time to reflect on their careers and explored entrepreneurial ventures prior to recommencing senior leadership roles for example:

“Well I had a year or so of trying some entrepreneurial ideas” (Alfred).

“I left with a pay package...I had all sorts of ideas about becoming self-employed and working as an interim and maybe becoming a consultant, and all this sort of thing” (Dominic).

This raises an important consideration. At the time of interview, some of the opted-out leaders were exploring entrepreneurial ventures after leaving leadership roles. A longitudinal study would identify if these opted-out leaders were in fact 'successful' leaders who were exploring opportunities prior to returning to senior leadership roles. Since the completion of the interviews, three opted-out leaders have in fact returned to senior leadership roles; three remain exploring entrepreneurial careers. If those successful leaders previously quoted had been interviewed whilst on their career break, they would have been categorised as 'opted-out' or possibly 'derailed,' due to the nature of their exits.

These findings have significant implications for the research and construction of theory. The leadership derailment literature presents a 'black or white' view of derailment. Little attention is paid in the literature to how derailed leaders might recover from career setbacks. Zhang and Chandrasekar (2011, p.46) suggest, “30% to 50% of managers and executives derail at some time during their career.” This implies derailment is a dynamic process with some leaders able to recover from this 'derailment' to continue a successful

leadership career. This links to the finding that both successful and opted-out leaders demonstrated greater degrees of resilience. By comparison, derailed leaders have remained derailed, possibly due to lower levels of resilience. This offers up an opportunity for further future research on what causes some derailed leaders to 'bounce back' whilst others remain derailed.

Successful leaders also drew on their resilience to recover from failures for example:

"I guess that was a pretty seminal moment, particularly when we didn't win it... I sort of sat there and thought 'well that was a bit of a bugger'...so I spent the next nine months...building something of a reputation in the x industry...I tend to be temperamentally quite robust...I bounce back thinking, 'get on with, we'll work something out,...all experiences are valuable.' There hasn't been anything in my career I haven't learnt lessons from" (Andrew).

This ability to recover quickly from mistakes, setbacks and failures was not prevalent in derailed leaders. All derailed leaders have remained 'derailed' since the completion of the study. Again, this raises the question of not only what causes derailed leaders to derail, but what causes some leaders to be unable to 'bounce back.' This will be explored further in the 'Discussion' chapter when positioning derailment and success in the context of the resilience literature.

Making a wrong career choice

Both successful and opted-out leaders cited making the wrong choice of roles for example:

"I decided to go somewhere different...it was a lonely time...I'd made a bad decision...I was in charge of the business so I had to put on a positive face..." (Rakesh, *successful leader*).

"I remember quite a few times in my career where I thought I'd made a mistake and the feeling of absolute... well I couldn't sleep at night and stuff like that, you know. You felt you couldn't leave it because you didn't want to let it beat you, on

the other hand it could be quite a destructive environment” (Alex, *opted-out leader*).

Successful leaders quickly identified they were in the wrong role and with the same levels of resilience previously demonstrated, learnt from their mistakes and moved into more suitable roles. Opted-out leaders were more likely to have a ‘crisis of confidence’ and remain in roles longer before leaving. Of the three types, derailed leaders stayed longer in roles to which they were not suited. This suggests that successful leaders know when to stop doing something whilst those that derail carry on regardless (Goldsmith 2008).

The impact of the unethical behaviour of others

Where senior executives in the organisation demonstrated dysfunctional or unethical behaviours, both successful and opted-out leaders left the organisation. By comparison, derailed leaders stayed in roles and with organisations for some time, even after negative events had influenced their careers with the organisation significantly and detrimentally. This was discussed previously in the thematic analysis and the attribute ‘ethical.’

6.4.6 Summary of a comparison of the careers across the types

Successful leaders demonstrated distinct patterns of decision-making that differentiated them from derailed leaders. With no set career path identified in their early years, successful leaders were both proactive and opportunistic in identifying suitable roles throughout their careers. Roles were primarily selected to develop a breadth of business management skills, for the impact and challenge inherent in the role and the opportunity to engage in and lead significant change. Successful leaders illustrated confidence in their career decision-making and in their ability to succeed in the challenging ‘stretch’ roles for which they were applying. Successful leaders moved across organisations, industries and sectors and were geographically mobile. Career decisions were made in consideration of their family obligations, partners provided counsel and roles were accepted or declined on consideration of family.

In managing career setbacks, mistakes and failures, some successful leaders took ‘time out’ to consider their next career move. This was an important finding for the research as

this indicated that successful leaders may at some points in their career have been considered as 'opting out' or even potentially to have 'temporarily' derailed. This challenges the relatively 'black or white' view of the derailment literature, by suggesting that derailment is a dynamic concept. Those leaders who had opted-out, were demonstrating some of the characteristics of successful leaders and, since interview, a number have returned to senior leadership roles. This raises the possibility that the opted-out leaders could have been successful leaders taking 'time out' and the question of why some leaders 'bounce back' more quickly than others. This will be discussed further in the following chapter. Resilience was important for successful leaders in managing career setbacks and failures.

In comparison to successful and opted-out leaders, derailed leaders were more likely to have identified career aspirations in early years. Roles were more likely to be selected according to the requirement for expertise. Derailed leaders were geographically mobile in the UK. They were less likely to engage with head-hunters and did not select roles overtly for the challenge, impact or requirement to lead significant change. They were more likely to follow a linear career, albeit they transitioned organisations and industries. Derailed leaders did not move across sectors. In their career decision-making, only one derailed leader cited consideration of family in their career decision-making. In responding to career setbacks and failures, derailed leaders were less resilient and more likely to remain in their role for some time following the failure.

The findings relating to the decisions leaders were making in their careers were significant for the research. In the construction of theory, career decision-making becomes a fourth key theme in understanding how leadership talent enacts success or derails, together with resilience, change and achievement orientation. These will be discussed further in chapter seven.

6.5 The meaning participants gave to success

From the literature review, it was identified that the terms 'talented leader' and 'successful leader' were used interchangeably. Logically this means that a successful leader is a talented leader and a talented leader is a successful leader. Dries (2013a)

suggested performance, results and achievement were an 'output' of talent. However, this can be disputed through the leadership derailment literature. 'Success' is rarely defined in literature, other than in terms of leadership performance or effectiveness. Identified in the TM literature was a lack of consideration given to talent as active agents in TM practices. 'Success' and other possible outcomes of talent, such as performance, results, and achievement are set in the context of the organisation. The meaning leaders themselves give to 'success' and the impact this may have on their career decisions is not considered in the TM literature. The findings in this chapter however, indicate that both successful and opted-out leaders make career choices based on the meaning they give to success. Over time, that meaning can change particularly in relation to the balance between career and family, having a significant influence on the way in which talented and successful leaders manage their leadership careers.

During the interviews participants were specifically asked what success meant to them at key stages of their career including the early years, whilst establishing their career, the present day and when considering the future. In describing what success meant to them some leaders emphasised success in the context of professional aspirations whilst others related success to personal circumstances.

The following tables illustrate how leaders across the three leadership talent types gave meaning to success at different stages of their careers:

Talented and successful leaders	Talented and opted-out leaders	Talented and derailed leaders
Early Years: the meaning of success		
<p>Related to career</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being offered a job on a graduate scheme • Being seen as a top performer • Getting the grades for their degree • Going along with the pack; doing something vaguely interesting • Privileged to be leading an exciting life • Enjoying career • Could “pay my way” • Enjoying self • Senior in role • Being a CEO • Being a Business Leader • Being self made • Doing something different • Doing something interesting • Learning to lead • Working with people • Being proficient • Going to Oxford <p>Related to personal circumstances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kudos due to current relationship • Financial security • Not having to rely on others • Securing a decent base • Balancing learning, leadership and happiness • To work hard and acquire a semi and a car 	<p>Related to career</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The kudos of being a lawyer working for a big firm and the money that went with that • Working for the best firm; earning the big money • No view other than to move on and up through accelerated development <p>Related to personal circumstances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting an education so didn't experience poverty • Getting away from working class roots • Economic freedom (a different life from parents) • Not wanting to live like my mother; not relying on anyone. Just wanted to earn money. 	<p>Related to career</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating at a higher level compared to peers • Car and salary through apprenticeship

Table 37: The meaning of success: The early years

Talented and successful leaders	Talented and opted-out leaders	Talented and derailed leaders
Career building stage: the meaning of success		
<p>Related to career</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial reward • Moving on career wise • Board relationships • Being part of a transformational business • Re-engineering the way things are done in the wider society • Business growth (own business) • Success on a project • People growing in his organisation as a result of business growth • Learning from mistakes and events in order to find a better way of sustaining organisational success to the benefit of employees • Getting on with things; getting things done • Doing work they enjoyed, that was interesting, challenging and mentally stimulating • Leaving a legacy • Building a lasting World Class organisation • Wanting to be a CEO – wanting to influence something bigger • Knowing I'm doing big things that affect people's lives and wanting to do them well • Wanting my mum to feel proud 	<p>Related to career</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being an Executive Partner • A reputation for getting things done • Being trusted • Moving the business forward • Adding a great business to the myths and legends • A respected reputation • Pride in others going on to be successful • Escaping working class roots • A vision to create something sustainable in the future for people in the organisation. • Deliver on the promises the organisation is making • Doing the job well, making a difference at execution • Making progress • Feeling that I can help and make a difference 	<p>Related to career</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial reward • Self-worth – a sense you're doing something you are successful at. • Closing the deal • Power • Progressing up the career ladder and becoming director • To become a CEO • Self-fulfilment, doing a good job and achieving things • Being able to pay the mortgage • My father seeing I was doing well • Achieving or surpassing the objectives. • The development of my leadership team, both existing and aspiring - teaching them methods of presentation designed to influence stakeholders and drive change. It also means the skills necessary to lead other people

Table 38: The meaning of success: career building stage

Talented and successful leaders	Talented and opted-out leaders	Talented and derailed leaders
Current meaning of success		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A profitable company • Sharing the vision • Financial Performance • Satisfying the stakeholder • Putting something back from a company point of view • Perceived by others as successful • Adding value • Supporting people, wanting them to feel valued and engaged • Feeling good about myself. • Having a good reputation • Balancing family with business • Developing talent • Doing work I love: it's like a hobby • Making a difference in the industry • Still, at the age of x working being recognised and contributing • Building a legacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work / life balance (cited three times). • Having enough money to do what I want • To do work I enjoy and not for the sake of it • Being engaged and inspired • Work which is motivating and rewarding • I like my life and people value what I'm doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not getting fired rather than being a star – more in fear of getting fired and losing job which breeds certain behaviours • Self-fulfilment, finally • Making sure I've got enough for the basics of life • Getting roles that make a difference • To have a level of regard from others
Going forward and looking back: the meaning of success		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being recognised in the wider industry • A non-executive director role • Giving something back • Having a work/life balance • Being a magistrate • Teaching • Wanting children to be happy, to have found their level in life and be happy • Being a good guy to work with. • Doing what you say you're going to do. • Balanced • Taking time to develop others • Being a good team player a good leader, focused on results • Outside of work – someone who can be relied on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's not about who I work for anymore • Rather than money, it's about the quality of the work I do and having a natural interest in it • Engaged and enjoying what I do • With 3 years to retirement; play more golf, do non-executive roles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to grow a business dependant on my relationship with others in particular the Managing Director

Table 39: The meaning of success: present day, going forward and looking back

Leaders attributed many meanings to success and those meanings appeared to change over time, from early year's examples of success as financial reward through to later year's examples of wanting to make a difference, have a work/life balance or leave a legacy. Some of the early years examples appeared to be a response to childhood circumstances for example, success as meaning financial freedom because of childhood poverty or wanting mothers or fathers to see them do well. There were distinct differences in the meaning the different leadership talent types gave to success. Successful leaders provided richer, broader meanings of success encompassing themselves, others, the organisation and the wider society. By comparison, derailed leaders gave a narrower view of success, in particular when being asked to look back and consider what success has meant to them.

How leaders expressed the meaning they gave to success can be most closely aligned to motivation theory. Interestingly, the TM literature does not draw on motivation theory other than to suggest that in considering talent as 'input' "TM should focus on effort, motivation..." (Dries 2013, p.278). Where definitions of talent focus on being "driven to succeed" (Thorne and Pellant 2007, p.6) it seems remiss not to consider what meaning of success leaders are 'driving' towards. Reviewing the meanings attributed to success, highlights the potential conflict between the individual's and the organisation's meaning of success and what it means to be a successful leader. One opted-out leader made this observation:

"To be successful in an organisation you have to mould yourself to whatever their template for success is... I've seen a lot of miss-matches where individuals are talented and work hard but they are working hard on the wrong things or on the things that the organisation doesn't think are important. So I think it is vital to understand what makes the organisation tick and map yourself on to it, so the other feature I think of my own success is that I have been able to be flexible and show the right face and say the right things. Sometimes if you have a set of values which is, you know, too strong and embedded, you don't achieve success, and again, I have worked with a lot of people who, you know, stand rigidly by their set of values and then can't understand why organisations don't love them. I would say, it's because you know, they don't share your values" (Sean).

It could be said that TM practices seek to 'mould' the individual to the organisations 'template' for success and this appears to be the approach of strategic talent management in advocating organisationally specific definitions of talent. This again positions leadership talent as passive agents in TM practices, rather than active participants seeking to 'operationalise' their own meaning of success.

The changing meaning attributed to success was significant for the opted-out leaders. Half of these leaders cited success as meaning work/life balance in their later years, indicative of their decision to leave leadership roles. The meaning attributed to success will be explored further in the Discussion Chapter in the context of motivation theory.

6.6 Summary of the deep dive into success and derailment

This last of the three findings chapters offered a deep dive into success and derailment through a review of: the perceptions of successful leaders on the causes of derailment; a comparison of the career choices and decisions across the three leadership talent types and the meaning leaders give to success. The perceptions of the successful leaders on the causes of leadership derailment offered some validation of the findings of the thematic analysis with resilience and change emerging as central themes. The perception of successful leaders was that of derailed leaders as 'sad' rather than 'mad' or 'bad' which again typified the findings of the thematic analysis. By comparison, derailed leaders demonstrated limited awareness of the reasons for leadership derailment and cited their own derailment as caused by others.

An exploration of the career histories of the three leadership talent types identified important findings for the construction of theory. Successful leaders were demonstrating significantly different patterns of career decision-making. These related to the confidence with which they made career decisions, the prevalent desire for challenging, stretching roles that enabled their development and were novel experiences and their resilience when experiencing career setbacks. Through these career choices the enactment of the themes and attributes of resilience, achievement orientation, change and confidence are demonstrated. Career decision-making becomes the fourth important theme in

differentiating leadership success and derailment and will be positioned in the context of literature in the Discussion Chapter.

A further important finding was identified as significant to the construction of theory, relating to the dynamic nature of success and derailment. Some successful leaders in recounting their career histories spoke of taking 'time out' following negotiated redundancies to explore alternative options including consultancy and entrepreneurial activities. These leaders then resumed senior leadership careers. If during their time out they had been interviewed, due to the nature of their exits, it was possible they could have been considered 'opted-out.' Similarly, since interview, some of the opted-out leaders have resumed successful leadership careers. This is important for the construction of theory as it raises two considerations. Firstly, that success and derailment are more dynamic concepts than the TM literature and the 'black or white' view of the leadership derailment literature suggest. Secondly, that of importance in advancing leadership derailment theory is not only understanding the cause of derailment but also understanding what enables some leaders to more quickly 'get back on track.' This will be considered in the Discussion Chapter.

Finally, in this deep dive into success and derailment, the meaning leaders attribute to success was explored. For leaders, the meaning given to success appeared to align to motivation factors, whereas for organisations success appears to be based on output for example, results and performance. This indicated the meanings given to success by organisations and their leaders were misaligned. Curiously, TM literature pays little attention to the motivations of talented leaders; however, the meaning leaders attach to success significantly influences their career decisions. This will be reviewed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between having talent and being successful as a leader in an organisation by identifying how talented leaders enact success and why some leaders derail. This purpose was distilled into a number of aims to be addressed through exploratory research questions:

Aim	Research question(s)
Expand theoretical understanding of how leadership talent can be defined by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach.	1. What attributes differentiate talented and successful leaders?
Identify how those leaders who are successful, enact their talents into sustained success.	2. How are successful leaders enacting their talents? 3. Over time, how do talented and successful leaders sustain their success?
Extend theoretical understanding of why some talented and successful leaders derail from their career path.	4. By comparison, what characterises those leaders who stall, plateau or derail? 5. What causes some talented leaders, over time, to involuntarily stall, plateau or derail from their leadership career?
Clarify the meaning both successful and derailed leaders give to success, and the impact this has on their career.	6. What effect does the meaning leadership talent gives to success have on their leadership career?

