

WORKING PAPER

TOPIC

Line Managers' Involvement in Talent Management: The Case of a Malawian Bank

CONFERENCE STREAM

LEADERSHIP MANAGEMENT AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

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1.0 Abstract

Purpose - *Line Managers (LMs) are a critical stakeholder in the success of talent management (TM) activities due to the frequent and close interactions that they have with employees (Blanco and Golik 2021; Cooke et al., 2014:226; Blass and Maxwell 2012:256). However, little is known about how LMs are involved in TM. This paper aims to examine the involvement of LMs in TM at a Case Study Organisation.*

Design/methodology/approach - *Our findings draw on an embedded single case study using 47 in-depth semi-structured interviews with multi-stakeholders (e.g., LMs, Human Resources Department (HRD) staff, senior management, and the Staff Representative Council (SRC), supervisors, officers). The interviews were supported by the analysis of secondary data, for example, documentation.*

Findings - *The study found that the Case Study Organisation managed its talent using a hybrid TM philosophy comprising an exclusive strategic position TM philosophy and an inclusive self-initiated talent development TM philosophy. Consistent with the hybrid TM philosophy, LMs initiated TM processes, proposed TM decisions, implemented TM decisions, and acquired TM expertise. In terms of coverage, LMs were more involved in TM since they performed several operational tasks (e.g., initiating TM processes and implementing TM decisions) in several TM practices such as talent acquisition and identification, talent development, performance management, and merit pay. In terms of depth, the involvement of LMs in TM was moderate because their involvement was limited to proposing decisions across TM practices. This was supported by a moderate acquisition of TM expertise as the LMs' TM training had mixed reviews.*

Limitation - *The findings are limited to the Case Study Organisation as the study adopted a single case study.*

Originality/value - Theoretical - *We respond to calls by several scholars for an in-depth study on LMs' involvement in TM within different national and industrial contexts (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen 2016; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Kravariti et al., 2022). We attained this by providing insight on the coverage and depth of LMs' involvement in TM in a Case Study Organisation.*

Methodology – *By drawing our findings on an embedded single case study, we respond to the call by Cooke (2018:11) and Cooke et al., (2022) for in-depth*

human-centered qualitative research. Finally, we respond to the call by Gallardo-Gallardo et al., (2020:463) for multi-stakeholders perspectives studies on LMs' involvement in TM.

Keywords: Line Managers (LM), Talent Management (TM), Human Resource Management (HRM), Banking, Malawi.

2.0 Introduction

TM research is increasingly focused on talent shortages (Vaiman et al 2012), the conceptualisation of TM (Scullion and Collings 2011), the correlation between TM and performance (Sheehan 2012), and more recently, the impact of COVID-19 (Cascio 2020). While recognising the progress made in TM research, several authors have called for more in-depth empirical studies to contextualise the TM research agenda in line with LMs involvement within different national and industrial contexts (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen 2016; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Kravariti et al., 2022; Cooke 2018). For example, there is a lack of knowledge around LMs' involvement in various TM elements via HRM (e.g. Gollan et al., 2015), their involvement in single TM practice, e.g. - talent identification (e.g. Blanco and Golik 2021; Kotlyar 2018; García-Carbonell et al., 2015), and how they mediate talent performance (e.g. Kravariti et al., 2022). In addition, there is limited research on TM in the banking sector (e.g. Alruwaili, 2018), or TM in the Malawian context (e.g. Jamu, 2017; Dzimbiri and Molefakgotla 2021). Studies that have been conducted do not provide a holistic understanding of the topic, mainly due to, (1) their focus on LMs' involvement in HRM decentralisation (Gollan et al., 2015), and (2) their focus on a single TM practice (e.g. talent identification) which limits our insight on whether the extent of involvement is the same across TM practices or varies from one practice to another (Blanco and Golik 2021). Excluding the work of Hirsh (2015), who attempted to account for the extent of LMs' involvement in TM, prominent research lacks in examining the extent to which LMs are involved in TM (CIPD 2016; Vokted 2019; Bratton and Watson 2018). This is because relevant research on TM in the banking sector has focused on other aspects than LMs (Racolța-Paina and Bucur 2019), coupled with the majority of research studies conducted in Europe, Asia, and limited parts of Africa, all contextually different from Malawi. Thus, following Jamu's (2017) work on TM in Malawian universities and Dzimbiri and Molefakgotla's (2021) on the Malawian health sector, this study explores the involvement of LMs in TM in the banking sector, looking specifically at the Case Study Organisation. To attain the aim, the study is guided by the following two

