INTERNAL MOBILITY VS. CAREER ADVANCEMENT

A qualitative case study about organisational vs. individual goals in a MNC

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to describe and understand Key Talents expectations and motivations for internal career development in a MNC, and how the MNC manages their Key Talents in terms of internal mobility.

Theory: To gain a deeper understanding of how the vital career management information flows across hierarchies, functions and professions in the organisation, and how the individuals understand the practices we have used translation theory. Scandinavian institutional theory perspective on translation focuses on translation of management practices, and the knowledge-based perspective on how knowledge flows and is understood in an organisation.

Method: This thesis has been conducted as a qualitative case study. The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three HR professionals and 18 Key Talents (engineers) from four departments at the R&D division of a MNC. A short survey was also sent to all 105 Key Talents.

Result: Result show that insufficient translations processes have resulted in inconsistencies in understandings of career and internal mobility, difficulties to navigate in the organisation, lack of incentives for managers to develop employees and promote internal mobility and uncertainties and insecurities about their career opportunities.

Foreword

We would like to express our gratitude to our case company who not only granted us access and expressed a great interest in our study but also helped us with all the practical aspects of our interviews.

We would also like to thank all of our respondents for taking the time to meet with us and for sharing their thoughts on this topic so generously.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Changes in conditions for career

The personal career success for the individual is not only of interest for the employee in question, but also for the organisation since it can contribute to overall organisational success. Traits that make employees successful in their career are also traits that make them successful at their job, and therefore help the organisation to succeed as well (Judge, Higgins, Thorensen & Barrick, 1999). Furthermore, positive career experiences can have an impact on turnover and organisational commitment (Igbaria, Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1991). However, career planning is not as common in organisations as it was few decades ago (Aronsson, Hellgren, Isaksson, Johansson, Sverke & Torbiörn, 2012), and when there are career management systems they sometimes fail to meet employees' needs (Gerpott et al., 1988).

The labour market, and with it the employment scene, has changed since the 1980's (Arnold & Silvester, 2005) which has led to an increase in the responsibility of the own career development for the individual (Turney and Feldman, 1998). Organisational structures have become flatter with fewer layers of management, which increases the possibility of lateral career moves (Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth & Larsson, 1996). At the same time, job security and stability are decreasing for managerial and white-collar workers, and long-term advancement within the same organisation is becoming less common (Cappelli, 1999). This implies a shift in the way careers are viewed and managed, since traditionally careers happened hierarchically within the same organisation (Sullivan, 1999). E.L. Goldberg & Associates (2011) discuss in a benchmark report the increasing need of managers with broad general competence for companies, especially after the changes in the structures of the organisations. This increases the need for internal mobility and internal-lateral career opportunities prior to upward mobility for the individuals who want to become managers. Also, internal mobility increases the intellectual capacity of the organisation, since individuals are knowledge-bearers and they transfer knowledge across the organisation (Aronsson et al., 2012). However, Cheese, Thomas and Craig (2008) argue that hierarchies are still strong in many large organisations, and that organisation do little to increase and enable collaboration across business areas and functions.

From the perspective of the employee the definition of a successful career has also changed in the last years. (Seibert & Kramer, 2001). A career management benchmarking report from 34 organisations by E. L. Goldberg & Associates (2011) showed that the focus in career success markers has shifted from the traditional measurable objectives to more intrinsic values (E.L. Goldberg & Associates, 2011). Furthermore, Suutari, Tornikoski and Mäkelä (2012) show that todays' careerists are primarily motivated by intangible and non-financial rewards.

According to Arnold and Silvester (2005), from the employee's perspective these changes in the labour market have led to an increased workload and global competition for jobs. This entails a greater need for the employees to update their skills in order to stay employable (Aronsson et al., 2012), as well as for organisations to develop their staff in order to stay competitive. Since the employees have an increased workload, it leaves less time to reflect upon and plan their future. It also creates a bigger need for networking, coping with change and uncertainty, as well as self-management and flexibility (Arnold & Silvester, 2005).

In other words, both career and internal mobility have become more diverse and difficult to manage, for employer and employee.

1.2 A case of low internal mobility in spite of numerous career advancement possibilities

An underlying assumption in the literature on internal mobility and career, is that there is a positive correlation between the number of opportunities or vacancies in an organisation and the internal mobility, meaning that if there are more open positions it increases the internal mobility (e.g. Anderson, Milkovich & Tsui, 1981). Furthermore, Mignonac and Herrbach (2003) argue that if employees perceive there to be numerous opportunities for internal career movement, it also increases their willingness to apply for internal jobs. With an interest in investigating an organisation's strategy for internal mobility and the employees' understanding of their internal career possibilities, we have chosen to conduct a case study of a Multinational Corporation, MNC in Sweden that has low internal mobility despite having numerous possibilities and openings.

The case company in this thesis has been anonymised and will hereon be referred to as Alpha AB. Alpha AB is a large global organisation that employs mostly engineers. One of their biggest selling points when recruiting and retaining talents is that they have numerous career

opportunities. One part of the internal career management strategy is to identify Key Talents - employees that score high in performance reviews and show high potential, with a view towards becoming leaders. The organisation wants the Key Talents to make several internal lateral movements across department borders to gain a broad understanding of the business, before advancing vertically. Cheese et al. (2008) argue that one important aspect of talent is their mobility potential. However, the Key Talents in our case rarely apply for available positions outside their own department.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

Purpose: *To describe and understand Key Talents expectations and motivations for internal career development in a MNC, and how the MNC manages their Key Talents in terms of internal mobility.*

In order to fulfil our purpose, we are asking these research questions:

- How does a MNC manage their Key Talents in terms of internal mobility, and how is this strategy translated to and understood by the Key Talents?

- How do Key Talents understand their internal career development, both in terms of previous career and future possibilities?

2. Previous research

In this section we will present previous research in the field of career management. We will start by defining career and talent management and continue to discuss what could influence an individual's career choices. We will then present research about career development practices used by organisations.

2.1 Definition of career

From a strict individual perspective, career can be defined as the sum of the experiences during a professional life:

> *"The sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person."* (Arnold & Silvester, 2005; 520).

Arnold and Silvester (2005) state some main points that can be drawn from this definition. The first is about *sequence,* which indicates that instead of having a single viewpoint of the current position, it takes into account past and future positions that together form the career. Secondly, it underlines the *experience* of the person. One person's feelings of being successful might differ from the traditional objective measurements of success such as salary level and position in hierarchy. Lastly, *employment-related,* refers to activities such as training, professional development or voluntary work (Arnold & Silvester, 2005). In other words, for the individual, a career is not restricted to conventional career paths with increasing seniority but also entails lateral career steps as well as training and development in the same position.

2.1.2 Career management of employees identified as Talents

There are three different understandings of Talent Management. It can be viewed as common HR practices, succession planning practices or as management of talented employees (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Because of these different understandings there is a debate on whether Talent Management should include all employees or only those with high performance and potential (Iles, Chuai & Preece, 2010). In this thesis when referring to Talent Management we use the latter understanding - the management of talented employees, since our study focuses on the career development opportunities for Key Talents. Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe (2013)

argue that Collings and Mellahi (2009) definition of Talent Management is the most commonly used:

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

Due to the purpose of this study, we will further investigate how an organisation works to fill the vacant key positions with Key Talents. In order to fully understand how this can be done, we argue that we need to look to career management which can be defined as:

"The design and implementation of organisational processes which enable the careers of individuals to be planned and managed in a way that optimises both the needs of the organisation and the preferences and capabilities of individuals." (Mayo, 1991; 69).

In our case, the organisation wants to increase internal mobility, which is the movement of workers between internal organisational positions (McDonald & Benton, 2015), in order for Key Talents to have a broad general competence; however, do they take the preferences and capabilities of the individual into consideration?

2.1.3 Changing of career

Two concepts of new careers are frequently discussed, boundaryless career and the protean career (see eg. Arnold, 2011). The idea of boundaryless career is that it is free from the boundaries of organisations and occupations and is instead sustained by networks, both professional and personal and is driven by initiatives of the individual (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001). The protean career is value-driven and focuses on independence and personal development, and is alike the boundaryless career driven by initiatives of the individual (Hall, 2002).

However, Greber, Wittekind, Grote & Staffelbach (2009) assert that scholars might exaggerate this change in careers. They made a quantitative study in Switzerland and found that almost two thirds of their sample reported a traditional career orientation. Unlike this

result, Doogan (2001) concluded in a study from the United Kingdom, that 42% of managers and 39% of professionals of the sample had been in their current organisation for more than 10 years. However, Reitman and Schneer (2003) found that career paths like the boundaryless or the protean clearly existed, at least for MBA graduates in the US. But in the same sample they also found that one third had experienced the traditional career with one employer. Greber et al. (2009) points out that these thoughts of organisational change and changing of careers might have an influence on people's career preferences but not necessarily on their labour market experience.

