Loughborough University

This item was submitted to Loughborough's Research Repository by the author.
Items in Figshare are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated.

Workplace career conversations: aligning organizational talent management and individual career development?

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

PUBLISHER

© Maggi Evans

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

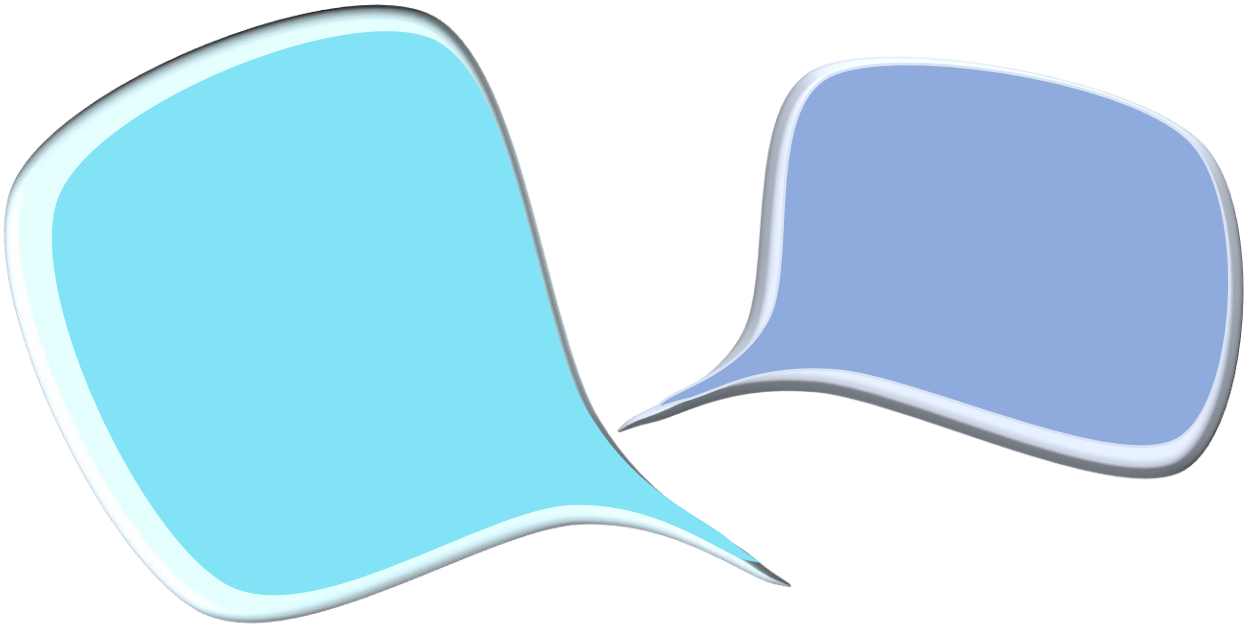
This work is made available according to the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Full details of this licence are available at: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

LICENCE

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

REPOSITORY RECORD

Evans, Maggi J.. 2019. “Workplace Career Conversations: Aligning Organizational Talent Management and Individual Career Development?”. figshare. https://hdl.handle.net/2134/27036.



Workplace career conversations: aligning organizational talent management and individual career development?

by

Maggi Evans

Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of
Ph.D. of Loughborough University

October 2017

© by Maggi Evans 2017

Loughborough University

Abstract

Purpose: This thesis takes a contextualised stakeholder approach to exploring alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development. The contribution and nature of career conversations as an opportunity for alignment is considered.

Design: This qualitative study was conducted in two phases. Phase one involved semi-structured interviews with Human Resources and Organizational Development professionals (n = 30). Phase two involved semi-structured interviews using career narratives with line managers and individuals from five case study organizations which were also involved in phase 1 (n = 40). Data were analysed thematically by stakeholder group and within each case study.

Limitations: The sample used within the study were not selected to be representative. The conversations described by participants may not be representative of all of the conversations they have experienced. The case study organizations were all UK based.

Findings: For most HR professionals, talent management was driven by organizational goals with little reference to individual needs, hence, alignment was not a priority for them. In contrast, individuals and line managers described a commitment to seeking overlap between organizational and individual goals, with some line managers describing their role as 'brokers'. Career conversations were seen by all stakeholders as an important part of talent management and career development, with the potential to be a vehicle for alignment. Detailed analysis of the career conversations described by individuals identified a broad range of helpful conversations, the majority of which took place informally. Additional categories of career shaper (from Bosley et al, 2009) were also identified as 'collaborators' and 'catalysts'. A variety of contextual features were found to influence the enactment of talent management and career development. These were summarised as a 'contextual map' indicating local, organisational and environmental dynamics.

Originality/value: The research reinforced the value of taking a contextualised perspective of both organizational talent and individual career (e.g. Cohen et al 2004; Sparrow, 2014). It also captured the voices of different stakeholder groups (e.g. Collings, 2014; Thunnissen et al, 2013).

Contents

Chapter		Page
1.	**Introduction**	1
1.1.	Why this research?	1
1.2.	Research summary	2
1.3.	Structure for the thesis	3
1.4.	Summary of findings	4
1.5.	Contribution	5
2.	**Career literature review**	8
2.1.	Introduction	8
2.2.	Theoretical perspectives	8
2.3.	Career self-management	15
2.4.	Organizational career management	18
2.5.	Other parties in career management	23
2.6.	Career conversations	28
2.7.	Summary and conclusion	32
3.	**Talent Management Literature Review**	35
3.1.	Introduction	35
3.2.	What is talent management?	35
3.3.	Research background	37
3.4.	Talent management practice	43
3.5.	Mutuality within talent management	50
3.6.	Talent conversations	54
3.7.	Summary and conclusion	57
4.	**Methodology**	60
4.1.	Introduction	60
4.2.	Research questions and study design	61
4.3.	Phase one – data collection	70
4.4.	Phase one – analysing the data	76
4.5.	Phase two – data collection	81

4.6. Phase two – analysing the data 88
4.7. Study features and limitations 91
4.8. Conclusion 95

5. Alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development 97
5.1. Introduction 97
5.2. Organizational talent management -aims 98
5.3. Organizational talent management – intended practices 102
5.4. Organizational talent management – intended roles 106
5.5. Organizational talent management – career conversations 112
5.6. Individual career development – career narratives 117
5.7. Individual career development – expected roles 123
5.8. Individual career development – career conversations 127
5.9. Summary 128

6. The nature of positive career conversations 130
6.1. Introduction 130
6.2. Conversation set-up 131
6.3. Contribution of the career conversation 145
6.4. Perceived interpersonal relationships 155
6.5. Summary 159

7. The influence of organizational context 161
7.1. Introduction 161
7.2. HR and OD perspectives on contextual influences 162
7.3. Case study one – JW 168
7.4. Case study two – HX 174
7.5. Case study three – MT 179
7.6. Case study four – SB 183
7.7. Case study five – IH 188
7.8. Summary 190

8. Conclusion 194

8.1. Introduction 194

8.2. Review of research questions 195

8.3. Overall contribution 197

8.4. Drawing and verifying conclusions 199

8.5. Implications for talent and career theory 202

8.6. Study limitations and surprises 204

8.7. Reflections 207

References 209

Appendices 224

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

2.1	Individual-organisational attachment map, from Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni (1995)	11
2.2	Individual career planning model, from Hirsh (2008)	16
2.3	Web of possible sources of career support, from Hirsh (2008)	22
3.1	Nine box grid, talent management tool	47
4.1	Components of data analysis, interactive model, from Miles & Huberman (1994)	65
4.2	Phase 1 - initial discussion prompts	72
4.3	Phase 1 - adaptations in the discussion approach	74
4.4	Phase 1 – refined discussion prompts	74
4.5	Phase 1 - Early data display	76
4.6	Phase 1 – embryonic data display	77
4.7	Phase 1 - Contextual map of influences on organizational talent management and individual career development	80
4.8	Phase 2 - Changes to interview prompts during research process	87
7.1	Contextual map of talent and career influences	162
7.2	Impact of policy change at JW	171
7.3	Revised contextual map of talent and career influences	193
8.1	Contextual map of talent and career influences	200

Tables

2.1	Five career propositions, adapted from Clarke (2013)	10
2.2	Career self- management items, from Sturges et al (2002)	17
2.3	Organizational career management items, from Sturges et al (2002)	20
2.4	The role of line managers in career development, from Yarnall (1998: 381)	24
2.5	Career shaper roles identified through the research, adapted from Bosley *et al.*, 2009	27
2.6	Summary of effective career discussion findings from Kidd *et al.*, (2003, 2004)	29
2.7	Career literature review lines of enquiry	33
3.1	Alternative approaches to talent management, adapted from Collings & Mellahi (2009); Sparrow *et al*. (2014)	38
3.2	Additional talent perspectives, from Thunnissen *et al*. (2013b)	40
3.3	Summary of talent management steps, adapted from Barner, (2006)	44
3.4	Role of corporate HR in global talent management, from Farndale *et al*. (2010)	47
3.5	The ACS Development model, from Smith & Campbell (2011)	55
3.6	Summary of Critical Career conversations adapted from Clutterbuck (2012)	56
3.7	Talent literature review lines of enquiry	58

4.1	From lines of enquiry to RQ1	61
4.2	From lines of enquiry to RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4	63
4.3	Phase 1 - Breakdown of organisations represented in the research	71
4.4	Phase 1 – Final coding	78
4.5	Phase 2 - Overview of case study organizations and participant recruitment	83
4.6	Phase 2 – Number of positive responses, number of participants and location of conversations	84
4.7	Phase 2 - Reflections on recording and transcribing versus note taking	84
4.8	Phase 2 – interview prompts for individuals and line managers	85
4.9	Phase 2 – First cycle coding post case study one	89
4.10	Phase 2 – coding of career conversations	89
5.1	Talent management approaches adopted by HR participants	101
5.2	Role of the individual and the organisation, HR participants	107
5.3	Aims of career conversations, HR participants	113
5.4	Summary of vision for career conversations, HR participants	116
5.5	Number of employing organisations and functional or cross functional career	120
5.6	Perspectives on what had helped career development	122
5.7	Perceived career development roles, individual and line manager	123
5.8	Perceived contribution of conversations to career development	127
6.1	Summary of career conversations showing the number of positive ‘single’ and ‘themed’	132
6.2	Set-up features of positive conversations	133
6.3	Conversation trigger and described contribution	134
6.4	Setting of conversations with different outcomes	142
7.1	Description of local dynamics, HR participants	163
7.2	Description of organizational dynamics, HR participants	165
7.3	Comparison of conversation triggers for each case study organization	169
7.4	Participant perceptions of career development at JW	173
7.5	Comparison of perceived conversation outcomes HX and all other conversations	176
7.6	Participant perceptions of career development at HX	177
7.7	Comparison of frequency of positive conversations on personal development and future career options	180
7.8	Participant perceptions of career development at MT	181
7.9	Participant perceptions of career development at SB	187
7.10	Elements of organizational dynamics	191
8.1	Discussion points for how to improve organizational talent management	201

Appendices

1	Phase 1 – Participant profile summary	225
2	Phase 1 - Information provided to phase one participants	226
3	Phase 1 and phase 2 - Informed consent form	229
4	Scanned exerts from research diary	230
5	Phase 1 - Probing within the interview	232
6	Phase 1 - Embryonic data display diagram and its application in the interviews	233
7	Phase 1 – First cycle coding	234
8	Phase 1 and phase 2 – Topics discounted for further analysis	235
9	Phase 2 – Information provided to employing organizations	236
10	Phase 2 – Sample information provided to participants	238
11	Phase 2 – Individual and line manager perspectives, initial discussion prompts	240
12	Phase 2 – Summary notes from first case study showing application of initial coding	242
13	Phase 2 – Sample mindmaps and summaries showing initial analysis of context, conversation and role from case study 1	246
14	Phase 2 - Second iteration of data coding	247
15	Phase 2 – Screen shot of conversation analysis matrix	248
16	Phase 2 – Log of coding parameters	249
17	Diagrams showing thoughts on structuring the findings	251
18	Career management practices in case study organizations	252

Acknowledgements

In particular I wish to thank:

All of the participants who helped with this study. I enjoyed hearing your stories and I appreciate the interest you have shown in my research.

