Dries, N., Van Acker, F., Verbruggen, M. (2012). How 'boundaryless' are the careers of high potentials, key experts and average performers? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 81 (2), 271-279.

Abstract

The talent management literature declares talent management a prime concern for HRM professionals while the careers literature calls talent management archaic. Three sets of assumptions identified through comparative review of both streams of the literature were tested in a large-scale survey ($n = 941$). We found more support for the assumptions advocated in the talent management literature. Those who organizations consider their 'best' people are more often found in traditional-organizational careers – both in terms of employer inducements and employee attitudes. Traditional-organizational careers yield more career satisfaction than careers displaying more boundaryless features. Individuals' career types are mostly determined by supervisor-rated performance, much more so than by personal career orientation.

Keywords. New careers; Boundaryless careers; Talent management; High potentials; Expert careers; Career orientation; Career satisfaction.

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How 'Boundaryless' are the Careers of High Potentials, Key Experts and Average Performers?

Talent management is the differential management of employees based on their relative potential to contribute to the competitive advantage of their organizations (Lepak & Snell, 1999). It is often described in the management literature as “a strategic imperative” (Ashton & Morton, 2005, p. 28). In contrast, voices in the careers literature label it “at best an anachronism, and at worst a false promise used to keep valuable employees in organizations” (Baruch & Peiperl, 1997, p. 356). The contemporary careers literature emphasizes the untenability of the traditional-organizational career based on the fact that organizations can no longer promise long-term employment to employees, let alone a rapid progression along the organizational ladder (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan, 1999). As a result, the premise that hard work and the display of exceptional talent will be rewarded by steady upward advancement is said to be undermined (Baruch & Peiperl, 1997). Simultaneously, however, the current demographic situation (characterized by skills shortages in the labor market due to lower birth rates, a larger relative percentage of older employees, and large-scale retirements) along with changes in the psychological contract between employers and employees that imply decreased loyalty (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993) are causing organizations to *more than ever* focus on talent management as a strategic tool for attracting and retaining valuable employees (Silzer & Dowell, 2010).

So which is closer to the truth? Should talent management be buried alongside the traditional-organizational career? Or can talent management (still) offer added value to organizations and individual career actors alike? Considering the degree of interest in both ‘new’ careers and talent management, surprisingly few empirical studies on these topics are found in the literature. Several authors have argued that careers researchers need to study actual facts about modern-day careers rather than develop new dogmas (Arnold & Cohen,

2008). The current paper aims to integrate the careers and the talent management literature by empirically testing some of their contradicting assumptions.

Assumptions Advocated in the ‘New’ Careers Literature

The contemporary careers literature seems to advocate three general assumptions about careers, that lie at the heart of the hypotheses in the current study: first, that the best people nowadays are in ‘boundaryless’ careers (Sullivan, 1999); second, that boundaryless careers are generally more satisfying (e.g. Baruch & Peiperl, 1997; Tulgan, 2001); and third, that careers are increasingly self-directed and guided by people’s personal career orientations (e.g. Forrier, Sels & Stynen, 2009). However mainstream the notion of the boundaryless career may have become in the ‘new’ careers literature, a number of recent studies conclude that it may not be completely attuned to the experiences career scholars and actors are (still) having in the field.

First of all, although there is little discussion over the fact that opportunities to pursue a stable, single-employer career are, indeed, in decline (Arnold & Cohen, 2008), the current literature may overestimate the changes that have been taking place, particularly about the capacity of individual employees to enact their careers as ‘free agents’ (Tulgan, 2001). A volume of studies examining the career mobility of employees from all over the world across organizational, functional, and geographical boundaries have concluded that, on average, boundaryless careers are still quite rare, even among highly employable people (Vandenbrande, Coppin & van den Hallen, 2006; Verbruggen, Sels & Forrier, 2007). Second, although the boundaryless career literature enthusiastically promotes the benefits of boundaryless careers, its discourse may be potentially harmful for weaker employee groups (Van Buren, 2003). Especially more vulnerable employee groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and poorly educated people have experienced disproportionate declines in job stability in recent years (Sullivan, 1999). Furthermore, studies looking into the determinants

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of career satisfaction in the 'new' career climate have concluded that traditional career inducements such as promotions, pay raises, job security provided by the organization, and mutual employee-employer loyalty are still preferred by a majority of employees (e.g. Walton & Mallon, 2004). Third, studies looking into the motivators of boundarylessness have found that, when cross-boundary moves *are* made, they are often determined by organizational or labor market determinants, rather than by career orientation (Forrier *et al.*, 2009).