Exhibit 4 (repeated): A summary of the aims of the research and research questions

A hermeneutical, phenomenological, interpretivist philosophy underpinned the research and an inductive approach to the construction of theory was taken. During the interview stage, a further 'talent type' was identified and a three-type leadership talent typology was defined consisting of:

1. Talented and successful leaders
2. Talented and opted-out leaders
3. Talented and derailed leaders

Whilst the research questions focused on the 'successful' and 'derailed' leadership talent types, the inclusion of the 'opted-out' talent type provided a significant contribution to the research and subsequent theory building.

7.1.1 Self-reported data: reliability and causality

Issues of reliability, validity and credibility in qualitative research were outlined in section 3.7.4. Prior to a discussion of the findings however, it is important to highlight the impact of self-reported data on reliability and causality. Alvesson and Ashcraft (2012, p.254) caution that "most published research reports based on interview data convey a strong faith in interview accounts as a reliable source of evidence...buttressed by the status of interviews as a pervasive cultural genre". The qualitative interviews in this study resulted in self-reported data. Self-reported data poses a number of challenges for the interpretivist researcher. Firstly, participants may have already interpreted their own experiences and attributed meaning to these. The interpreter is therefore interpreting the interpretations of others. Denzin (1989) refers to this as an implied double-hermeneutic or interpretive circle with two interpretive structures interfacing which can affect the reliability of findings dependant on how the phenomenon under study are captured and located in the present.

Secondly, unlike quantitative or quantifiable data where there are systematic and standardised methods of gauging variation thereby providing the researcher with consistent benchmarks, in an interpretivist study of qualitative interview data, data emerges simultaneously (Bryman 2004). Bryman (2004) argues that this can create an ambiguity about the direction of causal influence. In self-reported data leaders may have already assigned causal relationships to their experiences.

Thirdly, as suggested by George and Mclean (2007) in their research on how dysfunctional behaviours in failed leaders manifest, leaders may as they recount their experiences, engage in rationalising. This can result in leaders being unable to admit or take responsibility for mistakes, setbacks or failures; blaming external factors or denying mistakes. It is possible in self-reported data that this process of rationalisation has already taken place and the interpreter is interpreting a rationalised recounting of experiences.

Finally, talented, hardworking and capable leaders can believe that they do not deserve their success which can distort the recounting of experiences (Kets de Vries 2005). The

use of a case study, securing multiple interviews across the three talent types and the 'deep dive' into success and derailment were intended to increase the reliability of the self-reported data. To avoid incorrect assumption of causation, relationships between themes and attributes are discussed rather than causation stated.

7.1.2 Significant findings

The findings were presented as three chapters. Chapter four provided a review of a case study organisation and enabled an exploration of the challenges in identifying and operationalising the attributes required of leadership talent in organisations. This is significant given that proponents of the strategic talent management approach to TM argue definitions of talent should be specific to the strategy of the organisation (Collings and Mellahi 2009) and values (Schuler 2015). However, this approach relies on the ability of TM decision makers in the organisation to define leadership talent effectively in a way that can then be operationalised and used to identify and develop such talent. This means identifying for example, the specific traits, skills, knowledge, capabilities, strengths, attitudes and behaviours that for the organisation are required 'talents,' aligned to strategy and values, then identifying these in the 'target' population.

The case study organisation used leadership competencies, a list of characteristics of 'high potential' and a nine-box grid to benchmark their leadership talent all of which were identified in the literature review as approaches to defining talent. When aligning the definition of talent to the values of the organisation, 'buzz words' or jargon were used to define some of the characteristics of talent. Despite these 'buzz words' reflecting the organisation's values, there was recognition from the TM decision maker that the interpretation of the characteristics was not clear. Not all characteristics were defined and their interpretation across the organisation was said to be inconsistent. The case study provided a useful illustration of the problems inherent in generating lists of attributes where for example, traits, skills, experience, attitudes and behaviours are not distinguished or adequately defined. The case study made plausible that organisations may not be effective in defining and identifying their leadership talent. As a consequence this also made plausible that the wrong leaders may be identified as 'talent' therefore increasing the risk of leadership derailment.

Chapter five presented the findings from the thematic analysis. Whilst in the early stages of the analysis, over 200 attributes were identified, on completion nine themes with 28 corresponding attributes had been identified as being important in identifying attributes of successful, opted-out and derailed leaders. As a theoretical advancement, the attributes were distinguished as:

- 'Inputs' which related to their traits, attitudes, competencies. These are the 'talents' of the leader.
- 'Mechanisms' which related to the leader's behaviours, actions, responses. These are the mechanisms used for enacting their talents.
- 'Outputs' which related to what the leader achieved as an outcome of enacting their talents. This could be the delivery of a result, adding value, or a final outcome of success or derailment.

The theory of 'leadership talent type profiles' was used to create a profile for each leadership talent type. These profiles were used to identify the differences between the leadership talent types across all the key themes and attributes. From the themes and attributes presented in chapter five, three themes and three attributes were significant in differentiating successful and derailed leaders. These were:

- The theme of resilience
- The theme of achievement orientation
- The theme of change
- The attribute of confidence
- The attribute of business management skills
- The attribute of expert knowledge

The final findings chapter presented a deep dive into success and derailment. This provided an additional lens through which to view derailment. Successful leaders identified eleven reasons for leadership derailment. With the exception of 'complex personal lives,' these linked to and validated the key themes and attributes identified by the thematic analysis. The causes of derailment identified by successful leaders and the differentiation of the derailed leaders from successful leaders, through the thematic

analysis, suggested that derailed leaders were 'sad,' rather than 'mad' or 'bad' (Furnham 2010).

An exploration of the careers of successful, opted-out and derailed leaders identified that successful leaders were demonstrating different patterns of career decision-making compared to both derailed and opted-out leaders. These patterns of decision-making appeared to be influenced by the confidence with which they made career decisions, their desire for challenging stretching roles that engaged them in novel experiences and change initiatives and their resilience in overcoming career setbacks. Derailed leaders were not demonstrating these same patterns. The findings also highlighted that some successful leaders had, at points in their career, 'opted-out' to pursue other opportunities following redundancy situations. Since the research interviews some of the opted-out leaders have returned to senior leadership roles to continue successful careers. These two scenarios have highlighted the dynamic nature of success and derailment which is absent from both the TM and the leadership derailment literature.

Within chapter six the meaning leaders attribute to success was explored. Through this exploration, it was identified that leaders give different meanings to success over the course of their careers and that the meaning they give to success may affect their career decisions. This has important consequences. It was identified in the literature that there is a lack of emphasis on talent as an active participant in TM practices and that talented leaders are 'done to' rather than co-creators. The findings illustrated a potential disconnect between the organisation's definition of success and that of the leaders. The leadership talent type profiles, the identification of the significant themes and attributes that differentiate successful and derailed leaders and the finding of career decision-making as a differentiator in success and derailment, collectively address research questions one through to five. The findings from the review of the meaning each leadership talent type gives to success, addresses research question six. The purpose of this chapter is to position the findings in the broader literature and to discuss the implications of the findings.

7.1.3 Structure of the chapter

This chapter is comprised a series of subsections. The first subsection reviews the leadership talent type profiles of successful and derailed leaders in the context of the literature, positioning both the theoretical value of considering leadership talent type profiles with inputs, mechanisms and outputs in place of lists of characteristics, and the attributes and themes themselves. The second subsection positions the four important themes and three attributes identified as most significant in the appropriate literature. There then follows a subsection which places a 'spotlight' on the opted-out leaders as a contribution of the research. The final subsections consider the wider implications of the research, the contribution of the research and the limitations and opportunities for future research before concluding the chapter.

7.2 A theory of leadership talent as inputs, mechanisms and outputs using leadership talent type profiles

The leadership talent type profiles provide a theoretical contribution to the fields of TM and leadership derailment in two ways firstly, in clearly positioning and differentiating between inputs (attributes an individual has), mechanisms, (things the individual is doing) and outputs (the outcome of enacted talents). This enables a more nuanced understanding of how both success and derailment manifest. Secondly, the leadership talent type profiles advance understanding of the characteristics of successful leaders and by comparison, the characteristics of derailed leaders and how each enacts these talents into success or derailment. These profiles contribute to addressing the first three aims of the research and corresponding first five research questions. The following leadership talent profiles first appeared in chapter five incorporating the results of the thematic analysis. These have been updated to reflect the findings from chapter six, that the three talent types demonstrate distinct patterns of decision-making in relation to their career.

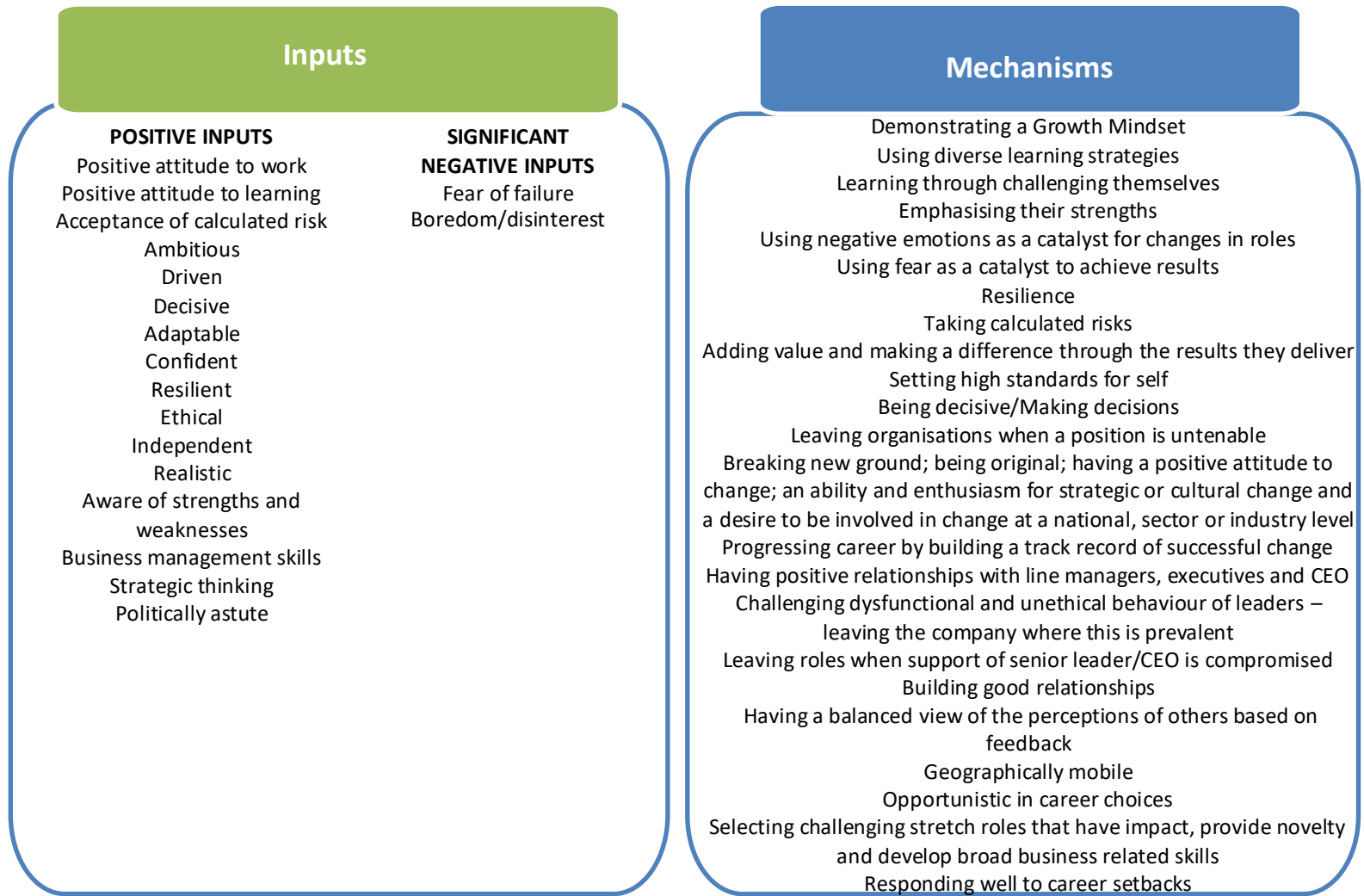


Figure 5: Final talent profile of the talented and successful leadership talent type

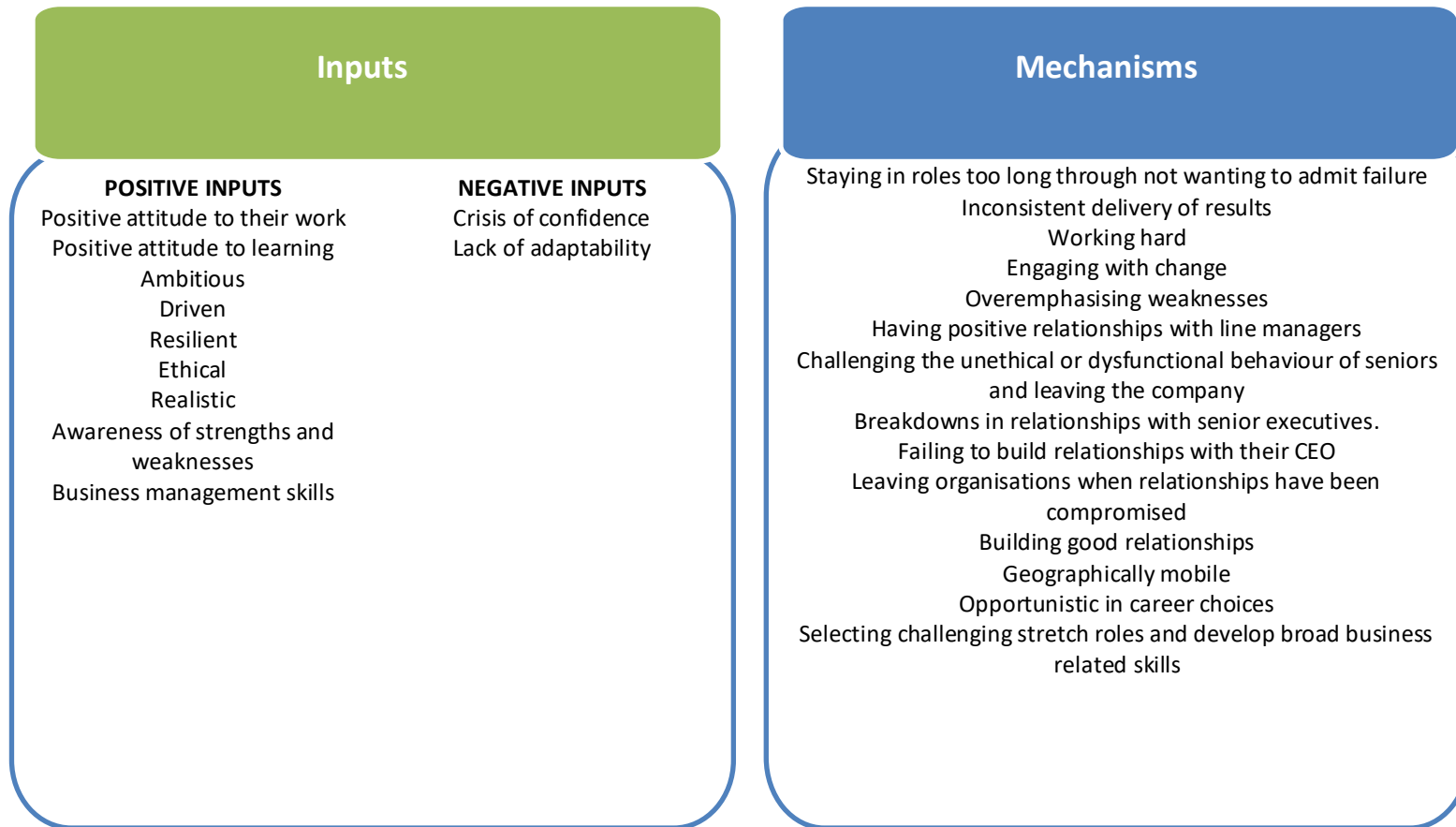


Figure 6: Final talent profile of the talented and opted-out leadership talent type