Professor John Arnold for the wonderful support, insightful feedback, constructive challenge, and for helping me to improve my grammar!

Dr Andy Rothwell for seeing new connections, providing valuable feedback and sharing my enthusiasm.

Steve Carter, Marie Shelton and Emma Crowe – my colleagues at Apter Development for your support, patience and time.

My amazing family – Dave, Sam, Lily and Fred. Heartfelt thanks for your love, support, belief, encouragement and for putting up with me when I was engrossed in my research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Why this research?

Throughout my own career I have engaged with the careers of others. When working in Human Resources and Organizational Development roles I was accountable for developing career management policies, processes and skills. I subsequently moved into consultancy and have been involved in many varied assignments including talent management strategies and individual executive coaching. Within this work I have observed an apparent disconnect between organizational talent management and individual career development. Keen to understand more about this, I started to read some of the academic literature. This confirmed my sense of conflicting assumptions (e.g. De Vos & Dries, 2013) and the potential benefit of working across the boundaries of talent and career (e.g. Inkson, 2008). I therefore started to frame a study to look at alignment between individual and organizational goals. Was it possible to have a common goal? If so, how could individuals and organizations be supported in finding and achieving this?

Having continued my reading (e.g. Bosley *et al*., 2009; Kidd *et al.*, 2003; Smith & Campbell, 2011), I decided to focus my research on workplace career conversations as an encounter where it could be possible to identify a common goal and agree a plan to work towards it. As a starting point, I wanted to explore three inter-related areas: the interest and commitment to a common career and talent agenda among stakeholders; the conversations which were already taking place and the conversations individual and organizations wanted to take place; the possible influence of context on the interest in a common agenda and the nature of any conversations. My hope was that this research would give me evidence to inform my consulting work, helping me better to support both organizational and individual clients. Furthermore, I hoped to use this study to contribute to further theorizing within the fields of talent and career.

Since embarking on this research, the topics of talent and career have continued to be an issue of concern for organizations. For example, a recent Deloitte survey of over 10 000 HR and Business leaders (Deloitte, 2017) identified 'careers and learning' as the second most important trend they were facing (83% rating it as important or very important) followed by 'talent acquisition' (81% rating it as important or very important). The survey cites a need for 'new rules' for careers which are based

on meeting employees' needs and supporting them to find a career direction which works for them. This desire for new ways of approaching career to meet the needs of the individual and the organization echoes recommendations made by Herriot & Pemberton over 20 years ago (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995, 1996, 1997). Perhaps this new style of career has been and gone, but based on more recent literature (e.g. Clarke, 2013) I suggest that such an approach has yet to be adopted. I therefore hope that this research can make a contribution to understanding more about such a joint approach.

1.2 Research summary

Based on my reading and initial conversations with organizations and individuals I framed my research as four interlinked questions. Within these questions 'organizational talent' was used as an umbrella term to refer to the current and future people resourcing needs of the organization. The term stakeholders was used to refer to different stakeholder groups, particularly HR as representatives of 'the organization', line managers and the individual employees. It was recognised that some people could simultaneously belong to more than one stakeholder group. The term 'career conversations' was used as a broad description of face-to-face conversations which people regarded as being connected to their career in some way. Thus, conversations regarding personal development as well as conversations relating to specific job opportunities could be included if participants considered them to be related to career.

RQ1: In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals?

RQ2: In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?

RQ3: What types of career conversations are seen to make positive contributions to people's career development?

RQ4: In what ways does organizational context seem to influence the alignment of organizational talent needs with individual career goals and the nature of career conversations?

1.3 Structure for the thesis

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce a focused review of the career and talent literature. Whilst recognizing the common ground between career and talent, I have chosen to explore these literatures separately (in chapters 2 and 3 respectively). This is for two key reasons. Firstly, for the senior managers and HR people I talk with, talent management is seen as a separate and important topic. Secondly, the talent management literature draws on some fields which are not the primary considerations of the career literature, but are significant issues for HR professionals when developing talent systems for their organizations (e.g. Strategic Human Resource Management). I therefore concluded that my understanding of the context for this thesis was best served by looking at the literatures separately and then drawing out common themes. Accordingly, the literature review sets out the context for the present study and positions it clearly within the literature for both career and talent. Throughout this, questions emerging from the existing literature are identified and are captured as 'lines of enquiry'.

Chapter 4 describes the methods of the research. Starting with the lines of enquiry emerging from the literature review, the research questions are positioned and the research design is described. This involved two phases of research. The first phase was semi-structured interviews with 30 senior HR and OD professionals, gaining their perspectives on talent management and career conversations. This explored their general thinking, their practical experience and issues of 'focus and fit' (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). The second phase took place within five case study organizations and involved semi-structured interviews with 40 line managers and individuals. These qualitative data from both phases were analysed thematically. The intention of the methodology chapter is to provide information on the research journey such that others can follow the steps taken and have visibility of the decisions and assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Detailed examples of the data collection and the analysis have been included within the Appendix.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 take the research questions in turn and explore the findings. Throughout these are related to existing literature and cross-referenced between the different research questions to reflect their interacting nature. A brief overview of the findings is given below.

Finally, chapter 8 provides a conclusion. Taking the data from the preceding chapters it draws together the threads of the findings. These conclusions report on post-research discussions of the

findings with a range of individuals and organizations. They also cover possible implications of this research for the academic community and for practitioners. Within this chapter I have allowed myself to don my consultant hat once more and suggest some practical ways for organizations and individuals to use these findings as part of their organizational career or talent management approaches.

1.4 Summary of findings

The findings demonstrated how complex the areas of talent and career are, with many cultural, organizational and individual contextual influences. These were captured as a 'contextual map' illustrating some of the influences of 'local dynamics' (between the local network and the individual), 'organizational dynamics' (the strategic and cultural variations between organizations) and the 'wider influences' (economic, social, political, technological and cultural elements).

The findings related to RQ1 (to what extent do stakeholders seek alignment) demonstrated that organizational talent management and individual career management are inextricably linked. There was a widespread view that individuals owned their career and the organization facilitated it, with both hoping to achieve their goals. However, the study illustrated the many challenges in delivering this from an individual and organizational perspective. There was a significant difference in the way talent and career were viewed by different stakeholder groups. For the HR participants, the focus was mostly on meeting the needs of the organization through formal processes. Moreover, some of the talent management practices they implemented seemed counter to seeking alignment (for example, a lack of transparency). For the individuals and line managers however, the interest was more clearly on seeking alignment between the needs of the different parties. The career narratives of individuals indicated that they saw alignment as largely influenced informally at a local level between the manager and the individual. Many individuals did not understand how to proactively manage their own career, and they felt they had little support from the organization in identifying and meeting their own needs.

The findings for RQ2 showed that all stakeholders could see value in career conversations. HR participants saw these conversations as a formal opportunity for the individual to talk about their aspirations and interests. Moreover, they recognised that such conversations were beneficial for all employees, not just those within their 'talent' population. Thus, the HR views on career conversations contrasted with their views on talent management, showing a more individual led and inclusive

approach. Individuals and line managers described the value of these conversations in terms of helping their career thinking about 'where am I now', 'where am I going' and 'how do I get there'. They valued open, informal conversations, and were keen to use these to understand common ground between their aims and those of the organization.

RQ3 supported previous research that a wide variety of career conversations are helpful to individuals. The particular contribution of this study is to show the value of the line manager perspective and to position the nature of conversations taking place within the wider development network. Furthermore, the study illustrated two additional types of conversations which may take place, 'catalyst' and 'collaborator'. Whilst all conversations were seen to provide support to the individual and thus help them to achieve their goals, the collaborator and catalyst conversations were particularly relevant to the joint achievement of individual and organizational goals. The other conversations played an important role in preparing for collaborator conversations and supporting the individual in taking accountability for their career. Whilst individuals were able to describe many positive conversations, there was a desire for more discussion, particularly about future opportunities.

RQ4 illustrated how some of the contextual features (such as culture, organizational goals and HR processes) identified in the talent management literature may influence careers. The perceived influence of context on talent management as described by the HR and OD participants was considered first. These data were represented as a contextual map, illustrating influences on the enactment of talent management and career development. This was followed by analysis of the reported conversations in each of the five case study organizations. There were considerable variations in talent and career experiences between the case study organizations. This emphasized the importance of understanding the context and developing organizational and individual support approaches which are appropriate to the context. The contextual map was applied to these case studies as a way of exploring the differences.

1.5 Contribution

As a doctoral thesis this work is intended to make an original contribution. The findings presented here can be considered to support some previous findings, to extend some previous research and to challenge certain other findings. Each of these contributions will be considered briefly below. A full discussion of these can be found in chapter 8.