research questions, (1) how is talent understood and managed through the lenses of TM philosophy? (2) How are LMs involved in TM?

3.0 The Case Study Organisation's context

The Case Study Organisation is a non-profit, state-owned organisation entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the price and financial stability of the country. Like other state-owned banks around the world, pursuing their mandate includes supervising the banking sector which is one of the most demanding and challenging sectors (RBM2018). Unlike manufacturing and other service sectors, the banking sector is very challenging due to the fierce competition that forces banks to continually engage in ICT enabled innovation to create differentiated products (e.g. digital banking). This ultimately intensifies the dynamism of the sector (Soto 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2014:133; Copper *et al.*, 2019; Kirsch and Wailes 2012; Mofokeng 2018:453; Wang *et al.*, 2014;133). Consequently, the sector experiences an ever-increasing demand for resilient, trustworthy, agile, and adaptable talent who can leverage technology to adapt banks to the sector's dynamics (Cooke *et al.*, 2019; NBGL 2018:2; Mofokeng 2018:453). Yet, due to the intense competition for skilled workers and coupled with the lack of talent in the industry, talent is very difficult to attract and retain (NBGL 2018; Mutasa 2019:2). The situation is exasperated with state-owned banks like the Case Study Organisation whose nature of the jobs demands unique talents, for instance, financial-supervision talents that are not locally available and may not be attracted by available remuneration (Menzela 2009:7). Thus, understanding how LMs are involved in TM would be important to address the challenges as LMs are one of the key TM stakeholders in the Case Study Organisation.

4.0 Literature review

4.1. Understanding the term talent

A notable shortfall of talent is a lack of clarity (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013:290). This is evidenced by the existence of multiple definitions with different connotations. (Berger and Berger 2011:4; Iles 2013). While some scholars have bemoaned the lack of a universal definition of talent, others nevertheless failed to recognise the need for a clear and consistent definition (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013; Williams 2000:34), as the lack of a universal definition of talent provides an opportunity to organization to formulate their meaning of what talent is rather than accepting universal or prescribed definitions (Tansley 2011:270).

Therefore, different organisations define talent differently since the term is heavily influenced by the nature of its business, industry, and context (CIPD 2007; Tansley 2011:270). Yet, the way talent is understood determines the TM approach adopted by organisations (Turner *et al.*, 2016:58). Thus, the subsequent section provides an understanding of the TM approach.

4.1.1 Understanding the term talent management (TM)

TM refers to a “systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent employees and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation” (Collings and Mellahi 2009:304). While the definition is discredited for its failure to consider environmental labour changes, nonetheless, it is strategically focused and comprehensive (Cappelli 1999; Cascio and Boudreau 2016). This is because it builds on earlier influential TM perspectives/approaches developed by prominent scholars (Collings and Mellahi 2009:305; Lewis and Heckman 2006; Boudreau and Ramstad:2005).

First, Lewis and Heckman (2006) through a wide-ranging review of some TM definitions, identified three TM perspectives that organisations used to manage talent. The first perspective equated TM to traditional HRM in which all employees were considered talented and managed the same (Cooke *et al.*, 2014). While the perspective is well known for promoting fairness and equality among employees, nonetheless, the perspective is discredited for its failure to distinguish itself from traditional HRM (Iles *et al.*, 2010:127). In contrast, the second perspective regards TM as a talent pool that “focuses on projecting employee/staffing needs and managing the progression of employees through positions” (Lewis and Heckman, 2006:140). The perspective assumes that the organisation is aware of its future needs and all it ought to do is to devise a plan that guides the provision of those needs (Cooke *et al.*, 2014:256). The third perspective focuses on talented people where “high performers, high potential employees, average and underperformers are classified into A, B and C players” categories, respectively (Lewis and Heckman 2006:141; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014).