Assumptions Advocated in the Talent Management Literature

Along with the proclaimed death of the traditional-organizational career, organizational talent management has been said to be outdated and out of touch with the current-day needs of organizations and individual career actors (Baruch & Peiperl, 1997). However, there is a huge gap between the positions taken in the careers literature with regard to talent management, and those taken in the management literature. In fact, ever since Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod (2001) coined the expression 'war for talent', there has been a linear increase in the popularity of talent management as a concept, both among academics and practitioners (Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Where the careers literature identifies a demand-supply gap in terms of career *opportunities*, the talent management literature assumes a gap in terms of potential career *incumbents* (Tucker, Kao & Verma, 2005).

What is more, several authors (see Van Buren, 2003) have identified a growing bifurcation of the labor market between those who are in a position to benefit from the current-day career environment and those who are not. Those employees who are still in a position to receive traditional career opportunities (i.e. job security and upward advancement possibilities) are also those who are most competent, well-educated and (externally) employable. Although the contemporary careers literature typically assumes that the best employees are acting like free agents (Tulgan, 2001), the opposite seems to be true. Rather

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than being free agents, the best employees are those to whom organizations still offer internal career opportunities – which, in general, they gladly accept.

At the heart of the talent management literature lies the notion of ‘workforce segmentation’, prescribing different career management strategies for employees from different talent categories. Lepak and Snell (1999), for instance, recommend that organizations adopt commitment-based HR strategies for employees with high strategic value and uniqueness – measured by performance indicators aligned with strategic targets (rather than intangible indicators of potential like career orientation; see Derr, 1986). As a rule, this applies to high-performing employees with high leadership potential (usually called ‘high potentials’) (Cope, 1998), or pivotal technical expertise (‘key experts’) (Rothwell & Poduch, 2004). Conversely, market-based (transactional) career management strategies are recommended for more expendable employees, i.e. the ‘average performers’ in the organization (Lepak & Snell, 1999). This approach implicitly assumes that organizational careers characterized by steady upward movement are still the most desirable type of career.

The talent management literature thus yields assumptions directly opposite to those in the careers literature – first, that traditional-organizational careers are more and more ‘reserved’ for those who organizations consider their best people; second, that traditional-organizational careers are still considered most satisfying by employees; and third, that careers are largely determined by organizational assessments of a person’s added value.

Insert Figure 1 around here

Hypotheses

The ‘new’ careers literature (e.g. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) has identified the following employer inducements and employee attitudes as being characteristic of the traditional-organizational career: high job security offered by the employing organization (hypothesis 1); a high degree of organizational support (hypothesis 2); regular upward promotions

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(hypothesis 3); regular pay raises (hypothesis 4); and high organizational loyalty (hypothesis 5) and commitment from the side of the employee (hypothesis 6). Based on our review of the literature on labor market bifurcation (Dries, 2011; Van Buren, 2003), psychological contracts (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993), and talent management (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Rothwell & Poduch, 2004), we hypothesize that the careers of the high potentials and key experts in our sample (two privileged groups in terms of talent management) (Cope, 1998) will demonstrate more features of the traditional-organizational career than those of the average performers (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, based on the literature on the determinants of career satisfaction (e.g. Walton & Mallon, 2004), we hypothesize an effect of organization-assigned talent category on overall career satisfaction (hypothesis 7). More specifically, we expect that high potentials and key experts will be more satisfied with their careers than average performers. We do not expect to find a *direct* relationship between organization-assigned talent category and career satisfaction, however; rather, we hypothesize that the relationship between them will be fully mediated by the employer inducements and employee attitudes associated with the different talent categories (as stated in hypothesis 1 through 6).