These results support a number of previous findings. Firstly, the view that there are conflicting assumptions between talent and career was endorsed in this study (De Vos & Dries, 2013). The organizational perspective taken by most of the HR participants illustrated the findings of Thunnissen *et al.*, (2013a) that focuses primarily on the organization's perspective, with little consideration of other stakeholders. Moreover, there were many examples of 'information asymmetry' (Dries & De Gieter, 2014) which could inhibit alignment of aims. For individuals and line managers however, many expressed a desire for an 'organizational career' and would like one based on partnership and ongoing learning (e.g. Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, the study supported the suggestion by Inkson (2008) that there are potential benefits of bringing the thinking from both fields together. For example, in this study it was shown that talent management approaches could be enhanced through greater appreciation and understanding of career self-management research. The study also supported the view expressed by Yarnall (2007) that for many organizations talent management was 'rebadged' organizational career management. The varied nature of helpful career conversations was also corroborated (Kidd *et al.*, 2003).

This study can also be seen to extend some previous research. As described above, the findings related to RQ3 proposed two additional categories of career shaper roles. The 'collaborator' and the 'catalyst' provide an extension of the work of Bosley *et al.*, (2009). These are potentially helpful categories in applying the career shaper typology to professional and managerial groups. In addition to attracting further research, they could be used as a way of describing approaches to career conversations within a training setting. A further extension of previous research is the contextual map. This responds to a number of calls and observations in previous research. For example, Sparrow *et al.*'s, (2011) recognition of the impact of organizational and national context and a bringing together of individual and organizational perspectives (e.g. Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Thunnissen, 2013a). This contextual map has potential to be further developed as a diagnostic and practical tool for organizations to consider their current and desired approaches to talent management and career development. Finally, the construct 'career world-view' (Bosley *et al.*, 2009) was applied in a new way to consider the influence of this on career self-management.

Finally, the study challenges some previous perspectives. In particular, the talent management focus on formal talent processes was seen to be potentially limiting in terms of supporting individual career development to meet organizational needs. Individuals largely referenced informal, local activities as having the most positive impact on their career. It is therefore

suggested that the informal approaches are given greater visibility. Those working on talent management could find ways in which positive (or helpful) informal approaches can be encouraged (without creating more formal process!). Furthermore, the data in this study suggest that more attention in talent management could be given to supporting individuals in taking greater career accountability. In particular, this study indicates that this can be done through more support on career self-management and clarifying the 'career deal' (e.g. Herriot & Pemberton 1995) rather than investing more in formal practices. The suggestion by some (e.g. Clutterbuck, 2012; Hirsh *et al.*, 2001; Smith & Campbell, 2011) that there is a 'right way' to conduct career conversations is also challenged. The findings in this study indicated that a wide variety of conversations can be helpful to participants and there is no prescribed approach. Furthermore, many helpful conversations can be one-off encounters which may not take place within a trusting, mutual relationship.

Chapter 2: Career literature review

2.1. Introduction

Career has been recognized as an 'extraordinarily pervasive concept' (Gunz & Peiperl, 2007:4) which is used in 'myriad ways' (Cascio, 2007:555). This has created a diverse theoretical and research base, albeit predominantly from a Western perspective (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). Within the field of 'career' are topics as broad as vocational selection, government education policy and human resource management. Furthermore, each approach tends have its own agenda and taxonomy, often with little reference to the others (Inkson *et al*., 2015; Peiperl & Gunz, 2007). The literature review presented here will focus specifically on the issues relevant to the present study - the intersection of individual and organizational career aims. Firstly, a theoretical overview will provide some perspectives on the nature of the individual/organizational interplay in career, with a particular focus on the organizational career, psychological contract and power. Secondly, the role of the individual will be considered through reference to literature on career self-management. This will be followed by an exploration of organizational career management. Other roles will then be considered, with a focus on how other parties such as a line manager, mentor or coach can support (or hinder) individual career development within an organizational setting. This will then lead to a specific review of literature on career conversations, a central theme for the current study. Throughout the review of the literature, 'lines of enquiry' will be identified. These will be reviewed in the methodology chapter to form specific research questions for this study. In particular, this review of the literature will illustrate the potential tension between individual and organizational goals and the opportunity for career conversations to be an event where the needs of the individual and organization are both explored.

2.2 Theoretical perspectives

Given the breadth of career as a concept, a suitable definition can be difficult to locate. However, the definition proposed by Arthur & Rousseau (1996), has been widely cited and positions career as *'the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time'* (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996: 6). This definition encapsulates two features of the career concept which are particularly relevant to this study. Firstly, the time dimension; career is dynamic and is concerned with the present and the

way it relates to the past and the projected future, so both individual and organizational aims may change over time (e.g. Herriot, 1992). Secondly, careers need to be understood from the perspective of the person's *experiences,* from within their context, not just in terms of objective measures such as career path and promotions or individual subjective measures such as satisfaction, fairness and balance (e.g. Clarke, 2013; Young *et al.*, 2002). However, it should be noted that this definition does not situate career within an organization. Whilst recognizing that not all careers are organizationally based, many careers are (a topic to be discussed below). Therefore, an additional element to the career definition is proposed, capturing that '*organizational careers are relationships over time between individuals and their organizations'* Herriot, 1992: 3).

Theories of organizational careers have been changing. Early career theories tended to describe careers as linear, often occurring within one organization (e.g. Baruch, 2003, 2006). However, there has been growing attention to new career forms such as Hall's 'protean' career (Hall, 1996), and Arthur & Rousseau's 'boundaryless' career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). These recognize that organizations are changing (for example changing structures, a need for increased flexibility, a lack of long term employment security) but that there are alternative ways for individuals to meet their career needs. These models encourage career self-management, mobility and employability (Eby *et al*., 2003; Van Buren, 2003; cited in Clarke, 2013). These new career forms were initially considered to herald the end of the organizational career. However, little evidence has been found to support its demise (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Baruch, 2006; Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, individuals do still seem to continue to conceptualize their career in organizational terms (Dries, 2011). Clarke, (2013) has addressed this anomaly. Instead of asking if the organizational career is alive or dead, she has explored how the concept could be redefined for the twenty first century. Using a career narrative approach and referencing other research, Clarke developed five propositions as summarized in Table 2.1 below. These suggest a positive future for a '*new organizational career*' (Clarke, 2013: 696) which incorporates aspects of both boundaryless and protean career concepts. Whilst recognizing the limitations of the study, Clarke calls for further research to explore new organizational careers from an organizational and individual perspective. Of particular interest to the present study is Clarke's assertion that both individual and organizational needs can be met within an equal relationship. Others challenge this belief. For example, Yarnall, (2008) questions the premise of finding common career ground, pointing to the almost '*invariable*' differences between individual and organizational aims (Yarnall, 2008: 45). These arguments will be further discussed in the section on power and agency below.

Proposition	Summary
1.Organizational careers can be flexible, challenging and mobile	More volatile organizational systems and flatter structures have challenged the established metaphor of a career ladder. Broader skill sets are valued and many people move across functional boundaries often with 'sideways' moves and ongoing change.
2.Organizational careers provide opportunities for employee development	Employee development is seen as an essential part of the relationship with structured and informal training being offered. Some of this may be self-directed, but there can be opportunities for personal and career development.
3.Organizational careers can be jointly managed	Employers can offer career opportunities and support with individuals having responsibility to utilize these opportunities. The organization is transparent about its expectations and needs, and employees look to fulfill these.
4.Organizational careers foster balanced relationships	There are benefits for the organization (increased employee commitment) and to the individual (personal development and employability). The relationship can be characterized by trust and loyalty.
5.Organizational careers can hinder mobility	An organizational career may reduce the interest in employees considering alternative career options, leaving the organization may be perceived as high risk. However, tenure within an organization is likely to be medium term, so moves to other organizations are likely within a career.

Table 2.1: Five career propositions, adapted from Clarke (2013)

A second strand of relevant career literature comes from the psychological contract. This is a widely used way to consider the relationship between an individual and the employing organization (e.g. Clinton & Guest, 2014; Conway *et al.*, 2014; Herriot & Pemberton, 1996: Rousseau, 1995). However, some claim it is a somewhat vague construct (e.g. Conway & Briner, 2002; George, 2009), leading to suggestions that it should be viewed as a metaphor rather than a theory (Guest & Conway, 1998). As with any metaphor, there are numerous descriptions of what it means, but George (2009) summarized it as follows;

> *'the general consensus would appear that the psychological contract is promisory, implicit, reciprocal, perceptual and based on expectations'*
>
> George, (2009: 3)

Many claims have been made for the impact of psychological contract. Following a review, Conway & Briner (2005) conclude that it is a fairly strong indicator of an individual employee's attitudes and a less strong indicator of their behaviour. Contract breach appears to have a stronger influence than contract fulfillment, negatively impacting levels of trust, commitment and employee investment

(Conway & Briner, 2002; George, 2009). A recent study (Clinton & Guest, 2014) found a link between psychological contract breach and voluntary turnover, suggesting that behaviour can be influenced when there is a perceived breach. With changes in organization's employment relationships (as described above), it is recognized that a range of psychological contracts are likely to operate. Building on transactional and relational contracts, Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni (1995) suggested an 'attachment map'. This captured the timeframe of a relationship (short or long-term) and the level of embeddedness (internal or external). The map enabled different types of career relationship to be described as shown in Figure 2.1 below. The 'core' relationship represents the classic relational career epitomized by a fair exchange, ongoing investment and a mutually beneficial relationship (e.g. Rousseau, 1995). Relationships representing 'new' style careers may start in one of the other quadrants depending on the set-up of the relationship and the preferences of the individual (Inkson *et al*., 2001). However, these too could develop and change over time with more being expected of the relationship as the psychological contract moves towards the longer term and insider positions. When discussing the impact of psychological contract it is therefore important to consider the nature of the employment relationship, recognizing that different psychological contracts are likely to operate in different circumstances.