Boudreau and Ramstad (2005:129) further identified talent as “talent pools (e.g jobs, roles or competencies) whose availability would make the biggest difference to the organisation’s success”. Thus, to improve the definition, Collings and Mellahi (2009) came up with a fourth perspective for TM known as the identification of critical positions. The perspective involves the systematic identification of critical positions, followed by the identification of potential people to fill the positions and the deployment of differentiated management practices designed to attract, retain, and develop them (Huselid *et al.*, 2005; Sparrow and Makram 2015:253; Mellahi and Collings 2010:145). While the perspective is discredited for creating inequality among employees, nonetheless, it is credited for its ability to contribute to organisational competitive advantage (Huselid *et al.*, 2005:2; Mellahi and Collings 2010:145). Yet, literature claim that there is another TM approach called the hybrid TM approach which combines exclusive and inclusive TM approaches (Stahl *et al.*,2012; Turner *et al.*, 2016).

4.2 Line managers’ involvement in TM

According to CIPD (2019:1), LMs are defined as “those managers to whom individual employees or teams directly report and who have the responsibility to a higher level of management for those employees or teams.” LMs are involved in TM through the following practices, talent acquisition and identification, talent development, performance management, merit payment, and TM expertise (Kotlyar 2018; García- Carbonell *et al.*, 2015; Cascon-Pereira *et al.*, 2006; Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014; Lopez-Cotarelo 2018; Gautam and Davis; 2007; Brewster *et al.*, 2015; Budhwar 2000a; Hutchinson and Purcell 2010:364).

4.2.1. Talent acquisition and identification

Regarding talent acquisition practice, the literature indicates that LMs were involved in operational tasks such as formulating job descriptions and shortlisting applicants (Hutchinson and Purcell 2010:364). In addition, LMs continuously monitored employees’ performance and appraised employees whose results provided input to the talent identification process (Bratton and Watson 2018:65; Adebola 2017:178; Yarnall, 2011:516). Yet some studies found that LMs had primary responsibility for talent acquisition and identification decision-making process (Lopez-Cotarelo 2018:266; Gautam and Davis; 2007:20; Brewster *et al.*, 2015:586; Budhwar 2000b:293; Hutchinson and Purcell 2010:364). In contrast, some studies found that LMs jointly

shared talent acquisition decisions with HRM specialists but LMs held primary responsibility in decision making (Budhwar 2000b:293; Gautam and Davis 2007:20; Hall and Torrington 1998:49). Other studies found that LMs jointly shared talent acquisition decisions with HRM specialists, however, primary responsibility was held by HRM specialists (Watson et al 2007; Hall and Torrington 1998:49; Gautam and Davis 2007:20; Budhwar 2000b:293). Last, some studies found that LMs were completely left out of talent acquisition decisions (Gautam and Davis 2007:20; Budhwar 2000b:293; Hall and Torrington 1998:49). In light of the above, it can be deduced that there are mixed results on LMs' involvement in talent acquisition and identification.

4.2.2. Talent development

Regarding talent development practice, literature revealed that LMs' involvement in talent development was limited to tasks and responsibilities, and decision making (Cascon-Pereira *et al* 2006). About the former, LMs' undertook training needs analysis (TNA), supported learning and development through facilitating sharing of knowledge amongst employees, facilitated job rotation to enhance employees' work experience, undertook secondment, initiated talent development policies, and coached staff (Macneil 2001; Šiugždinienė 2008:34; Fitzgerald 2014; CIPD 2007; Gibb 2003:283; Hutchinson and Purcell 2010:364; CIPD 2019:4). Concerning the latter, LMs' had sole responsibility for talent development decision-making (Budhwar 2000b:293; Hall and Torrington 1998:49; Staunton 2014:94). In contrast, other studies found that LMs' jointly shared talent development decision-making with HRM specialists but held primary responsibility in decision making (Gautam and Davis 2007:20; Torrington and Hall 1998:49; Budhwar 2000b:293). Some studies found that LMs jointly shared responsibility with HRM specialists in talent development decisions making but the primary responsibility for decision-making was held by HRM specialists (Budhwar 2000b:293; Gautam and Davis 2007:20). Finally, LMs never participated in talent development (Budhwar 2000b:293; Hall and Torrington 1998:49). Overall, the review uncovered mixed findings on the involvement of LMs in talent development.

