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Talent Management in a Different Light

A practice-based case study on an MNC

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TALENT MANAGEMENT IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT
- A practice-based case study of an MNC

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Abstract: Talent Management (TM) is a widely used concept with several diverse meanings assigned by scholars and organizations. As a response to the absence of thorough case studies of TM in practice as well as widely spread assumptions in the TM literature, we will in this paper present a study of how TM is practiced by a multinational corporation. We approached the study, combining elements of different practice-based theories, in the framework of a qualitative case study. Major findings included the existence of gaps between the intentions of TM and how it is used in practice, but also that TM has causally positive effects for the organization. Further, we have found that TM has become a way to enhance a top-down control mechanism. The study also shows that TM is composed of some ineffective tools and that cost and benefit analyses are made in non-translatable denominations. The main implication of the results is that the financial sustainability of TM can be undermined by arbitrary assumptions.

Keywords: Activity System, Practice, Practice-based theory, Talent Management

Abbreviations:

AB	Aktiebolag, the Swedish term for 'limited company', similar to AG, Ltd or Inc
HR	Human Resources
HQ	Headquarters
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LPP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
MNC	Multinational Corporation
SVP	Senior Vice President
TM	Talent Management
VP	Vice President

Introduction

Since the second half of the last century the reality of business practices has been reshaped. Previously, machine, capital and geographical locations were considered to be the main competitive advantages for organizations (Michaels et al., 2001; Iqbal et al., 2013). Today, talent is accredited as a critical success factor for organizations and consequently the approach to talent in organizations has changed (Michaels et al., 2001). Most industries invest large amounts of resources in recruitment processes, including thorough planning, analysis, sourcing and careful selection; after this initial investment, it is then essential to follow up by motivating, developing, rewarding and retaining the acquired talent (Schweyer, 2004). Pascal (2004) states that the value of an organization corresponds to the success of talent management (TM) and the growth of human capital as an asset.

The idea to compete in terms of talent is, however, nothing new. In the seventies talent was seen as a growing competitive tool for organizations (Miner, 1977). Searching for the right person for the right position became key in creating value in an organization (Gubman, 2004). Although it was not until 1997 that McKinsey & Company coined the term 'War for talent', thus giving the ongoing phenomenon a name, the new business reality was already focused around talent: how to attract it, how to retain it, and how to maximize performance (Michaels et al, 2001).

Since the reshaping of the business reality and the coining of the term, research in the field of talent management has increased almost exponentially (Scullion & Collings, 2011). TM is now a widely used term and it has garnered an increasing amount of attention within academia and the business world. As Lewis and Heckman (2006) state, in 2004 the term resulted in 2.7 million hits in a popular online search engine. One year later, it resulted in 8 million hits. Today, in 2015, the term results in over 33 million hits on Google. Despite this growth, Lewis and Heckman (2006) go on to say that there is still no real consensus when it comes to the definition of talent management. Even though there is no unanimous definition of talent management, they identify three comprehensive perspectives or schools of thought in talent management research. The first perspective centers on traditional HR department practices, i.e. recruiting, selection, and development, as well as career and succession management. The authors argue that talent management, in this perspective, is interchangeable with HR (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; cf. Chowanec & Newstrom, 1991; Heinen & O'Neill, 2004; Olsen, 2000). The second perspective defines talent management as the processes that ensure the flow of talent throughout the organization (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; cf. Kesler, 2002; Pascal, 2004). The third perspective has a more generic approach to talent and does not take organizational boundaries or specific positions into account. Talent management in this perspective is focused on the performance of the employees and aims to either fill the whole organization with top performers, so called top grading, or alternately, ridding the company of the low performers (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; cf. Michaels, et al, 2001).

Lewis and Heckman (2006) argue that with such a vast amount of definitions, the subject has become too broad to actually make meaningful sense and has resulted in the creation of a term without value. Even if the term itself may no longer carry much value, a vast number of organizations claim to practice TM. The central aspect of talent management is widely considered to include all organizational activities that are related to the attraction, selection, development and retainment of the best people in the most strategic positions, while taking both strategic priorities and local contexts into consideration for how talent should be managed (Farndale et al., 2010). Empirically, it has been shown that talent management strategies in most high performing organizations have been centered around three directives (Berger & Berger, 2011): (1) cultivating people that make or will make the biggest contribution to the organization, now and in the future; (2) retaining key position back-ups; and (3) allocating resources related to training, rewards, education, assignments and development based on current and potential contribution of the individual.

The basic rationale behind TM is to find the right person for the job (Uren, 2007), but there is no unified definition of what talent is nor how to measure it, especially at an organizational level (Tansley, 2011; Tansley et al., 2007). Ulrich and Smallwood (2012)

argue that talent is not an abstraction, it should instead be looked at as an ability to create value if the right choices are made regarding management of talent within an organization. However, due to the abstract nature of TM it is not always possible to know what the right choices are (ibid). The ambiguous interpretation of TM is one reason why organizations often find greater value in in-house definitions of talent that are based upon behavioral aspects, knowledge, skills, competencies, and cognitive capabilities, rather than using a universal or prescribed definition (Tansley, 2011). Even with in-house definitions, geographical and organizational distance create difficulties within assessment and mobility (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). It is argued that performance is up to 70 percent context-dependent, meaning that if someone displays talent in one situation it does not guarantee that the same person will have the same success in another situation. This divergence results from the fact that ways of operating might differ between situations, which can also make the assessment biased or non-telling for other instances (ibid). Additionally, just because organizations identify and incorporate talented people in their operations, it does not mean they automatically will contribute as employee performance or contribution is a function of ability, motivation and opportunity (Boxall & Purcell, 2011), which can be expressed by the formula:

$$P = f (A, M, O)$$

Therefore, organizations should focus on motivation, opportunity and, potentially, training, in their cultivation processes — given that they have talented people (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Tansley, 2011). On the other hand, if Minbaeva and Collings' (2013) conception of the impact of context on performance is correct, Boxall and Purcell's (2011) function is either very simplified or at the very least, one of the variables is a function itself dependent on context.