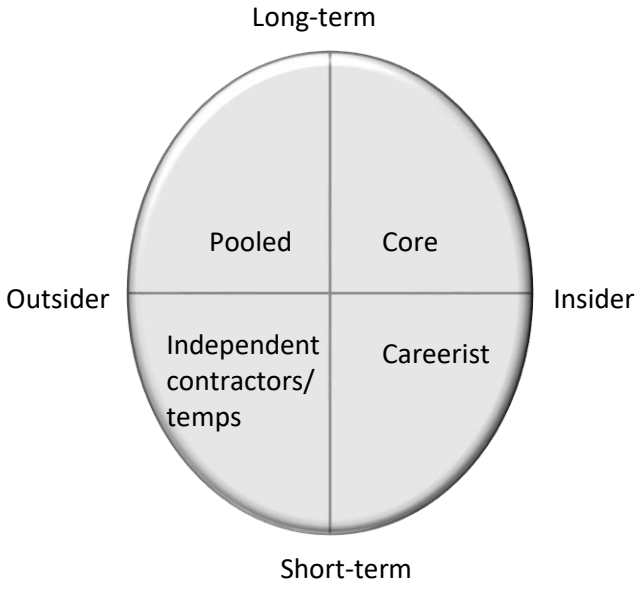


Figure 2.1: Individual-organizational attachment map, from Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni (1995)

Within the research on career and psychological contract three perspectives are particularly relevant to the current study. Firstly, there is work on HR systems and processes which form part of the psychological contract, communicating promises and future expectations (Aggarwal & Bharguva,

2009; Rousseau, 1995; Sturges, *et al.*, 2000). Strong HR systems have been associated with an increase in job satisfaction (Berg, 1999). Formal and informal career processes are part of these HR processes (Slay & Taylor, 2007). The individual will have expectations and will evaluate the extent to which they perceive these expectations have been met and this may impact outcomes (such as attitudes and organizational commitment). Some research indicates a low level of satisfaction with training and career development within organizations (e.g. George, 2009; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), which could negatively impact psychological contract fulfilment. Secondly, is the research on social exchange of career self-management whereby those who engage in career self-management directed at furthering their career within the organization are likely to expect additional help and support with their career development (DeVos *et al.*, 2003). This has been referred to as a 'virtuous circle' of career self-help and career management help (Sturges *et al*., 2002). For example, a study with graduates demonstrated that those who did more networking attracted and received more informal career help than those who did not invest time in the initial activity (representing an example of Social Exchange Theory). A follow-up study, (Sturges *et al.*, 2005) found a link between individual career management behaviours and perception of psychological contract fulfilment. Thus it can be seen that psychological contract is a useful concept for exploring the intersection between individual and organization in terms of career.

The third perspective of psychological contract theory relevant to this study concerns trust and its influence on career. Trust has been linked to constructs of organizational justice which includes distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice (e.g. Aggarwal, 2014; Aryee *et al.*, 2002). Herriot & Pemberton (1995) describe the breakdown of trust between employees and the top management in their organizations. Citing the downsizing activity of the early 1990's they portray managers whose '*feelings of equity and trust have been violated, and their very identity threatened*' (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995: 62). They discuss feelings of employee powerlessness as trust in the old psychological contract disappears. According to Herriot *et al.* (1998) there are three ways in which trust is eroded by top management: reneging on obligations; using rhetoric (such as 'old is bad, new is good') to deceive and prioritizing their own needs above those of other employees. They proceed to propose ways in which to rebuild trust, which they indicate is essential to sustainable organizational performance. They suggest recognizing that transitions will be ongoing and that they need to be incorporated into organizational career management thinking. Based on this premise, they recommend a four-stage model for career contracting: informing the other party of wants, needs and offers; negotiating who will deliver and provide what; monitoring the delivery of the contract; renegotiating and exiting. This approach involves making the psychological contract for career explicit

in an attempt to build trust (Herriot & Pemberton, 1996, 1997). Such overt contracting creates a change from the normally '*implicit'* nature of the psychological contract (George, 2009).

From the above it can be seen that psychological contract provides a helpful lens to use when considering the relationship between the employee and the organization in terms of career. However, it should be noted that psychological contract is complex and the impact of breach may vary for different people. For example, according to an individual's personality they may engage in different relationships and may respond to perceived breaches in different ways (e.g. Conway & Briner, 2005). Furthermore, the 'organization' is not one entity and individuals may have different levels of trust with their supervisor than they do with the 'organization' (Aryee *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, a breach in psychological contract may influence an individual's contribution to the organization, but may not influence their relationships with co-workers or customers (Conway *et al.*, 2014). Within this study these nuances of the psychological contract will help to develop understanding of the mutual expectations and perceived social exchange between the different stakeholder groups.

The third element of career literature to be explored in this theoretical overview concerns power and control. There are many aspects of power and control research which can be applied to career. Whilst recognizing that power and control has an influence on much career literature (e.g. trust within the psychological contract as covered above), there are three areas of particular relevance to this study: discourses of mutuality; self-management as a form of control and structuration theory. Each of these areas shall be considered. However, firstly it is helpful to locate this discussion within the context of some wider research on power and control.

Many of the ideas in this area are drawn from Foucault's work (e.g. Foucault, 1982). Drawing on Bentham's vision of a Panoptic tower, (where individuals are aware that they can be observed at any time and they won't know if it's happening), Foucault suggested that this represents the way discipline and punishment operate within modern society. Accordingly, people are classified as individuals, but systems are in place to encourage people to conform to the norm and the system will take action when they do not conform. At an organizational level management control can be achieved through surveillance and communication of expected norms through processes such as assessment, appraisal, feedback on values, professional training exams. Power and knowledge are central to this approach, with the relationship between them recognized as complex and iterative, rather than causal (e.g. Damodaran & Olphert, 2000). The question is less who has the power, but rather *'how people are constituted by the effects of power*' (Stead & Bakker, 2010:51).

Discourses describe the way in which a phenomenon is socially and personally represented as '*a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events*' (Burr, 2003:64). As such, a prevailing discourse is unlikely to be conscious or questioned, thereby influencing the power relationship. Key for this study is an understanding of prevailing discourses on the mutuality of the individual/organizational relationship. This clearly links to the discussion on psychological contract above in terms of the level of trust that employees feel. Do individuals perceive that their organization has their best interests at heart? Does the organization trust that the individual is committed to performing to the best of their ability? There are differing views on this. Feldman (1988), highlights a long-term incompatibility of personal and organizational goals. Meanwhile Herriot (1992), positions mutuality as achievable, but recognizes this is based on the assumption that organizations are '*a social collaborative activity rather than a controlling manipulative one*' (Herriot, 1992:127). If the mutuality discourse is unquestioningly adopted, the assumption is likely to follow that the organization will act in the interests of the individual and vice versa. Such an assumption could conceal a number of power dynamics. For example, if trusting the organization's intentions, an individual may not question a lack of transparency. This however, gives additional power to the organization, termed by Dries & De Gieter (2014) as information asymmetry.

The organization does not necessarily have all of the power. Indeed, as Foucault highlighted, power relations are complex and not necessarily repressive (Burr, 2003). Individuals can manage themselves in a way to exert power too. For example, uncertain careers could contribute to individuals categorizing their knowledge as career capital and thus choosing to withhold it as a type of security (Kamoche *et al.*, 2011). Individuals who feel required to work long hours in pursuit of a promised career may engage in *'political misbehavior such as deception*' (Vardi & Weitz, 2004:506). Furthermore, some employees may choose to refuse career development or promotion, preferring their status quo rather than complying with the social norm of ambition (Hube, 2004, in Cascio, 2007).

The interplay of power between the individual and the organization can be explored through reference to structuration theory (Giddens, 1976, 1991). This challenges the dualist notion of structure (control through social rules) and agency (individual freedom), suggesting a symbiotic relationship between the two. Such interplay is captured in the work of Grey, (1994). He conducted a study of 100 people of all levels in an accountancy firm and tracked the normalizing and surveillance aspects of their careers (starting with the selection process). He found numerous examples of

individuals actively managing themselves in order to achieve the career, for example, managing the boredom of the early years of audits by re-framing it as '*this is getting me where I want to be*' (Grey, 1994: 487). Interestingly, the employees involved in the study seemed to ascribe to the mutuality discourse as many saw disciplinary and surveillance activities as support, helping them to achieve their career goals. Similarly, Lips-Wiersma and Hall (2007) recognize an interplay between the individual and organization, referring to it as;

> '*a kind of 'organizational dance,' a highly interactive mutual influence process, in which both parties are at once the agent and the target of career influence'*
>
> Lips-Wiersma & Hall (2007:771)

This section has introduced some career theory relevant to the present study. From this, some lines of enquiry emerge. How do people experience an organizational career and how does this reflect the 'new organizational career' suggested by Clarke (2013)? How implicit are career deals and are there any examples of formal contracting as suggested by Herriot & Pemberton (1997)? What do individuals want and expect from their employer in terms of career support and opportunities and how well do they feel this is being delivered? What discourses do people use to describe alignment of individual and organizational goals and how do they describe the *'dance'* between the different parties (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007)?

2.3 Career self-management

In response to recent changes in organizational careers, many have suggested that individuals should now recognize that career is their personal responsibility, and therefore not expect organizational support (George, 2009). However, the relational approach to psychological contract considered above indicates a shared responsibility, a view supported by Clarke's, (2013) career narrative interviews. Both agree that the individual has some responsibility, so what does this mean? Career self-management can be seen as a process which requires a number of skills and practices (Inkson *et al*., 2015). Both skills and practices elements shall be considered below with a focus on career self-management for people who already have experience of work, rather than for those faced with initial vocational choice.

The career self-management process is typically positioned as a structured cycle of goal setting, planning and action (e.g. Greenhaus *et al*., 2009; Seibert *et al.*, 2013). This is considered an

ongoing process, taking place within roles as well as involving changes of role (Inkson *et al.*, 2015). One model of career planning is shown in Figure 2.2 below. Proposed by Hirsh (2008), this model clearly shows the interactive nature of career planning and differentiates 'thinking about careers' from 'taking career action'. Within this model some of the actions people can do are apparent. For example, they can build self-knowledge, get involved in discussions and consider career options. The model also captures elements of the organizational context through reference to thinking about 'future business needs'. This context is broadened by Inkson *et al.* (2015) to include other aspects of the '*careerscape*' (Inkson *et al.*, 2015: 294) such as possible longer term economic, technological, demographic and political changes. However, whilst this model is presented as a logical and conscious process, it should be recognized that much of career planning may be unconscious and intuitive (Kreishok *et al.*, 2009), so surfacing a person's views and perceptions may be difficult.



Figure 2.2: Individual career planning model, from Hirsh (2008)

A more specific set of career self-management actions were proposed by Sturges *et al.*, (2002). This is reproduced in table 2.2 and lists observable behaviours for supporting career development. The networking section captures elements of building a network and using it to develop skills. The importance of a network to career is widely recognized (e.g. King, 2004; Seibert *et al.*, 2013). However, people have different resources available to them when building and harnessing a network.

Iellatchitch *et al.*, (2003) refer to Bourdieu's work (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986) in describing career capital. They define career capital as;

> '*different modes of support the individual obtains and has at his/her disposal and may invest for his/her further career success*'
>
> (Iellatchitch *et al.*, 2003:5).

They suggest this is composed of three types of capital: economic (what I possess); social (who I know and who knows about me) and cultural or informational (durable cultural and educational resources). It therefore follows that those with high social capital within a career area will be more advantaged in networking activities than those without such social capital.