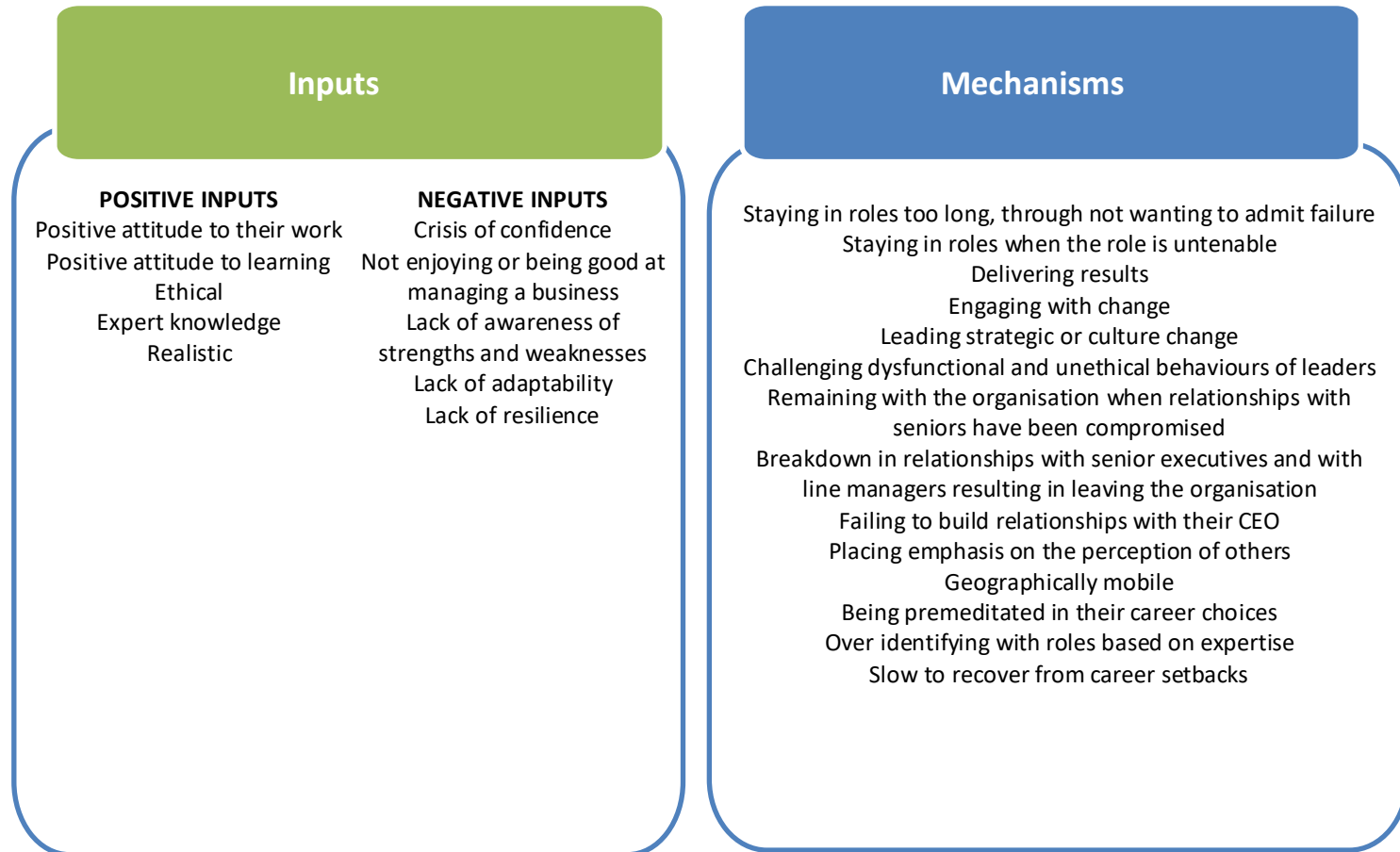


Figure 7: Final talent profile of the talented and derailed leadership talent type

7.2.1 The theory of definitions of talent as inputs, mechanisms and outputs

A theoretical framework, which clearly identifies inputs, mechanisms and outputs, helps to provide clarity on definitions of talent as object in the emerging TM field. It is of practical relevance to organisations seeking to better identify, attract, retain and develop talent by differentiating between what talent 'has' and what they 'do' and the outcome of that. It also enables a better understanding of why talented leaders derail. As identified in the literature review, TM literature presents vague, conflicting 'definitions' of who or what constitutes talent (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013; Ross 2013b; Tansley *et al.* 2007; Thorne and Pellant 2007). This is curious given the centrality of the concept to the field of TM. Talent appears to be taken for granted both by academia (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013) and in practice, where there is a sense that 'we know it when we see it.' Vague terms such as 'A' players defined loosely as high performers with high potential (Huselid *et al.* 2005) are used interchangeably to define talent. As a subset of talent, by nature of their strategic value to the organisation (Collings and Mellahi 2009), leadership talent is less defined. Definitions of leadership talent are made more complex as terminology such as being a great leader (Goleman *et al.* 2002; Collins 2001) or effective as a leader (Charan *et al.* 2011) become synonymous with being talented as a leader and what it means to be successful as a leader.

Whilst some authors suggest that definitions of talent are best left to the organisation (Collings and Mellahi 2009), others for example, Michaels *et al.* (2001), in an attempt to identify the 'magic formula,' present lists of undefined characteristics that seem neither connected nor underpinned by evidence-based research. Both approaches present challenges. The creation of organisationally specific definitions of talent aligned to the strategy and values of the organisation, requires the TM decision makers not only to understand the talent requirements of the organisation, but to be able to define what the 'talents' are that are necessary to deliver those requirements. These need to be defined in such a way that when operationalised a consistent clear and transparent meaning is communicated so that respective 'talents' can be identified in leaders and developed. Finally, these definitions of talent must manifest the desired results. The statistics evidenced in the derailment literature would suggest that organisations are not getting this right. The challenge of definitions of talents as lists of characteristics was amplified

during the initial coding stage where over 200 attributes were identified as being demonstrated by the leaders. Anecdotally, in the initial stages of the research, when reviewing how talent was defined in literature, over 300 attributes were identified as being used to describe talented or successful leaders. Such lists do not typically differentiate between for example, traits, skills, knowledge, abilities, attitudes or behaviours. Defining leadership talent is further complicated by the predominance of consultancy-based models such as learning agility (Korn Ferry 2014) which emphasise specific sets of skills as defining leadership talent.

A lack of definition of leadership talent as object has both implications for theory and practice and inhibits a better understanding of why talented leaders derail. That talented leaders do derail is clearly evidenced in the leadership derailment literature (Furnham 2015; Korn Ferry 2014; Carson *et al.* 2012; Hogan *et al.* 2009). However, within the derailment literature whilst there is unity on the definition of derailment (Ross 2013b) the reasons for that derailment are diverse and also typically manifest as lists of characteristics.

Defining leadership talent as inputs, mechanisms and outputs enables a clear distinction between what 'talents' successful leaders have, how they enact their talents through appropriate mechanisms (their behaviours, actions and responses) and the output of that process for example, results and outcomes. The literature review revealed a gap relating to not only clarity on the attributes of leadership talent but also how these talents were enacted. Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* (2013) provides a frame of reference to consider the categorisation of talent as including ability, capacity, capability, contribution, performance, potential, skills. However, some of those can be seen as outcomes of having talents for example, performance and contribution.

Dries (2013a) suggests there is a tension in TM over whether talent is innate or can be learnt. However, this assumes the talent someone has to be singular. Talent as innate draws on the giftedness literature and forms some definitions of talent for example, Michaels *et al.* (2001, p.xii) refer to "intrinsic gifts." Whilst it can be acknowledged that, there could be tensions in TM literature over talent being innate rather than acquired, an absence of clear definitions of talent means evidenced based research cannot be used to

judge each suggested attribute of talent in turn to determine if in psychological terms such attributes could be identified as 'innate.' Without defining what 'talents' are being referred to talent as innate is an unsubstantiated generalisation. Talent as innate has significant implications for practice and assumes a need to spot people who have the 'right stuff' (McCall 1998) rather than emphasising the development of talents and the mechanisms to enact them.

That definitions of leadership talent are presented in TM literature as innate signifies a tendency when definitions are forthcoming, to focus on 'input's, characteristics talented leaders are expected to have. The challenges of this were summarised by one talented leader whose TM decision maker interviewed her as a benchmark to define talent:

“They said ‘we need more people like you, you’re our stereotype of a perfect x and so we want to interview you and find out what it is’...and then six months later I’d left and I felt like saying...’this person you’re looking for just doesn’t exist. You’re looking for someone who’s nice and cuddly and focused and a hard taskmaster and pacey, etc, etc., but someone that’s also human’” (Stacey).

This illustrates how a focus on lists of undefined characteristics as inputs and definitions of talent can create a profile of talent that is contradictory with “beleaguered executives” comparing themselves against such lists and “always finding themselves wanting” (Goffee and Jones 2006, p.10). Whilst tensions between inputs and outputs is eluded to in literature (Thunnissen and Arensbergen 2014; Dries 2013a) a theoretical framework of inputs, mechanisms and outputs has not been explored. This provides a contribution to the definition of talent by encouraging a greater emphasis on mechanisms than inputs. It is through mechanisms that talents are enacted. These mechanisms can be learnt and developed. Comparing both the inputs and the mechanisms used by successful and derailed leaders contributes to understanding how talented leaders enact their talents and why some leaders derail which is the overarching purpose of the study.

7.2.2 Comparing the talent profiles: why some leaders succeed and others derail

The leadership talent type profiles provide a theory of the attributes of the different talent types. These profiles collectively contribute to addressing the aims of the research and research questions with the exception of the final research question on the meaning given to success. Each talent profile provides a summary of the thematic analysis and the findings from chapter six. The inputs describe the personal characteristics of the talent type, their attitudes, skills, knowledge and traits. The mechanisms illustrate how successful leaders enact their talents and the outputs are the outcomes of this enactment, i.e. success or derailment.

The attributes of leadership talent as inputs

The inputs are viewed through a positive or negative lens. The following table provides a comparison of these. For completeness, the opted-out leaders are included in the table, however they will be discussed separately later in this chapter:

	Talented and successful	Talented and opted-out	Talented and derailed
Positive inputs	Positive attitude to work Positive attitude to learning Acceptance of calculated risk Ambitious Driven Decisive Adaptable Confidence Resilience Ethical Independent Realistic Awareness of strengths and weaknesses Business management skills Strategic thinking Politically astute	Positive attitude to learning Positive attitude to work Ambitious Driven Resilience Ethical Awareness of strengths and weaknesses Business management skills	Positive attitude to learning Positive attitude to work Ethical Expert knowledge Realistic
Negative inputs	Fear of failure Boredom/disinterest	Crisis of confidence Lack of adaptability	Crisis of confidence Not enjoying or being good at managing a business Lack of awareness of strengths and weaknesses Lack of adaptability Lack of resilience

Table 40: Summary of the inputs from the leadership talent type profiles

Unlike the literature review where many associated terms are used to describe the ‘what’ of talent (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.* 2013) the inputs from the thematic analysis comprised attitudes, traits, abilities and skills. Some of these attributes were considered to be significant in differentiating successful leaders including, ambitious, driven, decisive, confidence, business management skills and resilience. These will be discussed further in the next section as a significant contribution of the research and a gap in the literature.

These attributes are not replicated entirely in definitions of talent or as causes of derailment in literature and so contribute new theory on the attributes of talented and successful leaders and the causes of leadership derailment. Where definitions of talent in literature contain specific reference to certain attributes some of these are distinctly different for example, Davies *et al.* (2011 in Cascio and Boudreau 2016) identified a set of skills pivotal to success. However, on review these skills were said to be required by all employees in a global organisation. Some of these skills for example, computational thinking and new media literacy were unreferenced by any of the participants of this study. Others were eluded to for example; adaptive thinking could be part of the 'adaptability' attribute. Only social intelligence directly linked to the attributes identified in this research. This links to the themes of 'relationships with senior leaders' and 'relationships with others.' Michaels *et al.* (2001) listed 'drive' and 'the ability to learn and grow' as defining talent. These correlate to the attributes of 'driven' and 'attitude to learning.' However, other characteristics they listed as comprising talent remain undefined such as attitude, character, skills and knowledge. It is therefore unclear to what these relate. Other authors also elude to a range of skills, knowledge, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, abilities and competencies (Silzer and Dowell 2010; Williams 2000) none of which are specifically defined.

The greatest correlation is to the definition of talent provided by Thorne and Pellant (2007, p.6) who suggest talented people tend to be "creative, self-confident, self-starters, edgy, resilient, entrepreneurial, intellectually flexible, opportunistic, unique and different" as well as "inspiring, driven to succeed, a natural leader, having self-belief, passionate, adaptable, committed, perceptive, emotionally resilient and optimistic." However, this definition is not underpinned by research, it is unclear where it originates from and whether it is simply the authors opinion. 'Self-confidence,' 'adaptable,' 'resilient,' 'driven' and aspects of 'uniqueness,' relate to attributes identified in this study. The meaning of other characteristics is unclear and so cannot be compared for example, what it means to be a 'natural leader,' 'passionate' or 'edgy.' The difference between resilient and emotionally resilient is also unclear.

When considering specific constructs of talent, there is some correlation with aspects of those constructs for example, McCall's (1998) and Lombardo and Eichinger's (2000)

reference to talent as the ability to learn. McCall (1998, p.5) suggests that leadership potential is “the demonstration of the ability to acquire the assets needed for future situations,” and that those with ‘the right stuff’ have the capacity to continually learn. This correlates strongly with the attribute of ‘attitude to learning,’ enacted by successful leaders as a willingness to learn using diverse learning strategies and learn from challenging experiences. This was also enacted through their career decisions and their desire for roles that challenged them and enabled them to develop new skills. However, this definition of talent has since been incorporated into the learning agility model (Eichinger *et al.* 2010) and is operationalised as assessment tools that assess 27 dimensions of learning agility. Some of these dimensions link to attributes of successful leaders identified in this research for example, ‘self-awareness,’ ‘confidence’ and ‘change agility.’ However, others such as ‘presence,’ ‘problem solving’ and ‘explains their thinking to others,’ were not prevalent in this study. There was also some correlation to the concept of emotional intelligence in particular relating to the levels of self-awareness, confidence and good interpersonal relationships demonstrated by successful leaders.

Whilst there were some links to current definitions in literature of both talent and success in relation to leaders, the set of attributes proposed through this research provides a new theory of the collective attributes of successful leadership talent. That this theory includes ‘negative’ inputs is also a new consideration. These negative inputs related to how successful leaders used a ‘fear of failure’ and ‘boredom and disinterest’ as catalysts to either achieve a result or change roles. This presents a more human side to successful leaders than is generally depicted in the literature.

The leadership talent type profiles also provide a new theory of leadership derailment. Zhang and Chandrasekar (2011, p.37) as a response to the lack of research in leadership derailment suggest this is due to the assumption that “ineffective leadership is simply the absence of effective leadership.” The problem with this premise is that, as there are no clear definitions of ‘effective’ leadership, there is no basis for understanding how ‘ineffective’ leadership can be defined. Through the thematic analysis it was found that to a certain extent, derailed leaders demonstrated a ‘lack’ of the attributes of successful leaders, including ‘ambitious,’ ‘driven,’ ‘adaptable,’ ‘resilient,’ ‘self-awareness,’ and ‘strategic thinking.’ However, derailed leaders were also found to rely on expert

knowledge, have crises of confidence and to not enjoy managing a business. The lack of these attributes and demonstration of the others correspond to the following literature:

- Lack of business management skills (Hogan *et al.* 2009)
- Relationship problems (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Van Velsor and Leslie 1995; McCauley and Lombardo 1990)
- Low self-awareness (Lombardo and Eichinger 2000)
- Unable to think strategically (Morrison *et al.* 1987 in Hogan *et al.* 2009; McCall and Lombardo 1983 in Hogan *et al.* 2009)
- Unable to adapt (Morrison *et al.* 1987 in Hogan *et al.* 2009)
- Inability to adapt and change (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Van Velsor and Leslie 1995)
- A narrow functional orientation, which links to expert knowledge (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Van Velsor and Leslie 1995)

Ready (2005) suggests that an inability to reinvent during large-scale change is a key derailer in leaders. This links to the findings of the research that derailed leaders did not engage in change to the same extent as successful leaders, together with a lack of resilience and adaptability.

Hogan and Hogan (2001) have been influential in the identification of personality characteristics that result in dysfunctional behaviours when over-used. They identified eleven such characteristics (Hogan *et al.* 2009). These characteristics form the Hogan Development Survey, a psychometric tool for identifying 'derailer' characteristics. None of these characteristics were predominant in the derailed leaders in this research. Derailed leaders were not demonstrating 'dysfunctional' characteristics frequently enough to form part of their talent type profile. This suggests that the derailed leaders in this research could more aptly be described as 'sad' rather than 'mad' or 'bad' (Furnham 2010).