Barlow (2006) states that retaining key position back-ups, or succession planning of senior leaders, is indeed a high priority for many organizations. However, even if this is a theoretically sound concept, it rarely pans out as planned. There are some reasons as to why succession planning fails in practice, for example, the individuals considered might not want the position, they may leave the organization — as people that have undergone training are more likely to do — or reorganizations may change the need for talent (Barlow, 2006; Capelli, 2008; Hills, 2009). One solution to this issue, as presented by Barlow (2006), is to have a more generic pool of talent, a pool filled with able people, out of which some can be chosen to succeed senior leaders when the need arises. Capelli (2008) also proposes to spread out the risk when it comes to talent supply; even if it often is less expensive to develop and train someone internally, the external market is faster and can be more responsive. Additionally, organizations can no longer provide internal career growth to the same extent as earlier, primarily due to flattened hierarchical structures in organizations (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). If people do not have the ambition to stay in the same organization for a long period of time, the external labor market might also be a more viable option than the internal.

Allocating resources for talent management processes based upon actual and potential contribution may pose problems, as there are not any proven formulas to measure the precise impact talent has on an organization or performance of TM systems (Schweyer, 2004; Scullion & Collings, 2011). Though a meticulous assessment of talent could give indications

of how to allocate resources, it would be a mistake to assume that talent management decisions are, or could be, completely just and fair (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). Standardizing processes could be a step towards making TM more just and fair but there are no indicators that TM would yield better results and is widely criticized as a result (Barlow, 2006; Minbaeva & Collings, 2013). It is suggested that talent management practices should be based on personal development (Barlow, 2006). Talented people must want and need to be in charge of their personal development process, with support from the organization, in order for talent management to yield good results (ibid). Additionally, it is crucial that TM initiatives are strategically anchored and not only seen as HR practices (Guthridge et al., 2008; Schweyer, 2004).

Given the ambiguous nature of TM in contemporary society, the widely spread assumption of the existence of functional best-practice models and similarly the lack of thorough case studies, especially of TM in practice (Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Tansley, 2011; Uren, 2007), this study seeks to thoroughly describe and analyze how TM is practiced. By studying the practices related to TM in an organization, we will be able to look beyond problematic dualisms, such as action/structure and human/non-human, shed light on individual actions as potential building blocks of social structures and look at reason as a practice phenomenon (Schatzki, 2001). Furthermore, we will provide insights and hopefully illuminate the practicalities of TM, identify values and potentially quantify them.

Methodology and an Overview of the Case Organization

The studied organization is a publicly traded company operating in the security solution business. As it is a Swedish multinational corporation (MNC), it shall henceforth be referred to as Security AB. Security AB has a direct presence in around 30 markets and an indirect presence in an additional 100 markets all over the world. Around 25 employees and managers are situated in the headquarters and the company further employs around 5500 people, stretching from blue collar industry workers, to salesmen, administrators, researchers, analysts and managers. Security AB has worked with an inorganic growth strategy since it was founded in the 1990s and has acquired already existing companies in new markets.

Security AB has an extensive, wide reaching TM apparatus, present throughout the whole organization. The company's corporate HR designs the different components of their TM and then runs them together with local HR and local management, with support from external consultants in some cases. The main idea behind Security AB's TM apparatus, according to senior executives, is to attain and then utilize the potential and talent within the organization effectively and efficiently. Around this idea a number of activities and practices have arisen, these will be the focus of this study and will be presented in further detail in the empirical section.

Design of the study

As the purpose of the study relates to a specific phenomenon of which a deep understanding has been critical, a qualitative case study was the most viable option for our research (Silverman, 2011). In undertaking all qualitative research it is essential to contextualize the

studied phenomenon by acquiring background information (Collis & Hussey, 2014); accordingly, we undertook extensive literature studies about TM.

To deepen our understanding of how TM is practiced at Security AB, the qualitative case study included interviews and document studies (Kaijser & Öhlander, 1999; Silverman, 2011). This helped us understand the participants' interpretations of situations and objects (Silverman, 2004). A qualitative case study made it possible to use different data collection methods (Ritchie et al., 1994; Silverman, 2011) which then facilitated the creation of a wider, more comprehensive and more diverse basis for the analysis. Using different data collection methods may also have eased the process of an ongoing comparative analysis (Czarniawska, 2014). During the ongoing comparative analysis we compared context-independent theories from literature studies with context-dependent theories from the study, as well as contradictory or non-aligning results from the study. This made it possible to develop and formulate questions anchored in relevant themes and preconceptions and to reformulate or discard irrelevant questions (ibid). As several data collection methods were used, it is also imaginable that the basis for a comparative analysis became more extensive as a result.

Data Collection

The collection period stretched over ten weeks and was divided into three phases. The first phase gave a comprehensive insight into the company. This phase began with a meeting with our assigned contact person, the Head of Learning and Development, who until late 2013 served as Head of Corporate HR, and had been a key figure in the design and development of TM in Security AB. The initial meeting was followed by a longer interview with said contact person and a walk through of their internal IT portal. This first phase gave us an overview of how the organization functions as well as their view of TM.

The second phase consisted of studying the internal IT portal, to which we had unrestricted access, as well as analyzing about 200 documents from the portal. The documents made up approximately 1700 pages covering descriptions, guidelines, program content and directions, as well as results and statistics of the organization's TM apparatus and its practitioners and participants. The internal IT portal was studied at Security AB's HQ and the documents that could not be accessed externally were downloaded to a flash drive in order for us to access, study and analyze them when we were not present at the HQ. After examining the documents, we had a more detailed view of the internal workings of Security AB, particularly regarding the company's intended TM design. In addition to this we identified key people to interview in the third phase. Our contact person mediated the contact information and openly communicated our presence and intention to decrease resistance among the potential interview candidates. Additionally, our contact person strongly encouraged all potential interview candidates to cooperate fully with us.

The third and last phase consisted of interviews with the selected key people (see Table 1). The third phase was intended to give us a deeper understanding of the TM apparatus and its elements in practice. The interviews were semi-structured, covering a range of topics that were of interest, and were recorded and transcribed. The questions were open ended in order for the respondents to elaborate freely. In addition, a number of follow up questions of more precise nature were asked. The topics or open ended questions were sent to

the respondents a few days in advance to the interviews, giving them the possibility to prepare their responses before meeting with us.

Table 1
List of interviewees

Organizational Level	# of Interviews
Senior Executive Level	5
Senior Managers	8
Other Personnel	5
Total	**18**

Data Analysis

Previous studies show us, there is a lack of consensus as to what talent management as a phenomenon entails, hence it was important not to have a normative approach. Given the aim of the study to describe and analyze how TM is practiced at an organization, a grounded theory inspired study was undertaken (Martin & Turner, 1986). Using a grounded theory approach limited the extent to which the results may be tainted by incorrect, contradictory, or at least misaligned, preconceptions (ibid). However, as Martin and Turner (1986) indicate, some preconceptions are necessary in order to carry out the study effectively. In our case, the preconception we had was of TM as managing the supply, demand and flow of talent through the organization.