4.2.3. Performance Management

The literature presents mixed results of LMs' involvement in performance management. The first set of studies found that the involvement of LMs in performance management was limited to performance management tasks and responsibilities levels (Cascon-Pereira *et al.*, 2006; Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014). For instance, LMs were involved in setting performance targets, continuously monitoring employees' performance progress, and providing performance feedback to employees (Bratton and Watson 2018:65; Hutchinson and Purcell 2010:364; CIPD 2019:4). In contrast, some studies found that LMs undertook performance appraisals and had primary responsibility for performance appraisals' decisions (Hall and Torrington 1998:49; Mansor *et al.*, 2011:2342). Some studies found that LMs jointly shared decision making on performance appraisals with HRM specialists but LMs had primary responsibility for decision making (Watson *et al.* 2007; Keegan *et al.*, 2012). In contrast, some studies found that LMs jointly shared performance appraisals' decision-making with HRM, but HRM held primary responsibility (Valverde *et al.* 2006:627; Hall and Torrington 1998:49). Overall, the review uncovered mixed findings on the involvement of LMs in performance management.

4.2.4. TM expertise

Studies revealed that LMs encountered capacity challenges to perform TM tasks effectively (Trullen *et al.*, 2020). Consistent with the claim Mansor *et al.* (2011:2350) suggested that such problems could be overcome by capacitating LMs with TM expertise as evidenced by the claim in his study that LMs training empowered them to undertake talent development responsibilities effectively. Several studies established LMs' involvement in the acquisition of TM expertise (Golik *et al.*, 2018; Trullen *et al.*, 2016:456). Yet, the progress on LMs' involvement in the acquisition of TM expertise has not been promising as typified by research findings that LMs were either provided with inadequate TM training or were completely denied the opportunity of TM training (Hutchinson and Purcell 2010:367; Cunningham *et al.*, 2004:284; Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014).

4.2.5. Merit payment

The literature presents mixed results of LMs' involvement in merit payment. Budhwar (2000b:293) found that LMs had sole responsibility for reward decisions in 14.3% of the sampled companies. In contrast, some studies found that LMs shared decision-making responsibility with other stakeholders such as HRM specialists, yet primary responsibility was held by HRM specialists (Nik Mat 2014:117; Hutchinson and Purcell 2010:363; Budhwar 2000b:293). Yet, some studies found that LMs were completely left out of the merit-payment decision-making process (Evans 2015:466; Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014:155; Budhwar 2000b:293). Finally, Budhwar (2000:293) found that LMs shared decision-making responsibility on rewards with HRM specialists, yet LMs held primary responsibility for decision-making in 11% of the sampled companies.

4.3. Literature review summary and gap

The literature review exercise looked at talent definitions and TM perspectives. In addition, the review unearthed mixed findings on LMs' involvement in TM practices. The first set of studies found that LMs were involved in the operational tasks of TM practices. In terms of coverage, the results indicate that LMs were more involved since they performed several operational tasks in several TM practices. Yet, in terms of depth, LMs were less involved since their involvement was limited to operational rather than decision-making (Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014; Cascon-Pereira et al 2006; Budhwar 2000b). The second set of studies found that LMs alone made decisions in TM. In terms of depth, this entailed that LMs were heavily involved as they had decision-making authority (Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014; Cascon-Pereira *et al.*, 2006; Budhwar 2000). The third set of studies found that LMs shared decision-making responsibility with HRD, and LMs held primary responsibility for decision-making. In terms of depth of involvement, this entailed that LMs were more involved in TM as they had the final say on TM decisions. The fourth set of studies found that LMs shared decision-making responsibility with HRD in which HRD had primary responsibility in decision making. This entailed that LMs were moderately involved as they were partially involved in the decision-making process through either proposing for decision or being consulted whenever a decision was made (Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014; Cascon-Pereira *et al.*, 2006; Budhwar 2000). Finally, some studies found that LMs were completely left out of the decision-making process. Thus, if one was to map the literature findings on the continuum where at one end the LMs own decision-making and at the other end, the LMs do not own the decision-making and the