Finally, based on the literature on the identification of talent in organizations (e.g. Cope, 1998), we expect that the most important prerequisite for being identified as a high potential or a key expert will be supervisor-rated performance, rather than career orientation – job performance being the main indicator of employee contribution used by organizations (Dries & Pepermans, 2008) (hypothesis 8).

Method

Procedure and Sample

Data for this study were collected by an online survey, as part of a broader Belgian research initiative addressing current issues in talent management. Twelve internationally

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active for-profit organizations (from the banking, insurance, business consulting, ICT, energy, and automotive sector respectively) agreed to participate in this particular lap of the project. The study had a case-control design. Employees identified as high potentials (defined as employees with exceptional leadership potential) or key experts (defined as employees with exceptional technical skills) represented the *cases* (i.e., the subsamples demonstrating the condition of interest in the study); the *control groups* were composed of matched subsamples of average performers (we specifically asked not to assign low performers to this latter group). Within each participating organization, the case groups were carefully selected by our point of contact (POC) within the HR department to be representative of the organization's high potential or key expert population, respectively. Subsequently, each case group was matched with a control group of average performers within the organization exhibiting a similar distribution in terms of gender, age, educational level, and job level (see Table 1).

Individual respondents participated in the online survey on a voluntary basis. To decrease the risk of common method variance (CMV), we administered different parts of the survey (randomly composed from the total survey) at three different points in time. Respondents were free to choose at which times they completed which section of the survey (time intervals ranged from an hour to several days). Respondents who completed the entire survey were rewarded for their participation by receiving an individual feedback report based on their responses. The study achieved an overall response rate (across organizations and talent categories) of 49%. 941 respondents completed the entire survey. Table 1 provides an overview of some relevant sample demographics.

Insert Table 1 around here

Measures

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Where possible, archival data was collected (this data was not debriefed to individual respondents); all other variables were assessed by way of self-report measures (we could not obtain access to archival salary data, for instance; as for promotion data, most organizations did not keep formal records). Unless specified otherwise, respondents were instructed to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale to which extent each item was true of them (ranging from 1 = To little or no extent to 7 = To a great extent). Cronbach's alphas (α) ranged between .80 and .90 across the three samples (see Table 2).

Archival Data

Organization-assigned talent category. Our POCs within each participating organization indicated for each of the respondents whether they had been identified as high potentials (1), key experts (2), or average performers (0). To ensure the validity of the organization-assigned talent category variable, we required that respondents had been formally assigned their label at least one year prior to survey administration. Organizations were not allowed to compose ad-hoc lists of high potentials, key experts and average performers especially for the study.

Supervisor-rated performance. Supervisor-rated performance was measured using the item "Last time this respondent received a performance rating from his or her supervisor, the overall appraisal of his or her performance was...". The POCs were instructed to respond to the item on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Not meeting expectations to 5 = Substantially exceeding expectations, based on available archival data or by consulting the supervisor in question.

Self-Report Data

Employer Inducements

Job security provided by the organization. Job security provided by the organization was measured using the 'security' scale developed by Dries, Van Loo and Pepermans (2009)

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as part of a broader scale measuring subjective career success. A sample item is “I experience stability and (job) security in my current employment situation”.

Organizational support. To measure perceived organizational support, we used the scale developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986). The measure contains eight items, a sample (reverse coded) item being “Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice”.

Promotions since entry. The number of promotions since entry was obtained by asking “How many times have you been promoted within the organization you currently work for?”. Promotions were explicitly defined as moves made up the hierarchical ladder of the organization.

Salary increase since entry. Salary increase since entry was calculated by subtracting respondents’ inflation-adjusted salary at organizational entry (i.e., “The first ever net month salary I earned in this organization equalled...”) from their current salary (i.e., “The most recent net month salary I earned in this organization equalled...”). Respondents were asked to look up the figures in their salary sheets if they could not remember them exactly. We used net month salary measures as people in most European countries tend to think of salary in these terms.