Our chosen methodology for this study, grounded theory, centers on creating a theory of social constructions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We deemed that grounded theory was suitable for the study, as we do not aim to prove or disprove a hypothesis with our purpose, we simply aim to construct theory of a socially constructed concept (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). Further, during the coding and categorization of the data collected in the first phase, we developed ten concept cards from the resulting categories — related to assessment, communication, culture, development, evaluation, mobility, recruitment, results, talent and tools — in accordance to Martin and Turner's (1986) model, into which we placed the coded data. These concepts guided us during the second phase when we coded the content of the documents as well as when we identified key people to interview and what areas to focus the interviews on. During the third phase we interviewed employees about elements of the TM activities at Security AB and their experiences with them. After the data was collected in the third phase, we reclassified a few of our previous concept cards based on our new findings and ended up with seven comprehensive categories — assessment, communication, development, evaluation, mobility, recruitment and talent.

Additionally during our analysis we studied context-independent theory, including previous TM related studies and blueprints of Security AB's TM system, to contrast the context-dependent theory we had developed from our case company, and assessed the context as suggested by Flyvbjerg (2006).

Limitations

This case study will give a subjective view of the studied organization's TM apparatus, and according to Bloor and Wood (2006), this form of study may therefore not be of external validity, nor can it be applied objectively to any situation (ibid). Furthermore, since this study uses a qualitative method, it is important to be conscious of the fact that narratives are not reality, and instead they are only descriptions and interpretations of the reality (Czarniawska, 2014). As a measurement to improve the validity of the findings, triangulation techniques (Denzin, 1970) have been used for the data collection. Convergence and corroborating evidence have been sought both among different types of sources or methods, e.g. documents and interviews, and across data sources, e.g. discussing the same topic with more than one respondent (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Ideally we would have preferred to observe the practice in person but due to practical difficulties this was not possible. That limitation, in combination with only a small sample of the organization being interviewed, could have contributed to some views/voices being privileged over others, which of course always is a risk with qualitative studies. We have tried to limit the impact by conducting interviews over several levels in the organizational hierarchy as well as choosing geographically dispersed interview objects representing different age groups. However, it is possible that the respondents were not transparent, or fully open, especially since they were recorded (Walsham, 2006).

Regarding ethical questions, we made sure all respondents were aware of the purpose of their interviews, both why they were interviewed and the study itself. Before every interview it was communicated that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed. All respondents were kept anonymous during the process so they would not risk being exposed to Security AB or any other party. We also offered all respondents chances to review the transcriptions and summaries. Before the fieldwork was launched we agreed with Security AB that we would keep them anonymous in the study, as findings could potentially be sensitive.

Theorizing Practice

As mentioned above, much of the existing TM literature assumes that best-practice models exist. The literature is also permeated with the implication that only measurable parameters are worth thorough — if not to say exclusive — assessment (Berger & Berger, 2011; Farndale et al., 2010; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Tansley, 2011; Uren, 2007). In order to look beyond these assumptions, we have chosen to approach TM at Security AB with practice-based theories.

> *Within a workspace, a stabilized way of doing things becomes a practice when it is institutionalized and made normatively accountable both for its practitioners and for those who view it from outside* (Gherardi, 2010, pp. 504-505).

The world as a whole has been described as an assemblage of practices, where practices are routinized bodily activities that manifest the social order inscribed in the bodies of the participants and are made possible when material resources are contributed (Nicolini, 2012). The structure or structural properties of practices are said to be both the outcome and medium of practices (Giddens, 1984; Nicolini, 2012). When trying to determine how the verbal, visual and material take shape within the world, or in a more local level such as an organization, practice-based theories have shown to be fruitful (Gherardi, 2010), as it is within the field of practice that phenomena like agency, knowledge, language, ethics, power, etc. can be studied (Schatzki, 2001). Practice-based theories have been described as a very broad theoretical framework or as a general theory that explains how practice in the world produces social subjects, and how the world itself is produced through practice (Ortner, 2006). However, it is also argued that there is no common understanding of what practice-based theories are, i.e. there is no unified practice-based theory (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2001); instead practice-based theories emerged from the same scholarly traditions and share a family resemblance (Nicolini, 2012). Nicolini (2012) proposes that it is beneficial to combine parts of practice-based theories, as the theories share common elements, rather than unify them into one universal theory or disregard whole sub-theories as they all have different strengths. This section will present Bourdieu's work of theorizing practice as it has been influential on subsequent work on practice theories (Nicolini, 2012), and then present two different schools of practice-based theories: practice as tradition and practice as activity. By combining elements from the chosen schools it is possible to analyze the practice from the case study on both an individual and a collective level, and in addition they will contribute a dimension of learning and knowledge spreading.

Bourdieu (1984) explained practice with the equation:

$$Practice = (Habitus \times Capital) + Field$$

In which *habitus* refers to the principles that generate and organize practices (Bourdieu, 1990), i.e. the force that explains regularities, coherence and order in human behavior. One way to conceive habitus is as a cognitive framework inscribed in bodies, and mainly developed during the upbringing rather than secondary socialization (ibid). Nicolini (2012) argues that it is through habitus that Bourdieu conjoins the ideas that aspects of the social world become internalized through experience and by that determine the behavior of individuals and groups — that the internalized aspects enable lived meaningfulness and practices of meaningful actions — as well as how the social world is constructed by practices. *Capital* can essentially be anything that can be exchanged, both material and non-material assets (Bourdieu, 1990). It is through the exchange of capital that a variation in legitimacy and power can be determined (ibid). According to Bourdieu (1990) any conduct will be driven by the pursuit of some interest and as a conductor is governed by habitus, agency becomes a fundamental aspect to the concept. The *field* refers to the arenas in which social and power positions are structured, determined by the distribution of social capital and the relations between different social positions (Bourdieu, 1990). The field shapes habitus and once it has been activated it will, in its turn, create or reinforce the field (Bourdieu, 1977).

This is similar to Lau's (2004) description of practices as social games taking place in different social fields in which agents act in the pursuit of fulfilling interests.