Networking
• I have got myself introduced to people who can influence my career
• I have talked to senior management at company social gatherings
• I have built contacts with people in areas where I would like to work
• I have pushed to be involved in high profile projects
• I have asked for career advice from people even when it has not been offered
• I have asked for feedback on my performance when it was not given
• I have refused to accept a new role because it would not help me develop new skills
Mobility
• I have made plans to leave this organization once I have the skills and experience to move on
• I have made plans to leave this organization if it cannot offer me a rewarding career
Practical
• I have kept my CV up to date
• I have monitored job advertisements to see what is available outside the organization
• I have read work-related journals and books in my spare time
• I have looked outside the organization for career related training or qualifications
• I have taken on extra activities which will look good on my CV
Visibility
• I have made sure I get credit for the work I do
• I have made my boss aware of my accomplishments

Table 2.2: Career self- management items, from Sturges *et al.* (2002)

Whilst the Sturges *et al.*, (2002) list of career self-management activities is helpful, its focus on the observable behaviours may overlook some of the 'thinking about careers' aspects in the Hirsh (2008) model above. For example, building self-knowledge through reflecting on values, interests, skills and aspirations. The list includes actions for developing a career within the current organization and also for considering a career beyond the current employer. However, it appears that '*career agility'* (Inkson *et al.*, 2015: 297) is not captured. This draws on the work of the protean career (e.g.

Hall, 2004), characterized by transitions and continuous learning. It is suggested that career agility can help people to adapt better to changing situations and opportunities.

An alternative framework for considering career self-awareness into action can be found in Bosley *et al.* (2009). Whilst this was proposed as a framework for reviewing the impact of career help (see section 2.5 below), it provides some additional ways for conceptualizing career self-management. Building on Parsons (1909) and Super (1990) they identify three elements: career self-concept; career world-view and career direction/opportunities. Career self-concept captures a dynamic view of self, incorporating self-awareness (values, strengths, aspirations, beliefs), professional identity and general view of self. Career world-view is a concept which emerged from their research and describes the individual's understanding of how careers work. This is likened to a personal career theory and includes occupational and organizational understanding about how to access opportunities, an understanding of the implicit career rules (Bailyn, 1989). Career direction/opportunities describes the more observable elements of career. This is likely to be influenced by career self-concept and career world-view, but may also be influenced by wider social structures, economic conditions and geography. All three of these are likely to play a part in career self-management. In particular, referring back to Hirsh's (2008) model, building career self-concept may be a helpful element of 'self-knowledge' and career world-view may be a helpful addition to 'career options'. Raising awareness of these would enable people to understand which beliefs and assumptions are helping them and which may be limiting their opportunities.

This section has described a number of approaches and considerations of career self-management. From this, further lines of enquiry emerge. How do individuals engage in career self-management and in what ways does this reflect existing models (e.g. Hirsh, 2008; Sturges *et al.*, 2002)? What do stakeholders see as the role of individuals in managing their own career? How do people explore the *'careerscape'* within their organization and beyond it (Inkson *et al.*, 2015)? How do career self-concept and career world-view seem to influence career action (Bosley *et al.*, 2009)?

2.4 Organizational career management

Historically organizations have played a significant role in mapping career development for their employees (e.g. Baruch, 2006; Lips-Weirsma & Hall, 2007). This has often been done with little reference to individual career development approaches (e.g. Bagdadli, 2007; Savikas & Lent, 1994).

However, some suggest that as new forms of career emerge, the role of the organization is still important, albeit different from the previous role (e.g. Baruch, 2006). This section will explore views on the nature of this changing role and then consider ways in which the organization can manage careers. This will enable further lines of enquiry to be developed. However, firstly it is helpful to define what is meant by 'the organization'? It is, after all, made up of individuals and groups rather than being a single entity. Furthermore, it is in a state of constant flux, responding to its environment (Stacey, 2011). Each individual employee is likely to experience the organization in a different way, dependent on their experiences, the people they interact with, their personality and many other factors. Moreover, the term potentially hides a degree of complexity and may indicate an assumption that leaders and managers have some power or control over the direction of a group of people (a discourse strongly challenged by Stacey, 2011). However, in our common way of describing work, we readily attribute characteristics to 'the organization' and this forms part of people's narrative about their careers (e.g. Clarke, 2013). Therefore, whilst recognizing the limitations of the term, it will be used as a shorthand for those in positions of authority and influence who share a commitment to achieving an agreed set of overall goals.

The changing nature of organizational support for careers has been discussed for some time (e.g. Herriot *et al.*, 1998; Hirsh & Jackson, 1996; Parker & Inkson, 1999). In particular, the increased focus on the individual (for example with protean and boundaryless careers) can create problems for organizations which primarily view their people as a resource to be managed (Inkson *et al*., 2015). Recognizing a change in the balance of career accountability between the individual and the organization, Lips-Wiersma & Hall (2007) identified two possible scenarios. In the first scenario, the organization would stop any involvement in career management and career development with the individual taking full accountability. The second scenario involved an ongoing role for the organization, but in a more challenging way than historically. They summarized this new approach stating;

> '*it requires a systemic approach where the whole system is able to respond competently and flexibly to the career aspirations of the individual while also integrating these with the strategic direction of the organization'*
>
> (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007:788).

This, they suggest, requires business-wide involvement and clear communication of expectations to individuals, thus repeating the recommendations of Herriot *et al.* (1998) discussed above. Further changes that have been suggested include a fundamental transition of the employment relationships

from '*employees as contractors'* to *'partners in a joint venture'* (Parker & Inkson, 1999:84). These approaches both assume that organizations will take an approach based on mutuality (in line with Clarke's proposition three, 2013). However, as discussed above, this discourse can be challenged and may not be appropriate for all organizations, depending on their strategic aims and source of competitive advantage. For example, applying the individual-organizational attachment map of Figure 2.1 (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995), organizations may pursue different approaches with different employees. They may adopt a partnership approach with 'core' employees, but may choose a transactional relationship with temporary employees or those contributing specialist skills for a particular project.

A further change in organizational career management is the emergence of extensive literature and research in the field of talent management. The work on talent management has attracted much interest, and draws on career concepts and vocational psychology in addition to other fields such as Strategic Human Resource Management (Dries, 2013; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Inevitably this creates some overlap in literature, concepts and practice and some have questioned whether they are separate or if talent management is simply a '*re-badged and repackaged career strategy*' (Yarnall, 2008:5). However, as stated in the introduction, for this thesis the literature on talent and career are being explored separately. Themes from both shall be used to inform the development of the research questions and the analysis of the findings.

So, what do organizations do to help them to manage careers? A wide variety of policies, processes and practices can be included within the umbrella of organizational career management. In essence these help the organization to manage people before they join, when they are employed and as they leave the organization (Sonnenfeld & Peiperl, 1988). Sturges *et al*. (2002) matched their list of individual career actions with a similar list of what the individual could expect from the organization. These are listed in Table 2.3 below and are presented in the original format, showing both formal and informal practices.

Formal Practices
• I have been given training to help develop my career • My boss has made sure I get the training I need for my career • I have been taught things I need to know to get on in this organization • I have been given a personal development plan • I have been given work which has developed my skills for the future • My boss has given me clear feedback on my performance

Informal Practices
• I have been given impartial career advice when I needed it • I have been introduced to people at work who are prepared to help me develop my career • I have been given a mentor to help my career development • My boss has introduced me to people who will help my career

Table 2.3: Organizational career management items, from Sturges *et al.* (2002)

The inclusion of formal and informal practices is also echoed by Hirsh, (2008), however, she takes a wider perspective and identifies a range of activities, stating;

> '*Some of the most important enablers of career development would not generally be seen as career processes at all*'
>
> Hirsh, 2008:5

Within this she includes job design, selection, development and performance appraisal. A diagram illustrating the 'web' of possible career support is shown in Figure 2.3 below. An even broader range of possible organizational career management practices is given in Inkson *et al.* (2015). Adapting work from Arnold (1997) and Arnold & Cohen (2013) they list 19 possible activities. In addition to activities identified by Sturges *et al.* (2002) and Hirsh (2008) they include more detailed practices. For example, they reference internal vacancy notification, career paths, secondments, development centers, job rotation schemes, succession planning and outplacement. This suggests that there are many possible mechanisms for organizations to support individual career management through formal processes and through informal career advice and support.

However, in practice it seems that many organizations are not utilizing these mechanisms and that in general, career support is seen as weak. Perhaps, rather than being a shared accountability between individual and organization it is more important to employees than it is to employers;

> '*It is a key issue for employees and they are amazed and frustrated that organizations do not engage in it properly*'
>
> Hirsh *et al.* (2001: 2)

Certainly, these perceptions would account for the generally low satisfaction with career development highlighted in the psychological contract section above (e.g. George, 2009).

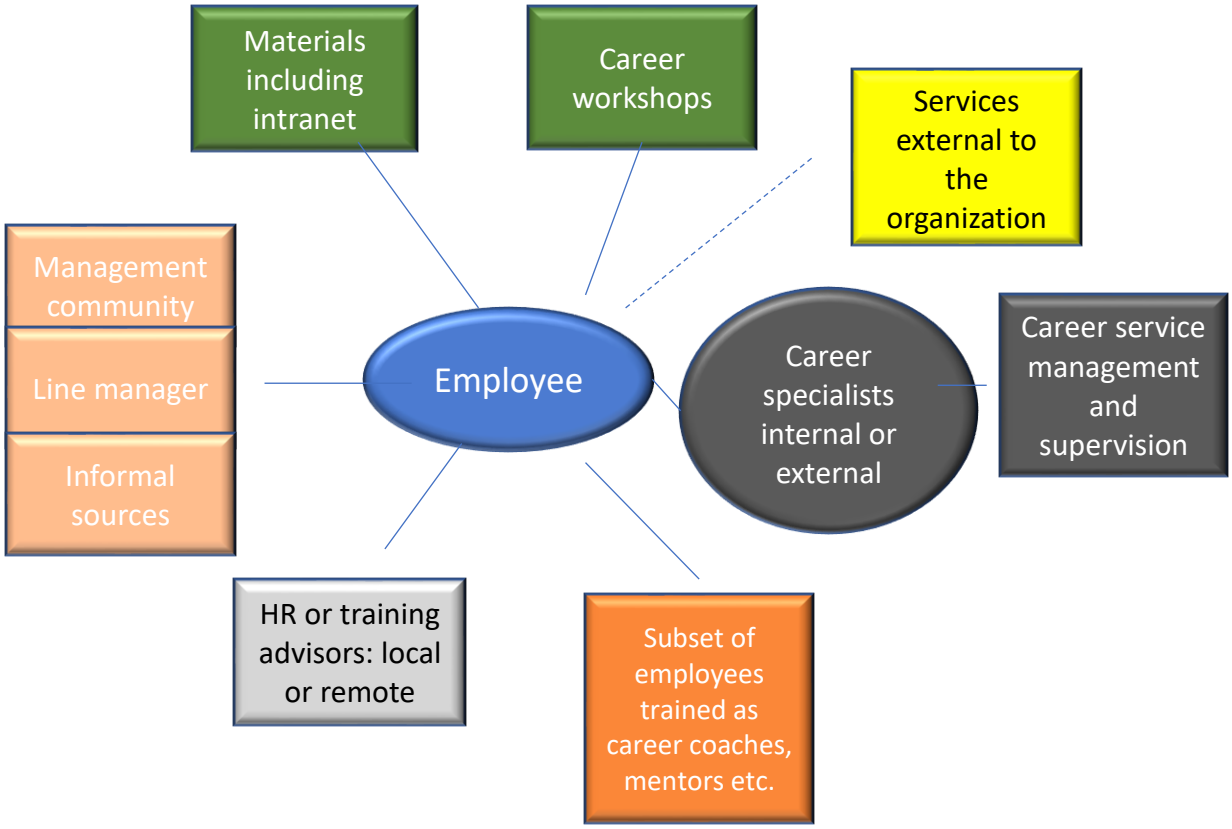


Figure 2.3: Web of possible sources of career support, from Hirsh (2008)