Hogan *et al.* (2009) and McCartney and Campbell (2006) present summaries of research on characteristics of derailed leaders (see Tables 5 and 6). Hogan *et al.* (2009) use research from 1983 to 2008 and McCartney and Campbell (2006) use research from 1974

to 2001. As suggested, some of those characteristics match those identified in this research, many however, did not. Some of the studies cited by both sets of authors are now 30 - 40 years old. The findings of this research provide a more current view of causes of derailment. As well as providing latest research into the inputs, or attributes of successful and derailed leaders, the talent type profiles also present new insight into the mechanisms used by successful leaders to enact success and how these compare to the mechanisms derailed leaders use.

How successful leaders enact success through mechanisms

The leadership talent type profiles summarise both inputs and mechanisms used by talented, opted-out and derailed leaders. As previously discussed where literature presents definitions of talent, these definitions manifest as lists of characteristics. This was also illustrated through the presentation of the case study. These characteristics are the inputs, the 'talents' an individual is expected to have. Also as previously discussed, when definitions of talent were amalgamated (including practitioner models of talent) over 300 attributes were identified as suggested to be attributes of talented and successful leaders. Without evidence-based research, it appears arbitrary which of those appear as a final list of attributes operationalised in organisations. Mechanisms are a theoretical contribution of the research and are contrary to the view of talent as having the 'right stuff.' The mechanisms identify the behaviours, actions and responses of successful leaders, the things they do, the enactment of their talents into success. By comparison, the talent profiles identify the behaviours, actions and responses of derailed leaders that contribute to their derailment. The mechanisms provide a way forward in understanding success and derailment. Mechanisms can be observed, have consequences but most importantly can be developed or addressed. An understanding of the mechanisms, those things successful and derailing leaders do would enable TM decision makers to focus their leadership development efforts and would bring hope to derailing leaders

The mechanisms used by successful leaders highlight broad actions for example 'breaking new ground' and some very specific actions for example, 'leaving the company when the support of senior leaders has been compromised.' These can be compared to

mechanisms used by derailed leaders such as ‘staying in roles too long’ and ‘over identifying with roles based on expertise.’ That talented leaders do not always enact their talents is again, evidenced by derailment literature. Mechanisms shift the focus from the talents an individual has to what they do with what they have, having implications for both theory and practice. The literature does not define talent in this way, by making clear distinctions between inputs and mechanisms.

7.3 Key themes: resilience, change, career decision-making and achievement orientation

From the findings of the thematic analysis in Chapter Five and the review of the careers across the types in chapter six, four important themes were identified and three attributes which differentiated successful and derailed leaders. These attributes contributed significantly to both success and derailment. These were in order of significance:

1. Resilience
2. Change
3. Career decision-making
4. Achievement orientation

Together with these four themes, the following three attributes were of greatest significance:

1. Confidence
2. Business management skills
3. Expert knowledge

All these major themes contributed to gaps in the TM literature. Resilience was a gap in both the TM and leadership derailment literature. Other than a cursory mention (Eichinger *et al.* 2010; Michaels *et al.* 2001) resilience was not cited as an attribute of talent. Yet resilience was perceived by successful leaders to be fundamental to their success and a cause of derailment in leaders. Lack of resilience was evident in derailed leaders and was the most significant differentiator of success and derailment.

Whilst change is cited in literature as an attribute of successful leaders (Eichinger *et al.* 2010) and inability to change as a cause of leadership derailment (Van Velsor and Leslie 1995) successful leaders were demonstrating specific behaviours in relation to change. For example, successful leaders had a desire for novel and challenging experiences, for roles that necessitated leading change, a desire to implement change at an industry, sector or national level and an overall enjoyment of change that they actively engaged in. By comparison, whilst derailed leaders successfully engaged in and led strategic change, which is contrary to the derailment literature, they did not embrace change to the same extent as their successful counterparts. Successful leaders used change to escalate their career progression. This was not identified in the TM literature.

Successful leaders demonstrated patterns of decision-making in relation to their careers that were not prevalent in derailed leaders. They were opportunistic in their decision-making with no set career path other than to develop a breadth of experience. They actively sought challenging roles that enabled them to develop, sought out novel experiences and were more likely to switch industries and sectors. Successful leaders did suffer career setbacks, mistakes and failures however; they appeared to recover from these quickly. By comparison, derailed leaders were more likely to identify a career path and be pre-meditated in their career moves, focussing on roles that complimented their expert knowledge. They did not use engagement in change as a catalyst for accelerating their careers. When derailed leaders experienced setbacks, they did not recover to the same extent as successful leaders.

Achievement orientation was identified as a 'management skill' by McCartney and Campbell (2006) citing Spencer and Spencer (1993) but otherwise does not appear to be referenced in TM literature. It can also be argued whether 'achievement orientation' is in fact a skill.

As these themes were gaps in the TM and leadership derailment literature, a multi-disciplinary approach is now taken to position these themes in the context of broader literature. The evidence-based discipline of psychology offers a degree of rigour through which to orientate the key themes. This in turn, provides a contribution to the field of TM

by not only identifying these key themes but also by drawing on the discipline of psychology to present more rigorous definitions of these.

Confidence appeared to be an enabler of the major themes and will be explored in this context. Breadth of business management skills and the ability to apply these successfully compared to a reliance on expertise provided a differentiation between successful and derailed leaders. The effects of this will be explored through a discussion of the themes.

7.3.1 Resilience as a differentiator of successful leaders

The findings identified the attribute of resilience as having the largest number of codes allocated to any single attribute. When briefing leaders prior to interview, they were asked to talk about defining moments. Bleich (2015, p.247) summarising defining moments states:

“Defining moments happen to all of us. Some moments are marked by conscious collective awareness, such as the bombing of the World Trade Centers in 2001. Others are deeply personal and may lie dormant for years... Defining moments may be tragic, joyful, situational, planned, or serendipitous. But what each has in common is that it unfurls a part of the human spirit that was unknown and changes the way one thinks, views the truth, or acts with purpose.”

Resilience was an important differentiator of successful leaders. This resilience was primarily self-identified as a result of defining moments such as trauma, setbacks, failures, or even opportunities. King *et al.* (2016, p.1) suggest that resilience is “severely under-researched” and has been largely overlooked in the context of organisations and therefore organisational leaders. In their call for further research on resilience and its application in the workplace, they cite economic turbulence, dramatic change, increasing complexity and competitive pressures as causing challenges and adversity for individuals in organisations. The resilience of individuals therefore becomes key to their survival and success. They also suggest that resilience “is a necessity for...employees given it assists them in overcoming adversity and ultimately succeeding” (King *et al.* 2016, p.1). As previously cited, a successful leader highlighted this:

“There is no success without failure and the other way round. So the interesting thing for me is why...there has been what I call bounce back ability in some of the successful people you’ll be talking to and why there was less bounce back ability in some of the...less successful people... It’s not that...simple a dichotomy of some succeed and others fail but it’s that at the point of challenge, why some people emerge reinvented, reenergised, re-launched and others don’t” (Marcus).

Derailed leaders by comparison, did not refer to resilience. Furthermore, successful leaders themselves suggested lack of resilience as a reason leaders derailed. Resilience therefore emerged as the most significant differentiator of successful and derailed leaders. The identification of resilience as an important differentiator of leadership success and derailment and the positioning of this in the context of resilience literature is a major contribution of the research.

Conceptualising resilience

Resilience is conceptualised in different ways in literature. This is due to the differing approaches emerging from alternate disciplines for example, developmental psychology, ecology, biology and psychiatry (Windle 2011). Out of the corresponding research, have emerged different perspectives, with resilience alternately considered to be (Fletcher and Sarkar 2013; Windle 2011; Luthans 2002):

- The response to adversity through the course of life
- Personal characteristics or traits
- A dynamic process of positive adaptation and coping
- An outcome achieved through utilisation of protective factors
- Psychological capital (PsyCap)

Of particular relevance is how successful leaders respond to adversity, which was a factor in both their personal and professional lives.

Resilience as a response to adversity

It is suggested that the conceptualisation of resilience emerged from developmental psychology (Windle 2011) and clinical research on mental dysfunctions, in particular in schizophrenic mothers and their children (King *et al.* 2016; Luthans *et al.* 2006). With this emergence from developmental psychology much of the early research on resilience, considers adversity in childhood (Fletcher and Sarkar 2013; Windle 2011) and the corresponding factors that enabled some children over others to thrive following such adversity. Fletcher and Sakar (2013) suggest such factors were qualities within children who thrived including an easy temperament, self-esteem, planning skills and a supportive environment. This exposure to adversity at an early age correlates with some of the experiences of the leaders who were either successful or opted-out. During the reciting of their earlier childhood or adolescent experiences these participants began to allude to aspects of resilience because of these experiences as the following illustrates:

Childhood experience	Participants Observation
Dysfunctional mother	<p>“My mother became an alcoholic...quite severely...it’s a constant learning experience” (Sebastian).</p> <p>“I didn’t really get on with my mum...she is quite demanding emotionally and...she is very needy emotionally....I came to the conclusion that my need for resilience as I was growing up is probably something that has stood me in very good stead” (Stacy).</p>
Death of a parent	<p>“He committed suicide when I was six...a PhD for someone to do at some point is the number of people who have ended up as leaders of organisations or leaders in society or culture or whatever, who have lost a parent. It’s fascinated me how often that is the case” (Dominic).</p>
Poverty	<p>“...a simple family life with little financial possibilities...for 15 days I slept on the floor of a small empty apartment. Little by little an elderly couple adopted me and ...he helped build a bed and we found a mattress” (Leonardo).</p> <p>“My mother struggled a lot with basically making ends meet so I think that in itself probably had quite a major impact on me” (Samuel).</p>
Child abuse	<p>“I was also raped at a very early age. I didn’t have a very good opinion of men... I didn’t want ever to be reliant on a male for anything whether that was financially nor emotionally. At the time I just wanted to earn money. But now I know the power behind the drive to do that” (Susan).</p>
Unspecified trauma	<p>“You expect the terror and you manage it... Some of the things that happened in my personal early life are frankly not repeatable... I suppose I started out with an expectation that for every form of progress, there was going to be a bloody great fence with lots of prickly bits on it and I don’t think I’ve stopped thinking that really” (Marcus).</p>

Exhibit 24: Successful and opted-out: examples of resilience in early years’ trauma

These early years’ incidents were acknowledged by leaders as equipping them with a resilience that they were then able to draw upon throughout their leadership career. Whilst early research in developmental psychology tended to focus on the negative consequences of stress and trauma, evidence suggested that both children and adults did manage to overcome difficulties and that “good outcomes are frequently present in large numbers of life histories” (Garmezy 1991, p.421). In an attempt to identify how individuals arrived at good outcomes, research began to focus on resilience as protective factors (Fletcher and Sarkar 2013; Windle 2010; Bonanno 2004; Garmezy 1991; Werner 1989; Rutter 1987) and positive adaptation (Fletcher and Sarkar 2013; Masten 2011; Tugade and Fredrickson 2004; Curtis and Cicchetti 2003; Luthar *et al.* 2000).

It is clear that even though significant trauma or stress took place during the early years of some of the participants, successful outcomes, and positive adaptation occurred. Research into the concept of resilience has since broadened from a focus on the reaction and response of children to adversity. Resilience research now encompasses the impact of resilience on for example: improved sports performance (Sarkar and Fletcher 2014); the occurrence of post-traumatic stress in the armed forces (Reivich *et al.* 2011) and PsyCap in organisations (Luthans *et al.* 2010; Sweetman *et al.* 2010; Youssef and Luthans 2007; Luthans *et al.* 2006). Furthermore, resilience in literature has since been considered in the context of a more diverse population now including for example, soldiers (Williams *et al.* 2016), adults exposed to disruptive events (Chaudhary and Chadha 2014; Bonanno 2004), victims of abuse (Bogar and Hulse-Killacky 2006) and nurses (Jackson *et al.* 2007). Whilst there is a lack of scholarly literature on resilience in leaders, other than as PsyCap, practitioner interest in resilience is growing (Sudbrink 2016; Manson 2014; Sherlock-Storey *et al.* 2013; Lanz 2012; Allen 2012).

The consideration of resilience in adulthood has tended to focus on understanding how adults respond to adverse life events for example, job loss, bereavement, ill health and divorce. However, Bonanno (2005, p.265) suggests that “generative experiences” can characterise resilience. This is highly relevant to the career experiences of successful leaders.

Resilience as personality characteristics and traits

Whilst some authors (Rutter 2012; Rutter 2007) argue resilience is not a trait and “cannot be seen as a fixed attribute of the individual” (Rutter 1987, p.317), others suggest there are personality traits that are linked to reactions to stress and trauma and therefore enablers of resilience. Bonanno (2004) cites the study of Kobasa *et al.* (1982) to suggest two key traits of hardiness and self-enhancement. Whilst Kobasa *et al.* (1982) make no reference to resilience in this study, instead emphasising the relationship between hardiness and positive health practices, hardiness is widely discussed amongst researchers in the context of resilience, and in some cases is synonymous (Furnham 2013).

Bonanno (2004, p.25) suggests that hardiness “helps to buffer exposure to extreme stress” and consists of three dimensions: finding a meaningful purpose in life; a belief that learning can come from positive and negative experiences and a belief in the ability to influence surroundings and outcomes. In hardy people these dimensions, together with higher levels of confidence and the ability to use active coping, enable situations to be perceived as less threatening. Successful leaders demonstrated dimensions of hardiness through citing the delivery of results that ‘added value’ or ‘made a difference’ and through the meaning they gave to success, linked to a higher purpose. Successful leaders had higher levels of confidence and cited learning from mistakes and failure as well as positive challenges. They were also much more likely to have internal locus of control and seek to influence outcomes, demonstrated through the attributes of ‘confidence’ and ‘decisive’ and through their career decision-making. Buddelmeyer and Nattavudh (2016) suggest that those with internal locus of control react in a more constructive way to problems, seeking solutions. Amenable to change such people also search for the most effective coping strategies. Successful leaders were also found to have more positive relationships both personally and professionally, drawing on this support network. By comparison, derailed leaders did not demonstrate the dimensions of hardiness, were less confident, were less likely to ‘bounce back’ from failure and were more likely to have relationship ‘breakdowns.’

Some authors (Bonanno 2004; Bonanno *et al.* 2002) suggest that trait self-enhancement is linked to resilience. Self-enhancement results in positive biases towards self that during difficult times promote wellbeing. The high levels of self-awareness enabled successful leaders to feel positive about their capabilities whilst preventing narcissism, a potential pitfall of self-enhancement. Further traits of those who demonstrate resilience are the expression of positive emotion (Bonanno 2004; Frederickson *et al.* 2003; Frederickson and Levenson 1998; Keltner and Bonanno 1997) and the ability to regulate emotion (Bonanno *et al.* 2002). Other authors encapsulate the ability to regulate emotion in aspects of emotional intelligence and suggest that this enables resilient individuals to build good relationships with others and to cope with change (Furnham 2013). This suggestion by Furnham (2013) that resilient individuals are able to cope with change is indicative of the successful leaders who due to their resilience were able to pursue

proactively, challenging opportunities that required leading significant change. Resilient individuals show greater emotional stability through adversity (Bonanno *et al.* 2001; Luthans *et al.* 2006), are more open to new experiences and show more flexibility to changes in demands (Tugade and Fredrickson 2004) which typified the successful leaders.

Resilience as Psychological Capital

The conceptualisation of resilience as Psychological Capital (PsyCap) appears to amalgamate thinking with regard to resilience as traits, a process and an outcome. The construct of PsyCap is comprised “the state-like positive psychological resources” (Luthans *et al.* 2014) of hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (Luthans *et al.* 2014, Sweetman *et al.* 2010; Avey, *et al.* 2009; Youssef and Luthans 2007). Luthans, *et al.* (2006, p.25) suggest that PsyCap is “an outgrowth of positive psychology” that considers “what is right with people instead of the almost singular focus of what is wrong and/or dysfunctional.” When applied to the workforce in organisations, this manifests as positive organisational behaviour. PsyCap, they argue is a core construct of positive organisational behaviour that they go on to define as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development...” which can help to explain and predict performance (Luthans *et al.* 2006, p.25). PsyCap is characterised by the four positive constructs of self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience (Luthans *et al.* 2014; Peterson *et al.* 2011; Sweetman *et al.* 2010; Luthans *et al.* 2010; Avey *et al.* 2009; Youssef and Luthans 2007; Luthans *et al.* 2006). Luthans *et al.* (2006) argue that this operational definition of PsyCap differentiates it from other forms of human capital such as skills, knowledge, ability and experience whilst highlighting the developmental nature of resiliency. Self-efficacy, optimism and hope act as pathways to resilience and “may moderate the relationship between resilience and outcomes such as performance” (Luthans, *et al.* 2006, p.29).