Practice as Tradition

When a practice is performed, individual performance takes place and is understood as part of an ongoing practice in contrast to the background of other practices (Nicolini, 2012). To take part in an existing practice one must learn how to act, how to speak, what to say, how to feel, what to expect and what things mean. In other words, actively or passively, absorbing a practice entails accepting certain norms as well as certain ways of wanting and feeling. In this context knowledge is seen as a set of practical methods, acquired through training and not fully disclosed in the discourse, i.e. knowledge is equated with the level of ability to carry out social and material activities (Nicolini, 2012). However, practical knowledge cannot be transmitted through manuals or words. The process of transmitting practical knowledge can only transpire through customs, traditions or institutions (Nyíri, 1988), similar to the idea of implicit learning and tacit knowledge (cf. Reber, 1989). This notion is central when conceptualizing practice as tradition and the argument for this conceptualization is constituted by two aspects: (1) the fact that practice includes elements of habituation and learning, i.e. the transmission of practical knowledge; and (2) that practice will go beyond the individual and last in a historical perspective (Turner, 1984). However, this theory has been criticized for lacking an explanation of how the first aspect would explain the second and that a coherent theory for learning is necessary (Nicolini, 2012). One such theory is the process of *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP) developed by Lave and Wenger (1991).

The central idea of LPP is that the learner becomes engaged in a practice, characterized by a particular and identifiable process, to the extent that some responsibility for the end product can be ascribed to the learner (Lave & Wenger, 1991). By becoming engaged the learner gains access to expertise and knowledge that is socially bound to the practice, as well as the community that is produced by and produces the practice (ibid). In this sense, learning is more about developing identities, belonging and inclusiveness, than the traditional view of learning as a cognitive process. Learning will not be possible unless participation is present and when entering a practice, a beginner is not only a learner but also someone who confirms, sustains and reproduces the social order in which knowledge exists (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Additionally, learning is not only a one-way stream since a practice stretches over several different social spaces, each with different influence and power — learning and influence go all directions (ibid). However, the level of influence and power does not have to be symmetrical within the practice. Within this notion, learning is constantly ongoing in all practices and should not be separated into different activities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A practice gives meaning to operations and participation or membership, it is what defines success, rewards and punishment, as well as what aspects to produce and reproduce. Though this can only be grasped to its full extent when actively participating in the practice (ibid).

Practice as Activity

It has been suggested that individuals never react directly to their environment. Instead, their reactions are always mediated by cultural media present in the immediate social environment or cultural heritage, e.g. signs, symbols and artifacts, the most fundamental of which is language (Vygotsky, 1978). As individuals participate in activities and take part in a learning process they internalize these cultural media (ibid) similar to the, above discussed, idea of how habitus is formed. Thus, activities become less dependent upon external artifacts and more dependent upon implicit signs and symbols (Vygotsky, 1978). Nicolini (2012) comments on Vygotsky's (1978) idea and states that history, culture, institutions and power are all embodied in human action through mediation.
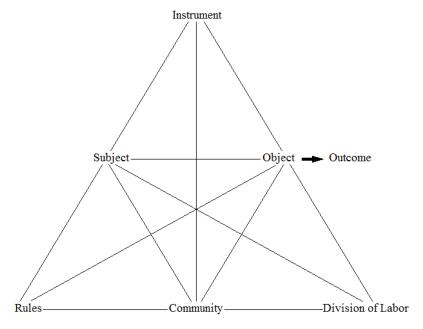

Figure 1. A simplified model of an Activity System

The basic level of human action is simple operations, which in their turn constitute actions (Kuutti, 1996). However, it is not until they are put in the context of larger, historically situated practices that the meaning of the actions or operations comes to existence, and can be understood and analyzed. This is dependent on the suggestion that consciousness and intelligence are inhabited in the interaction between the individual and the cultural medium rather than in the individual's mind (Miettinen, 1999). Drawing on this, scholars began to argue that activities and social practices could be studied in the premise of a few interrelated analytical elements and the fundamental forms of mediation between them (Nicolini, 2012). Engeström (2014) introduced the concept of activity systems (see Figure 1) as a basic unit of analysis. All activities proceed from a subject, an individual or a collective that is engaged in the activity, they also include an object, or a problem space, that is converted into an outcome with help of instruments, e.g. tools, language, etc. (Engeström, 2014). In addition, the activity is both generated by and dependent upon a community, i.e. the people that share the same object of work. There is also a division of labor within any activity that regulates and specifies tasks, power, access to resources, etc. among the members in the activity system (ibid). Lastly, all activities are governed by a set of rules, be they actual rules or guidelines,

norms, etc. that regulate actions and interactions within the community (ibid).

All activity systems are oriented and directed towards the objects (Nicolini, 2012), which can be shared within the subject, or participants of the activity, for manipulation and transformation to the extent that the motive for communal actions becomes embedded (Engeström, 1999). In this way an object both connects and organizes the different elements in an activity system, as well as it acts as the driving force and source of coherence (Engeström, 1999; Engeström, 2000).

There are three main characteristics to an object, namely that it is emergent, fragmented, and evolving (Nicolini, 2012). The elements of an activity system are highly dependent on the nature of the object and in addition, the interests of the actors within the community will define the object (ibid). In that sense an object is both partly emergent and partly given. Nicolini (2012) also states that the object is fragmented, the fullness of the object is never visible to a single individual within the system. Furthermore, as the object is composed by multiple actors and shaped by other activity systems or practices, it is imaginable that contradictory interests or interpretations are embedded in the community (Nicolini, 2012). As a result, it is plausible to believe that the system will be characterized by contradictions and conflicts rather than harmony and unity (ibid). The last characteristic is that an object is evolving, that it emerges and can be manipulated during the activity. Objects are always understood and manipulated through mediation, and access to instruments both makes actions possible and constrains them, which makes re-negotiations and restructurings of the object necessary (Engeström, 1999). Interpretive flexibility and negotiation surrounding an object allow it to be contestable, which is often acted upon (Nicolini, 2012). Objects also have the function of connecting activity systems with each other, one system's object can become an element in another system and a hindrance to yet another system. In this way a network of activity systems emerge in which some systems are fundamentally dependent on each other, while others are in conflict (Engeström et al., 1999). These relationships are said to be essential when accounting for the nature of activity systems (Nicolini, 2012).