There are many potential lines of enquiry emerging from the literature reviewed in this section. Firstly, seeking to understand the organizational aims and intentions behind career management practices and the extent to which this applies to all or some employees. To what extent do organizations view alignment of career aims and organizational needs and a partnership approach as desirable (Clarke, 2013; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007)? In what ways are there different aims for different groups of employees (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995)? Secondly, considering the specific practices through which these aims are enacted. What formal and informal organizational career management practices are operating and how do these reflect approaches suggested in the literature (e.g. Hirsh, 2008; Inkson *et al.*, 2015; Sturges *et al.*, 2002)?

2.5. Other parties in career management

A variety of people may be involved in supporting the career development of an individual (Bosley *et al.*, 2009; Kidd *et al.*, 2003). This may be as part of operationalizing a formal organizational approach or it could be informal. This section will explore the nature of this support, starting with the line manager through whom a lot of the organizational career management processes described above are delivered. The role of mentor will then be considered before describing the work by Bosley *et al.* (2009) on career shapers which provides a typology for the nature of support given by other parties. As with the other sections, this will enable further lines of enquiry to be identified.

The line manager is often recognized as having a significant role to play in an individual's career development (e.g. Hirsh 2008, Schein, 1978; Yarnall, 1998). Moreover, the line manager's contribution to encouraging employee growth and development can have a significant influence on employee trust in organizational leadership (Gordon *et al.*, 2014). It is widely suggested that the line manager's role in career development is increasing as HR devolve more of their work to line managers (e.g. Perry & Kulik, 2008; Renwick & MacNeil, 2002). Furthermore, the perceived shift from organizationally managed careers to jointly managed careers has also been linked to an increasingly important role for the line manager (e.g. Yarnall, 1998). As part of research into the line manager's impact on individual voluntary career development activity, Yarnall (1998), summarized the existing literature on the manager's role. This was categorized under three headings as seen in Table 2.4. These items clearly link with career self-management as described above. For example, they support an individual in both '*thinking about careers'* and in *'taking career action'* (Hirsh, 2008). They can also be seen to illustrate the Bosley *et al.* (2009) categories: career self-concept (through feedback and support on goals); career world-view (though communicating the meaning of career development and information on future opportunities) and career opportunities and action (through providing learning opportunities and job redesign).

Devolvement of career responsibility to the line does not seem to have been entirely successful and there is often a gap between the practices espoused by the HR function and those which are enacted through the line manager (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Indeed, the study by Yarnall (1998) concluded that it was rhetoric to see managers as proactive developers of their team. However, when pushed by team members who were keen on career development, managers did provide more support. Many explanations are given for the variable performance of line managers in taking on devolved HR activities. Purcell & Hutchinson (2007), cite a range of studies when

summarizing the explanations as lack of training, lack of interest, work demands, conflicting priorities and manager's self-serving behaviour. A study by Paustian-Underdahl *et al.* (2013) also identified the influence of biographical information (such as personality characteristics, work and life experiences) on the perceived supportiveness of supervisors. Moreover, with regard to career development specifically, whilst many organizations position career development as a line manager accountability, few clearly define what specifically they expect managers to do as part of this (Yarnall, 2008). Managers may also lack training in how to fulfill this role. For example, only 5% of organizations questioned in a CIPD survey had trained their line managers in how to support career management (CIPD, 2003). This theme is picked up on by Hirsh, (2008) who recommends skilling managers to provide effective career support to their team members in both formal and informal settings.

Promoting career development
• Communicating the importance of career development • Communicating the meaning of career development • Raising awareness of the benefits of career development • Creating a climate for suitable development e.g. providing opportunities for staff to share learning experiences with their peers • Encouraging the use of development resources
Spending time with staff individually on career development issues
• Acting as coach and counsellor • Providing feedback on individual performance • Providing information on future opportunities within the organization • Supporting individuals that are examining their career goals and plans • Being a resource and source of ideas for development options • Helping to identify and overcome obstacles to development • Acting as a sounding board • Setting realistic expectations
Taking actions to further their staff's development
• Championing career interests • Redesigning jobs to create more challenging opportunities • Reinforcing development of staff through reward

Table 2.4: The role of line managers in career development, Yarnall (1998: 381)

An alternative perspective on the line manager role in career development has been proposed by Crawshaw & Game (2015), applying attachment theory. Attachment theory focuses on the dynamics of a relationship, suggesting that secure relationships are formed through repeated 'care giving' and this creates a 'secure base' from which individuals can be self-reliant (e.g. Bowlby, 2005). Crawshaw & Game (2015) conducted a qualitative study to explore the nature of line manager-individual relationships in a career development context. They found that despite a wide range of

organizational support (such as internal vacancies, career counsellors and annual career development reviews), individuals saw career development as their accountability. However, the line manager was perceived as a partner in this process. In particular, people valued line managers who demonstrated acceptance of the employee and were accessible in terms of physical availability with a willingness to listen. They also valued awareness of where the person wanted to go, often supported through informal interactions and collaborative career planning and decision making, respecting independence but also being willing to influence others. These findings were further developed through a large survey. This supported the finding that in the context of career development, line managers are perceived in a caregiving role as described by attachment theory.

Mentoring is an established form of work-place developmental and career support (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Eby *et al.*, 2010). Whilst definitions of mentoring are often contested, most agree that a mentor supports the growth and development of a protégé (e.g. Higgins *et al.*, 2007). Many cite benefits for both the mentor and the protégé (e.g. Higgins *et al.*, 2007). However, it is difficult to establish cause and effect in something as complex as mentoring (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). The functions of mentoring were summarized by Kram (1985) as 'career' functions (e.g. sponsorship, coaching, access to development opportunities and understanding how to manage the political environment) and 'psychosocial' functions (e.g. role modelling, emotional support and friendship). Early studies reviewed the impact of mentoring in terms of career success as measured by pay and promotion (Dougherty & Dreher, 2007). However, over recent years the conceptualization of mentoring has changed. It has developed from largely being seen as a single, long-term, formal hierarchical relationship aimed at facilitating career progression to include multiple, shorter term relationships focused on broader development (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Using social network theory, Higgins and Kram label this career support a '*developmental network*' (Higgins & Kram, 2001: 264). This is likely to include informal, self-forming mentoring relationships which some research has found to be particularly effective (e.g. Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The network may also include the line manager as a mentor (e.g. Eby & McManus, 2004; McCarthy & Milner, 2013). Whilst common, there are concerns that it may be difficult for line managers to act as mentors for the same reasons identified above with regard to line manager career support.

Research has explored the influences on successful mentoring at both individual and organizational level. The findings include differences in terms of protégé personality and career stage and the mentor's personality and educational experience (Higgins *et al.*, 2007). At an organizational level Higgins *et al.* (2007), suggest that there has been little research beyond exploring factors which

may affect the initial forming of mentoring relationships. One consistent feature of positive mentoring is positioned as the quality of the relationship (e.g. Eby *et al.*, 2010; Kram, 1996). In their 'critical but appreciative analysis' of the psychology of careers, Arnold and Cohen (2008), summarize findings on the nature of helpful relationships in careers. They refer to these as '*real relationships'* characterized by closeness, support, a focus on subjective rather than objective outcomes and ideally a genuine knowledge and care for the other person. This has similarities with the attachment theory findings of Crawshaw & Game (2015) described above. However, Arnold & Cohen (2008), conclude;

> '*there is little direct evidence that mutuality and sharing are essential features of effective career networks, nor that people are seeking closeness in their career related relationships*'
>
> Arnold and Cohen, 2008:32

This is consistent with the findings on 'anatomy of credibility' of career helpers (Bosley *et al.*, 2007) discussed below.

A wider review of the contribution others can make in supporting individual career development was investigated by Bosley *et al.*, (2009). Exploring '*shaping encounters'* (Bosley *et al.*, 2009: 1488) of non-managerial employees they used career narratives to build deep understanding of how participants made sense of career support they had received. The encounters included some short one-off interactions as well as some longer-term relationship based support. Focusing on an individual's perception was important to create meaning and to recognize some of the inherent complexities in managing a career such as the tension between individual agency and organizational constraints. The narratives were subsequently analysed to develop a typology of career helpers, with a commitment to descriptions which would be easily understood and recognized by those who had contributed to the research. Five career shaper roles were identified and are summarized in Table 2.5 below. The typology was positioned as a starting point, reflecting what emerged from the participants involved in the study. It was recognized that other categories, for example relating to non-directive listening and support, could emerge with a different participant group. These descriptions illustrate that in addition to formal career helpers within an organization, (such as managers and HR professionals) many people may informally perform such a role (e.g. colleagues). Furthermore, a wide variety of career help can be valued by participants, some of this may be relationship based but there can also be a value in more transactional career support (for example with a gatekeeper or intermediary).

Role	Description
Advisor - suggestions	• Offer opinions and suggestions which help to shape career view and actions in pursuit of career such as work experience, skills and job search techniques. Has little impact on career self-concept • Can include professional career advisors, managers, colleagues and family members
Informant - knowledge	• Provide information and insights into specific job vacancies and occupations, without obviously influencing choices. Can help shape career self-concept which has a subsequent impact on career direction • Often includes friends, family members, managers, colleagues and training staff
Witness - feedback	• Share perceptions of individual strengths and weaknesses, shaping career self-concept and aspirations, thereby affecting career direction • Commonly managers, but can also be training and HR professionals, colleagues or family members
Gatekeeper - opportunities	• Have the power to provide or restrict access to jobs. Can be proactive (approaching individuals with roles, thus shaping career direction) or responsive (responding to requests for different roles or development opportunities, either positively or negatively) • Often managers or HR professionals
Intermediary - intervention	• Able to positively influence on behalf of someone, sometimes there is little evidence that they were involved, but a belief that they have helped in some way • Mostly managers, can be colleagues and family members

Table 2.5: Career shaper roles identified through the research, adapted from Bosley *et al.*, 2009

This section has considered the role of other parties in supporting career development. Having discussed literature on the role of the line manager, mentors and wider career support, it is possible to identify three specific emerging lines of enquiry. Firstly, what do stakeholders view as the line manager's role in career development, and how is this enacted (e.g. Yarnall, 1998)? Secondly, relating to a network of career support, who do people seek career support from (Higgins & Kram, 2001)? Thirdly, in what ways are other parties seen to shape and support career development (Bosley *et al.*, 2009).