middle has shared responsibility, one would be tempted to extrapolate that the LMs' involvement across TM practices lagged in as far as owning decision-making in TM practices is concerned as very few studies found LMs making TM decisions alone, or having primary responsibility on decision making where the responsibility was shared with HRD. Most studies found that LMs were involved in operational TM tasks. Nevertheless, such a deduction would be premature and susceptible to criticism as it is based on an incomplete examination of the whole phenomenon. First, this is because the findings were derived mostly from studies that focused purely on HRM which was guided by egalitarian principles, and not TM which is guided mostly by the doctrine of exclusivity. Second, most of the relevant TM studies focused on single TM practice thereby making it difficult to appreciate whether their level of involvement could be the same across the practices or vary from one practice to another. Third, most studies were conducted in the USA, Europe, and Asia, the Middle East, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa and focused on private and multinational organisations, and very few on Africa and the banking sector (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen 2016:40; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013:1745; Anlesinya *et al.*, 2019). Third, most TM studies are conceptual (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013:1748). Thus, TM research has lagged in offering TM solutions to organizations, especially within different national and industrial contexts (Thunissen 2016:57; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2020). Consistent with the above observations and cognisant of the fact that "TM is not a one size fits all" issue, scholars called for more empirical contextualised research specifically focusing on the LMs' involvement in TM in a state-owned organisation in Africa (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen 2016; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2020; Kravariti *et al.*, 2022; Anlesinya *et al.* 2019). Thus, the study intends to fill the gap in question. Three key research questions guided the study, (1) how is talent understood and managed through TM philosophy lenses? (2) How are LMs involved in TM?

5.0 Research Methodology

Consistent with the nature of the study whose central research questions are "how" and "which" aimed for an in-depth examination of LMs' involvement in TM, the study followed a pragmatic research philosophy (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Bonneton *et al.*, 2020; Samuelson and Martea 2020). The study adopted an *embedded single* case study because of its capability to facilitate an in-depth examination of the LMs' involvement in TM by analysing sub-units of analysis (e.g., varied levels of employees - LMs, Senior Management, HRD staff, other staff, and Staff Representative Council) within the main analysis unit - the Case Study Organisation (Bonneton *et al.*, 2020; Whelan *et al.*, 2010; Robson and McCartan 2016). While

acknowledging the criticisms of an embedded single case study for lack of generalisation and breadth, (Renwick 2003; MacLeod and Pennell, 1993: 536; Crowe *et al.*, 2011; Stake 1995), it should be emphasized that the present study was not aimed at attaining generalisation or breadth, rather, it was aimed for an in-depth understanding of key stakeholders understanding of TM implementation through the lenses of LMs within their particular context-the Case Study Organisation context. (Yin 2014, Gustafsson 2017; Bryman 2004; Renwick 2003; Kelliher, 2005: 123; Evans 2017; Tyskobo 2019). The study thus responds to the call by Cooke (2018:11) for single case studies on HRM. Besides, in response to the request by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, (2020:463) on multi-stakeholder perspectives studies of LMs' involvement in TM, qualitative data was collected through in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews with forty-seven (47) key stakeholders at varying levels who were sampled using non-probability and quota sampling techniques (Whysall *et al.*, 2019:120; Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Using the NVIVO software, the collected data were subjected to a reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun and Clarke 2021:4; Creswell 2009:186; Rossman and Rallis 2017:450; Bryman 2012:68; Maguire and Delahunt 2017:3354). Based on the research questions, two themes were generated namely, (1) management of talents using hybrid TM philosophy, and (2) LMs' initiated, proposed, implemented TM decisions and acquired TM expertise. The subsequent sections provide research findings by unwrapping the themes.