As a positive psychological attribute, resilience “enables people to feel at ease outside of their normal comfort zone” and is a “cumulative and interactive process that enables individuals to go beyond what is normal” (Luthans *et al.* 2006, p.7). King *et al.* (2016) argue that whilst PsyCap indicates a growing appreciation for resilience in the workplace, it does not foster an understanding of how resilience impacts work outcomes. This conceptualisation of resilience does however aid understanding of how the attribute of

'confidence' contributed to the resilience of successful leaders, enabling them to accept and succeed in increasingly challenging roles. Derailed leaders, by comparison, demonstrated both a crisis of confidence and a lack of resilience.

Defining resilience

Whilst resilience has been conceptualised as personal characteristics accessed in times of adversity, as traits, an outcome or a process (King *et al.* 2016; Manson 2014; Fletcher and Sarkar 2013; Windle 2011; Ahern *et al.* 2006), most researchers agree that adversity and positive adaptations are pre-requisites of resilience (Fletcher and Sarkar 2013; Windle (2011). This has led some authors to simplify the definition of resilience to one of the ability to 'bounce back' from setbacks (Luthans *et al.* 2006; Tugade and Fredrickson 2004; Jacelon 1997). This seemed to be the term most used by successful leaders. The focus of research into resilience as the ability to bounce back then becomes the identification of those traits that enable some individuals to bounce back when others do not (Tugade and Fredrickson 2004). One successful leader did however suggest that organisations might inhibit leaders from developing resilience and the ability to learn how to bounce back, through a lack of tolerance for failure:

“The ability of the leader to fail and learn from that failure may be down to the organisation... Organisations don't tend to wait to find out if that is possible, and they tend to replace immediately, but the learning is from failure and the resilience created in that person is tremendous” (Deepak).

Resilience as 'bouncing back' may not only be an oversimplification but a misrepresentation of the nature of resilience. Bonanno (2004, p.21) cite research by Bonanno *et al.* (2001) to suggest that post potentially traumatic events, resilient individuals demonstrate stable, healthy functioning over time, together with “generative experiences and positive emotions.” This view of resilient individuals as not just bouncing back but rather emerging from trauma demonstrating healthy functioning and generative experiences correlates with those leaders who experienced such events in their early years.

Windle (2011, p.152) concludes as a result of her review, that resilience be defined as “the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress, or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and ‘bouncing back’ in the face of adversity.” Whilst this is a comprehensive definition following an extensive review of resilience literature and research, it omits a distinction made by others that resilience is not solely linked to adversity and conflict. Resilience can be a response to, or outcome of, positive events, including career progression and increased responsibility (Bonanno 2004; Luthans 2002). Resilience not just as a response to trauma but also as an outcome of positive events is an important distinction in the context of this research. Successful leaders progressed their careers through the pursuit of challenging roles, actively seeking roles of increasing responsibility that both contributed to and were a result of their resilience:

“I was thinking...why not have a last go at...doing something different...really jumping out and challenging yourself and that’s what I did really...” (Grant).

In the above example, the successful leader had left a CEO role to pursue an alternate senior role in a different sector, industry and country.

“...and I think if something comes up and it looks like it could be fun and you think...‘what have I got to lose?’ ...When someone comes up and says ‘I know you might think this is crazy...but why don’t you ... run this business?’ My first reaction might be ‘bloody hell, that’s a bit of a long shot,’ but you know each time I looked at this stuff I thought ‘actually, what have I got to lose?’ ... I don’t not sweat...you think ‘look, let’s get on with it...it will be interesting,’ you don’t just avoid the challenge...” (Andrew).

In this latter example, the successful leader was recounting his experiences in a senior role, with responsibility for a project of national importance and public visibility. Resilience is therefore both an enabler and a consequence of the pursuit of challenging roles (Luthans *et al.* 2006).

Resilience in the face of setbacks

Prevalent in successful leaders was their ability to recover from career setbacks, mistakes and failures quickly. The research identified that successful leaders did fail and at times leave leadership roles to pursue alternative opportunities such as entrepreneurship and consultancy temporarily. However, when the timing was appropriate for these leaders they were able to re-establish themselves in senior leadership roles. Derailed leaders, by comparison, were leaving senior leadership roles and could not re-establish themselves.

Seligman (2011) suggested that as failure is inevitable in working life, less resilient people will stall in their careers and will have an adverse effect on an organisation. By comparison, resilient people would rise in organisations. Recruiting and retaining such people would enable organisational success. Resilience was not considered in TM literature as contributing to organisational success.

Some authors (Coutu 2002) suggest that resilience stems from realistic optimism. This is evidenced by Seligman (2011, p.102) who, after 15 years of studying optimism, suggests it can be identified as a key characteristic of those who are more resilient. This manifests itself in a perception that setbacks are firstly temporary and that the problem will go away quickly. Secondly, the set back is 'local' and relates to a single situation. Thirdly, the setback is changeable and something can be done to resolve it. Setbacks as local and changeable appear to be how successful leaders viewed their setbacks, taking ownership for resolving their situation again demonstrating internal locus of control. By comparison, derailed leaders tended to view their derailment as being caused by others and appeared less able to respond positively in the face of such setbacks.

How successful leaders enact talent into success through the mechanism of resilience

In the findings, resilience was initially defined as an 'input' however, that assumes a trait based definition of resilience. If resilience is viewed as positive adaptation for example, it becomes a mechanism, whereby behaviours, actions and responses are demonstrated in the face of adversity or challenges (Luthans *et al.* 2014). Challenges can be both 'negative'

and 'positive.' Successful leaders enacted their talents through the mechanism of resilience in both their personal and professional lives as the following illustrates:

Sebastian	"I did some very unusual things for a year... surviving out in the wilds... We were self-sufficient for a year."
Stacy	"When you are out of your normal environment there is something very exciting and very well worth exploring about working in a different country. Maybe it was a little bit as well of being out of touch with my mum, mentally as well as physically and being able to do my own thing."
Leonardo	"...no money to call home and no money to call me. I used to call my mum and call two rings...both without picking it up, so going back and forth, code, but never picking up the phone as I had no money to pay and neither did they - so this was the only way."
Grant	"It made me much more immune to the knocks that you get...I think personal resilience, you know, you get that from friends and colleagues as well, but actually, you have got to carry a large degree of that resilience and I felt that set of circumstances helped me develop that, but also, you know, strong family background."
Marcus	"If everything has gone right for you throughout your career...then to my mind you are a completely worthless individual....what value do you have in dealing with the normal world of slips, trips and falls in your working life if everything has gone right for you...? You know, what use is that to the rest of us...? When I talk to people...about what I've done in my career and what might be of help to them... it's what I did when it was getting difficult... What the pain in the arse things have been across that journey...people don't want to hear just about what the good things are, it's just going to piss them off, it's what the pain in the arse things are going to be and what you do about it."
Andrew	"Half of it in my view, a lot of life is about facing up to it, to work out challenges, to work out where you sit in it all."
Dominic	"I don't fly around; I take things very measured all the time. I'm always fairly calm in a stressful situation....and I'm normally the kind of person who can pick up a challenge and go and sit down and think through it logically."

Exhibit 25: Enacting talent into success through the mechanism of resilience

These examples illustrate how the successful leaders faced challenges and setbacks seemingly 'head on' through their resilience. As Tugade and Frederickson (2004, p.320) suggest "being able to move on despite negative stressors does not demonstrate luck on the part of those successful individuals but demonstrates a concept known as resilience." Successful leaders were resilient and could demonstrate resiliency, both in times of adversity and in times of positive career challenge. This contributed to their confidence in pursuing and attaining challenging roles and roles that incorporated a requirement for significant change. By comparison, derailed leaders did not demonstrate a capacity for resilience and demonstrated a crisis of confidence. It is plausible there was a correlation between the two.

7.3.2 Change as a differentiator of successful leaders

Change was the second significant differentiator of successful and derailed leaders. Whilst the volume of codes was lower than other themes, engagement in change had a significant impact on the careers of leaders. Four successful leaders were engaging in change at a sector and national level. Higher levels of resilience and confidence were contributing factors in this. Derailed leaders did not demonstrate this same engagement in change.

Through the thematic analysis, it was identified that leaders talked about change in specific ways. Attribute descriptors encapsulated the meanings given to change for example, 'breaking new ground' was interpreted as doing something not done before, being original. 'Being part of something big' was interpreted as actively engaging in or leading change that had an impact on the industry, sector or at a national level. Whilst change is referenced in both the TM and leadership derailment literature, how change was referenced did not seem to capture the meaning given to change by leaders in this study.

In TM literature innovation as a potential aspect of change is referred to in definitions of talent as someone who is creative and innovative (Tansley 2011; Goffee and Jones 2009; Thorne and Pellant 2007). Berger (2004) also references creativity and innovation as a competency against which to benchmark talent. However, leaders referred to neither

creativity nor innovation. Rather it was a desire to be original, to be unique, for them personally to experience something different. Change agility as an aspect of learning agility (Eichinger *et al.* 2010) was of relevance given the reference within change agility to those leaders who are learning agile as being curious and engaging in skill-building, albeit the latter was incorporated in the attribute of 'attitude to learning' in this research. Empirical research on learning agility (Dai *et al.* 2013, p.124) identified that learning agility, encompassing change agility was "significantly related to career success outcomes such as CEO proximity."

Elsewhere in the TM literature 'change' presents as a required characteristic of talent by some authors for example, Chambers *et al.* (1998, p.45) suggest that "at senior levels of an organisation, the ability to adapt, to make decisions quickly in situations of high uncertainty, and to steer through wrenching change is critical." High adaptability, decisiveness and actively seeking novel and challenging experiences indicated that successful leaders in this study were demonstrating this critical capability. In derailment literature, an inability to adapt and change was cited as a reason for derailment (McCartney and Campbell 2006; Van Velsor 1996; McCall and Lombardo 1983). However, derailed leaders were engaging in leading change and so, in this research it could not be concluded they had an inability to change. Furthermore, in this research adaptability was considered to be an attribute of resilience rather than of change. For derailed leaders only one code was generated for 'adaptability' indicating whilst derailed leaders were leading change, they themselves either were not adaptable or did not perceive themselves to be adaptable.

On reviewing the findings in the context of the literature on change, what appeared to differentiate successful leaders and derailed leaders was not necessarily their ability to lead change, instead it was their perception of change and the meaning they gave to it, exemplified by the attribute descriptors. Of most relevance to the findings for the derailed leaders was the work of Brisco and Hall (1999, p.48). They propose two meta-competencies related to career development, identity and adaptability. They argue that if a person has adaptability they can recognise the qualities needed for future performance. They can then make the personal changes needed to meet those requirements. Identity and adaptability are co-dependent, as the individual has to change their awareness of self

so they can affect the change. As well as lower levels of adaptability, derailed leaders over identified with their expertise, failing to acquire a breadth of business management skills or enjoy practically applying these. Rather than an inability to lead change, their derailment appears in part down to an inability to adapt, linked to a perception of themselves as experts. This was referenced in the literature by Dries (2013a) who suggested that as people develop over time so does their self-concept. In interpreting Whitty (2002) Dries (2013a, p.277) maintains “there is not one ultimate talent-related identify that a person should strive to fulfil.” In this study, derailed leaders appeared to over identify with their expertise.

That change is a significant differentiator in leadership success and derailment is supported by literature. However, distinctions need to be made between the ability to lead change and the leaders own ethos of change which is influenced by their adaptability, their resilience, their change agility and their self-perception linked to how they identify themselves through their expertise. Resilience, change and career decision-making were related in this study.

7.3.3 Career decision-making as a differentiator of successful leaders

The review of TM literature identified a lack of emphasis on talent as an active agent in the TM practices of which they are central. Instead, they are presented as passive assets, (Inkson 2008). As a result, there is little in the TM literature to understand how talented leaders are making decisions in relation to their careers. Yet the findings indicated that successful leaders were proactive, opportunistic, actively sought challenging roles to enable themselves to develop a breadth of business skills, made decisions based on their relationships with senior executives and wanted to engage in work that presented novel experiences where they could deliver a result and make a difference. Rather than passive assets, successful leaders are extremely active in their pursuit of career experiences. Indeed, it seems ironic given the definitions used to describe these talented individuals, that they are assumed passive. Because of a lack of acknowledgement of such talented leaders as active agents, there is a corresponding lack of reference to how such leaders manage their careers. Career decision-making is therefore set in the context of broader literature. The findings identified two important considerations. Firstly, how leaders made

career decisions when all was well, secondly how they made decisions following career setbacks, mistakes or failures.

Enacting success through career decision-making

Given the geographical mobility of all the leaders interviewed and the incidence of switching organisations, industries and sectors prevalent in successful leaders, literature on the 'boundaryless' career was identified as relevant to this study. Arthur and Rousseau (1996, p.6) suggest that the boundaryless career is characterised by six meanings:

1. Careers move across the boundaries of separate employers
2. A career draws validity from outside the current employer
3. A career is sustained by external networks
4. Traditional career boundaries indicating advancement are broken
5. A person rejects existing career opportunities for personal or family reasons
6. The individual may perceive a boundaryless future

Boundaryless careers comprise sequences of experiences across roles and organisations. Success in such careers is a result of psychological success, marketability within the organisation and marketability in the external market place (Cheramie *et al.* 2007; Eby *et al.* 2003). Boundaryless careers have been a focus of literature on career success as traditional approaches to career progression have been affected by a flattening of organisational and physical changes to work places (Sullivan and Arthur 2006; Arthur *et al.* 2005).

In the absence of a complete career history and understanding of perceived internal or external marketability, the concept of the boundaryless career cannot be applied to the leaders in the study fully. However, aspects of the concept of the boundaryless career relate to the career decision-making and behaviours of successful leaders. These include, switching organisations, industries and sectors; being approached by head-hunters as validation of marketable skills; the pursuit of challenging roles that do not conform to traditional hierarchical career progression; the engagement of family in career decision making and the collective perception from leaders that they will continue to pursue a

career that 'interests' them. Cheramie *et al.* (2007, p.360) suggest the concept of the boundaryless career is the antithesis of considering executives as organisational resources as "they are individuals who seek to manage their own careers by taking advantage of opportunities to maximise their success." In predicting success in a boundaryless career Eby *et al.* (2003) suggest that there are three variables; firstly career insight which includes self-awareness and an understanding of their career goals; secondly a proactive personality and being prepared to identify and act on opportunities, persevering through setbacks; thirdly, being open to experiences. Successful leaders demonstrated these variables in the pursuit of roles whilst derailed leaders did not. However, whilst the concept of the boundaryless career gives insight into the decision making of successful and derailed leaders, this study was not designed to test the application of this concept. In the absence of complete career histories and a detailed understanding of how the decision-making process factored in internal and external markets, further generalisations would require further research.

Together with the concept of the boundaryless career, the notion of career decision-making self-efficacy was relevant in understanding the career decisions of successful and derailed leaders. Self-efficacy is often referred to as confidence (Paulsen and Betz 2004) however, Bandura (1997) made the distinction that self-efficacy was a more specific belief in one's capability to achieve. Taylor and Betz (1983, p.63) related career decision-making self-efficacy to "confidence in the ability to complete the tasks necessary to make career decisions." This can be measured using the domains of accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, planning and problem solving and is perceived to be central to successful career outcomes (Paulsen and Betz, 2004).

Prevalent in the career decisions of successful leaders was the pursuit of challenging roles that provide development opportunities and the engagement in novel experiences and strategic change. The attributes of: decisive, adaptable, confident, self-awareness and resilience were visible in their career decisions. By comparison, derailed leaders did not demonstrate those same levels of confidence, adaptability, self-awareness or resilience, although they did not demonstrate career indecision (Taylor and Betz 1983). A preference for roles that enabled them to demonstrate their expert knowledge rather than enabled an acquisition of a breadth of business skills also characterised their decisions.