Mediation and different accessibility to the elements within the activity system are sources of contradiction within the system; modification of existing or introduction of new elements is also said to potentially create tension or misalignment within the system (Engeström, 2014). Due to the fact that activity systems are interrelated, a modified object in one system can trigger conflicts and misunderstandings with other systems (ibid). However, Engeström (2014) points out that contradictions can accumulate within a system over time before a resolution process is triggered. Although these contradictions are secondary to the underlying contradiction between the value of use and exchange, which both permeates all other contradictions and supports the notion that activity systems never can attain equilibrium (Nicolini, 2012). Furthermore, since the approach emphasizes that activity within a system is mostly directed towards the object, it has been criticized for mainly accounting for only one type of social interaction, i.e. purpose-filled collaboration, while disregarding others, such as conflict, opposition, resistance, etc. (Smolka et al., 1995).

As we discussed above, by applying elements of these presented schools of practice-based theories to our findings we will be able to account for behavior on both an individual

and a collective level as well as illuminate how talent, in practice, is defined and necessary conditions for learning to take place.

Case Description

Senior executives and TM designers have stated that the core concept of TM at Security AB is to attain and then utilize the potential and talent within the organization effectively and efficiently, in order to support the organization in achieving its goals. TM is seen as an ongoing process that is powered by development of talent. The company has three main interests in their program of TM. Firstly, that there is a desire among the employees to develop themselves and that the company itself recognizes that this desire is necessary in order to create a sustainable work environment; secondly, is the impact of TM on the top line, such as increased revenue by better performing employees; the third interest is the impact on bottom line, which manifest itself in cost reduction due to increased business acumen among employees. To become a successful organization with good results and lower costs, the company tries to identify their employees' developmental needs and support them in achieving their individual goals.

Talent at Security AB

Security AB fosters a performance culture, and regardless of the organization's desire to develop its employees, concrete results ultimately determine an individual's value to the organization. This policy is clearly shown in remuneration systems as well as in promotion and development opportunities. However, the HR department, with the help of a consultancy firm, have found a strong correlation between a number of specific competencies and performance within the organization. These competencies have been bundled up in four areas and are seen as the cornerstones of the performance culture.

The first cornerstone, *networking,* refers to the ability to create and align networks, manage stakeholders, utilize networks and link people to perform together, in order to increase efficiency and refine processes. The second cornerstone, *business acumen*, involves understanding cost and value creation as well as taking both the local and group level into consideration when making decisions that will affect profitability. The third cornerstone, *leadership,* focuses on encouraging open communication, honesty and providing clear direction for individuals and teams, as well as empowering peers and subordinates. The fourth cornerstone, *execution and commitment,* refers to taking responsibility for individual success, accepting accountability, delivering on promises and encouraging performance.

According to internal documents and a senior executive, the cornerstones are said to be the very definition of talent in Security AB, stretching over the whole organization. An employee's individual aptitude in these competencies will define his or her individual talent regardless of their role in the organization, even if it will be necessary to complement these competencies with others, which is dependent on the different roles in the organization. An official internal document comments that the cornerstones

> */.../ are linked to achieving our business goals and represent the core competencies that are required to be successful within [Security AB]. The*

> *more closely your behaviour reflects the [cornerstones], the more likely it is that you and your team will be successful.*

This being said, some of the interviewed employees of Security AB noted that the cornerstones are not unique to the organization and that they are rather general competencies that will take you far in any organization. Managers are supposed to aid their employees in developing the cornerstone competencies but the desire for development must come from the employees. According to a senior manager, there is no guarantee that a manager will make any effort in assisting the employee, even if said employee has an expressed desire to develop. Corporate HR has developed general tips and plans in order to aid development which are available to all employees through the internal IT portal but it is unknown to what extent these are used.

In addition to the cornerstones, English language skills act as a barrier, or rather a criteria, in the definition of talent. We found examples of opportunities within the organization having been highly connected to individuals' competency in English, rather than their competencies in the cornerstones, especially during the process of integrating acquired companies into the corporation. As one manager commented, his career took off after the company he worked for was acquired by Security AB:

> *There is no doubt that [my proficiency in English] was my biggest advantage. In the end of the day, [the headquarters] needed someone that they were able to communicate with and since my boss had other responsibilities /.../ I ended up in the center of everything /.../ [H]eadquarters came to appreciate me.*

Assessment and Evaluation

The main control mechanism of the TM system is Security AB's development and performance reviews, according to the HR department. There are two official reviews, one main review during the third quarter and one interim review during the first quarter. In addition to the official reviews, the executive team expects the managers to have a few informal reviews with each subordinate every year. The main review includes agreeing upon and setting new performance targets as well as following up on the previous year's performance targets based on the business objectives, individual behavior commitments based on the cornerstones, and individual development plans. The interim review is usually a follow up session covering the plans and targets from the main review, and the informal reviews usually include fragmented follow ups. There are guidelines developed by HR for how to assess employees and their performance in order to ensure fairness in assessment over the whole group. There is, however, no formal coordination or quality control among the managers to ensure that the guidelines are followed or interpreted in the same way. The guidelines are detailed in regards to what must be assessed but leave room for subjective interpretations of how to actually assess employees. This lack of generalization has never been raised as an issue by assessed individuals, however.

In the case of managers it is common to use an evaluation tool called a 360 degree review as a base for assessment and development plans. A 360 degree review gives feedback

connected to the cornerstones from all directions: the direct manager, peers, subordinates and external parties such as former clients and the external consultants that organize the review and compile the results. The reviewees themselves choose the people that give feedback and the only guideline is that all directions must be represented. The 360 degree review has been described by senior executives and other managers as a very powerful tool but that it becomes less useful for the company the further down in the organization you get. One top executive commented:

> *[The 360 degree review] shows how other people perceive you and what your behavior looks like. It presents concrete facts that indicate what the individual then can develop. In that way it is a very powerful tool.*

The results are presented to the feedback receiver by the external consultants and then discussed with the immediate manager. The 360 reviews have been implemented by the organization for just over a year and so far no one has been evaluated more than once. There are no expressed plans or guidelines that they will be given on a regular basis. However, both executives and reviewees have expressed advantages connected to receiving them regularly, not necessarily annually but a few years apart so effects on adjusted behavior will be noticeable.

Report and Development

The results from the assessments are reported using a communication tool on an individual level, including performance over the last two years, potential to advance — which is not disclosed to assessed employees — and areas to develop along with some concrete suggestions on how this can be completed. The reports are then compiled and travel upwards in the organization, e.g. from a line manager to an area manager, to a country manager and to the senior VP of HR, who is also a member of the senior executive group. In some cases managers will suggest and nominate their promising subordinates for promotions and development programs. The company uses the "grandfather principle", which refers to the fact that the superior manager of the employee's direct manager must approve of the suggestion before it can become reality.