4.0 [Findings](#)

4.1 [Theme 1: Managing talents using hybrid TM philosophy.](#)

The study unearthed eleven (11) diverse perspectives on talent definition. Yet, further analysis revealed two perspectives on talent definitions namely, (1) talent as attributes staff possessed as stated by participant SP10 *"I look at talent as skills and also experience that someone has"* (SP10), and (2) talent as elite staff whose performance is exceptional and have potential to excel in higher positions in future as defined in the following excerpts *"those people who really work hard to add significant value to the bank's operations...the way they work and the way they achieve the bank's objectives"* (LM18), and *"talent refers to certain employees that have certain potential"* (SP3).

The study found that the Case Study Organisation managed its talent using a hybrid TM approach comprising an exclusive strategic position and inclusive self-initiated training. The former was manifested in special treatment accorded to employees in the position of supervisor, manager, director, and executive manager vis-à-vis employees below supervisor positions. For instance, the Case Study Organisation managed employees in strategic positions using differentiated TM practices such as (1) 360 degrees performance management system and (2) devoted more resources (e.g. huge salaries, large housing loan entitlements, and free cars) towards retention initiatives and (3) and subjected the employees to specialised supervisory and leadership development programme (LDP) programmes as stated below,

“There are several types of training and there are certain training programmes like supervisory and leadership training programmes. These are intended to train employees on how to manage their staff and its only provided to people who have the responsibility of looking after other staff and like supervisors, managers and executive management” (HRD1)

The latter was manifested in the self-initiated capacity-building programme which supported employees wishing to advance their career aspirations. The programme was open to all employees and was not linked to talent development needs analysis (TNA) results. Yet, employees were only allowed to pursue a course relevant to their work and to pass exams on the first attempt. Thus, the Case Study Organisation provided all the support (e.g. financial and time off to attend classes, etc) until the employee completed the programme. The programme had a significant impact on employees’ career aspirations particularly those below supervisory positions as it enabled them to be promoted to pivotal positions. The programme enabled employees to attain relevant qualifications which were one of the promotions eligibility criteria besides experience and performance.

4.2 Theme 2: LMs initiated, proposed, implemented TM decisions, and acquired TM expertise

4.2.1 Talent acquisition and identification

The study found that the Case Study Organisation deployed recruitment and promotion practices to acquire and identify talents from external and internal markets, respectively, to fill its key vacancies. Additionally, the study found that LMs initiated the process by identifying the vacancies as claimed by (SM1),

“Like in my department, line managers are the ones who identifies gaps in their divisions, the gaps that are supposed to be filled” (SMD1),

drawing job description, and formulating interview questions as evidenced in the extract below,

“Thereafter, they are involved in making job descriptions, making interview questions and interviewing the candidates with other people during interviews” (SP13).

Besides initiating talent acquisition, LMs proposed decisions in both talent acquisition and identification. In the former, LMs participated in talent selection interviews and recommended successful candidates for employment as claimed by LM15 *“as a manager, I was involved in the recruitment process we... participate in the interview”* (LM15). In the latter, LMs recommended employees for promotion into key positions as stated in the extract below,

“most of the promotions in the bank the way they have been done is that recommendations come from the managers, they look at the team and then make recommendations to Director and HR and then HR does promotions, so the role mainly is to make the recommendations” (SP2)

The criteria that guided LMs to identify potential staff for promotion comprised three factors namely, experience in the Case Study Organisation, performance, and relevant qualifications. Yet, the extent of the impact of the factors on the outcome varied from one factor to another with experience having the most impact compared to performance and qualification as observed by LM19 below,

“Very interesting if you may ask me in terms of promotion, what I have seen promotions in the bank are done looking on to the years of service, not necessarily that a person has a higher qualification or the person is a high performer” (SP12).