Recovering from career setbacks, mistakes and failures

Blenkinsopp and Zdunczyk (2005) suggest that despite extensive literature on career management, few writers have considered career mistakes. What was interesting from the findings in chapter six, was that the careers of successful leaders were 'peppered' with mistakes, failures and setbacks such that at certain points in their careers they may have alternatively been categorised as opted-out leaders and some as potentially derailed. What differentiated them from derailed leaders was their recovery and subsequent move back into senior leadership roles. Derailed leaders remained stalled at lower levels of leadership than prior to their derailment. Dattner and Hogan (2011, p.117) argue that it is "inappropriate responses to failure that can derail your career" rather than the failure itself. Seibert *et al.* (2016, p.245) suggest leaders should "expect the unexpected" during their careers. They cite both resilience as the capacity to bounce back from career disruption and adaptability as the ability to reformulate career goals in light of new circumstance as being important in being able to "keep calm and carry on" (Seibert *et al.* 2016, p.245). This provides a direct correlation to the findings of the research with successful leaders drawing on their resilience and adaptability to regroup. With lower levels of adaptability, derailed leaders may have found it more difficult to reformulate goals, particularly given their possible self-concept as an expert.

Marks *et al.* (2014, pp.106-108) suggest that to recover from setbacks executives need to figure out why they 'lost;' identify new paths and seize the right opportunity. This appears to be a pattern adopted by successful leaders. Self-awareness enabled an understanding of what had gone wrong. When career mistakes had been identified successful leaders quickly rectified these, particularly if that related to mistakes made in selecting roles. Where successful leaders suffered career setbacks, they took the opportunity to 'regroup' before identifying new opportunities. By comparison, derailed leaders stayed in roles longer when these roles were 'compromised' and seemed less able to regroup.

Of significant difference between the successful and derailed leaders was their attitude to failure. Successful leaders identified failure as an important part of the learning process as a leader. By comparison, derailed leaders did not emphasise the value of learning from failure. Moxley and Pulley (2003) suggest hardships are crucial to developing well-

rounded leaders. However, this did not appear to be perceived the same way by derailed leaders. Kovach (1989, p.46) refers to the concept of 'successful derailment' and suggests that, "learning is thus the hallmark of leaders and successful executives...continue to grow and develop throughout their lives. And for many, adversity provides the best opportunity for learning." With higher levels of resilience, successful leaders are more able to set failure in that context.

7.3.4 Achievement orientation as a differentiator of successful leaders

The working definition of 'achievement orientation' was 'those traits, skills, competencies or behaviours that enabled a leader to successfully accomplish their personal and professional goals.' Included in this theme were the attributes of 'delivering results,' 'ambitious,' 'driven,' 'setting high standards,' 'working hard' and 'decisive.' An interesting dichotomy emerged where successful leaders were emphasising all attributes apart from 'working hard.' Derailed leaders only emphasised 'delivering results.' Achievement orientation therefore became an important differentiator between successful and derailed leaders.

In the study 'ambitious' and 'driven' were said to be 'inputs;' traits leaders possessed whilst 'setting high standards' and 'working hard' were 'mechanisms' and 'delivering results' were outputs that enabled leaders to achieve. 'Decisive' was considered a trait, whilst 'making decisions' was a mechanism, an enactment of that trait. In literature achievement orientation is often referred to in connection with goal setting (Elliott and Harackiewicz 1994; Dweck 1985) and in the context of motivation (Nicholls 1984; McClelland *et al.* 1953). In this study, leaders did not reference the setting of goals, instead they were reflecting on the achievement of them through the attributes listed. Whilst leaders eluded to their motivation through the meaning they attributed to success for example, the study was not designed to explore in depth the motives of the leaders in relation to the attainment of goals.

In the TM literature 'driven' is the more commonly referenced attribute of those included in the theme 'achievement orientation.' This is sometimes used simply as a descriptor for example, Michaels *et al.* (2001) defines talent as someone who 'drives' organisational

performance. They later refer to talent as the sum of a person's attributes, including 'drive.' Thorne and Pellant (2007) suggest talent is 'driven to succeed.'

Decisiveness was referenced in literature both in the context of talent and derailment, albeit in vague terms for example, Chambers *et al.* (1998) suggest there is a need for leadership talent to make decisions quickly. Whilst Furnham (2010) suggests 'sad' leaders fail due in part to their inability to make decisions. What is interesting is that 'delivering results' is not explicitly referenced in TM literature however, 'performance' together with potential and leadership effectiveness are perceived to be definitions of talent in some TM approaches.

In the derailment literature whilst 'lack' of ambition was not referred to, variants of decision-making and drive were. In their early research on success and derailment in upper-management roles, Lombardo *et al.* (1988) identified that derailed leaders were more likely to lack the cognitive ability to make high-quality decisions when situations were ambiguous and were seen to lack drive. Failure to meet business objectives was referenced (Carson *et al.* 2012; Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011; Van Velsor and Leslie 1995) as a reason for derailment although not explicitly as failing to deliver a result. Derailed leaders in this study did appear to achieve their objectives and delivered results, these results were not however, set in the broader business context. Further research is required into the theme of 'achievement orientation' and the attributes of 'delivering results,' 'ambitious,' 'driven,' 'setting high standards,' 'working hard' and 'decisive' to determine the correlations between these for both successful and derailed leaders.

7.3.5 Summary of the key themes

The leadership talent type profiles provide a theoretical contribution through both the consideration of inputs, mechanisms and outputs to better define talent and the profiles themselves as definitions of talent and causes of derailment. The identification of the key themes provides a further contribution. Resilience was identified as a gap in both the TM and the leadership derailment literature. A review of the resilience literature positions the role resilience contributes to leadership success and derailment, which is a relatively new area of study.

Referring back to the literature review it was found that the meaning successful leaders gave to change most closely related to aspects of learning agility. The study did not correlate with the findings in derailment literature that derailed leaders were unable to lead change. Rather the emphasis was on a lack of personal adaptability, together with alternative perspectives on change that differentiated them from successful leaders. A lack of resilience and crisis of confidence were also found to be factors contributing to derailment.

As the TM and leadership derailment literature did not reference the way in which leaders managed their careers, the concept of boundaryless careers and career decision-making self-efficacy provided theoretical clarity to the findings. Reviewing literature on career setbacks identified the positive learning experience that can be gained from such setbacks. Successful leaders who suffered temporary setbacks shared this view.

The attributes of the theme 'achievement orientation' were surprisingly lacking in both the TM literature and the leadership derailment literature. In the broader literature 'achievement orientation' as a term was more closely linked to goal setting and motivation however, generalisations could not be made in relation to these in the context of this study. That 'achievement orientation' as a theme comprising the attributes of 'delivering results,' 'ambitious,' 'driven,' 'setting high standards,' and 'decisive' differentiates successful from derailed leaders is a contribution to theory.

7.4 A spotlight on the opted-out leaders

The opted-out leaders were identified at interview stage as leaders who did not define themselves as derailed having voluntarily left senior leadership roles. These leaders presented a contribution to the research providing a more dynamic view of talent, success and derailment. Throughout the thematic analysis, the opted-out leaders presented as an anomaly never quite matching either the profile of the successful leaders or the profile of derailed leaders. As the thematic analysis progressed, it became apparent that some of the opted-out leaders were more aligned to the profiles of successful leaders. Crisis of confidence, inconsistency of results and achieving through working hard were interesting discrepancies. The findings in chapter six identified that

some successful leaders had at points in their careers left senior leadership roles as a result of a negotiated 'deal.' This highlighted the nuances presented in the derailment literature that up to 50% of executives derail "at some point in their career" (Zhang and Chandraksekar 2011, p.46). Anecdotally the researcher was aware that some of the opted-out leaders had returned to senior leadership roles post interview. This meant that, had the interviews occurred at different times, the opted-out leaders may have presented as successful leaders and the successful leaders as opted-out leaders. Of interest is then how leaders recover from setbacks that have caused them to need to regroup before resuming senior leadership roles. The development of resilience, confidence and adaptability appear to be imperative here.

7.5 The meaning given to success

The final aim of the research and corresponding research question was to explore the meaning leadership talent gave to success and consider the impact this had on their career. This went beyond 'definitions' of success to explore what it meant for the talented leaders themselves to be 'successful' given the TM and broader literature on talented and successful leaders uses the words interchangeably. As the uneasy relationship leaders can have with success was raised in the literature as a cause of leadership derailment, success, its meaning and its consequences needed to be considered. Chapter six summarised the meanings provided by leaders that ranged from wanting a car and a salary as the meaning of success in the early years, through to wanting to build a legacy. As the meaning given to success changed, successful leaders and opted-out leaders revised their career decisions. For successful and opted-out leaders family became a greater consideration and was seen as the cause of some leaders opting-out. Given the TM literature's lack of focus on talent as an active agent in TM practices, there is a lack of reference to the meaning talent may give to success and the consequences of that. There was a need to look outside the TM literature.

Kets de Vries (2010, p.1) through his research into the meaning executives gave to success, found it was "a metaphor for many things, made up of different combinations of patterns, values and ideas. That one persons' definition is different from another and that definitions vary through life stages." Interviewing 160 executives to understand the

meaning they gave to success these were: family, wealth, work/career, recognition/fame, power, winning/overcoming challenges, friendships and meaning. This broad list has similarities to the meanings provided by leaders in this study. Kets de Vries (2010) also posed the effect of upbringing on increased drive to succeed as well as the 'price of success' through a fear of failure. This 'fear of failure' was identified as an interesting anomaly of successful leaders.

Attributed to Hughes (1958 in Hall and Chandler 2005) career success literature considers subjective career factors and objective career factors. Subjective career factors relate to the individual as they evaluate their career and objective career factors relate to the external perspective that validates the internal view for example, through rewards (Hall and Chandler 2005). Compared to derailed leaders, successful leaders provided a rich description of success that was a combination of both subjective and objective factors. Given their career decision-making self-efficacy successful leaders sought to enact their meanings of success through their career decisions alternatively seeking both subjective and objective factors.

An alternate lens to view the meanings attributed to success is through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan 1985). In intrinsic motivation rewards are perceived to be inherent in the activity itself. For successful leaders this related to making a difference or adding value through the results they delivered. This differs from extrinsic motivation where the rewards are external. This related to for example, the money, cars and houses cited at the early stages of a leader's career. None of the leaders appeared to have a negative relationship to success although successful leaders used a fear of failure as a catalyst to success.

7.6 Contribution to knowledge

There has been recognition in the TM field that there has been a neglect of the perspective of the individual. TM approaches need to be a greater balance between the needs of the organisation and the needs of the individuals in order to retain high potential talent (Farndale *et al.* 2014). This study places leadership talent at its heart,

enabling greater consideration of leadership talent as active participants in TM practices. In doing so, the research has been able to contribute to knowledge in a number of ways.

7.6.1 A theory of leadership talent as inputs, mechanisms and outputs

TM is an emerging phenomenon-driven field with a corresponding lack of conceptual clarity. Different approaches to defining TM have a corresponding effect on how talent is defined. Either attempts to define leadership talent manifest simply as instructions with regard to the types of attributes that should be included for example, traits, skills or abilities or, manifest as lists of undefined and contradictory attributes. Proponents of the predominant approach to TM, strategic talent management, advocate that definitions of talent should be organisationally specific however, this relies on the capability of the TM decision makers to interpret the talent needs of the organisation into a definition of the attributes of talent that can be operationalised. In academia and in practice there is a lack of rigour in definitions of such attributes of leadership talent. Given the incidents of leadership derailment, a more effective way of identifying the attributes of leadership talent is needed. Using an inductive approach to theory generation, a theory of leadership talent type profiles was designed which identifies talent as: inputs, such as specific skills, traits and attitudes and mechanisms, specific behaviours, responses and actions and finally outputs, the results of enacting talents using mechanisms, such as results, success or derailment.

7.6.2 Construction of theory on the attributes of leadership talent: Leadership talent type profiles

Attributes for each of the leadership talent types were identified through thematic analysis and used to populate talent profiles for each talent type. Each attribute was defined and those that differentiated successful, opted-out and derailed leaders were positioned in the context of literature and evidence-based research. This created a more rigorously defined profile of talented and successful leaders than the lists of disparate characteristics prevalent in literature and offers greater insight into the causes of leadership derailment.

7.6.3 Conceptualising talent and success

Currently the terms talent and success are used interchangeably in connection with leaders however, they mean different things. 'Talents' should be considered an input and success an output, an enactment of talents. Leaders attribute different meanings to success, which is a holistic representation of their life stage. For organisations, success is not explicitly defined in TM literature other than as performance. This study contributes to an understanding of the disconnect between how literature depicts leadership success and successful leaders and the way leaders themselves depict their success. For some leaders a re-evaluation of the meaning they give to success causes them to leave their leadership careers for alternative lifestyles. Talent and success are proposed as distinct and different concepts that need to be referred to as such in the TM literature.

7.6.4 Understanding the causes of leadership derailment

Leadership derailment is an emerging field with much of the empirical research conducted in the 1990's and identified as US focused. This research provides a current perspective on causes of leadership derailment. Within the leadership derailment literature, derailed leaders are often depicted as 'sad,' 'mad' or 'bad.' The research contributes new theory and knowledge on the attributes of leaders who derail, the causes of their derailment and more importantly provides hope for leaders who are derailing by identifying appropriate and inappropriate success mechanisms.

7.6.5 Positioning resilience in leaders in the TM, derailment and resilience literature

King *et al.* (2016) suggest that there has been limited integration of resilience theory into the workplace. They 'make a call' for researchers to explain how resilience helps people to deal with demands in the workplace in order to perform effectively. This research contributes to the debate by suggesting that resilience is a mechanism through which talented leaders enact their success.

7.6.6 Opted-out leaders and the dynamic nature of derailment

Both the TM and leadership derailment literature present a black or white view of success and derailment. The identification of the opted-out leaders provides a contribution of knowledge to facilitate a better understanding of the dynamic nature of success and derailment, whereby 'opting-out' can provide an opportunity for leaders to 'regroup' following setbacks before resuming successful careers.

7.7 Implications of the research

The implications of the research are presented as implications for theory, practice and methodology.

7.7.1 Implications for theory

The proposition of leadership talent defined as inputs, mechanisms and outputs has significant implications for the definition of talent as innate or acquired (Meyers *et al.* 2013). The emphasis of the theoretical construct of the leadership talent type profiles is on the mechanisms. These are the behaviours, actions and responses demonstrated by successful leaders, which as such can be learnt. This shifts the emphasis of theory from attempts to identify the 'right stuff' of talent, to the more observable and developmental behaviours and actions of successful leaders. Definitions of talent become centred on what talented leaders do rather than what 'talents' they have. This distinction is crucial in light of the derailment literature that evidences the frequency with which talented leaders derail and provides insight into the mechanisms that might prevent this.

Identifying the key themes and attributes that differentiate successful and derailed leaders and then rigorously defining and positioning these in literature, has implications for the theoretical advancement of knowledge in relation to those themes and attributes. In particular, the research has implications for development of theory on the correlation between resilience and leadership success or derailment and in how 'achievement orientation' could be conceptualised in TM literature.

7.7.2 Implications for practice

The research has significant implications for practice. Definitions of talent in literature are currently vague and contradictory. Where organisations construct their own definitions of talent aligned to organisational strategy, such definitions can manifest as vague lists of characteristics which when operationalised are difficult to benchmark talent against. A general lack of evidence-based research underpinning the characteristics selected required attributes of leadership talent generates an overall sense that such characteristics are at the whim of how talent is perceived by the author or the practitioner. Given the derailment literature evidences talented leaders derail at an alarming rate, organisations need to more effectively define and develop their leadership talent. At the beginning of the research over 300 supposed attributes of talent were identified from the definitions of talent, primarily consultancy based, prevalent in literature. Without empirical research it seems a 'needle in a haystack' to select the 8-12 characteristics that depict what it means to be 'talent' in an organisation. Through this research, it is suggested that practitioners shift the emphasis of their definitions of talent from personal characteristics, to the mechanisms used to enact success; the behaviours, actions and responses. Rather than the suggestion that talent is 'innate,' mechanisms can be developed, which has implications for talent development strategy.

There are further implications for practice from the identification of resilience as a significant attribute of successful leaders. Derailed leaders by comparison lacked both resilience and adaptability. Resilience as it applies to leaders is lacking in resilience literature. That resilience was identified as fundamental to success and can be developed and that lack of resilience is a contributor to derailment again has implications for an organisation's talent development strategy.

Successful leaders were identified as having distinct career decision-making patterns. The concept of the boundaryless career was most applicable to successful leaders. These leaders were proactive, opportunistic and geographically mobile. They sought challenging opportunities that provided novel experiences, the opportunity to engage in impactful change and developed a breadth of business management skills. Rather than being passive resources, these individuals were active decision makers in their own careers. This

has implications for the retention of these individuals and the ability of the organisation to provide corresponding career opportunities. Where organisations have a career path that is typified by hierarchical progression through expert roles, consideration needs to be given to the fact that over identification with expertise was a key characteristic of leaders who derailed.