2.2 Influences on the individual's choices of internal and external career moves

There are usually four specific types of mobility discussed (Aronsson et al., 2012; Ng, Sorensson, Eby, Feldman, 2007). *Internal-upward mobility* refers to promotions within the same organisation and are often the most desired type of job mobility by employees. The second one is *external-upward mobility* which also means a promotion, but to another employer. *Internal-lateral mobility* is a movement in the same organisation, on the same hierarchal level. *External-lateral mobility* is also a movement on the same hierarchical level, but to another organisation. This movement might be a cause of low satisfaction with the employer (Fields, Dingman, Roman & Blum, 2005).

Ng et al. (2007) discuss three sources of influence on mobility; the structural perspective, the individual perspective and the decisional perspective.

The structural perspective brings up macro factors such as economic conditions - if the economy is growing it is more likely that organisations will open up for both upwards and lateral movements as well as influence the individual's willingness to try a new job. If the economy is weak, people seem to be more risk-adverse (Ng et al., 2007). Social characteristics are also brought up as an impact on career and mobility, for example economic crisis, war, technological breakthroughs or policies and legislations (Kanter, 1989). A third aspect is industry differences, and according to Ng et al. (2007) the most interesting industry characteristics for job mobility are; gender composition, wage level, labour intensity and industry growth. The fourth and last concerns the organisation's staffing policies, which Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988) believe to affect internal mobility. They suggest four generic types of organisations based on their supply flow: openness of internal labour market to

outsiders, and to their assignment flow: internal cohort competition of assignments and promotions. If the openness of the internal labour market to outsiders is high, the organisation tends to recruit from the outside, and if it is low the organisation focuses on internal recruitment, except for entry-level positions. If the internal cohort competition is high, the organisation emphasises internal competition for assignments and promotions, and if it is low seniority decides who gets the assignments or promotions. The four generic types suggested are: baseball teams, clubs, academies and fortresses (Sonnenfeld & Peiperl, 1988). Ng et al. (2007) put a mobility perspective on these and suggest that Baseball teams "seek the best players" and do a lot of external recruitment as well as having a high internal competition for assignments and promotions. They are likely to provide many opportunities for upward mobility, and also some opportunities for lateral mobility, both internal and external. Clubs value seniority for promotions and assignments. Once inside the organisation, opportunities for lateral movements are many. Recruitment outside the organisation seldom happen and if it does, mostly at the entry-level. In Academies, the internal competition for assignments and promotions is high, and the external recruitment is low. There are many possibilities for internal-lateral movements. In Fortresses, lateral mobility is frequent and the presence of promotions is low; when it happens, seniority is rewarded. At the same time, there is an openness to the external market. However, it is likely that instead of recruiting from outside the organisation, they lose employees to the external market (Ng et al., 2007).

In the individual perspective on job mobility, Ng et al. (2007) discuss the Big 5 personality traits in relation to job mobility. The people most likely to have upward or lateral movements are those who have high extraversion (Watson & Clark, 1992), a high level of conscientiousness (Tharenaou, 1997) or a high level of openness to experience (Ng et al., 2007). Career interests also play an important role in the individual's mobility decisions, for example, those who have enterprising career interests, i.e. individuals that prefer management, are more likely to seek out upward mobility options. Personal values might also have an impact in how individuals prefer to manage their career. Ng et al. (2007) use the Schwartz (1992) classification scheme for personal values as a base, and conclude that achievement and power are related to upward mobility, both internal and external. Values related to internal mobility seem to be conformity and tradition, whereas values related to external mobility could be stimulation and universalism. Individuals' attachments styles are also related to their likeness for different kinds of mobility. Those with a secure attachment

style, that is, a positive self-view and a positive view of others, are more likely to make upward and lateral moves. People that are less likely to make mobility moves often have a fearful attachment style, which means that they have a negative self-view and a negative view of others (Ng et al., 2007).

The decisional perspective takes the individual's decisional behaviour into concern. Ng et al. (2007) find that if a mobility option goes hand in hand with the subjective norms, e.g. if a mobility option is seen as trendy, the individual is more likely to pursue the possibility. The attitudes to the type of mobility, and a belief that the transition is doable also affects the individual decision.

2.2.1 Career anchors

Another way to view career choices and motivation is Schein's (1996) career anchors, which are areas so central to the person's self-perception that he or she would not give them up, even in a situation concerning a difficult choice.

The career anchors defined by Schein (1996) are:

- Managerial competence - people with this anchor want to manage others and be generalists. If they have a specialist position they often view it as a short-term effort in order to gain some experience. Leadership, promotions and responsibility are important to these people.
- Technical/functional competence - these people build their career identity around their special skill and are eager to develop this skill further.
- Security - people with the security anchor are concerned about having reliable and predictable surroundings. It can be a wish to stay in a specific city.
- Autonomy and independence - freedom from restrictions is the most important thing for people with this anchor. Being bound by rules such as set working hours and dress codes are difficult.
- Entrepreneurial creativity - people that feel the importance of personal creation, for example, of products or organisations, can have this anchor.
- Pure challenge - these people are driven by strong competition or difficult-to-overcome obstacles.

- Service/dedication - for these people it is important that their values are reflected by those in the organisation, and that they work for a meaningful cause.
- Lifestyle integration - for these people, a balance between work time and free time is important.

According to Schein (1996), only one of these is our real anchor, even though we can feel that many of them are important to us. Our real anchor directs our career choices.

Some critics of this concept object that we have more than one anchor, and that those anchors may change during our work life. Despite the criticism, the anchors can have an importance for understanding peoples' career choices (Aronsson et al., 2012). Arnold & Silvester (2005) state that identifying our career anchor might assist in our own assessment and management of our career. They also argue that it is important that the human resource department is aware of the distribution of the various anchors in their organisation, since it can assist them in creating career planning policies or give career guidance. Schein (1996) concludes that imposing policies such as standardised working hours on a workforce that values the autonomy/independence anchor is counterproductive. There is also a difficulty in climbing the career ladder for people with the technical/functional anchor, without abandoning their core anchor in favour of becoming general managers (Schein, 1996).

2.2.3 Career orientation of engineers

As this study focuses on the career of engineers we have looked into scholarly contributions on this specific group in terms of career. Research has shown that engineers are a very heterogeneous group when it comes to career orientation preferences (Igbaria, Kassicieh & Silver, 1999; Trembley et al. 2001). One study showed that one third prefer the managerial path and are willing to abandon the technical field (Biddle & Roberts, 1993). Already in the 1950's there were discussions about the problem of rewarding technically-oriented people with managerial promotions, and as a counterpart the dual career ladder was introduced, which allowed both a managerial and a technical career path (Shepard, 1958). However, Trembley et al. (2001) showed in their study where a survey was sent out to 900 engineers that the two traditional career paths; the technical and the managerial are not enough for all engineers. This is further supported by Igbaria et al. (1999) who state that the dual career ladder is not the best option for engineers. Also, Mignonac and Herrbach (2003) argue that compensation and career management systems, as well as success norms, still force engineers

with career aspirations towards the managerial path. Furthermore, they claim that career development for engineers often requires them to change technical field and/or functions (Mignonac & Herrbach, 2003).

2.2.4 Embeddedness

Another perspective on what influences the individual's mobility is embeddedness (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski & Erez, 2001) which relates to the forces that can make an individual stay at a certain job, even though there are better possible opportunities. These forces are fit, links and sacrifice (Mitchell et al., 2001). Fit describes the ways in which the job relates to other interests, preferences and goals of the individual, and how the organisational values reflect their personal values. The location of the organisation or job can also have an impact. The better the fit, the higher likelihood that the individual might feel professionally and personally tied to the organisation. The second force concerns the individual's links to the other people in the organisation. It can constitute both formal and informal links about work-related issues or personal issues. The more links, the more bound the individual is to the organisation and job, and for a person with a lot of social links, it can be a challenge to attain the same level of linkage in another setting. The third one relates to what the individual must sacrifice, both professionally and personally to leave the current job. It could be an internal career path, benefits or seniority. Personal sacrifices could include moving from one society to another, or to leave great colleagues (Mitchel et al., 2001). Embeddedness can have both a positive and a negative side. The positive is that a good fit between the organisation and the individual and positive links to others is a sign that an individual's career is going well. However, it decreases the probability of the individual to make the most out of possible career opportunities (Aronsson et al., 2012).

2.3 Career management

Baruch (2006) states that there are two opposite views on who is in charge of career development. One claims that the organisation is responsible since they create a business strategy which often also includes career development practices. On the contrary, according to the second view, the responsibility should be placed with the individual as they should create their own future (Baruch 2006). It has been found that the environment for career development has changed for both employers and employees and that there is a need for a combination of the two perspectives (Baruch, 2006; Mayrhofer, Meyer, Iellatchitch, &

Schiffinger, 2004; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). The benchmark report by E.L Goldberg & Associates (2011) also concludes that most companies have a self-reliance strategy when it comes to career management, leaving most of the responsibility with the employees, and that many of them would benefit from taking a more active role in the career path of their talents (E.L. Goldberg & Associates, 2011).