Employee Attitudes

Career orientation. Derr’s Career Success Map Questionnaire (1986) was used to measure career orientation. This scale assesses respondents’ relative preference for five different career orientations: getting ahead (i.e., a preference for upward mobility and leadership), getting secure (i.e., a preference for job and financial security), getting free (i.e., a preference for autonomy), getting balanced (i.e., a preference for work-life balance), and getting high (i.e., a preference for in-depth specialization). It presents 30 pairs of statements to respondents; for each pair, respondents have to indicate which statement is more true of

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them. A sample item pair is “I enjoy working in a situation where I am a leader and am responsible for achieving certain objectives” (getting ahead) versus “I enjoy working as an expert or ‘troubleshooter’ and being able to demonstrate my expertise in a particular area” (getting high). Respondent scores for each career orientation range from 1 to 12, in accordance with the number of times its corresponding statements were preferred over others.

Loyalty preference. To measure loyalty preference, we used the five-item scale developed by Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth (2006), which assesses the general attitude of respondents toward mutual employee-employer loyalty (i.e., without referring to their current employer specifically). A sample item is “I prefer to stay in a company I am familiar with rather than look for employment elsewhere”.

Organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was measured using the original scale developed by Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). The scale contains 15 items. A sample item is “For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work”.

Career satisfaction. To measure career satisfaction, we used the Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990) scale. The scale is made up of five items, an example being “I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals”.

Analyses

The study’s multiple mediation hypothesis (hypothesis 7) was tested using Preacher and Hayes’ SPSS macro command set. Organization-assigned talent category was recoded into two dummy variables with average performers as the reference category. Two separate analyses were performed to test whether the difference in career satisfaction between high potentials and average performers on the one hand, and key experts and average performers on the other hand could be (partially) explained by the proposed mediators (hypotheses 1 – 6). The indirect effects of talent category on career satisfaction were tested by assessing the effect of each dummy variable while controlling for the other (see Table 3). Organizational

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tenure was controlled for by entering it as a covariate. Finally, a six-predictor multinomial logistic regression model (see Table 4) was fitted to the data to test the relationship between career orientation, supervisor-rated performance and organization-assigned talent category (hypothesis 8), again using average performers as the reference category. All continuous variables were standardized in order to obtain standardized regression coefficients. Outliers were removed from the data when they were more than three standard deviations away from the mean.

Results

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations between the study variables.

Insert Tables 2 around here

Hypotheses 1 through 7 were tested using multiple mediation analysis. Table 3 reports the strength of each indirect effect and its related confidence intervals. Closer inspection reveals that significant indirect effects on career satisfaction were found only for the high potential category, and only for the mediators organizational support (hypothesis 2), promotions since entry (hypothesis 3), and organizational commitment (hypothesis 6). No significant indirect effects were found for the key experts. Furthermore, the independent-to-mediator paths for job security (hypothesis 1) and salary increase since entry (hypothesis 4) were significant both when comparing the average performers to the high potentials and the key experts (i.e., both groups report higher job security and salary increases than average performers), but the corresponding mediator-to-dependent paths were non-significant. On the whole, we found only partial support for hypotheses 1 through 6.

Insert Table 3 around here

In accordance with hypothesis 7, our analyses revealed that the direct effect of organization-assigned talent category on career satisfaction became insignificant as soon as

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the mediators were added to the model. This finding goes for the high potentials vs. average performers model ($t(388) = .13, p = .89$) as well as for the key experts vs. average performers model ($t(388) = .06, p = .55$). The mediation model as a whole explained 32% of the variance in career satisfaction ($F(9, 388) = 21.65, p < .001$).

Finally, hypothesis 8 was tested using a six-predictor multinomial logistic regression model. Table 4 summarizes the regression estimates as well as the overall model evaluation criteria, which indicate good model fit. As can be seen in Table 4, both the odds of being identified as a high potential and a key expert were positively and significantly related to supervisor-rated performance. In addition, the getting ahead career orientation was found to be a significant predictor of being identified as a high potential (odds ratio = 1.22); and the getting high orientation significantly predicted whether a respondent was assigned the key expert label or not (odds ratio = 1.10). However, in both cases the odds ratio associated with supervisor-rated performance was higher (2.46 and 1.61, respectively), indicating that – in support of hypothesis 8 – it is the more important predictor.