2.6 Career conversations

Understanding the role of the individual, the organization and other parties is helpful in building the picture of career. However, it can remain somewhat abstract until consideration is given to the actual mechanisms through which individual and organization can work together on career issues. Career conversations provide one of these mechanisms. They are an event at which both organizational and individual perspectives may be represented and they can be a key action in a joint career project (Young *et al.*, 2002). Career conversations are widely recognized as a tool in helping people with career self-management and therefore form a crucial career development activity (e.g. Hirsh *et al.*, 2001; Hirsh, 2008; Yarnall, 2008). This awareness seems to be widely recognized in the HR community too, for example, the CIPD website (2016) includes a number of resources and opinion pieces about the importance of quality career conversations. However, it seems that career conversations are not being consistently used as a mechanism to support career development. For example, Yarnall (2008) stated;

> '*one of the biggest gaps in career processes is a lock of honest discussion with most individuals about their perceived potential and the realistic options open to them*'.
>
> Yarnall, (2008: 132)

Furthermore, a study by Right Management (2010), involving 28 000 employees in 15 countries concluded that career discussions between employees and their immediate managers were very rare.

Workplace career discussions were studied by Hirsh *et al.* (2001, see also Kidd *et al.*, 2003, 2004). Before undertaking the research, they took a mutual benefits stance to career development, with the individual benefitting from access to interesting work (including upwards and lateral moves) and the organization benefitting from a supply of higher skills and a more flexible workforce. They recognized that many individuals needed ongoing help and support with their careers in terms of information and advice on specific jobs, business direction and relevant skills for the future. They suggested that much of this information and advice was likely to be delivered through conversations. However, they were concerned that provision of workplace career conversations was poor and that there was little research in this area. They therefore undertook research to explore the key features of effective conversations (effective as defined by the receivers of the conversations). They were interested in understanding the setting, who the conversation was with, who initiated the conversation, how the behaviours and relationships were described and the outcomes. Through semi-structured interviews and some surveys they collected accounts of 198 career discussions, 162 of which were described as positive. A summary of the results is presented in Table 2.6 below.

Who the discussion was with	• Manager (not boss) 26% • Boss 21% • Mentor or coach 14% • Specialist external advisor 12% • HR personnel 11% • Facilitators at external events 8% • Friends/work colleagues 8%
Setting for the discussion	• Informal (not part of HR process) 50% • Mentor/coaching 14% • Follow-up meetings 14% • Events 8% • Appraisal/development review 7% • Regular internal meeting 4% • Meeting with external advisor 3%
Most commonly mentioned qualities and behaviours of discussion 'givers'	• Personal qualities 56% • Challenge and advice 49% • Facilitative skills 46% • Information giving 46% • Giving feedback 33% • Managing the session 25% • Status, knowledge and experience 10%
Most commonly mentioned qualities and behaviours of discussion 'receivers'	• Preparation before the session 12% • Facilitative skills 11% • Probing 8% • Personal qualities 7% • Gathering information 7%
Outcomes of effective career discussions	• Future direction 65% • Self-insight 61% • Awareness of opportunities 53% • Feel-good 51% • Job move 35% • On-going dialogue 25% • Political awareness 25% • Skill development 22% • Career skills 22% • Contacts 14% • Commitment and retention 11% • Secondment 4%

Table 2.6: Summary of effective career discussion findings, adapted from Kidd *et al.* (2003, 2004).

These findings relate to much of the other research reviewed in this chapter. For example, the wide range of people involved in providing informal career discussions supports the 'developmental network' idea of Higgins & Kram (2001). The provision of feedback and information is similar to items in the line manager role of career support (Yarnall, 1998). The outcomes described are examples of the framework suggested by Bosley *et al.* (2009). For example, self-insight will influence career self-concept, political awareness is part of career world-view and a job move is an

example of a career opportunity. Likewise, consistent with Bosley *et al.* (2009), many of the conversations described by participants had a number of outcomes. The research also reinforced some concerns regarding the line manager's ability to take on a career development role with their team. Many participants were negative about their experiences of talking with their boss about their career and stated that they found it difficult (Hirsh *et al.*, 2001).

As shown in Table 2.6, 'personal qualities' of the givers were mentioned by 56% of the participants. This category incorporated behaviours which supported trust and openness, for example, honesty, frankness and being non-judgmental. Furthermore, respondents indicated it was '*important that the giver had the individual's best interests at heart and no particular agenda of their own'* Kidd *et al.* (2004:236). This is consistent with other research described above (e.g. Kram, 1996) and the finding by Bosley *et al.* (2007) that partiality was an important characteristic of career helpers. However, the findings of Kidd *et al.* (2004) do not constitute direct evidence of the necessity of these qualities within a career network (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). Challenge and advice were the most commonly mentioned interpersonal skills of givers of effective career discussions (mentioned by 49%). The description of this category included challenging an individual's self-perception, perceived barriers and rationale for different career choices. One common feature of this category was reference to being '*pushed out of the comfort zone'* Kidd *et al.* (2004:237). Two further categories were mentioned by 46% of respondents each. 'Facilitative skills' covered questions, listening and showing empathy. These descriptions are similar to those described by Bosley *et al.* (2007) as part of relationship credibility. 'Information giving' included very specific advice as well as more general information on a range of career options. This 'information giving' combined with the 'status, knowledge and experience' behaviours mentioned by 10% of people relates to the Bosley *et al.* (2007) description of the relationship between the organization and the helper. Bosley *et al.* (2007) concluded that valued helpers had some or all of three qualities: a relationship between the helper and the structure (contributing power, influence and knowledge); a relationship between the helper and the receiver (contributing personal knowledge, care and support); partiality (a sense of someone on your side).

The outcomes of these career discussions were categorized based on the data rather than using pre-defined constructs (Kidd *et al.*, 2003). As shown in Table 2.6, twelve categories of outcome were identified with many respondents reporting outcomes in a number of categories from one discussion. Four of these categories were mentioned by at least half of the participants. Firstly, future direction (65%), which included thinking about possible career options, making a decision on these

options or developing a specific plan. Self-insight was the second most common outcome (61%), leading to greater awareness of strengths, weaknesses, aspirations and values. The third most common outcome was titled 'awareness of opportunities' which included internal and external opportunities and some of the processes for accessing them (with political awareness captured as a separate category). Feeling good or motivated about self, work or career was also mentioned by more than half of the respondents (51%). This emotional response to positive career discussions was also evidenced in the rich and positive language used by many participants when describing their experiences. In addition to describing what was *on* the list of outcomes, Kidd *et al.* (2003) observed an interesting omission. They point out;

> *'Very rarely did anyone remark on how a career discussion had led them to be more 'satisfied' with their career or their job, despite the prevalence of the terms career satisfaction and job satisfaction in the literature of career interventions'*
>
> Kidd *et al.* (2003:130)

This reinforces the value of using respondent-generated categories rather than pre-defined ones.

The results of the above study confirmed the benefits of career conversations for individual career development. Rather than the prescribed conversations of formal processes such as appraisal, they found that individuals benefited from different types of career discussion at different times. Thus, sometimes it was helpful to have a reflective conversation, sometimes to receive honest and frank feedback, whilst at other times it was helpful to be given information which could help with career decision making and planning. Whilst positive conversations brought positive results, there was also a reported risk – if the conversation was viewed as negative it was unlikely to lead to any action and was likely to have a negative emotional effect. They concluded that career discussions were a key tool for career development and that investment should be made in learning how to do them well, (as part of mainstream training rather than a separate initiative). As a contribution to such learning they developed a detailed checklist for givers and receivers of career discussions, linking to four stages of career discussions which they identified Hirsh *et al*. (2001). The stages were: setting up the discussion; establishing trust; sharing information and agreeing action.

The research by Hirsh *et al*. (2001) was conducted within five case study organizations. All organizations had established career development approaches and a commitment to providing career support. Within the original findings, overviews of the organizations are given (Hirsh *et al.* 2001) and the potential impact of organizational and wider contextual factors is raised. There were some

differences identified in who the career discussions took place with, but wider contextual differences were not extensively explored.

The above research demonstrates that the respondents benefitted from career discussions with a variety of people in a variety of ways. However, this research did not situate these conversations within the context of other career development activities (individual or organizational). The lines of enquiry are therefore an attempt to broaden the understanding of career conversations from all stakeholder perspectives. Accordingly, the emerging lines of enquiry are: what do different stakeholders see as the contribution of career conversations?; what types of conversations are valued by each stakeholder group?; in what ways do conversations seem to be influenced by organizational context?

2.7 Summary and conclusion

A wide variety of career literature has been explored in this chapter. Career has been positioned as a dynamic concept relating to an individual's work experiences. A number of theoretical perspectives have been introduced and the '*new organizational career*' (Clarke, 2013) has been suggested as an alternative to the 'boundaryless' and 'protean' career forms. This new career form is based on a belief in mutuality – meeting the needs of the individual and the organization. However, not all agree that this is possible (e.g. Yarnall, 2008). The degree of perceived alignment between individual career and organizational resource needs will therefore be an interesting topic of study. Given the seemingly changing nature of careers, the individual is seen as having an increased level of accountability for managing their career. This has raised questions regarding the role of the organization in career development and the role of the individual in their own career self-management. This chapter has presented some approaches to both organizational career management and individual career development which have emerged from previous research. Many organizational career management activities are dependent on the contribution of the line manager, and the nature of the line manager's role has been discussed. Furthermore, other parties may form part of an individual's career network and their contribution has been explored. Career conversations have been described as a mechanism through which career support can be given. The nature of these career conversations has been discussed, citing previous research. This chapter has highlighted the potential tension between individual and organizational goals.

Throughout this review of the career literature, a number of lines of enquiry have been identified. These are summarized in Table 2.7 below. The talent literature will be reviewed in the next chapter, with additional lines of enquiry emerging. These shall then be brought together in the methodology chapter (chapter 4), with both literatures used to inform the approach to the present study.