A positive perception among the employees of the organisational career development practices and possibility for internal mobility creates a psychological commitment to the organisation (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989). Byars & Leslie (2011) state that when choosing an effective career management program, it is important that it fits the organisation and its needs and that it is perceived as appropriate by the employees. They also state that the organisation will have reduced costs and turnover if the program is successful and efficient.

The extent to which employees pursue internal careers is positively related to their perceived organisational investment in their development. This means that if the organisation invests in employee development, it is more likely that the employee will seek out an internal career and also adapt to changes at their current position (Solberg & Dysvik, 2016). Furthermore, employees will be more satisfied and committed to their job if they perceive that the organisation is engaged in developing their skills and competency (Lee & Bruvold, 2003).

Mabye & Iles (1995) have identified four key components that are important in order for career practices to be appreciated among employees. First of all, practises should focus not only on current actions but that they also plan ahead. It is also important that they promote personal growth. Secondly, they need to involve the employee and plans need to be made in collaboration with managers and employees. Thirdly, it is crucial that links are made between assessment criteria and career development activities. Fourthly, the career development practices need to be in accordance with the reality of the particular organisation. Here line managers become important as they can link the goals of the organisation with career activities (Mabey & Iles, 1995).

2.3.1 Role of the manager
Many HR policies can only be implemented by the line managers and often they enact the 'informal' culture as opposed to official company policy (Truss, 2001). A benchmarking report showed that it is important that managers contribute to the professional development of

their staff in terms of creating opportunities for them to be challenged and increase their knowledge as well as allowing personal growth (E.L. Goldberg & Associates, 2011). The report indicated that managers tend to latch on to talented people in their teams as opposed to encouraging them to move within the organisation, even if this has a negative effect on their development (E.L. Goldberg & Associates, 2011). A case study from Ireland showed that managers weren't taking responsibility for the training and development which was hindering internal mobility (Garavan & Coolahan, 1996). However, a lack of execution of company policies from the manager isn't necessary an act of strategic disobedience, but can rather be a perception on their part that the policies are not compliant with the required daily deliveries (Boxall & Purcell, 2011).

3. Theory

In this section, we will present our chosen theory – translation, and provide two perspectives on this, Knowledge-based and Scandinavian institutional perspective. These have been used to gain a deeper understanding of how the vital career management information flows across hierarchies, functions and professions in the organisation, and how the individuals understand the practices.

3.1 Translation

Translation theory originates from Actor Network Theory which was created by Latour (1986, 1987) and Callon (1986) who in their turn were inspired by Serres (1982) (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016).

Translation is a concept used in many different academic traditions. In organisation and management studies, there are three main perspectives that discuss translation; Actor-Network Theory, Scandinavian Institutional Theory and Knowledge Based Theory. What they have in common is the focus on a phenomenon of translation, defining it as some sort of process where information changes as it moves across the organisational setting (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016).

Translation researchers (see for example Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996., Røvik, 2000) often refer to Latour's (1986) model of translation, which came about as a supplement to the diffusion model. The diffusion model argues that how efficiently an idea is spread in the organisation is correlated to the amount of force used to implement it versus the resistance that it encounters on its way through the organisation (Røvik, 2000). Latour (1986) argues that the diffusion model is not enough to understand the journey of an idea through an organisation. He posits that translation gives a better indication of how social artefacts are spread through an organisation. He defines it as:

> *"The spread in time and space of anything - claims, orders, artefacts, goods - is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it."* (Latour, 1986; 267).

Today, the translation perspective in Actor-Network theory focuses on settings with conflicting meanings or interests, the Scandinavian institutional theory focuses on translation of management practices, and the knowledge-based perspective on how knowledge flows and is understood in an organisation (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016). We have chosen to use the knowledge-based perspective together with the Scandinavian institutional perspective since it allows us to understand how the vital career management information flows across hierarchies, functions and professions in the organisation, and how the individuals understand the practices.

3.1.2 Translation from a knowledge-based perspective

The research field of knowledge-based theory has two separate views on the concept of knowledge. One view perceives knowledge to be more or less constant, knowledge transfer, and another view puts more emphasis on knowledge as developing as a result of social environments, knowledge translation (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016). It is defined as *"a boundary-spanning activity undertaken to ensure the effective flow of critical information and domain-specific knowledge across organisational boundaries."* (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016; 244). Merminod and Rowe (2012; 298) assert that knowledge translation *"links two or more groups of people separated by location, hierarchy, or function"*. Pawlowski and Robey (2004; 649) argue that *"translation involves framing the elements of one community's worldview in terms of another community's worldview"*.

Merminod and Rowe (2012) discuss the complexity of intra-organisational knowledge translation due to different cognitive environments in the different parts of the organisation. Knowledge translation goes beyond knowledge transfers, as it is referred to as a common lexicon to transfer area-specific information, based in organisational routines. Furthermore, they state that knowledge transfer is quite easy, and serves to solve basic problems of knowledge circulations among individuals in the organisation. Knowledge translation however deals with semantic or interpretive boundaries. In this, individuals who facilitate sharing of expertise - boundary spanners - become important since they can connect people from different locations, hierarchies or functions and transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge (Merminod & Rowe, 2012).

3.1.3 Translation from a Scandinavian institutional perspective

Wæraas and Nielsen (2016) write that the object of translation in the Scandinavian institutional perspective is management ideas, models or practices. Lamb and Currie (2012; 219) define it as *"the process in which ideas and models are adapted to local contexts as they travel across time and space"*.

An idea is developed in a specific area or local context, and for an idea to spread through an organisation, Czarinawska and Joerges (1996) argue that it must be translated and simplified into an object of some sort. This could be a model, a policy or a book. When reaching its new context, it becomes interpreted and modified to fit the local conditions, and will inevitably be changed (Czarinawska & Joerges, 1996).

Erlingsdottir and Lindberg (2005) build on this and present a model of translation. The sender is the originator of an idea, and through *disembedding*, i.e. detaching it from its institutional environment and *packing*, i.e. making it into an object - a model or policy - it is spread through the organisation. The receiver, the part of the organisation that is going to use the idea, *unpacks* and *re-embeds* the idea, i.e. translates it to be useful in the new setting and in the end, it becomes a routine.

4. Method

In this section we present our choice of method: a qualitative case study. We will bring up research design, setting, respondent selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations as well as ethical considerations.

4.1 Research design

This study has been conducted as a case study, which allows us to study an organisation using several data collection techniques (Hakim, 2000). Both qualitative interviews and a short survey have been used, and according to Hakim (2000), using multiple data collection methods creates a more holistic view of the topic investigated. The main focus has been on the interviews, and by doing qualitative interviews we can gather, explore and describe rich data (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

4.2 Setting

The case company for this thesis, Alpha AB, is a large global organisation in the engineering industry with over 97 000 employees worldwide, 20 000 of which are located in Sweden. Alpha AB was selected on based on the size of the organisation with its numerous career opportunities and also the organisation's interest in career paths and desire to increase the internal mobility. They actively work on developing tools and processes with the goal of facilitating employees' career path opportunities.

More specifically, our study focuses on the Research and Development (R&D) division of Alpha AB, which from now on we will call Alpha R&D. Alpha R&D has 7000 employees in Sweden and comprises of four departments. Three of these departments specialise each in different parts of the product that the company produces and the remaining department handles only quality issues. The R&D division mainly employs engineers but also administrative staff and HR professionals. For anonymity purposes further details about the organisation will not be disclosed.

The respondents in this study are engineers from all four departments and HR professionals from three of the departments. As stated previously, we have focused on respondents that Alpha AB describes as Key Talents, which means that they are engineers who have scored

high in the annual talent review in both results and potential. Key Talents exists on all levels in the organisation. The Key Talents that this thesis focuses on are either group manager, here called First Line Managers, or employees that identified as potential managers, here called Future Leaders.

During the course of this thesis we have been in contact with a gatekeeper who is an HR manager at one of the departments and who has granted us access to the organisation, the respondents and the internal documents and policies that were needed in order to fulfil the purpose of this study.

4.3 Respondent selection

The respondents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling common in interview-based research (Bryman, 2011). The first step in our sampling of respondents was to use criterion sampling, which means to sample all units that meet a certain criterion (Bryman, 2011). The first criterion was that the respondent had been identified either as a Future Leader in the talent review, or the respondent was a first line manager - First Line Managers. The second criterion was seniority of two years or more, since we thought it was important that the respondents have an organisational understanding. The gatekeeper provided us with a list of 105 names that met these criteria, divided into the different departments, as well as details about them being either Future Leader or First Line Manager. This created subgroups categorised in the four departments. From these subgroups, our gatekeeper, together with HR-managers from each department, made suggestions about which individuals to interview. It resulted in 18 interviews with 11 First Line Managers and 7 Future Leaders, divided as equally as possible between the departments. Moreover, we interviewed three HR-managers from the departments, selected by our gatekeeper. We are aware of the risk that the gatekeeper together with the other HR-managers might have chosen certain individuals to alter the results, and that the results might have been different using another sampling method. However, we had close discussions with our gatekeeper, explaining that we wanted typical cases (Bryman, 2011) that exemplified our interests. These interests were communicated to our gatekeeper, and were to interview individuals that had an ambition in making a career, had some sort of experience with career management systems, as well as being communicative and open to share their thoughts. Moreover, all of the 105 individuals from the first round of selection were invited to answer the survey.