There are three programs of a larger scope, here called *Program 1, Program 2* and *Program 3*, which are meant for the development of strategically important and promising employees. Enrollment in these programs must be sanctioned by the senior VP of HR in addition to the employee's "grandfather".

- *Program 1* is open to strategically important managers with senior positions. The goal of this program is to homogenize views of leadership and culture in order to align employees with the executive team's philosophy, thereby developing a stronger network. The program accepts around 20 individuals a year and is currently running, though it was put on hold in 2014 by the HR department as the newly appointed SVP of HR wanted to evaluate all ongoing programs.
- *Program 2* is open to younger employees that have shown high potential for future development in the organization. The program offers any employee the chance to increase self-awareness as well as concrete, individual tips on how to develop in

lacking areas. Just like Program 1, this initiative also aims to strengthen and train the individual to better utilize their network, as well as develop the participant's leadership skills while again homogenizing culture in alignment with the executive team. The program accepts around 20 individuals a year but is currently on hold by the HR department, though it is planned to start up again in the near future.

- *Program 3* is open to strategically important key account managers and is a platform for sharing experiences, creating and strengthening networks as well as segments meant to develop the cornerstone competencies. This program has been running annually since it was launched.

In addition to those programs, there are ad-hoc structured development opportunities, including: online English language programs for employees stretching from basic to advanced levels; shorter internal and external courses or programs that are meant to develop concrete skills such as programming in a certain platform or conflict resolution; regional and/or business area related conferences that promote networking; Executive MBAs; and more local seminars that are meant to develop the competencies within the cornerstones.

A senior executive manager and former participants proclaimed that during the time the programs run, all participants are expected to carry out their day-to-day work responsibilities and no special consideration is taken for the work load from the programs. Regardless, these programs are popular among employees and are seen as an opportunity, even if individuals do not get the same output from going through the different programs. Participants of Program 1 and Program 2 that work geographically and culturally close to the company headquarters claim that that the chance to strengthen their networks has indeed been valuable but that homogenizing processes have been of little value to them. On the other hand, participants who work from a larger geographical and cultural distance from the headquarters have been positive about what they have gotten out of the program. A former participant of Program 1 said:

> *I have always been close to [the Senior Executive Group] in the headquarters and worked closely with them so I knew [our definition of leadership and the culture] but for others who sit further away /.../ these programs, they are really important to them.*

While another participant, not located in Sweden, stated:

> *[Program 1] was great, I have definitely had use for what I learned, it has not changed how I do my job but I have a much better network now and I can use it. /.../ [M]aybe it is not realistic for everyone to go through programs this extensive but I think it would be beneficial to have more programs like this.*

The senior executive team has tried to homogenize the whole company in other ways. A step in this process has been to formulate a code of conduct and management is eager that the whole company will sign off on it. However, some employees are not even aware of its existence.

Out of the three programs with larger scopes, Program 3 has given the best measurable results and it has been appreciated by both former participants and executives. There are some key performance indicators (KPI), mainly connected to sales quantities that show positive effects of the program. It is mainly the exchange of knowledge and networking that are accredited with the success of the program. One illustrative example is the moment when two key account managers realized that they worked with the same client in different countries and had separate accounts for both. After this realization they merged their respective accounts and created additional value, both for Security AB and the client company.

Recruitment and Mobility

Employees in the organization have had the perception that completing Program 2 would guarantee advancement in the organization but as a former participant noted:

> *A lot of the participants came back and expected something but nothing happened. Maybe you had the perception that you were part of a program and a group [that would advance in the organization] but nothing in particular happened. It was not connected to anything, you just went through the program. /.../ Everyone had a good time but it has not furthered anyone's career, unfortunately. There are already five or six [people] who have left the company since [they completed the program].*

This is a view that has also been communicated, somewhat, by the senior executive team. For example, in the annual report from 2013 and in internal communication regarding the program, a picture is painted that the program will further one's career within the organization. However, managers expressed that though talented people are included in plans spanning over several years, the programs should be seen as steps on a path to a promotion rather than a guarantee of career advancement.

The HR department is open about their goal that 70 percent of all recruitments shall be internal. However, this is something the company has failed to achieve so far. Even though it is a global organization, there is little movement between functions and countries. Most of the employees are locals, from entry level to country managers. The company offers few to no incentives to move from one country organization to another and even if the corporate language is English, it is usually a requirement to know the local language. In some cases where there is a large strategic importance to move a certain person the company offers very beneficial expatriate contracts, but these only constitute 0.3 percent of all employment contracts.

The HR department and the senior executive team try to ensure a flow of personnel within the organization and use a succession planning tool, which is applied on three comprehensive levels in the organization. The first level covers senior management positions, the second level covers country managers and two levels down, and the third level covers the rest, excluding the lowest level employees. The tool has had various successes throughout the organization. In some countries up to 80 percent of the staff is covered in the succession planning tool and there is no noticeable internal movement. In other countries it has basically

been non-existent. Managers have been reluctant to plan their successor as they have perceived themselves as becoming less valuable to the company and at greater risk of being fired. The tool maps the employees, information about performance, potential, experience and development plans, as well as suggestions for career development in the coming four years. However, senior managers have mentioned that the organization is not large and hierarchical enough to have effective career plans for employees. Though they still recognize that some positions must be kept open in order for the succession planning to work at all, even if not all sub-organizations have been open to carry it out.

The age distribution among the employees is biased towards retirement age, especially in the corporate functions, and the company will face a drainage of currently employed personnel in the coming few years. Today, lack of existing competency among the employees is seen as one reason for low mobility within the organization; therefore most of the currently recruited personnel are external candidates. Security AB have clear guidelines of how the recruitment process should proceed, from a job description for the ad, to topics in an interview. The process covers assessing candidates' competencies, previous experiences, values, and personality, the last assessment being done with the help of external psychologists. It is not only for personality testing that Security AB uses external help: in 80 percent of the time they outsource the search for candidates to a recruitment firm, which presents only a couple of final candidates. The HR department claims that it is too resource intensive to have all parts of all recruitment processes in-house As a part of Security AB's employer branding strategy the HR department is keen to convey a pleasant experience for potential candidates, regardless if they will get the job or not. In some cases managers choose not to use the HR department's guidelines or suggestions, in other cases recruiting managers have not been aware of their existence.