4.2.2 Talent development

The Case Study Organisation developed its talent using a hybrid talent development approach consisting of inclusive and exclusive key role talent development approaches. Consistent with the hybrid talent development approach, the study found that LMs initiated the process by undertaking TNA for inclusive short-term specialised, inclusive generic, and exclusive long-term talent development programmes as evidenced by OF1,

“So, in that process the departmental managers assist us with finding the areas that need to be trained. So, line managers actually check on individual basis what their needs are and helping each one according to his training need (OF1).”

Additionally, LMs endorsed applications for an inclusive self-initiated talent development programme for staff wishing to advance their careers through pursuing professional studies under the Case Study Organisation’ full sponsorship,

“Ok, I remember when I wanted to start my advanced diploma programme, I wrote a memo to the director of HR requesting for the bank’s support and my manager had to endorse it before it was submitted to the DHR. The manager did his own assessment like if the programme I wanted to do will benefit our currency management department and in my case he was convinced that the programme would assist the department.” (OF2).

Guided by *“the results of the training needs analysis, the manager recommends the list of names for training to the director”* (OF4). Yet, for inclusive short-term specialised, some LMs deviated from the policy as they nominated staff to travel and not to address a training need. This was attributed to a limited talent development budget which led HRD directing departments to prioritise training needs for people who had never attended training in the previous year. With the allocated budget, not even covering the critical training needs, some LMs used the budget to motivate people through travel even though they had no training needs.

Besides TNA, seniority and years of service were used to nominate employees for a long-term programme. Yet, seniority had more impact on the outcome compared to the other two factors.

Once approvals were granted, LMs implemented the decisions by ensuring *“that people have attended their training programmes”* (LM18), and *“provide support to officers who would like to advance their career by attending day release programmes using the Banks’ self-initiated programme”* (SP13).

Finally, LMs acquired TM expertise through attending a leadership development programme that was exclusively targeted at employees in key positions as one of their roles involved leading. When participants were asked if the Case Study Organisation had any programme that equipped LMs with TM skills, all stakeholders responded,

“Yes, there is a programme that trains supervisors, managers and senior managers on leadership skills and it is called leadership development programme” (LM18)

There were mixed perceptions of the programme's effectiveness. Some participants felt that the programme was inadequate because the Bank had replaced the initial service provider who was considered very knowledgeable with another consultant whom participants were skeptical of his capability.

"Of course I know after Redpoint they tried to engage MIM to continue what Redpoint used to do but they failed... However, comparing Red point and the other one, we miss Redpoint"
(LM13)

Yet, some participants felt that the programme was adequate since they observed positive transformations manifested in the way some LMs managed talent after attending the programme.

"It helped so much, I remember one of the managers shared part of the program called emotional intelligence and how you manage it. I actually saw change in this manager" (OF5).

5.0 Discussions and conclusion

The study examined the involvement of LMs in TM in the Case Study Organisation. Consistent with the aim, the study was guided by two research questions, (1) how is talent understood and managed through the lenses of TM philosophy? (2) How are LMs' involved in TM? Concerning the former, the study found twelve diverse perspectives of talent (Sparrow *et al.*, 2011:11), whose further analysis resulted in two perspectives namely, (1) talent as attributes people possessed (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013:293), and (2) talent as elite people whose performance was outstanding and had potential to work in higher positions (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013:295). In addition, the study found that the Case Study Organisation used a hybrid TM philosophy comprising exclusive strategic position TM philosophy and inclusive self-initiated talent development TM philosophy to manage the varied talents. The former TM philosophy relates to the exclusive strategic management of pivotal positions (Collings and Mellahi 3009:305). The latter TM philosophy relates to inclusive TM philosophy (Buckingham and Vosburgh 2001:22; Cooke *et al.*, 2014:230). Finally, the finding confirms several studies that found a hybrid TM philosophy (Stahl *et al.*, 2012:26; Glenn 2012).