4.4 Data collection

This study has been conducted using primary data which was retrieved from semi-structured interviews with Key Talents (First Line Managers and Future Leaders) and 3 HR managers. In total, 21 interviews were conducted. The method was chosen because it allows us to both cover the pre-decided topics and to follow up on topics that occur during the conversation (Hakim, 2000). Also, a short survey (see appendix 2) was conducted to gain an initial understanding of the Key Talents inter-functional knowledge and their willingness to move within the organisation. Furthermore, we had access to company documents about their talent management tools.

All the interviews were conducted in March 2017. The majority of the interviews were held face to face at the respondent's workplace and a few were conducted through the use of Skype. The interviews varied in length and lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. We made the decision to conduct the interviews separately, as we felt that it would make the interviewee more comfortable not to be outnumbered and thus allowing a more open dialogue. All the interviews were recorded after consent was given and then partially transcribed. Before data collection began, an interview guide (see Appendix 1) was constructed in accordance to the research purpose, in order to ensure that both researchers covered all of the topics during the interviews. All but three respondents were interviewed in their mother tongue, Swedish, so there was no significant language barrier. The other three were interviewed in English. However, English is the official language at Alpha AB and the interviewees use it in their daily work so we did not perceive it to be a concern in their case.

4.5 Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and then coded and analysed using the qualitative data analysis software *NVivo* which helped to structure and organise our findings. We started analysing our data when we transcribed and saw the themes that were occurring. The next phase was to code the material to find patterns (Bryman & Bell 2011). The coding was guided by our research purpose and questions. We looked for themes that included career development practices, the role of the manager, and motivations for making a career at Alpha AB. We focused on the most common views of the respondents. The themes, together with the survey results, were used to present our results. In the discussion, we formulated the

themes differently, based on our findings in relation to the translation perspective. These were *inconsistencies in understandings of career and internal mobility, difficulties to navigate in the organisation, lack of incentives for managers to develop employees and promote internal mobility* and *uncertainties and insecurities.*

4.5 Trustworthiness

Some qualitative researchers apply reliability and validity the same way as quantitative researchers do, even though it can pose difficulties in measurement. For example, external reliability, the degree to which a study can be replicated, can be hard to approximate in qualitative studies since we can't "freeze" a social setting. External validity, the degree of generalisability, is often very low in qualitative studies since the use of small samples or case studies is common (Bryman, 2011). Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed a framework of four quality criteria for qualitative research that serve as an alternative to reliability and validity - trustworthiness. The four criteria of trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility alludes to the fact that there can be several possible aspects of a social reality, and that the researchers have to make sure they understand the social reality of their research setting. This is done by respondent validation and triangulation, the use of more than one source of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In our case, we used two types of data - survey material, which had a response rate of 72%, and qualitative interviews. Since we are two students conducting this master thesis, we have both analysed the interview material, and if uncertainties came up, the respondent was contacted for validation.

Transferability is typically low in qualitative research since it is examining a smaller group or a case, focusing on depth rather than breath, and is highly dependent on the contextual uniqueness of the social reality that is being examined. By providing a thick description of the context, the researcher can provide others with the judgement of whether or not the results could be transferred into another setting (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To give our readers an understanding of the contextual characteristics of this study, we have provided a thorough description of the case.

When it comes to dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1994) suggest an auditing approach, where every part of the process is reviewed by peers. Since we are two students writing this

thesis, a natural peer review happens during the process. Moreover, the course structure with seminars has provided us with peer review from other students as well.

Conformability relates to the question of objectivity, and is based on the assumption of the impossibility of a completely objective qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1994) suggest that it should be shown that the researcher has acted in good faith and has not let personal beliefs or theoretical convictions get in the way of the result. This is suggestively done through the auditing approach previously mentioned.

Overall, we believe that being two students writing this master thesis has helped us in the process of trustworthiness as well as in the thesis process over all.

4.6 Limitations

One of the limitations with this study has to do with the chosen sample frame. We made the choice to interview only Key Talents which means that the respondents have been selected by the organisation based on their criteria of what is required in in their organisation to climb the professional ladder. This could indicate that our respondents are a very homogeneous group that isn't representative for the employees in general. Another thing that our respondents have in common is that they all have good relations with their managers as it is the manager that appoints them as talents. This means that we have not received the perspective of the people who might be competent and who might have leadership skills but who either do not have good relations with their current manager or does not fit this particular organisation's talent management system. However, that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Alpha AB is a large group with many units and divisions which we haven't made comparisons with. It could be that the culture is different in the R&D division which we do not know about so we can not say if our results are relevant for the whole Alpha Group. Also, we have not made comparisons with another MNC so our findings could be specific to this particular MNC. However, to make generalisations is not the purpose of the study.

Organisational loyalty could also be impacting the respondents' answers both on a conscious and a subconscious level. The survival and well-being of the company is affected by its reputation and though the respondents were informed that the organisation will be anonymised it could still be affecting them in the interviews.

4.7 Ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council has identified four ethical principles to consider for research in social sciences. They are the information requirement, the requirement of consent, confidentiality obligations and utilisation requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). All of them have been respected during the course of this study. First of all, they state that the participation in the study is voluntary and that interviewees can withdraw at any point in the process which they have been informed of at the beginning of the interview and also before choosing to participate. An important aspect to consider is that the company in this case is very invested in learning more about this topic which might lead to employees feeling pressured to participate. Therefore, we have emphasised that their participation will be anonymous as well as a possible withdrawal would not be associated with them. According to the information requirement the respondents have to be informed about the purpose of the study. However, in order to be able to conduct the study it is often impossible to give all the information to the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, we had to instead give out more information later on in the process.

5. Result

In this section, we will go through our results, categorised in themes following the purpose of the study and interview guide. The themes are: career development practices, the role of the manager and making a career.

5.1 Career development practices

As the organisation prefers their managers to have a broad knowledge of the company, it is important for them that Key Talents have a greater internal mobility. As they are moving across different departments they gain a broader understanding of the organisation. HR states that Top Management wants to increase the quality of their products, and believe that this is done partly in having managers that can see the full picture. HR also states it is because they want to retain the Key Talents, and offer them career development opportunities. At Alpha AB it is the individual that has the main responsibility for their own career. HR are clear that it is the individual's own drive that makes them move in the organisation. Transparency is important, and all job postings are open for all applicants.

The organisation had an idea about the reasons for the low internal mobility prior to this study, as well as a desire to increase that number. HR believed that the cause was mainly due to a fear of losing the competencies gained when switching to another department as it often means starting from scratch in terms of the technical competence. They also thought that there was a lack of knowledge as to what jobs actually existed in other departments. Would taking a certain job mean a step up or a step down career-wise? They thought this was unclear and were already initiating actions to improve it. They also thought that the need for a sense of security caused people to take a management position in a department that they already knew. HR also state that some departments think that their department isn't attractive enough for other people to join, that nobody wants to come work there and that gives the wrong signal which might decrease internal mobility.

The identification of Key Talents is based on a yearly process where managers rate the individuals in their group based on performance and potential. To be rated as a Key Talent, and become a part of the leadership pipeline, the employee needs a high score in both performance and potential. The managers are given tools by HR which consist of an

assessment matrix of potential and performance. According to the assessment documents, Alpha AB define performance as *"the individual's achievements in the current role against defined objectives and behavioural criteria".* A high performer typically has met all or most of their objectives, showed the desired professional competences and is a consistent high achiever and good at developing people. Furthermore, the individual should live up to the company values: passion, trust, performance, customer success and change. Potential is defined as *"the person's ability to grow, adapt and develop enough to handle more complex future work challenges and responsibilities".* A person with high potential is usually a fast learner, fast adapter, strategic thinker and able handle stress in a good way. When looking at potential, previous career progression and the likelihood of continuing achievement and progress is taken into consideration.

According to Alpha AB, the characteristics of a Key Talent are an *aspiration* to rise to senior roles, an *ability* to be effective in more responsibility, and *engagement* to commit to the organisation and remain in challenging roles. Alpha AB believes that this shows the ability to take on either a more complex job within the same field, such as a line management job or a project management job.

Alpha AB states in their Key Talent identification and leadership pipeline document, that research has shown that 29% percent of high performers are also high-potentials, but 93% of high potentials are also high performers.

When an individual is identified as a Key Talent by their manager, HR sets up a meeting with the individual for a talent dialogue. This is partly to discuss the possibilities for them based on their motivations and interests, but also to give a second opinion as to whether the individual really is a Key Talent. It can sometimes be hard for the managers to distinguish between performance and potential.