Analysis

Security AB has employed TM in practice as a systematically organized set of operations, actions and activities that are intended to aid the company in achieving its comprehensive goals. The whole apparatus is designed, coordinated and ultimately controlled by the HR department and the main idea of Security AB's usage of TM appears to be to hire the best employees and get the most out of them, i.e. to maximize the output of the workforce. This would certainly be in the interest of a profit oriented organization as the marginal cost of labor would decrease with an increase of output from a fixed work force. If we draw upon Engeström's (2014) ideas of activity systems, we can frame the problem space or object as improving the performance of an underachieving workforce, while viewing TM at Security AB as an activity system. Every action tied to TM in the organization is oriented towards getting better employees and maximizing their performance, i.e. improving the consociation of the elements in an activity system (see Figure 1). If we widen our scope and view the practice in the whole organization as one activity system, sustainable profit maximization appears as the object. Improving the performance of an underachieving workforce can be considered a fragment of that object, i.e. how the HR department has defined the object in the frame of the organization wide activity system. It would be a logical response for the HR department to maximize and utilize the human resources in the organization as the division of

labor regulates the areas of the comprehensive organizational activity system where they can operate and towards where they can direct their efforts.

Security AB identifies an individual's desire to develop as a driving force. It becomes the key to a competent, hardworking, satisfied employee that in his or her turn is supposed to help achieve the organization's goals. The ideal practice is one in which employees develop and work hard, leading to better performance, and one in which output is maximized, while still in the frame of Security AB practices. Although this does not necessarily have to be the best practice when it comes to profit maximization or high performing employees within the given practice, as objects are constantly emergent, fragmented and evolving (Nicolini, 2012). The executive management group of Security AB is open about their desire for a performance culture and to foster these ideas the company has tried to create a field, or at least tried to convey a picture of one, which regulates what behaviors will be rewarded, notably proficiency in utilization of the cornerstone competencies. However, as concrete results are primarily rewarded and not one's proficiency in the cornerstone competencies, there is a risk of discrepant behavior among the practitioners. This could be a driver of practice mutation by redefining the object or altering other elements (Engeström, 2014; Nicolini, 2012), turning the practice into something different, potentially less profitable or sustainable, similar to how unsustainable dog breeding has left certain dog breeds with side effects, such as physical ailments or extremely low intelligence after breeding on other traits. On the other hand, TM at Security AB is supposed to be an aid for the organization to reach its goals and it is important that it is not allowed to corrupt the core business, which is a possibility if TM in practice and the core business are not aligned.

The idea to clinically map the strengths and weaknesses of the individual employees could indeed be valuable to the organization if the intention is to maximize performance and development, or gaining some control over structuration and matching of subjects, objects, instruments, tools, etc., if viewing it as an activity system. However, knowledge and skills only exist in the frame of a specific practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nicolini, 2012). Therefore it is crucial to consider the practice if mapping the employees for potential and ability as well as the fact that it will be risky to use generalized and universal fitting dimensions when assessing individuals if they are not all-inclusive. Managers in the company seem to have recognized that the cornerstone competencies are not sufficient when predicting performance. Rather it is mentioned that the cornerstones, in some cases, have to be supplemented with additional competencies depending on specific roles. If the cornerstone competencies do not work as intended and are not used as intended, it is legitimate to question their value to the company. This can be connected to and explained by the notion of transmission of practical knowledge (Nyíri, 1988). If it is not possible to convey practical knowledge through words or manuals it is not plausible to assess practical knowledge with the help of words or manuals. Lave and Wenger's (1991) conception of active participation in a practice being essential to fully understand said practice further supports the impracticality of assessing individuals according to the cornerstone competencies, as is used today. Therefore, the notion that reward systems in practice are mainly based on output or results becomes completely logical, according to Nyíri (1988) and Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideas. This could explain why Security AB, rather than trying to overcome these difficulties, has taken a step away from using the cornerstone competencies as intended.

One area in which the cornerstone competencies still have an effect is as cultural media. There is a correlation between high or good performance and an individual's possession of the cornerstone competencies. The employees acknowledge and legitimize this correlation and by promoting these cornerstones as artifacts of a performance culture they will be internalized by the participators of the activities, as Vygotsky (1978) suggested. Consequently, it is imaginable that Security AB has found a working mechanism for fostering a performance culture or supplying subjects with necessary instruments. However, it is a mechanism that is clearly under-utilized, as little is done to aid employee development in accordance with the cornerstones. If we draw on Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) ideas about how habitus is mainly shaped during upbringing and how it shapes the field, as well as considering that new, potential employees are screened for the competencies in the recruitment process, it is then plausible that the cornerstone competencies help in creating a strong performance culture in the long run.

As the study has shown, managers of the company try to modify or reinforce behavior with the help of rewards, but only in the case of good, concrete results. In that sense promotions, monetary rewards, etc. are the cultural media through which reactions are mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the company also attempts to modify or reinforce behavior with the development and performance reviews as well as the 360 degree reviews, more specifically by contrasting the behavior of the individuals to the cornerstones. Even though the reviews have been described as powerful, especially the 360 degree reviews, it is hard to say what effect they have had, as they have only been used for a very limited period of time.

Development and education are central to TM at Security AB but the company has to a large extent separated learning from the core practices. This is problematic, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), since learning should not be distinguished as a separate practice. Of course one could argue that development and education practices do exist within the organization and that learning is not distinguished from the practice as the practitioners then become responsible for the end product. In that sense, one could, however, also question the effectiveness and value for the organization. The company has chosen this strategy of proxy practices from which the participators are supposed to gain experiences, i.e. develop habitus, which could be useful in the organization's core practices. The proxy practices could also be seen as separate activity systems for which the outcome becomes elements in other activity systems related to the core business. This process is in line with Nicolini's (2012) notion that performance in an ongoing practice is always understood in contrast to other practices. Though the effectiveness, once again, can be questioned, especially as former participators of these proxy practices have expressed dissatisfaction regarding the usefulness of their experiences in their day-to-day work. The development and education programs should be calibrated to give a better effect and become more useful, like how flight simulators are to pilots. Conversely, senior managers stated that participation in these proxy activities was supposed to yield gains for the individuals and the company in the long-run, so it is possible that the effects are just not visible yet. Still, managers do not give any priority to the proxy practices when sending subordinates to them — no lenience is given regarding the workload in the participants' day-to-day responsibilities. Therefore it is likely that the outcome will not be optimized in either of these practices as time and energy are finite resources and the

usefulness of the experiences gained from the proxy practices in the participants' day-to-day work has not overcome this disparity. By looking at the practice theories we can see that the decreasing input of capital will not be counterbalanced by the limited increase of habitus, according to Bourdieu's (1984) function and as per Engeström's (2014) activity system, the instruments, or access to instruments, will be limited and most likely impact the outcome.