7.7.3 Implications for research methodology

The use of a case study to identify how the required attributes of leadership talent were defined and operationalised in organisations, provided useful insight into the challenges inherent in this approach. Potential future research could build on the research methods initially proposed, interviewing TM decision makers and leaders who are part of that process to understand the potential disconnect between organisational definitions of talent and the characteristics and mechanisms demonstrated by their successful leaders.

Longitudinal studies charting the career progression of talented leaders would enable a better understanding of the dynamic nature of talent, success and derailment, enabling the development of interventions to support leaders to recover quickly from career setbacks. This would be of benefit to practitioners seeking to retain their talented leaders.

Having constructed a theory of the attributes of successful and derailed leaders through the creation of talent profiles, further research can be conducted on the individual attributes through deduction and the proposition of hypotheses. The potential for further research is discussed in more depth in section 7.8.

7.7.4 Implications for methodology: advocating a multi-disciplinary approach

The increase in TM research over the last ten years, yet conclusion that TM is a phenomenon-driven field has implications for future research. There is a significant opportunity for multi-disciplinary research in TM, which is curiously disconnected for example, from career management research, positive psychology and leadership derailment literature. Incorporating the evidence-based research inherent in psychology to better define the attributes of talent will benefit academics seeking to define talent;

practitioners seeking to recruit, identify, develop and retain talent and leaders themselves looking to better understand the nature of their 'talents.' There is a substantial body of literature and research in psychology that can be drawn on in relation to understanding differences, competency, strengths, behaviour, potential and superior performance. Drawing on such literature would add credibility to the TM field that emphasises differentiating people at the core of its practice.

There is a significant opportunity to integrate research on leadership talent and leadership derailment. Such research answers a cry for help for those talented leaders who find themselves derailing. It also answers the puzzle in organisations where talented leaders do not seem to fulfil their potential.

7.8 Future research

There are significant opportunities for future research to build on the exploratory nature of this study. These include the use of alternative research methods to enhance the reliability of the findings from the study and additional research studies to gain greater awareness of some of the issues identified that, whilst not all central to this study, are worthy of further investigation.

Using alternative research methods

This qualitative interpretivist study used an inductive approach to theory building using interview data coded through thematic analysis. Further research using alternative research methods could be carried out to support the findings and further develop theory generated through the research. Such research methods could include quantitative studies using a deductive approach, longitudinal studies and greater use of case study data.

“Quantitative Methods essentially refers to the application of the systematic steps of the scientific methods, whilst using quantitative properties (i.e., numerical systems) to research the relationship of effects of specific variables” (Edmonds and Kennedy 2017, p.30). Quantitative studies with the use of questionnaires, in particular self-completed questionnaires, would allow for larger purposive sample sizes of successful and derailed

leaders. This would be beneficial in gathering further data on the importance of the nine themes and twenty-eight attributes identified through the thematic analysis which comprised the differentiated talent profiles. Rather than the inductive approach to theory building taken in this study, quantitative research is usually referred to as a deductive process, iterative in nature (Edmonds and Kennedy 2017). A deductive approach to theory testing (Saunders *et al.* 2009) could be utilised to support the reliability of the talent profile theory and refine the talent profiles.

Quantitative research requires variables to have a conceptual and an operational definition (Edmonds and Kennedy 2017). All themes and attributes have conceptual definitions. Operationalised definitions could be derived from the mechanisms used to enact success or contributing to derailment. The themes and attributes identified in this study would need to be converted into a question format and a Likert scale, frequently used for measuring attitudes (Bryman 2004), could be applied to some attributes to assess perceived relative importance of the attributes to success or derailment. In a Likert scale respondents are asked their degree to which they agree with statements. The scale is “deemed to measure the intensity with which respondents feel about an issue” (Bryman 2004, p. 540). Vignette questions where respondents are presented with scenarios and asked how they would respond would be useful in exploring the mechanisms (the actions and behaviours) of successful and derailed leaders identified in this study. Rather than a personalised definition of success, participants could be asked to consider a standardised definition of leadership success to allow for a repeatable study.

As a deductive, quantitative study the themes of resilience, change and achievement orientation and the attributes of confidence, business management skills and expert knowledge as being important in differentiating successful and derailed leaders could become hypotheses to be tested.

Whilst a quantitative study would enable exploration of the importance of the themes and attributes and be useful in testing hypotheses, longitudinal studies would be particularly useful in obtaining a rigorous understanding of success, derailment and career decision-making over time. This study was completed over a period of eight years and although all successful leaders sustained their success and all derailed leaders

remained at lower levels of leadership, half of the opted out leaders have since completion of the study, moved back into senior leadership roles. Furthermore, it was identified that at certain points in their careers, successful leaders could have been perceived to have opted out. This suggests that success and derailment are dynamic. Hassett and Paavilainen-Mantymaki (2013, p.1) argue that “research contexts and phenomena are far from static and there is a growing need for researchers to adopt more complex and dynamic research approaches to capture the reality they observe”.

Menard (2008, p.3) define longitudinal research as data “collected on one or more variables for two or more time periods, thus allowing at least measurement of change and possibly explanation of change”. Bidart (2013, p.254) suggests that longitudinal studies “make it possible to compare different moments in time, to analyse the intervals and to identify ‘ways of moving’”. As a result this method is well suited to studying “the life course as a process” and to identifying the subjective and objective elements that shape transitions (Bidart 2013, p.254). Longitudinal studies would be useful in observing how leaders enact their talent over the specified time period and for better understanding their career decision-making process. There are a number of commonly used approaches to longitudinal studies. These include, repeated cross-sectional studies to determine trends and the use of same or different panels drawn from the total population (Hassett and Paavilainen-Mantymaki 2013; Menard 2008; Bryman 2004). As longitudinal studies “allow insight into the time order of variables and therefore may be more able to allow causal inference to be made” (Bryman 2004, p.46) such studies could contribute to an understanding of the direction of causation between attributes. It was previously identified that ambiguity in the direction of causation is a limitation of this study.

Whilst longitudinal studies would add significant value to theory exploration, they are not without difficulty. This study encouraged leaders to reflect on their careers from early teenage years to date; on average this comprised a 20-30 year career history. The time period during which the longitudinal study would be conducted and number of data points selected would need to reflect that the enactment of leadership talent into success or derailment and career progression into senior leadership roles can be a lengthy process. Due to the length of the study, attrition may become an issue. Furthermore, if

the study is over a significant time period and the data points are some distance apart, a longitudinal study may not address some of the limitations of self-reported data previously identified. These included, rationalising (George and McLean 2007), sense making to reduce dissonance (Blenkinsopp and Zdunczyk 2005) and impression management (Sosik *et al.* 2002). Nor would it enable greater clarity on direction of causation.

Longitudinal studies charting the career progression of talented leaders would however, enable a better understanding of the dynamic nature of talent, success and derailment, enabling the development of interventions to support leaders to recover quickly from career setbacks. This would be of benefit to practitioners seeking to retain their talented leaders.

The initial intent of the study was to access a number of organisational case studies and to interview TM decision makers and leaders within the organisation. The purpose of this was to understand how organisations were defining leadership talent and if successful leaders within the organisation demonstrated this definition of leadership talent, or something different. The intent was also to understand what caused talented leaders within these organisations to derail. On completion of this study, organisations may be more willing to engage in future case study research as there is greater visibility of potential benefits to organisations and leaders in taking part. The use of a greater number of organisational case studies would be a significant contribution to academia enhancing understanding of how talent is defined in practice. Furthermore, the use of case study organisations to explore talent, success and derailment would reduce the reliance on self-reported data.

Exploring additional research areas

As this was an inductive study it is important to conduct further research to support theory building. Further exploration of resilience as a mechanism for enacting talent into success as a leader is required. This would draw on the interesting work of Rutter (2007, p.205) who suggests that there needs to be a shift from how resilience is conceptualised as protective factors to “what individuals do... a move from variables to processes or

mechanisms.” The aim of this would be to identify the mechanisms that enable leaders to be resilient where resilience is itself a mechanism used by leaders to enact talent into success. A comparative study on the career recovery strategies of successful and derailed leaders following career setbacks with emphasis on resilience, confidence and career-decision-making as enablers would be useful here.

When identifying the talent type samples of successful, opted out and derailed leaders, gender was not a selection criteria. No female leaders identified themselves as having derailed. Further studies on the gender differences related to areas of the study including leadership success factors and reasons for leadership derailment would be valuable. There is currently a gap in literature on such gender differences in particular with reference to derailment. This would add to the work of authors such as Nobre *et al.* (2014) who are exploring derailment in women leaders.

Further research on the ethical implications of success as a potential ‘derailer’ of talented leaders would be an important contribution to both the TM and leadership derailment literature. Swales (2013b, p.33), suggests that TM literature is “silent in relation to the ethical issues confronting organisations that operate talent programmes”. Literature on derailment of leaders documents the ‘uneasy’ relationship leaders can have with success, yet TM practices fail to acknowledge such issues.

Finally, further research could address locus of control as both a ‘talent’ and a mechanism for enacting talent into success. Internal locus of control was explicitly mentioned by one successful leader and could be inferred by others through a number of attributes including ‘decisive,’ ‘resilience,’ ‘confidence’ and through career decision-making. Whilst locus of control was not identified as a key ‘attribute’ as a result of the thematic analysis it appeared to contribute to the ability of successful leaders to enact their success. This would add to the literature on locus of control in career success (Zhou *et al.* 2016; Taylor and Popma 1990), as contributing to organisational performance (Howell and Avolio 1993) and as an indicator of self-awareness (Johnson *et al.* 2016) in the context of leadership talent.

7.9 Limitations of the research

Section 7.1.1 outlines some of the limitations inherent in self-reported data, in particular in relation to reliability and causation, and the steps taken in this study to minimise these limitations. It is the nature of qualitative, interpretative, research that sample sizes are small. Qualitative data does however, allow for emphasis on peoples lived experiences (Miles and Huberman 1994). Given the small sample sizes generalisation is at a theoretical level. Future research can test as hypotheses, the identified attributes of successful and derailed leaders.

Caution is needed when interpreting self-reported data in interpretivist studies as an interpretive circle is created whereby the researcher is interpreting the interpretations of the interviewee. Furthermore, as data emerges simultaneously the direction of causality cannot be concluded and indeed the interviewee may themselves have already determined causality. Rationalising (George and McLean 2007) and sense making to reduce dissonance (Blenkinsopp and Zdunczyk 2005) could affect the recollections of derailed leaders as they recount their stories. Similarly, successful leaders are often experienced in recounting their careers, especially those in the public domain. Researchers need to be aware of the effect impression management (Sosik *et al.* 2002) has on the information provided by participants. In this study creating an environment of trust and confidentiality and the use of 'snowballing' to enlist participants encouraged leaders to be more candid in their responses.

7.10 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between having talent and being successful as a leader by identifying how leadership talent enacts success and why some derail. The purpose, aims and corresponding research questions were met through the construction of theory on inputs, mechanisms and outputs of talent. These were presented as talent profiles for each leadership type. The attributes of successful, opted-out and derailed leaders were identified together with the mechanisms used to enact success. The theory of inputs, mechanisms and outputs was set in the context of TM literature and present a contribution to the way in which talent can be defined. From the

findings, four significant themes were identified: resilience, change, career decision-making and achievement orientation. These provide a contribution to knowledge. The identification of resilience was especially significant. Resilience in leaders is an emerging area of research in resilience literature. Resilience is also a gap in both TM and leadership derailment literature. By contextualising the resilience demonstrated by successful leaders and lack of resilience by derailed leaders a contribution was made to three fields of literature.

The meaning leaders give to success contributed to understanding the career decisions leaders were making through their 'leadership journey.' Changes in the meaning given to success affected the career decisions leaders were making, particularly at the later stages of their career when leaders were making alternate life choices. Meanings attributed to success could also be seen to be a response to childhood circumstances and therefore relate to resilience.

The research contributes to theory in the conceptualisation and definition of talent, success, derailment and resilience in the context of leadership. It has implications for theory, practice and future research. Identifying inputs, mechanisms and outputs as definitions of talent changes the emphasis from personal characteristics to mechanisms and the enactment of talent into success or derailment. This has implications for practice and the way talent is identified and developed. The attributes of successful and derailed leaders identified through the research provide a more rigorous definition of talent. Understanding the role of resilience in success and derailment provides new insight into the need to develop resilience in leaders to enable them to meet the challenges inherent in senior leadership roles and to recover quickly from career setbacks.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to explore the relationship between having talent and being successful as a leader in the context of the organisation by identifying the attributes of leadership talent, understanding how talented leaders enact talent into success and identifying why talented leaders derail. TM and leadership derailment literature was integrated in a way that is currently lacking and a multi-disciplinary approach was adopted. By addressing the aims and corresponding research questions the study sought to provide greater clarity on: the attributes that differentiate talented and successful leaders and how they enact their talents into success; what characterises those leaders who derail and the causes of that derailment and the meaning both successful and derailed leaders give to success. A better understanding of the attributes of leadership talent and the relationship between having talent and being successful is an imperative of the leadership derailment literature. As the literature on leadership derailment has evolved, evidence-based research suggests talented leaders derail at an alarming rate.

The messages from leadership derailment literature are that more leaders derail than are successful (Furnham 2010); that 'A' players could look like 'B' players and vice versa over time (Beechler and Woodward 2009) and that, "derailment is a fact of organisational life" (Van Velsor and Leslie 1995). The strategic imperative for leadership derailment literature is to understand why leaders derail, particularly as such leaders have often previously been identified as talented, high performers "fated and feted to be high flyers" (Furnham 2010, p.viii). It is suggested this should be an imperative for TM academics and practitioners too, together with developing a greater understanding of how to prevent it through TM practices. As previously successful leaders can derail at any point up to CEO level, this indicates that not only has something 'gone wrong' for the leader but that something has potentially 'gone wrong' with the organisations TM practices. Derailment flaws, factors and behaviours have implications for practice in the way organisations define their talent. As identification of talent is typically through positive correlations and the demonstration of positive attributes, little thought is given to the point at which such 'talents' could become 'derailers.' Understanding derailment helps TM decision makers

make better decisions on the organisation's definition of talent. The failure to consider leadership derailment in TM practices also raises ethical concerns. Walton (2011, p.4) is particularly scathing of the "hype about excellence and personal aggrandisement" that "creates unrealistic expectations" and can lead to "unintended tensions and consequences such as avoidable personal trauma, profound aspirational disappointments and failure." Being identified as a 'star,' 'high potential' or 'A' player can have a detrimental affect on a leader, which is currently acknowledged in the leadership derailment literature but not in TM literature where there is an overemphasis on strengths to the detriment of identifying and addressing problem behaviours (Zhang and Chandrasekar 2011). Regardless of the evidence of the high potential for leadership derailment, the TM and derailment literature are disconnected. This calls in to question how the 'war for talent' can be won when a high percentage of leaders derail and the TM literature does not acknowledge why this might be the case, other than to possibly conclude such individuals were not talent in the first place (Ross 2013a). Given both the high personal and organisational cost of such derailment failure to consider the causes of derailment is remiss of TM academics and practitioners. TM decision makers have an important role to play in reducing the personal and organisational cost of derailment by considering leadership derailment in their TM practices. Empirical research on derailment is however, dated, US focused and over-reliant on potentially biased consultancy models of derailment. This study provides a contribution to both academia and practice by identifying the attributes that differentiate successful and derailed leaders, the causes of leadership derailment and by providing a theoretical framework through which the relationship between talent, success and derailment can be understood. Through the study it was identified that having talent and being successful are distinct and different concepts and it is unhelpful to amalgamate the two and attribute them the same meaning, particularly as talented leaders can have an 'uneasy' relationship with success and 'success' can itself be a cause of derailment.

A review of the literature identified TM as a phenomenon-driven field (Dries 2013a) characterised by an absence of conceptual frameworks, evidence-based theory and definitions of TM, talent and consequently, leadership talent. The basic question of "what is talent?" appears to have been left unanswered in literature (Meyers *et al.* 2013, p.305).