"The managers say that 'this one is a really good employee', but is that really the same thing as having potential to become a manager? Or are they highly technical skilled? Because that is not the same thing." - HR respondent 2

The next step after being identified as a Key Talent for the first time (Future Leader) is to attend a training program to explore the area of leadership. Also, if a Future Leader progresses

in their career and becomes a manager (First Line Manager), additional leadership training is provided.

The organisation also works with succession planning on higher level managers, but since this thesis focus on Key Talents that are not yet managers, Future Leaders, and group managers, First Line Managers, this will not be further discussed due to the limitations of this thesis.

The organisation recently introduced one tool for making it easier for the employees to get an overview of the organisation and possible career paths.

> *"We have created a map between the engineering jobs, so that the employees can see how they relate to each other and use as a basis of discussion for planning their career and discuss with their manager."* - HR respondent 2

However, the organisation doesn't see this as part of their talent management strategy, since their view of talent management is about leadership.

5.1.1 Perceptions of career management practices from Future Leaders

All Future Leaders thought having a system for recognising talents was good. However, the purpose of identifying Key Talents is in some cases insufficiently communicated to the Future Leaders and many stated that they lacked the necessary follow-up for a full efficacy.

> *"It's good that you have a system, but then you need to work actively with it."* - Respondent 3

In general, the Future Leaders thought that the process lacked transparency.

> *"I think that you are missing something by not being transparent. It's supposed to be so special and there is no follow-up anyways."* - Respondent 3

The majority were confused about the career management tools, and the even the term Future Leaders. Some had never of it before and others wondered what it entailed and what the next step would be.

> *"...I was selected to this kind of talent review. So now I am apparently a talent. But I never understood what it meant so I don't know if it is useful or not. And now I am in this kind of leadership pipeline. But I haven't understood that either."* - Respondent 5

When talking about the different career tools that are available the knowledge in general about them was either low or non-existent.

"No, I don't know anything about that at all. That isn't clear to me at all." - Respondent 1

Furthermore, some of the Future Leaders were unaware that Alpha AB wants them to move not only vertically, but also cross-functionally. However, some of the Future Leaders recognise that their development is something that they themselves can affect by being creative, which is also the message that HR wants to communicate.

"With some own initiative there is almost no limit as to what you can do. Definitely." -
Respondent 4

5.1.2 Perceptions of career management practices from First Line Managers
The general perception of the talent management practices among First Line Managers was the same as that of the Future Leaders; good and strong system but not enough follow-up activities and no action plan. They acknowledge the danger in not having an active plan for building competence for the future, but instead giving this responsibility to the individuals. They also thought that they needed to be more specific with their talents as to what they want from them and what the next step will be.

"It is flattering to be selected as someone the company believes in. That is probably a motivation factor in itself. But then I think that we are bad at taking care it and developing on the theme. It is very much up to the individual himself and maybe his manager...Otherwise nothing else happens." - Respondent 12

Concerns were raised about the focus with the talent review being only for those in the pipeline for managers and not as much for other career paths. There is also a general lack of knowledge regarding the use of the talent review.

"But I think it's a bit weird this talent review… Focus is on managerial positions… There should be a talent review for different positions. Or maybe there is, maybe it's just that I don't know about it." - Respondent 11

Some of the First Line Managers mentioned that they have knowledge about the tool and the talents in their department, but when it comes to themselves being identified as a Key Talents

by their manager, they are confused. Some of them are unaware that the organisation wants them to move laterally and cross-functionally, before moving laterally.

The respondents also talk about the selection process for talents and how it is open for an individual interpretation and evaluation even though they are being given instructions. They acknowledge that a colleague might have done a different evaluation.

"Yes, it is pretty difficult. But we have good support in the instructions and in the guidelines. But it's not waterproof either, and some things I think that me and my colleagues might evaluate differently." - Respondent 12

5.1.3 Judgement of qualifications

It was discovered that there were two scenarios regarding the internal recruitment process where one was almost identical to the external recruitment and the other was much more informal.

"I was working in X department and then there was a guy who asked me about something… Then I said that I don't work in that group and then he said that that had to be fixed. So, I talked to the manager and then I sent in a formal application but I didn't apply for a position or anything." - Respondent 5

However, in many cases the internal recruitment process is perceived to be no different than the external one and the same amount of testing is used on internal applicants as well. This also causes feelings of not being validated for the work performed during the years with the company.

"...it was like 'oh my God I've been here 10 years and you have to spend one entire day evaluating me'. That felt strange." - Respondent 6

Moreover, many of the respondents also expressed a general confusion about the content of the job postings in terms of responsibility (more or less than in their current position), salary (more or less than their current position), tasks and deliveries.

"The text that is in the ads is difficult to understand and relate to something concrete. It says project leader, but what do you actually do?" - Respondent 1

There was mention of the entry requirements where many people were concerned about the need for a Master's degree despite in-house experience.

"It doesn't matter if the person in question have worked with exactly the same thing. If it doesn't say Master's degree on the paper it is no thank you (...) There are even people who have worked as consultants and then apply for their own position who don't get it." -
Respondent 2

5.2 The role of the manager

As mentioned previously, the organisation wishes to increase internal mobility. However, the organisation is, and has been for some years in constant shortage of staff and HR realises that the goal of the organisation may coincide with the short-term goals of a manager. HR wants to get the managers to understand the bigger picture and change their perspective. They want them to realise that if they do not develop them they will still switch jobs, but instead, it will be externally. From the HR perspective they also want the managers to understand that having people leaving the department with positive experiences for another department will help increase its popularity as they talk to their extended network which will then attract more applicants in the future. HR realises that the job of a group manager is very operational and that some of them need help sometimes to see the bigger picture. HR encourages all employees to discuss their development with their manager.

The organisation has given the main responsibility for the talent identification and development to the managers as they are the ones who know the individual and know how they act and perform. HR can sometimes act as door openers and facilitators, but the responsibility is still with the managers. When it comes to the support from the manager many of the respondents are very happy with it.

"We talk about what the next step is going to be. I've felt that with all my managers at Alpha AB. There is this open culture, everyone is kind of going somewhere, and you support each other in taking the next step - even if that means losing a valuable colleague you know that it is in the best interest for both the company and for that individual." - Respondent 8

However, by giving the majority of the talent identification power to the manager there is a risk that interpersonal differences between the manager and the employee have a negative impact on the employee's career possibilities.

"Somehow you are always in the group manager's lap. If you don't get along with your group manager, you are a little bit screwed. The group manager is the one who is going to see it but if the group manager doesn't even have an interest in seeing it, then you won't even be identified." - Respondent 6

There were also major concerns expressed regarding the power that the manager has when it comes to their career and the fact that the power over the employee's career does to a large extent lie with one single person. Respondents even went as far as to say that if you didn't have the support of your manager it is difficult to take the next step. This of course can both be due to lack of interest for the task of developing employees as well in some cases a perceived lack of the necessary skills with the individual. The perception of some respondents was that if they get opportunities has more to do with the particular manager and less with their individual performance or a central objective evaluation.

"I have actually seen such examples, of Future Leaders who had a good manager and they start their development, but when the manager is replaced it all stops." - Respondent 3

HR stated that much is up to the individual's responsibility and creativity saying that everything is accessible, however many respondents expressed difficulties with this.

"...and also to get ideas about different paths and discuss that with my manager. It is a little like a jungle there with all the courses there are." - Respondent 1

Respondents also expressed a need to have a coaching relationship with their manager. One even said that the support of the manager is required to be able to make a career which indicated perceived difficulties with navigating within the organisation.

"You need someone that you can talk to, a bouncing board and someone who has been where you are and can tell you about the situations that might occur and say 'this is good to keep in mind' and if along the way you get off track it is good to have someone to talk to. Share experiences with. It is vital for it to work." - Respondent 1

Many respondents also stated that it is important to have a manager who has an interest in developing their employees which isn't always the case.

"Then it's about having a manager who wants to develop you. If you don't have that, then it's difficult." – Respondent 11

There is an expressed desire from the employees to receive career support and coaching from their manager but the time that they have to spend on personal matters differs and many express that the focus lies more in the technical aspect of the job than the managerial aspects. The managers themselves express a shortage in and how personal duties are valued by the organisation.

"Do I have unreasonable expectations of what a group manager is supposed to do? Sometimes I feel like there is a conflict between my values those of Alpha AB. They think that you should be invested in all the projects and all the technology, but the staff I'm just supposed to manage a little with my left hand, kind of." - Respondent 7

5.3 Making a career

The respondents think that there are many possibilities for making a career at Alpha AB and results show that respondents see advantages of making a career internally.

"I noticed that I had a lot of advantages when I switched departments. The people who are external have a much longer start-up phase." - Respondent 1

Some were open to anything that could pose a challenge or be a step up in their career whereas others indicated that they were more prone to stay in the same field.