The low priority indicates a low risk strategy, i.e. a cost minimizing strategy, which is likely due to the difficulty of quantifying the benefit in monetary terms, as Schweyer (2004) and Scullion and Collings (2011) have shown. Cost minimizing is something that permeates the whole TM apparatus and the valuation of the output is arbitrary at best. Resources are concentrated in the top levels and Security AB has made the assumption that the marginal cost of impact is lower the higher up in the organization one is. Given that power balance has an impact on practices, shown in Bourdieu's (1990) notion of the field and Engeström's (2014) notions of division of labor and rules, it could be a self-fulfilling prophecy, if not the natural outcome.

TM practices still fill the function of homogenization and integration in the geographically and culturally dispersed company, conveying learning and transmission of practical knowledge regarding how to act, speak and interact with other individuals in the organization. Aligning habitus and integrating communities will likely decrease the risk of contradictory interests, friction and divergence, and objects will potentially not be as contested and modified or even fragmented. This would most likely mean that the practices would run more smoothly and be more efficient, but on the other hand may not necessarily result in a more objectively ideal practice, if such a thing exists. It is hard or impossible to quantify the benefits of these functions, at least in monetary terms, but the company has a history of acquiring mature, developed businesses with unique practices and has tried to integrate them into one corporation with a common and comprehensive goal. If we view them as interrelated activity systems, contradictions were accumulated to the extent that these over-arching TM functions were triggered as resolution processes (cf. Engeström, 2014; Engeström et al., 1999). The codes of conduct, relatively unknown among employees, appear to have been a failed attempt of tension resolution. In other words, the homogenizing TM initiatives appear to have been essential for continuous practices in the frame of Security AB as it is structured today. This is especially true if we consider transmission of practical knowledge and assume that the top executive managers want to remain somewhat in control as these transmissions can only transpire through customs, traditions or institutions (Nyíri, 1988).

A company with strongly interrelated practices would benefit from being homogenous as it would result in better conditions for flexibility and mobility. However, the resolution process is not finished and there are still many issues, such as highly fragmented views of objects and language. Mobility is still low, opportunities are a highly restricted scarcity and the given opportunities are distributed based on performance. The scarcity of opportunities could throw a wrench in the works of TM in Security AB. As practical knowledge is tied to a specific practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nicolini, 2012), and this practical knowledge can be equated with the ability variable in Boxall and Purcell's (2011) performance function, we could discuss difficulties in predicting movement in performance within a new role, i.e. how the actual in-house definition of talent holds up. The exact interrelation of the variables in the

performance function is not known so it is hard to predict performance in a new role or practice, during which the variables will likely assume new or different values. However, it is said that the variables have a positive correlation (Boxall & Purcell, 2011) which means that the function still becomes a useful analytical tool. To look at the movement of performance we have to consider the derivative of the function:

$$P' = f' (A, M, O)$$

Ability will most likely make a downwards move due to the lack of or limited availability of opportunities to attain practical knowledge beforehand. Additionally, motivation and opportunities will likely move upwards as a new role will include new responsibilities and tasks. In the end the movement of performance could go in any direction, including downwards, which could cause the wrenches in the works. The arbitrary assumption in the TM system is that because performance by an individual is high in one practice it will likely be high in another practice, which does not have to be true. Further, since opportunities are based on performance over the last two years, an under-performing individual could become trapped in a position in which his or her potential is not being utilized effectively or efficiently, as the expressed goal of TM in Security AB states.

If mobility in the organization was higher, it would also be easier to reach the target of 70 percent internal recruitments. The question remains as to why that target exists. It is possible that the company does not want to disturb the homogenization process and spend resources in inverting new or modified fields (cf. Bourdieu, 1990) or restore unwanted changes in the community or rules (cf. Engeström, 2014). This indicates that the senior executive group, the HR department and other managers have recognized that someone new to a practice is not only a learner, and a "teacher", but someone that also confirms, sustains and reproduces the social order in which knowledge exists (Lave & Wenger, 1991), i.e. someone new influences the composition of an activity system. Practical knowledge related to ways of acting, talking, etc. could potentially be drained or changed if the majority of new recruits are external and at the same time the workforce is not increased, as it is possible that employees with that knowledge are more likely to leave the company if their careers stagnate. Then again, with the stated lack of competence within the organization and the relatively inefficient system of knowledge transmission, this appears to be secondary in the company's strategy to maximize the output of the workforce.

Conclusion

This paper sought to describe and analyze how the Talent Management is practiceed. To accomplish this we completed a case study of a multinational corporation using a self-constructed organization-wide TM apparatus. The literature studies showed us that TM has a mainly positive connotation but was an ambiguous and flexible concept. As Schatzki (2001) suggested, we applied a theoretical framework composed of elements of practice theories in order to go beyond the problematic dualisms, shed light on individual actions as potential building blocks of social structures and look at reason as a practice phenomenon. By using the applied framework we have been able to show that while TM is often intended to work as a competence provision system, in practice the ultimate contribution of the system has been

to homogenize views and culture. This homogenizing effect has also had an influence on culture. By standardizing assessment and reporting systems, TM has improved the conditions for comparability among individual employees in different departments and organizations and by extension opened up opportunities for concentrating agency exposure to the top.

The study has further shown that the gap between what is communicated by the architects and operators of TM apparatuses and how it works in reality exposes both companies and their TM practices to a potential undermining of credibility by the community, if uncovered. The transmission of knowledge as a means to aid development among personnel and achieving organizational goals is rendered ineffective due to irrelevant knowledge being transmitted. Additionally, the study has shown that major arbitrary assumptions in the construction of TM system are made: where to allocate resources — the higher up in the organization, the greater impact it will have; and that desirable results from one individual in specific operations and actions will result in desirable results in other types of operations and actions.

To conclude, we have shown that TM has been employed as a system that increases the cohesiveness in a disintegrated organization and facilitates top-down control. As we have found through our research, Security AB has failed to achieve their intention of competence provision with their current system. We believe that this conclusion opens up the door for further research and analysis in TM. As a recommendation for future studies, if we assume that the applied theoretical framework is valid in practice, thereby implying that apprenticeship and trainee programs would likely yield good results in competence provision, a study of apprenticeship and trainee programs in the frame of TM would leave a valuable contribution to the TM discourse.

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