Insert Table 4 around here

Discussion

All in all, we found more empirical support for the assumptions advocated in the talent management literature than for those advocated in the careers literature. First, we found that both employees identified as high potentials and as key experts reported higher job security and salary increases since organizational entry than average performers. In addition, the high potentials also reported more organizational support, more promotions, and higher organizational commitment. Only for loyalty preference no differences were found between high potentials, key experts and average performers – possibly because it is a trait-like variable (see Briscoe *et al.*, 2006). Taken together, these findings indicate that employer inducements and employee attitudes associated with traditional-organizational careers are

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generally more pronounced in the careers of high potentials and (to a lesser extent) key experts, two privileged talent categories in organizations. The finding that the effects are less pronounced for the key experts is possibly explained by the fact that organizations tend to value leadership skills more than technical expertise (with the possible exception of manufacturing or high-tech firms), and therefore reward them with traditional career inducements to a greater extent (Rothwell & Poduch, 2004).

Second, our mediation model explained 32% of the variance in career satisfaction, which can be considered a large effect when comparing it to the effect sizes generally reported in the careers field (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). Overall, our findings show that employer inducements and employee attitudes associated with traditional-organizational careers – organizational support, promotions since entry, and organizational commitment in particular – are positive predictors of career satisfaction. The indirect effect of talent category on career satisfaction, again, was only significant for the high potentials in the sample, and not for the key experts (as compared to the average performers). It was fully mediated by the abovementioned mediators. In other words, it was not the organization-assigned talent category ('high potential') *in itself* that brought about a higher career satisfaction, but rather the employer inducements (higher organizational support and more internal promotions) and employee attitudes (higher organizational commitment) associated with it. These findings are in keeping with earlier publications that have found that employees in traditional-organizational careers are – generally speaking – more satisfied with their careers (e.g. Walton & Mallon, 2004), and directly oppose the assumption that boundaryless careers are seen as more satisfying by employees.

Third, we found that supervisor-rated performance was the most important predictor of talent category (and consequently, of the type of career a person is likely to be in). Being a 'high performer', according to our results, increased a person's odds of being identified as a

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high potential by 2.5, and as a key expert by 1.6. Although there was also a trend for career orientation to play a role (i.e., having a leadership orientation increased the odds of being identified as a high potential, and having an in-depth specialization orientation increased the odds of being identified as a key expert), the corresponding odds ratios were very small (approximating 1). Although this finding was in line with expectations - amongst all possible criteria for identifying high potentials and key experts, an above-average job performance is unanimously considered the most decisive factor by HR practitioners (Cope, 1998; Dries & Pepermans, 2008) – it does carry some important implications. Most notably, identifying talented employees based on performance data creates a risk of Halo bias, i.e. a process by which high performance scores are wrongfully generalized to other employee characteristics such as leadership potential or technical expertise (Balzer & Sulsky, 1992).

Limitations

A first limitation relates to the case-control design of our study. The most obvious limitation of this type of design is that it is not best suited for demonstrating causal effects. It does, however, have some advantages over regular cross-sectional and even longitudinal designs. As the prevalence of the condition of interest is typically very low in case-control studies (studies estimate that only between 1 and 5% of employees are identified as high potentials or key experts by their organizations; Dries & Pepermans, 2008), random sampling from a population would yield too few instances of the condition to allow for reliable analysis, and lead to major oversampling of the control group. Furthermore, several interventions were introduced in the design so as to reduce the risk of common method variance (CMV). First of all, different parts of the survey were administered at different points in time, and at a random sequence for each respondent. Second, archival data was collected where possible. And third, all measures were rated on their original response formats.

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Another limitation is posed by the study's sample. All organizations in our sample were large for-profit organizations; it is highly likely that smaller or 'flatter' organizations follow very different approaches to talent management, as they are characterized by vastly different career paths. Furthermore, since little to nothing is known about the size and composition of the populations of high potentials and key experts in Belgium – or in any country, for that matter – it is difficult to estimate the representativeness of our findings across organizations.

Directions for Further Research

To advance our understanding of talent management and the careers of employees assigned to different talent categories in the current career climate, longitudinal studies seem the way forward. One specific topic that has been underexamined is the reciprocal relationship between (voluntary or involuntary) boundarylessness and subjective evaluations of career. Previous publications have suggested that being assigned the high potential label can set off a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies (Dries & Pepermans, 2008). The literature on 'psychological success cycles' (see Hess, Jepsen & Dries, this issue), for instance, argues that causality can be quite difficult to demonstrate in career studies.