Some authors suggest talent can mean whatever people want it to mean and that everyone has their own idea of what it includes (Ulrich 2011). Others suggest that talent is indefinable; we simply know it when we see it (Thorne and Pellant 2007). Research suggests that decision makers navigating vague definitions of talent, choose leaders who are 'good enough' (Vaiman et al. 2012). This laissez faire approach to defining the 'who' and 'what' of talent is at odds with the strategic imperative to ensure organisations can attract and retain talent (Collings and Mellahi 2009) and the continual 'war for talent' rhetoric. Predominant approaches to TM such as differentiating human capital, strategic talent management and global talent management advocate the identification of 'A' players who can fill 'A' positions (Huselid *et al.* 2005), and of talent pools consisting of individuals who can fill strategic roles (Tansley 2011). 'A' positions and strategic roles comprise leadership roles with talented leaders required to fill these.

Strategic talent management advocates definitions of talent that should be organisationally specific and aligned to the strategy and values of the organisation (Iles *et al.* 2010a; Collings and Mellahi 2009). This relies on TM decision makers being able to define the leadership talent needed to achieve the strategy and operationalise this as a definition of 'talent' against which to benchmark leaders, often using a competency based approach. The findings of the research case study identified challenges in this process, when organisational 'buzz words' were used to define the requirements of leadership talent. These were operationalised as characteristics that were vague, undefined and misunderstood throughout the organisation and the leadership population. Whilst this was a single case study making generalisations inappropriate, it does make plausible that organisations are not defining the attributes of talent effectively. The effectiveness with which definitions of leadership talent are operationalised is an important consideration in leadership derailment as it raises the question of whether leaders who derail were 'talent' in the first place (Ross 2013a). When organisations are creating their definition of leadership talent through the identification of specific attributes aligned to the strategy, this poses three significant challenges for TM decision makers: Firstly, they must be able to 'translate' the strategy into required attributes which when demonstrated will enable the implementation of the strategy. Secondly, they need to be able to distinguish whether an attribute is for example, a trait, skill or behaviour and define it drawing on

evidence-based research to avoid subjective 'buzz words' as attributes of talent. Finally, they need to ensure that they are not identifying as positive traits those personal traits that could ultimately lead to derailment. Robie *et al.* (2008) for example, identified 'derailer' traits that were positively correlated to visionary thinking and financial acumen, potential attributes of leadership 'talent.'

A greater understanding of why some talented leaders go on to be successful whilst others derail is inhibited by the disconnect between TM and leadership derailment literature. Ross (2013a, p.16) argues that an understanding of derailment helps create a more robust TM strategy as those who have talent and potential yet derail "are a valuable learning experience for organisations in ensuring that definitions of talent and the reality of what success looks like in an organisation are aligned." It is remiss of authors in the TM field to fail to define their central concept and a naivety to consider only the 'bright side' of talent given the significant direct and indirect organisational costs of leadership derailment. Greater rigour in defining leadership talent and differentiating talent from success is needed, as is a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding talent, success and derailment.

The interpretive epistemological philosophy underpinning the research put leadership talent at the heart of the study in recognition that their voice is absent from TM literature (Collings *et al.* 2015) and that there is a failure to consider leaders as active agents (Greenwood 2002) in TM practices. This consideration of talented leaders as simply passive commodities (Inkson 2008) is at odds with the high performing, high potential, descriptors used to describe such talent.

The intent was to interview successful and derailed leaders however, during the recruitment of the participants, a third category of leadership talent was identified, those leaders who had voluntarily opted-out of leadership roles. Interviews were conducted with twenty-five successful, opted-out and derailed leaders. The decision to include the opted-out leaders, was rewarded through a richer understanding of the dynamics of leadership derailment. Together the three categories of leader formed a typology of leadership talent types.

From the findings a theory of inputs, mechanisms and outputs and a series of leadership talent type 'profiles' emerged that directly addressed the research questions and offered insight into how successful leaders were enacting their talents into success and why some leaders were derailing. This shift in emphasis from defining talent as a list of disparate characteristics "beleaguered executives are invited to compare themselves with," (Goffee and Jones 2006, p. 10), to understanding the mechanisms for translating talent into success has consequences for academia, practitioners and leaders. Rather than an emphasis on talent as 'innate' and leaders either having the 'right stuff' or not, the emphasis is on the mechanisms through which leaders enact their talents and that can be developed.

Through the thematic analysis, nine key themes were identified with a series of corresponding attributes. These attributes were separated into inputs, talents the leaders 'have' and mechanisms, what they 'do.' This was an important theoretical contribution making a clear distinction between talents and how successful leaders use mechanisms to enact their talents. A leadership talent type 'profile' was created for each leadership talent type which clearly distinguished between the inputs and mechanisms across the three talent types. This was a significant contribution of the research providing a current, research-based framework through which successful and derailed leaders are differentiated.

From the findings, four significant themes emerged as differentiating the talent types. These were 'resilience,' 'change,' 'career decision-making' and 'achievement orientation.' The attributes of confidence, business management skills and expert knowledge were also influential in success or derailment. The identification of resilience as a key differentiator of successful and derailed leaders was a significant contribution of the research. Whilst resilience literature is substantial, resilience in leaders is a relatively new area of study. Resilience in successful leaders and lack of resilience in derailed leaders was contextualised using the resilience literature. That resilience is something that can be developed offers hope to derailed leaders.

Resilience was a contributory factor in engagement with change. Interestingly and in conflict with the literature on leadership derailment, derailed leaders were

demonstrating a willingness and ability to lead change. However, low adaptability, low resilience and a sense of identity based on their expertise meant that derailed leaders were less able to personally adapt (Brisco and Hall 1999) and less engaged in change at a sector or national level compared to their successful counterparts.

Career decision-making significantly differentiated successful leaders from derailed leaders. Their pursuit of a boundaryless career (Cheremie *et al.* 2007; Eby *et al.* 2003; Arthur and Rousseau 1996) and their career decision-making self-efficacy (Taylor and Betz 1983) exemplified successful leaders as active agents rather than passive resources in the context of TM practices. This has implications for TM practices and the retention strategies used to retain such leaders. Traditional hierarchical structures and career progression appear more suited to the derailed leader's preference for continued development of their expert knowledge.

Interesting anomalies appeared in relation to the attributes within the theme of achievement orientation. Contrary to literature, derailed leaders were 'delivering results.' By comparison, opted-out leaders were delivering inconsistent results correlated to a 'crisis of confidence.' Successful leaders were less likely to cite working hard, which perhaps illustrates the adage 'work smarter, not harder.'

The meaning leaders give to success encourages a poignant pause as some of those definitions reflected a response to early years' trauma. Others reflected stages of life, as leaders transitioned from the meaning of success as being cars and houses to, 'making a difference' and 'leaving a legacy.' Interestingly successful leaders articulated a richer meaning to success. That leaders re-evaluated the meaning they gave to success was reflected in career decisions, particularly for the opted-out leaders.

Placing a spotlight on the opted-out leaders identified that they shared more similarities with successful than derailed leaders. Through the review of careers across the types, it was identified that successful leaders had at certain points in their careers opted-out to personally regroup and re-evaluate career choices. Meanwhile, some opted-out leaders returned, after the research interviews, to successful senior leadership roles. This illustrated the potentially temporary nature of derailment and raises interesting

questions on the role of resilience in managing career setbacks, failures and mistakes and how derailed leaders can be supported in their recovery from these.

The research provides a number of contributions including to theory, in terms of how talent and derailment and the attributes of both can be defined, and to practice in terms of pragmatic ways to consider the identification and development of talent to enable success and prevent derailment. Successful leaders are doing something different. Instead of focussing on 'talent' organisations should focus more on how we can each enact our talents in order to be successful. We each have our own unique set of skills, knowledge, capabilities, abilities, strengths and human frailties. Instead of trying to demand leaders satisfy some vague notion of talent, focussing on mechanisms to enact talent into success offers a more practical way forward for TM and leadership development in organisations and for individual leaders seeking a successful, sustainable and fulfilling career.

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Appendix 1:

**Example Participant Information Sheet
Example Consent Form**

PhD research project:

The Psychology of Talent: How Leadership Talent Enacts Success

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Thank you for agreeing to consider participating in this research project. This information sheet outlines the reason the research is being carried out, and what participation will involve. If you would like to talk through anything in more detail or have any queries, please contact us and we will be happy to discuss this further.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is firstly, to understand more about those characteristics and attributes that cause certain leaders to be perceived as talented. Secondly, to understand the relationship between talent and success: what causes some talented leaders to go on to be successful in their careers and sustain that success whilst others derail from their expected career trajectory. The project commenced in September 2009 and will run until June 2013.

The research will comprise 3 samples:

- Talented leaders accessed via their participating organisation, where that organisation has a talent management process
- Talented leaders accessed independently of an organisation
- Talented leaders who have derailed from their expected career path, accessed independently of an organisation.

What is involved for participating organisations?

The HR Director/Manager with responsibility for the talent management process will be interviewed in order to understand this process. Any documentation which supports the process will be studied. Leaders identified as talent will be approached for interview. These individuals will be asked to take part in a face to face interview of a pre-agreed duration and at a time convenient to them. We will ask for their written permission to tape the interview, to ensure that the information they give us is accurately recorded. The tape of your interview will be transcribed for the purposes of data analysis. It may be that a short follow up telephone session is required to clarify information post interview.

Who is running this study?

The project is a PhD research thesis, being completed by Suzanne Ross, PhD doctoral candidate at Nottingham Business School, who will conduct the interviews. Previously, the Talent Manager for the EMEA region of a global FTSE 100 company and with over 10 years experience in performance management, talent management and talent development practice in global organisations, Suzanne Ross is now a self-employed consultant, specialising in talent and performance management, leadership development and Leadership / Performance Coaching. The project is

being supervised by Professor Carole Tansley from Nottingham Business School and Dr. Maria Karanika-Murray from the Division of Psychology, both of whom have a long track record of researching information within the field of talent management, HR systems and psychology.

Why has our organisation been asked to participate?

We are particularly interested in the context of the organisation in understanding the nature of leadership talent, particularly large organisations with formal talent management processes and a requirement for leadership talent.

How will you protect confidentiality and anonymity.

The tape and transcript of the interviews will be handled only by members of the research team, in line with data protection principles and our approved research protocol. Hard copies of research notes will be kept in locked filing cabinets, and electronic files are password protected.

Once the transcripts of the taped interviews have been completed, the interview tapes will be destroyed and the relevant files erased. Individuals will be asked to provide a password which will be assigned to their data. Should they wish to withdraw their consent, they can quote their password and data associated with this password will be removed.

Neither the individuals nor their organisations will not be named or otherwise identified in any publication arising from this project. No unpublished opinions or information will be attributed, either by name or position.

What are the possible advantages and disadvantages in taking part?

At an individual level, we hope that those individuals participating will find the interview interesting and will take satisfaction from helping to develop the knowledge of this important topic. We also hope that they will find the project helpful to their ongoing personal and professional development. An Executive Summary of the thesis can be provided to your organisation on its completion.

The main cost to you will be the time needed to be interviewed. It may be that individuals give us information that is detrimental to themselves or your organisation. We are confident however, that the arrangements put in place to protect confidentiality and anonymity will mitigate that.

What will happen to the results?

The results will form part of the research thesis for doctoral studies and used to inform further education and communication forums, for example, seminars, conferences, research papers.

How can I find out more about this project and its results?

If you would like further information with regard to the study, please contact either: Suzanne Ross PhD researcher or Professor Carole Tansley, research supervisor at:

The International Centre for Talent Management and Development. HR Division, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham, NG1 4BU.

PhD research project
The psychology of talent:
How leadership talent enacts success

CONSENT FORM

Name:

Position:

Organisation:

The purpose of this research is to understand the characteristics and attributes of talented individuals and to understand the relationship between talent and success.

You are being asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately one hour. The interviewer will ask a series of questions about you, your career and your personal characteristics. Your responses will be tape recorded. During the interview, please let the interviewer know if you would rather not answer some of the questions put to you.

You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time before or after the interview, up until the data analysis stage which will begin 4 weeks from the date of the interview, without giving a reason for doing so. If you wish to withdraw you should contact the researcher (or their supervisor) and ask for your data to be withdrawn from the study.

Due to the nature of the research, extracts from the interview will be used in the final report. To protect your anonymity names will not be used and organisation names will be coded, i.e., Organisation A, Organisation B, etc. Only the interviewer and supervisor will have access to recordings. All recordings will be destroyed after the transcripts have been collated. All transcripts will be destroyed on publication of the research.

Upon completion of the interview you are free to ask any questions you may have about the interview or research in general. If, at the end of the interview you would like to discuss something further with support or counselling services, contact details will be provided.

Participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated. If you are happy to take part in this research please sign and date below. If you have any questions or concerns before, during or after your participation in this research my contact details are on the bottom of this form. This form remains confidential between yourself and the researcher and research supervisors. No other party/parties will be informed of your consent or otherwise to be interviewed. This consent form will be stored securely. It will be destroyed should you withdraw your consent. Where consent remains for the duration of the research, all consent forms will be destroyed on publication of the research.

Agreement to consent

Please read the following statements and confirm your consent to being interviewed by signing and dating the form.

I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me; that I have been given information about it in writing, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any implications for my legal rights up until the data analysis stage of the research.

I confirm that I currently have no formally diagnosed Mental Health issues.

I give permission for the interview to be tape-recorded by research staff, on the understanding that the tape will be destroyed at the end of the project and that confidential information which identifies me, my organisation or any other party will be erased.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

PhD research project
The psychology of talent:
How leadership talent enacts success

CONSENT FORM

Name:

Position:

Organisation:

The purpose of this research is to understand the characteristics and attributes of talented individuals and to understand the relationship between talent and success.

You are being asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately one hour. The interviewer will ask a series of questions about you, your career and your personal characteristics. Your responses will be tape recorded. During the interview, please let the interviewer know if you would rather not answer some of the questions put to you.

You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time before or after the interview, up until the data analysis stage which will begin 4 weeks from the date of the interview, without giving a reason for doing so. If you wish to withdraw you should contact the researcher (or their supervisor) and ask for your data to be withdrawn from the study.

Due to the nature of the research, extracts from the interview will be used in the final report. To protect your anonymity names will not be used and organisation names will be coded, i.e., Organisation A, Organisation B, etc. Only the interviewer and supervisor will have access to recordings. All recordings will be destroyed after the transcripts have been collated. All transcripts will be destroyed on publication of the research.

Upon completion of the interview you are free to ask any questions you may have about the interview or research in general. If, at the end of the interview you would like to discuss something further with support or counselling services, contact details will be provided.

Participation is voluntary and greatly appreciated. If you are happy to take part in this research please sign and date this form. If you have any questions or concerns before, during or after your participation in this research my contact details are on the bottom of the form. This form remains confidential between yourself and the researcher and research supervisors. No other party/parties

will be informed of your consent or otherwise to be interviewed. This consent form will be stored securely. It will be destroyed should you withdraw your consent. Where consent remains for the duration of the research, all consent forms will be destroyed on publication of the research.

Agreement to consent

Please read the following statements and confirm your consent to being interviewed by signing and dating the form.

I confirm that the purpose of the project has been explained to me; that I have been given information about it in writing, and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any implications for my legal rights up until the data analysis stage of the research.

I confirm that I currently have no formally diagnosed Mental Health issues which may influence my capacity to give valid consent or impair my ability to take part in the interview.

I give permission for the interview to be tape-recorded by research staff, on the understanding that the tape will be destroyed at the end of the project and that confidential information which identifies me, my organisation or any other party will be erased.

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Researcher contact details:

Suzanne Ross

c/o Professor Carole Tansley, Director of the International Centre of Talent Management and Development, HR Division, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham NG1 4BU

Appendix 2:

Interview structure

Suzanne Ross PhD research project:

The psychology of talent: How leadership talent enacts success

Interview structure

Format: Informal, participant led, semi-structured, exploratory

Structure:

1. Understanding the “Early Years”
 - a. How would you describe your early years?
 - b. What sort of educational choices were you making?
 - c. Where did your career start and how did it start that way?
 - d. What did being successful in those early years, mean to you?
 - e. Did you see yourself as successful?
2. Building your career
 - a. Talk to me about your career choices and the reasons behind those choices
 - b. When you look back over your career, what would you say were your greatest personal challenges and what were your “defining moments”. Can you talk me through some of the scenarios?
 - c. How have the organisations you’ve worked for, helped or hindered you in your career?
 - d. Were you ever part of a TM programme? If so, what was your experience of that? How did that help or hinder your career? What would it like to be part of that TM programme?
 - e. As you were building your career, what did being successful mean to you?
 - f. Did you see yourself as successful? What contributed to that success? Consider please personal factors and external factors.
3. Where you are now
 - a. Talk to me about where you are now?
 - b. What does being successful mean to you?
 - c. Do you see yourself as successful in that context? What has contributed to that success?
4. Looking to the future
 - a. What is next for you? Where do you see yourself?