"Some departments are easier to move to, more natural. In my case it is been from X to Y. It is the same kind of setup." - Respondent 2

However, the openness to search for new positions varied and some were more passive than others. Some thought that applying was a big step that required serious considerations. 38,16% replied in the survey that they looked at job postings on the internal web page every three months, 21,05% every month, 26,32 every week, 2,63% every day and 11,84% answered that they never looked for new internal vacancies. Also, some of the respondents

stated that career does not necessarily involve an upward career move, but that professional and personal development could be seen as a part of the career.

"Actually, I would be interested in all the positions that would challenge me and teach me something new." - Respondent 9

5.3.1 Inter-functional knowledge and understanding

Our short survey showed that 98,68% were willing to switch departments to advance in their career, 42,11% had already switched departments at some point and 75% had a positive experience of that switch. However, the interviews revealed that there is a low inter-functional understanding among the Key Talents. All of the respondents expressed a lack of knowledge of what the other departments do and what their future needs are but some also said that they could see the benefits of filling those gaps in knowledge.

"I think it is a bit too much like isolated islands, we work a lot within our own department and we are good at different things." - Respondent 12

The understanding some of the respondents have about the other departments seem to be either from previous work there, or that they are working specifically towards that department. They also state that they see differences between the departments.

"It might be easier to understand what the other departments are doing now, but before I became a manager, the step was huge. Even now I see that the departments are very different, surprisingly different. The way you work together, mentality and so on." - Respondent 11

However, one group is taking action and is independently running an initiative for creating stronger inter-functional ties.

"We are inviting the other group to come visit us - what are we really doing here, and how can we increase networking? It doesn't have to be the project leader that sits on all the contacts, the employees can independently contact each other over the department-borders instead. It is a win-win situation. Increased networks and decreased workload for the project leader." - Respondent 7

The organisation has seen less applicants for vacant positions in one department within the division in particular. The results from the survey also indicates a lower interest in making a

career move to that specific department (52,63% compared to 73,68% for the most popular department). Even among the survey respondents who already worked in this department there was a reluctance towards making a career move within this department. The department in question is a bit different from the other departments within the division, since they are not working with the actual development of the product, but selectively with product quality. Results showed that the department also stood out in that its raison d'être was highly questioned by many respondents.

"I think that department is unclear from a 'what-is-the-purpose perspective'. What do they actually do and how does that connect with the rest…What is the added value for the organisation? A bit like they lack an identity." - Respondent 11

Respondents questioned if the employees there had the right competence and background.

"I think we've gotten the feeling that they are bystanders sometimes…and maybe that they are not competent enough." - Respondent 9

Respondents also questioned the decision making power and mandate of the employees at the quality department.

"I worked with them as a project leader and it didn't matter what they thought. It was other people who made the decisions anyways." - Respondent 5

Furthermore, the results showed as that lack of knowledge in some cases becomes a strong group identification and a non-collaborative culture.

"If someone from another department makes a mistake … you're like 'they don't know what they're doing - we got to sort this out guys'. It is kind of said with a joking jargon, but at the same time it is like we do 'all this' and they do 'only that - so of course they are not capable of understanding this'. That's kind of how it is, and that also builds the feeling of not wanting to move" - Respondent 2

Many respondents also expressed an inner conflict in regards as to what to prioritise in terms of the own group, own department or Alpha R&D.

"You can feel sometimes that it is hard to put on the 'Alpha-hat', you look to the best of your own department. But it is only natural, it is so big that it is not quite manageable to look at the big picture." - Respondent 6

"It sort of becomes a compromise, to look bigger or to your group or your section." - Respondent 9

5.3.2 Motivation for career and professional development

HR presumed that the goal of a vertical career move was the biggest motivator for their Key Talents in their career decision making process. The survey showed that 81,58% of the Key Talents would choose a managerial position (higher than the one they currently have) if having to choose between that, and a non-managerial position within a new product/new field. 18,42% said that they would choose the latter option.

Results showed that the strongest motivator stated by almost all the respondents, was to learn new things and to be challenged and to gain a broader understanding of the organisation, understanding the bigger picture and contributing to the organisational development.

"If I were to switch area, it would be because I want new challenge for myself, and also to see Alpha as a whole with its challenges. To get a broader perspective..." - Respondent 9

And for many, their curiosity is their main driving force.

"It is the curiosity, to learn a new area, broaden your knowledge and also contribute with the knowledge I have." - Respondent 5

Working with people, team development and making others grow professionally is a big driver, especially for the managers interviewed. The Future Leaders are also driven by the human factor of the work, however, not to the same extent.

Some of the respondents state that having influence and power in decision making processes motivate them the most. To be able to state their views in matters that are important for them directly in the forum where they are discussed, instead of having to go through their current manager was brought up as very important for them.

"I would like to have some mandate to control and manage, not only to communicate something from above. Having more influence." - Respondent 10

Compensation and benefits were brought up by some respondents, however the ones that mention it, mention it as a salary raise when changing positions, and not as a driver in their everyday work. The position itself, and whether it matches the own interests and competences is a big motivational factor when the respondents discuss changing position within the organisation.

"*It is important that I can use my experience, that my profile and knowledge matches what the department is doing."* - Respondent 1

5.3.3 Professional dreams

When the respondents were asked about their dream job, the answers varied greatly. Some of them were not at all related to what they do as engineers.

"If I am to dream, I would like to work with food, maybe as a chef." - Respondent 3

However, many of the respondents dream about interesting projects or new products and many articulated the desire to be part of making the world a better place.

"During my career we will make the switch to alternative fuels. So during my career I will be contributing to a better world. That is pretty inspiring." - Respondent 14

Some, especially those who are managers, dreamed about being good managers - to work with leadership development and development of their employees. Others dreamed about having good managers. To lead a smaller organisation and get an overview also seems to be a dream for some of the managers. Some also stated that what exactly they were doing did not matter, rather the surroundings, the colleagues and the atmosphere were the important attributes of their dream job.

"I love to watch people grow and to be a part of creating better conditions for my team to develop professionally." - Respondent 8

When it comes to goals as opposed to far away dreams, some of the respondents want to climb the career ladder whereas others are satisfied with lateral movements. Something they

almost all have in common is that they wish to move and develop, and most of them express a wish to see other departments in the division and in the company and contribute to its success.

"I want to make sure that the business is run in a good way, and that there are progress" - Respondent 1

6. Discussion

In this chapter, we will first discuss our results using the Knowledge-based and the Scandinavian Institution perspective on translation. We will then discuss the findings in relation with previous research.

6.1 Translating internal mobility into career advancement - The journey of a Talent Management Idea

Using translation in a Scandinavian Institutional perspective, we can observe the process of translation as an idea that flows through the organisation through processes of disembedding, packing, unpacking and re-embedding (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg, 2005). In the following illustration we will show how the idea (to increase internal mobility) of the Top Management travels through the organisation and how it is translated first by HR, followed by managers and Future Leaders. Their goal was to increase internal mobility of the future managers by encouraging Key Talents to make lateral career moves as well as vertical ones. The background to this was that the organisation wanted to increase the quality of their product and ultimately the sales of their product. To increase the quality, they want managers who understand and have experience from the entire business and not just one part of it.

The following illustration, shows our results and how we understand them through translation. We show how the idea is translated on each level of hierarchy. For example, we see that HR created a talent management policy, which is their translation of the idea that came from top management.

	Results	**Translation process**
Top Management	**Target:** Increased product quality to increase sales **Mean:** Increase internal mobility of Key Talents in order to increase the knowledge span of managers and their understanding of the product and the organisation	*Sender* **Disembeds** the idea from their context in discussions with HR
HR	**Policy containing:** - Tool to identify Key Talents that in the future will be generalist managers - Leadership pipeline - Puts the responsibility to implement on managers and individuals - Do not communicate internal mobility goal clearly enough	**Packs** the tools for identifying Key Talents through a policy - Fail to pack the mobility goal of the organisation Also function as **boundary-spanner**, can translate tacit knowledge into explicit.
Managers/First Line Managers	- **Tool to identify Key Talents** - **Talent review** - Perceived lack of time - Lack of incentive - Own agenda that coincides with the internal mobility goal - Potential lack of interest in developing people - Do not communicate the individual's expected responsibility of own career	*Receiver* **Unpacks** the tools to identify Key Talents **Re-embeds** it and use it in the yearly talent review *Sender*: Fails to **disembed** and **pack** idea further Also function as **boundary-spanner**, can translate tacit knowledge into explicit. (Bound to specific managers and not a result of an established process)
Future Leaders	- **Training program for Future Leaders** - Insufficient information - Lack of plan and follow up - Lack of inter-functional understanding - Lack of understanding of the process and goals - No advantage as internal applicant - Inadequate understanding of the content in the internal job postings	*Receiver* Lack of object to **unpack** and **re-embed**. Those Future Leaders that have a manager that acts like a boundary-spanner understands the purpose of internal mobility and how it also relates to and benefits their personal career goals.