A second direction for further research is inspired by the relatively narrow scope of the current study with regard to its conceptualization of talent management. Clearly, talent management covers a much broader range of management practices than the mere assignment of employees to talent categories (Silzer & Dowell, 2010). There is a significant need and opportunity for more research about talent management, both qualitative (i.e., exploratory) and quantitative (i.e., inductive, confirmatory). Future research should look into the effects of organizational size, sector, structure and culture on talent management programs and their links to internal career opportunity structures.

Implications for Practice

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A first implication of the current study is that organizations should never lose sight of the fact that the assignment of employees to different talent categories is a strategic choice with important repercussions (Lepak & Snell, 1999). By labeling employees as high potentials or key experts, a 'Matthew effect' is brought about, by which privileged groups are allocated the lion share of career opportunities, causing them to land in an even better position relative to others in the organization. A possible danger is that the inequality of the system might cause negative employee reactions and perceptions of injustice (Dries & Pepermans, 2008). Furthermore, as only a minority (1 to 5%) of employees can be identified as a high potential or a key expert each year, it is clear that the risk of frustrating a large part of the organization's workforce, career-wise, is quite high. Bothner, Podolny and Smith (2011), however, advocate that by distributing career opportunities unequally, positive spillover might take place to the unprivileged talent categories, motivating them to work harder so as to become part of the in-group.

Instead of concluding from the contemporary careers literature that talent management is no longer workable (e.g. Baruch & Peiperl, 1997), the opposite conclusion may be equally valid. Rather than stating that organizations with stable, established career structures have missed out on important developments, one could argue that they are in a better position to face the 'war for talent' (Michaels *et al.*, 2001). After all, research has indicated that many young people still think in traditional career terms (Walton & Mallon, 2004). That being said, organizations must also beware not to cause 'career reification' by implicitly sending out the message that 'the best career' is the high potential (i.e. upward, elitist) career. In today's labor market characterized by structural talent shortages (Silzer & Dowell, 2010), it is more conducive to embrace and encourage a diversity of perspectives and orientations as to what a successful, desirable career might entail (Dries, 2011).

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Table 1.

Sample Demographics (n = 941)

Sample demographics	High potentials ^a %	Key experts ^b %	Average performers ^c %
Gender			
man	73	72	68
woman	27	28	32
Age			
< 26	3	4	7
26-35	43	29	40
36-45	47	41	35
> 45	7	26	18
Educational level			
high school degree	2	4	7
associate degree	7	12	20
bachelor's degree	13	17	25
master's degree	52	41	33
professional or doctoral degree	26	26	15
Job level			
non-management	16	25	31
line management	16	14	18
middle management	34	37	29
senior management	31	21	9
top management	3	4	2

Notes. % = within-group percentages; ^a n = 250; ^b n = 230; ^c n = 461; ** p < .001

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Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations between Study Variables (n = 941)

Variable	High potentials	Key experts	Average performers	1	2	3	4
	<i>m (sd)</i>	<i>m (sd)</i>	<i>m (sd)</i>				
1. Supervisor-rated performance	3.69 (0.74)	3.75 (.69)	3.50 (0.72)	--			
2. Getting ahead	5.43 (2.25)	5.30 (2.31)	5.16 (2.28)	.14**	--		
3. Getting secure	6.29 (2.26)	6.14 (2.29)	6.43 (2.35)	-.02	-.16**	--	
4. Getting free	4.47 (2.07)	4.31 (2.01)	4.49 (2.13)	-.08*	-.22**	-.31**	--
5. Getting balanced	7.68 (2.24)	7.76 (2.11)	7.72 (2.32)	-.05	-.37**	-.01	-.09*
6. Getting high	5.80 (2.12)	6.13 (2.19)	5.72 (2.14)	-.01	-.04	-.29**	-.05
7. Job security	5.24 (1.27)	5.49 (1.08)	5.01 (1.39)	.12**	.02	.09*	-.09*
8. Organizational support	4.61 (1.10)	4.58 (1.14)	4.43 (1.12)	.25**	.09*	.05	-.17**
9. Promotions since entry	2.08 (2.06)	2.29 (2.12)	1.67 (1.94)	.23**	.13**	.03	-.04
10. Salary increase since entry	1041.99 (2616.23)	1481.93 (4807.33)	773.62 (981.69)	.04	.07	.09*	-.06
11. Loyalty preference	3.35 (1.17)	3.29 (1.14)	3.46 (1.21)	-.02	-.13**	.43**	-.12**
12. Organizational commitment	4.81 (0.88)	4.82 (0.85)	4.67 (0.95)	.14**	.19**	.21**	-.31**
13. Career satisfaction	5.01 (1.03)	4.97 (1.03)	4.88 (1.12)	.24**	.03	.12**	-.15**