Regarding the latter (e.g. how are LMs involved in TM?) the study found that LMs were involved in TM practices such as talent acquisition and identification, talent development, performance management, merit payment, and acquisition of TM expertise. There were three levels of LMs' involvement in these practices. First, LMs' initiated TM processes. For instance, in talent acquisition, LMs initiated the process by identifying vacancies, drawing job

descriptions, and formulating interview questions. The finding mirrors Hutchinson and Purcell (2010:364) whose study found the involvement of LMs in similar activities. Equally, in talent development, LMs initiated a talent development programme by undertaking TNA. Thus, the finding confirms work by the CIPD (2019) and Golik *et al.*, (2018:237). Likewise, LMs initiated the self-initiated talent development programme by endorsing applications for the programme (Turner 2018:324; Hirsh 2015:3). Second, LMs implemented TM decisions. For example, in talent development, LMs implemented decisions by ensuring that employees approved for the talent development programme attended the training. Thus, the initiation of TM processes, and implementation of TM decisions, entailed that LMs were more involved in operational tasks and less involved in decision-making as all the tasks mentioned had nothing to do with decision making (Cascon-Pereira *et al.*, 2006; Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014; Budhwar 2000b).

Third, LMs proposed TM decisions. First, in talent acquisition, LMs' participation in selection interviews allowed them to be part of the panel that recommended successful candidates for employment. While the finding conflicts with Brewster (2015:586) whose study found that LMs had decision-making authority on talent acquisition, nonetheless, the finding confirms Blayney *et al.*, (2020:457) who found that LMs participated in the selection interview process with other panelists. Additionally, in talent identification, LMs proposed employees for promotion into key positions. This is in line with several scholars whose studies found that LMs recommended employees into the talent pools (Cadigan *et al.*, 2020:186; Jokhio 2018:195; Adebola 2017:178). Similarly, in talent development, LMs nominated employees for training. Similar findings were reported by CIPD (2019) and Golik *et al.*, (2018:237). Likewise, LMs appraised employees whose scores were submitted to executive management for approval. Finally, LMs proposed merit pay through the performance scores which after being approved were used to determine merit payment. Similarly, Nik Mat (2014:117) found that LMs proposed merit payments for their subordinates. In terms of depth, this entailed that LMs were moderately involved in TM since they partly participated in decision-making by making recommendations that formed the basis for executive management approval (Cascon-Pereira *et al.*, 2006; Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014; Budhwar 2000).

Finally, LMs acquired TM expertise through attending an LDP. A similar finding was reported by Kotlyar (2018:690) whose study found that LMs were subjected to TM training. While the finding confirms the acquisition of TM expertise through LDP, the extent of LMs acquisition of TM expertise situates between sufficient and insufficient ends of the continuum as there were

mixed reviews of its adequacy (Cascon-Pereira et al 2006; Cascon-Pereira and Valverde 2014; Budhwar 2000b).

Overall, in terms of coverage, LMs were more involved in TM practices as they were involved in several TM practices and operational tasks. Additionally, the number of operational tasks per TM practice that LMs were involved in varied from practice to practice with talent development topping the list and merit payment the least. Yet, in terms of depth, LMs' involvement in the entire TM programme was moderate as their involvement was limited to proposing decisions. There was no variation in the level of LMs' involvement across TM practices as their depth of involvement was limited to proposing decisions. This is a very important finding as it responds to calls by several scholars for a study on LMs' involvement in TM (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen 2016; Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2020; Kravariti *et al.*, 2022; Anlesinya et al 2019). By adopting an embedded single case study, and involving multi-stakeholders, the study responds to the call by Cooke (2018:11) and Cooke *et al.*, (2022) for single case studies on HRM, and the call by Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, (2020:463) for multi-stakeholder perspectives studies on LMs involvement in TM, respectively. Yet, the study was carried out in a single case, the Case Study Organisation, thus, the findings are limited to the Case Study Organisation. In the future, studies should look at the impact of low leadership independence on LMs' involvement in a single TM practice (e.g. talent acquisition, talent development).

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