The idea came from the top management, and through disembedding - detaching it from its institutional environment - they started the process of translation by going through the HR department who got the task of packing the idea - making it into an object, e.g. a policy. This is where it starts to get problematic since it seems like HR fails to pack the idea of mobility, even though they succeeded to pack the idea of Key Talent identification. The managers of the organisation, including the First Line Managers are the receivers of this idea, since they are the ones who are going to implement it with their employees. They unpack it and re-embed it to fit their environment, but fail to translate the practices further to their Future Leaders since they haven't committed to the role as senders. We argue that they lack incentive to act as senders of the idea to the Future Leaders.

It could be argued that the Future Leaders don't need to have this knowledge since they don't work actively with the talent reviews or have a task to perform. However, since they are Key Talents, and thus a vital part of this talent management idea, we argue that they need to be a part of the translation process in order for them to be aware of the goals and reasons behind the organisation's drive for increased internal mobility and how this relates to their personal career advancement goals. Using the terminology of the Scandinavian institutional translation process (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg, 2005), we can see that there is a lack of objects to unpack and re-embed for the Future Leaders. Also, this insufficient translation leaves the Future Leaders wondering what's coming next after they have been appointed as Key Talents.

Using the vocabulary of knowledge-based translation theory (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016), HR as well as the managers have been given the role of boundary-spanners. Boundary-spanners are meant to connect people from different locations, hierarchies or functions (Merminod & Rowe, 2012), to make sure that information travels from one function to another (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016). We argue that HR does this to some extent, but they fail in translating the mobility goal - they seem to have an underlying assumption that the counterpart already has this knowledge and therefore doesn't think there is either a need for translations or knowledge transfer. When it comes to the managers, some of them take on the role as boundary-spanners more than others which then explains the differences in the respondents and their understanding of the talent management system and available career paths.

6.2 Understanding our case through translation

Translation is a constant process and as Latour (1986; 267) puts it "*...people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it*" (Latour, 1986; 267). The outcomes of the translation process in this case can be summarised in four themes; *inconsistencies in understandings of career and internal mobility*, *difficulties to navigate in the organisation, uncertainties and insecurities* as well as *lack of incentives for managers to develop employees and promote internal mobility*.

6.2.1 Inconsistencies in understandings of career and internal mobility

One consistent theme that we could see in our results was that the groups that we interviewed, HR, Future Leaders and First Line Managers had very different understanding of career and the career management processes at Alpha AB.

Alpha AB wants to increase the internal mobility in the group of Key Talents through career moves. It seems like the organisation and the Key Talents have different views on what career entails, and what the motivators for making a career move might be. The organisation regards career mostly as changing position, laterally or vertically, whereas many of the Key Talents view career also as professional development in their current position. We can understand this as an example of when the organisation hasn't been able to sufficiently translate the viewpoints and goal of the organisation in regards to the Key Talents.

HR's perception is that the employees identified as Key Talents are highly motivated to make vertical moves. However, this was not something explicitly expressed by the respondents. They were motivated by learning new things, being challenged and getting a broader understanding of the organisation. It could be argued that they will obtain this when making a vertical career move, but also through lateral moves or professional development in the same position. Furthermore, one perception that HR had was that their low mobility was due to people's unwillingness to lose their competencies and learn new skills which is often required when switching departments. However, our results show that, almost exclusively, the respondents expressed a great interest in learning new things and stated that they wanted to be challenged, and that they found it demotivating when they were not. This can indicate a lack of translation between functional borders and hierarchies. HR do have meetings with the appointed Key Talents to discuss career aspirations, but this information seems to stop at this

point, and does not reach the policy makers in the HR organisation. If they knew about the career aspirations and motivators of the Key Talents as a group, they might act differently and with a more interactive approach, which was something the Key Talents seemed to expect.

Another example of different perceptions is that HR and the organisation promotes lateral moves and consider that the Key Talents should take these opportunities as often as possible. However, the results showed that the internal recruitment process in many cases is not only very thorough but almost identical to the external recruitment process which made many respondents not only think that their time at Alpha AB wasn't valued by the organisation, but also made some of them reluctant to apply to another internal position. If the internal and external recruitment process is almost the same, the organisation might miss out on giving their employees an incentive to make an internal career move instead of an external one. At the same time the organisation is creating obstacles for the internal mobility that they are trying to achieve.

6.2.2 Difficulties to navigate in the organisation

Our survey showed that 98,68% of the Key Talents were willing to switch departments if it meant a step up in their career and the in-depth interviews that we conducted confirmed that result. The viewpoint of the organisation, and most of the Key Talents, is that Alpha AB have a good career system, numerous career possibilities and professional development opportunities and HR stated that it is up to the individual to both find the right training and/or job opportunities and take advantage of what is offered. However, results showed that many Key Talents found it difficult to navigate in the organisation and thus we found many factors that could hinder their career advancement such as lack of support from the manager, bad relations with the manager, poor knowledge of other departments and their functions and lack of clear information in the job ads. To summarise, there are many things that were both unclear and difficult for the Key Talents and we argue that it could be improved if the managers knew more about and had more incentive to act as boundary-spanners.

6.2.3 Lack of incentives for managers to develop employees and promote internal mobility

We argue that there are several risks with assigning most of the talent identification, career development practices and translations of these to one single person. As pointed out in the result section, one risk is that interpersonal relations interfere too much with the assessment,

thus making it biased. It could also, for several reasons be sensitive for the employee to bring up that they are thinking about leaving the group. Another risk is the time and priority issue. We discovered a clear conflict between the operational duties and the talent management responsibilities. Managers reported a lack of time to develop their staff, a perceived opinion from the organisation that it wasn't a priority but rather something that should be handled after everything else. Furthermore, the managers have no real incentive to encourage their employees to make lateral moves. Their success with developing people isn't measured, but their daily deliveries are. Losing their Key Talents means risking not meeting set targets and additional costs for the recruitment and training of a new employee. Not to mention that there might not even be a replacement at all for several months. The organisation relies instead on the manager's understanding of the company's internal mobility and to act accordingly in their best interest despite risking being punished for not delivering properly. Also, this understanding varied greatly among the respondents. Some managers expressed a supportive attitude about their employees' mobility desires and said that they understood that if the employee didn't move internally they would probably go externally instead and be lost to the company. However, this study does not provide data for how many of these managers follow through in this way.

We argue that adequate translation of the purpose and benefits of internal mobility, and how this goes hand in hand with career advancement, is crucial since we know from previous studies (E.L Goldberg & Associates, 2011) that managers have a tendency to hoard Talents even if they are aware of the negative long-term effects. This becomes especially important in this case since there is a scarcity of engineers and the organisation is constantly battling with attraction and retention of talents.

6.2.4 Uncertainties and insecurities

Results showed that the translation of the current talent management processes create several uncertainties and insecurities among the Key Talents. Results showed an example of hierarchies of information in that First Line Managers had more knowledge and information about the HR strategies and talent management practices than the Future Leaders did. This created uncertainties with the Future Leaders who were unsure about what it meant to be talents and more importantly what the subsequent steps in their career and development plan would be. Furthermore, the emphasis that HR has on the role of the individual was unknown

to most of them. The Key Talents also expressed a lack of knowledge regarding the purpose and responsibilities of the other departments. The willingness to switch was present but the knowledge about the variety of the opportunities was too low to create a real motivation to switch. This uncertainty was further confirmed when we learned that the job ads were equally confusing to the respondents. Would taking a certain job mean a step up or down in my career? What would I be expected to deliver? Would it involve an increase in salary? These were all issues that were unclear for the respondents. We can see that the knowledge doesn't flow across functional borders, which here has created a low inter-functional understanding.

6.3 Results in relation to findings from previous research

Previous research (Baruch, 2006) show that there are two extreme views about whether it is the individual or the organisation that should be in charge of the employee's career and career development plan. What we found at Alpha AB is that they have chosen to place the responsibility with the individual and their manager. HR clearly states that there are numerous opportunities both career-wise and in terms of development through a variety of training and courses that are available on the company intranet. However, time is lacking both for the individual and the manager, leaving little time left for proper career management and planning. Research (Solberg & Dysvik, 2016; Mayrhofer et al., 2004) indicates that companies would benefit from taking a more active role in their employees' career development and not taking responsibility for the development of the employees hinders internal mobility (Garavan & Coolahan, 1996) which is another reason for companies to enable, support and give incentive to managers to prioritise employee career development.

Research about embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001) tells us that switching jobs requires a fit in terms of interests, values etc. The chance of the switch occurring increases if there are links to the new position in terms of personal network and it decreases if it requires a sacrifice in terms of a good manager, interesting tasks or likable co-workers. We argue that the knowledge among the employees at Alpha AB about the other departments and available positions are too low for them to take a decision based on these factors. They are not informed enough to know whether a certain position matches their interests, values and goals.