Notes. Salary increase since entry was reported in Euro; Cronbach's alphas were added on the main diagonal where applicable; * $p < .05$; ** $p <$

.01.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Table 2.

Continued

Variable	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Supervisor-rated performance									
2. Getting ahead									
3. Getting secure									
4. Getting free									
5. Getting balanced	--								
6. Getting high	-.25**	--							
7. Job security	.02	-.02	(.81)						
8. Organizational support	.05	-.03	.27**	(.87)					
9. Promotions since entry	-.05	-.12**	.10**	.17**	--				
10. Salary increase since entry	-.10*	-.02	.03	.03	.25**	--			
11. Loyalty preference	.02	-.19**	.03	.08	.13**	.06	(.80)		
12. Organizational commitment	-.06	-.04	.30**	.62**	.25**	.06	.32**	(.88)	
13. Career satisfaction	.06	-.04	.23**	.45**	.32**	.08*	.15**	.46**	(.90)

Notes. Salary increase since entry was reported in Euro; Cronbach's alphas were added on the main diagonal where applicable; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Table 3.

Results of the Mediation Analyses

Indirect effects	Bootstrap estimate	SE	BCa 95% CI lower	BCa 95% CI upper
High potentials vs. average performers				
Total	.40	.08	.24	.54
Job security	.02	.02	-.01	.08
Organizational support	.11	.04	.05	.20
Organizational commitment	.11	.04	.05	.20
Promotions since entry	.16	.04	.10	.26
Salary increase since entry	.00	.05	-.07	.10
Loyalty preference	-.01	.01	-.04	.00
Key experts vs. average performers				
Total	.12	.08	-.03	.27
Job security	.02	.02	-.01	.08
Organizational support	.03	.03	-.02	.11
Organizational commitment	.03	.03	-.03	.10
Promotions since entry	.04	.03	-.01	.10
Salary increase since entry	.00	.03	-.05	.06
Loyalty preference	-.01	.01	-.04	.01

Note. 1000 bootstraps were used; Indirect effects are significant when their bootstrapped bias accelerated confidence intervals do not include zero.

Table 4.

Results of the Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis

Predictor	β	$SE(\beta)$	Wald's χ^2	df	p	e^β (odds ratio)
High potentials vs. average performers						
Constant	-6.48	1.87	12.04	1	.001	-
Supervisor-rated performance	.90	.14	42.58	1	.000	2.46
Getting ahead	.20	.07	7.90	1	.003	1.22
Getting secure	.03	.07	.14	1	.714	1.03
Getting free	.12	.07	2.67	1	.102	1.12
Getting balanced	.08	.07	1.31	1	.253	1.08
Getting high	.04	.07	.34	1	.561	1.04
Key experts vs. average performers						
Constant	-2.84	1.15	6.15	1	.013	-
Supervisor-rated performance	.48	.14	12.09	1	.001	1.61
Getting ahead	.02	.05	.14	1	.704	1.02
Getting secure	-.05	.05	1.01	1	.314	.95
Getting free	-.04	.05	.47	1	.495	.96
Getting balanced	.04	.05	.59	1	.444	1.04
Getting high	.09	.05	4.43	1	.032	1.10
Overall model evaluation						
Likelihood ratio test			1390.62	12	.000	
Goodness-of-fit test						
Hosmer & Lemeshow			1362.52	1338	.310	

Note. Nagelkerke $R^2 = .12$.

Figure 1. Schematic overview of study variables and hypotheses.