HR has the viewpoint that all of the Key Talents want to make internal career moves if they are vertical. Considering Ng et al. (2007)'s discussion about structural, individual and

decisional perspectives on mobility, it seems like HR and the organisation believe that if they open up the structure for mobility, mobility will happen. They seem to fail to take the individual and decisional perspectives on mobility into consideration. Following Ng et al. (2007)'s discussion, we can see Alpha AB as a Baseball team with many opportunities for both vertical and lateral movements, with competition from both internal and external applicants.

In the individual perspective, personality traits that research (Ng et al., 2007) show are an indication for willingness towards upward or lateral mobility are a high level of openness to experience, which many of the respondents stated was a big motivator for them in their career development. To prefer the managerial path was an indication of willingness towards upward mobility (Ng et al., 2007), which also our respondents, especially among the First Line Managers, stated as a motivator. Values such as achievement and power was related to upward mobility and universalism and stimulation were values related to external mobility (Ng et al., 2007). In our case, since the setting is a big MNC, we argue that leaving the R&D division can be seen as external mobility in this viewpoint. These values were something that most of the respondents seemed to confirm.

Another problem we can see that has its root in lack of translation is HR's perception of the Key Talents' motivation for career development. In the decisional perspective, attitudes to the type of mobility, belief in oneself that the transition is doable and subjective norms were important (Ng et al., 2007). We have seen a subjective norm in some of the respondents, especially among Future Leaders, that leaving the department or even the group inside the department could be seen as breaking a norm, and therefore they are hesitant to leave, which in the end affects their decision to make the career move. To make the decision to move in spite of this, they need both information and incentive which is difficult to attain without proper translation.

Furthermore, it seems that HR believes that the main career anchor (Schein, 1996) of the Key Talents' is the managerial one. However, when asking the respondents about their dreams and career motivations, there were indications that there could also be other important carer anchors. Arnold and Silvester (2005) argue that it is important to know the composition of career anchors among the employee group to be able to create and implement suitable HR policies in career management. Furthermore, Alpha AB only focuses their talent management

strategy on the managerial career path, and it seems like those appointed Key Talents wish to pursue this path. However, researchers like Mignonac and Herrbach (2003) mean that career management systems force engineers with career aspirations towards the managerial path. We argue that it if motivations for making a career are translated across functional and professional borders (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016), for example HR investigating this more thoroughly, HR would have the knowledge that would facilitate them in creating suitable career management practices for their organisation.

7. Conclusion

In this section we will answer our research questions, present our contributions and recommendations for future research, as well as give recommendation to our case company.

As previously outlined, the purpose of study was to *describe and understand Key Talents expectations and motivations for internal career development in a MNC, and how the MNC manages their Key Talents in terms of internal mobility.*

We have illustrated one example of the journey that an organisational goal can make and be translated and understood during that process. In that we have shown how internal career can be perceived from both the perspective of the organisation and the individual. We have explored the motivations for the individuals to make a career and the need for internal mobility of the organisation. Furthermore, our results support previous research about the vital role that the managers have for employee development and career. In addition, we discovered that the organisation needs to take an active role to activate the managers to do this, and take control over this process.

RQ1 - How does a MNC manage their Key Talents in terms of internal mobility, and how is this strategy translated to and understood by the Key Talents?

The MNC wishes to increase the internal mobility across functional borders so that the managers have a broad competence and experience from several departments in the organisation. The end goal is to increase the quality of the product and ultimately increase sales. They do this by identifying Key Talents, who are the individuals that score high in performance and potential, and want to pursue the managerial career path. It is the closest manager that appoints the Key Talents in the group and after that HR has a talent dialogue with the individual identified as a Key Talent. The next step is to attend a training program to explore the area of leadership. However, after this it is up to the individual, sometimes with support of the closest manager, to continue the process. The organisation wants the internal mobility to come naturally through the Key Talents' motivation towards career development.

For this to work according to the organisation's wishes, we argue that it needs to be translated sufficiently. Much of the translation work is put on the managers, who have been appointed by the organisation to take the most active role in the employee's' career development. If they

have the time and interest, they translate the management idea down to the Future Leaders. We can see that the managers have been given the role as boundary-spanner, but lack incentives to fulfil that role. The organisation relies on managers to act on their behalf without giving them either the means or the incentives to do so. The translation to the managers is done by HR, who translate the talent identification process successfully, but miss out on translating the mobility goal.

The First Line Managers, who are responsible for identifying the Future Leaders, have a better understanding of the processes, responsibilities and goals of the organisation then the Future Leaders who expressed a general confusion about this. Everyone agrees that the system that they have for identifying talents is solid but they also agree that it is not being sufficiently used and almost all of the Key Talents perceive the organisation to be passive in their career development process.

The system that the organisation has today where the manager appoints the Key Talents and where the manager is also the person that helps the employee set up a career plan, makes sure that actions are taken and guides them professionally, it implies that one single person can make or break someone's career. With that system, we perceive the following risks: bias assessments, interpersonal relationships affecting the assessment, operational deliveries being prioritised before the development of their staff and the manager lacking interest in developing people.

RQ2 - How do Key Talents understand their internal career development, both in terms of previous career and future possibilities?

The Key Talents all agree that there are numerous career development opportunities at Alpha AB, and they want to continuously develop themselves professionally, to be challenged and to learn new things. They are open to switching departments, increasing their knowledge and gaining a broader understanding of the company, which is also the goal of the organisation. However, navigating in the organisation was found difficult by the Key Talents, and for this we found the following reasons: extensive internal recruitment processes, low understanding of the internal job postings and low inter-functional understanding of Key Talents.

7.1 Our contributions

We contribute to talent management research, more specifically to career management of talents, by applying the translation perspective. We showed how low internal mobility in spite of numerous career opportunities can be understood. Career management can be difficult for both employer and employee but by using the translation perspective we can understand why it is difficult. We argue that equal importance is placed on *how* the career management practices are implemented, as it is to *which* practices that should be used – which can be done with the translation perspective. We argue that internal mobility and career advancement can be two sides of the same coin. Even though the motivations and goals of the organisation and the individual are different, they can be combined. However, in order for both parties to be content there needs to be transparency and translation. We have shown that without an adequate translation process of the organisational goals, the results will not meet up to the organisation's expectations.

7.2 Future research

We have illustrated how a MNC manages their leadership talent in terms of career, and how the talents perceive their career opportunities. However, it would be interesting to look upon talents in different fields like technical competence, and how they experience an organisation's talent and career management systems. Furthermore, it would be interesting to measure how such a strategy affect turnover and employee engagement.

7.3 Recommendations to case company

- Simplify the internal recruitment process. Reduce the number of interviews to a minimum and base assessments mainly on one qualitative interview and assessments from current and former managers, the individual's results during their time at Alpha AB and the data from the individual's talent review and personal business plan. We also suggest a change in treatment of internal applicants where it is made clear that they are not just like any external candidate

- Create an internal talent IT system with the talent's profiles so that recruiters and hiring managers can use this to search for candidates.

- Install incentives for managers to develop their personnel and add employee development practices in their annual business plan. From a manager's perspective today he/she has many things to lose by promoting internal mobility and nothing to gain.

- Increase and standardise the information to managers from HR about management goals for internal mobility and how it relates to their and their employees career and professional development.

- Install an impartial internal career advisor at the HR department as a complement to the manager.

- Activities to increase inter-functional understanding, for example job rotation for managers and career fairs.

- Mentorship programs. Senior employees with management experience could act as impartial mentors for Key Talents.

- Internal job postings need more detailed information such as hierarchy, salary level, tasks and expected deliveries.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview guide

How long have you worked at Alpha AB?

What made you choose Alpha AB as your employer?

What do think about the career and professional development opportunities at Alpha AB?

Can you tell me about your professional goals with your employment here at Alpha AB?

What do you find most and least stimulating about your job?

What is important to you work wise? (tasks, colleagues, managers etc)

What motivates you to make a career?

What would be your dream job?

What do you think about the career tools? (Talent review etc.)

How do you perceive the support you get from your closest manager when it comes to your career and professional development?

Do you have any experience of the internal recruitment process? What are your thoughts?

What would motivate you to apply for a position with another department within the division? What would make you choose not to?

In our survey we saw that fewer people would consider applying for a position at department X, why do you think that is?

Appendix 2 – Survey

1. Which department do you work for?

- Department A
- Department B
- Department C
- Department D

2. Would you be willing to switch departments within Alpha R&D to advance in your career?

- Yes
- No

3. Have you previously switched departments within Alpha R&D?

- Yes
- No

4. If yes, please rate your experience

- Good
- Neutral
- Bad

5. If there was an opening for a manager position at department A, would you consider applying?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

6, If there was an opening for a manager position at department B, would you consider applying?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

7. If there was an opening for a manager position at department C, would you consider applying?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

8. If there was an opening for a manager position at department D, would you consider applying?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

9. How often do you look for available positions at Alpha R&D on the intranet?

- Every day
- Every week
- Every month
- Every three months
- Never

10. What would you choose?

- A management position (higher than the position you currently have)
- A position within a new product/technology/project (non-managerial)