Theoretical perspectives	• How do people experience an organizational career and how does this reflect the 'new organizational career' suggested by Clarke (2013)? • How implicit are career deals and are there any examples of formal contracting as suggested by Herriot & Pemberton (1997)? • What do individuals want and expect from their employer in terms of career support and opportunities and how well do they feel this is being delivered? • What discourses do people use to describe alignment of individual and organizational goals and how do they describe the *'dance'* between the different parties (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007)?
Career self-management	• How do individuals engage in career self-management and in what ways does this reflect existing models (e.g. Hirsh, 2008; Sturges *et al.*, 2002)? • What do stakeholders see as the role of individuals in managing their own career? How do people explore the *'careerscape'* within their organization and beyond it (Inkson *et al.*, 2015)? • How do career self-concept and career world-view seem to influence career action (Bosley *et al.*, 2009)?
Organizational career management	• To what extent do organizations view alignment of career aims and organizational needs and a partnership approach as desirable (Clarke, 2013; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007)? • In what ways are there different aims for different groups of employees (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995)? • What formal and informal organizational career management practices are operating and how do these reflect approaches suggested in the literature (e.g. Hirsh, 2008; Inkson *et al.*, 2015; Sturges *et al.*, 2002)?
Other parties in career management	• What do stakeholders view as the line manager's role in career development, and how is this enacted (e.g. Yarnall, 1998)? • Who do people seek career support from (Higgins & Kram, 2001)? • In what ways are other parties seen to shape and support career development (Bosley *et al.*, 2009).

Career conversations	• What do different stakeholders see as the contribution of career conversations?; • What types of conversations are valued by each stakeholder group?; • In what ways do conversations seem to be influenced by organizational context?

Table 2.7: Career literature review lines of enquiry

Chapter 3: Talent management literature review

3.1. Introduction

There has been growing interest in talent management over the past decade, from both academics and practioners (Dries, 2014). The field has been dominated by practice based research and many writers have commented on the ongoing lack of empirical research (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Thunnissen *at al*., 2013b, Thunnissen, 2016). This, combined with the relative newness of the field creates a number of challenges for the academic researcher. For example, there is no agreed definition of talent management, there is debate concerning the theoretical foundations and there is little consensus on the role of the individual. Given this context, the current literature review will provide a broad introduction to the talent management literature, starting by considering what talent management 'is', followed by a brief overview of the research background and a summary of key findings from the practice based literature. Having established this overview, I will then focus more specifically on mutuality and alignment within talent management, followed by the role of talent conversations. This review will help to identify 'lines of enquiry' emerging from the existing literature which are further discussed in the methodology section and used to frame the research questions for the current study. In particular, this literature review will draw attention to questions of stakeholder alignment, organizational and cultural context. It will also identify a gap in research on talent conversations.

3.2 What is talent management?

Talent management is an emerging topic which is gaining credibility as a field of academic study (Dries, 2013; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014a). Whilst many of the tools for talent management have been around since the 1950s (Capelli, 2008), the term 'talent' in the current context first appeared in the 1990s in the well-known McKinsey article, 'The War for Talent', (Chambers *et al.*, 1998). Whilst there is no agreed definition of talent management, it is generally recognized as encompassing the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of talents (e.g. Farndale *et al*., 2010). However, a consistent definition of talent management remains ellusive. Indeed, Thunnissen *et al.* (2013b) in their literature review of 62 peer reviewed articles observed that half of the articles they included had no clear description or definition of talent management.

Academics cite this lack of a clear definition, claiming agreement is important and will enable the development of more robust theory (Collings, 2014b; Iles *et al*., 2010; Nijs *et al*., 2013). However, at this stage in the field's growth, Sparrow *et al*. (2014a) point out that the lack of agreed definition may support greater innovation and avoid a politicized academic debate. With this in mind, some alternative definitions are introduced below.

One widely cited definition is offered by Collings & Mellahi (2009). They build on the work of Lewis & Heckman, (2006) and define talent management as;

> "*activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that differentially contribute to the organization'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 organization*"
>
> Collings & Mellahi (2009: 304).

This definition is broad and encompasses four main approaches to talent management (people, practice, position and pool) which shall be further explored in the next section on theoretical foundations. A similar definition is proposed by Scullion & Collings (2011) to capture the nature of global talent management to include;

> '*all organizational activities for the purpose of attracting, selecting, developing and retaining the best employees in the most strategic roles',* recognizing the need to balance *'global strategic priorities as well as the differences across national contexts'*
>
> Scullion & Collings (2011:6).

A further way to consider the definition is to review the intended outcomes, using this to infer the meaning and scope of talent management. Thunnissen *et al.* (2013b) cited a number of studies (e.g. Davies & Davies, 2010; Ready & Conger, 2007) to identify different levels of outcomes and effects. They concluded that talent management outcomes were to attract, motivate and retain, enabling the organization to meet their resourcing needs, reducing the gap between supply and demand of talent. However, this outcome view has been challenged by Capelli (2008), who comments that talent management in itself is not the intended outcome, rather the intention is to increase overall organizational performance in the eyes of the shareholder, i.e. to support achievement of the financial goals. Thus, organizational success would be a measure of talent management effectiveness. However, there remains no clear way of measuring the impact of talent management. Indeed, there

have been calls for this to be a focus of future research (e.g. Sparrow & Makram, 2015; Tarique & Schuler, 2014; Thunnissen, 2016).

A very different approach was taken by (Nils *et al*., 2013). Rather than starting with what talent management *does*, they started with trying to understand what talent *is*. Accordingly, they conducted a multidisciplinary review of definitions of talent and then applied them to talent management. This identified excellence as the main evidence for talent and incorporated insights from human resource management, gifted education, positive psychology and vocational psychology.

> *'Talent refers to systematically developed innate abilities of individuals that are deployed in activities they like, find important and in which they want to invest energy. It enables individuals to perform excellently in one or more domains of human functioning, operationalized as performing better than other individuals of the same age or experience, or as performing consistently at their personal best'*
>
> Nijs *et al*. (2013: 182)

This definition goes beyond the dominant 'human capital' stance (e.g. Farndale *et al*., 2010) and gives greater prominence to the individual's perspective. This definition was developed into a model and a series of propositions which shall be explored in the next section on research background.

These examples capture some of the challenges with defining talent management. Is it about the activities that take place? Is it about the nature of talent? Is it about the organizational outcomes? Is it about development? Furthermore, considering a constructionist perspective, does it matter what it 'is'? Indeed, perhaps it is appropriate to embrace the different perspectives and use this to build a rich understanding of the talent management landscape.

3.3. Research background

Whilst largely situated within the field of HRM and organizational behaviour (Nijs *et al.*, 2013; Thunnissen *et al*., 2013a), talent management draws on many disciplines with their own established theoretical foundations (Collings, 2014a; Dries, 2013). Within the peer reviewed journals there tend to be three streams of literature: definitions of talent and talent management; the aims and impacts of talent management; talent management activities and practices (Thunnissen *et al*., 2013b). A full review of these is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, an overview of the most common approaches will be given, building on the Collings & Mellahi (2009) definition of talent management

given above. This will be followed by some additional perspectives including the propositions by Nijs *et al*., (2013). Rather than presenting these as competing alternatives, the intention is to illustrate the breadth of the field and to echo the stance of Sparrow *et al*. (2014c) that there are merits in talent management being positioned as a 'bridge field' (Sparrow *et al*., 2014c: 279) drawing on varied literature and thinking from across disciplines. This combination of viewpoints will enable 'lines of enquiry' to be identified which inform the present study.

The definition given by Collings & Mellahi (2009), can be separated into four different approaches to talent management. One focuses primarily on people, one on practice, one on positions and a final one on strategic pools. Each has an underlying philosophy of what is most likely to contribute to organizational success and draws on different elements of Human Resource Management theory. This approach has been further developed by Sparrow *et al.* (2014b) to indicate the strategic context within which each is most likely to be beneficial. A summary of each approach is given in Table 3.1 below. Whilst these are presented as alternative approaches it is recognised that in many situations a combination of approaches will be appropriate (Sparrow *et al*. 2014b).

Focus	**Summary**
People	Star performers are seen as the source of competitive advantage. Most likely to be appropriate in an environment of high stability in an organization with a people focus. This enables differential performance to be observed and standards to be developed for assessment of people's ability to impact on a known problem. The focus is on the people who can make a differential contribution, the 'A' players with high value and high uniqueness.
Practices	Competitive advantage seen as driven by adherence to excellent practice. Most likely to be appropriate in an environment with high stability and high process focus. Talent is considered as human capital and thus talent management encompasses all key people activities such as recruitment, succession planning a development, but with the implication that it should be done faster and across the whole enterprise, using data to drive improvement.
Key positions	Systematic identification of key positions which have a major impact on ongoing competitive advantage (not just leadership positions). Most likely to be appropriate in an environment of strategic uncertainty with a high process focus. Differentiation of roles by strategic importance to 'A', 'B' and 'C', with a focus on the attraction, recruitment, development and retention of people to fill these roles.

Strategic talent Pools	Focusing on strategically important groupings or clusters of talent to meet possible future needs. Most likely to be appropriate in an environment of high strategic uncertainty and high people focus. Closely aligned to succession and strategic workforce planning with a key task of projecting the needs of the organization and the progression of employees. Uses data analytics, scenario planning and forecasting, with HR informing key business decisions.

Table 3.1: Alternative approaches to talent management, adapted from Collings & Mellahi (2009); Sparrow *et al*. (2014b)

Each approach is seen to have merits and drawbacks. For example, the people approach has been criticized for its focus on individuals as the source of competitive advantage, which other organizations could easily replicate through recruiting these people (e.g. Pfeffer, 2001). Others, (e.g. Gelens *et al.*, 2013) have highlighted the potential negative impact on those not identified as 'talent'. The practice approach (dominant in much of the practitioner literature) has been challenged for failing to account for organizational context and alignment between the organization and individual goals (e.g. Stahl *et al.*, 2012). These approaches all tend to lead to differential treatment of certain employees based on perceived value to the organization. Their value can be assessed using a matrix such as the HR architecture model (Lepak & Snell, 1999) which assesses human capital in terms of value and uniqueness, thereby identifying which groups to invest in most.

The propositions for talent management developed Nijs *et al.* (2013) challenge the largely human capital oriented perspective of the approaches outlined above. Rather than assuming employees are focused on creating value for their organization, they recognize the unpredictability of people's motivations and behavior. Accordingly, they take a more psychological stance to build understanding of the talent construct. The propositions relate firstly to the definition, stating that talent can only be measured where it is operationalized as having an ability element (with innate and developed abilities) and an affective element (incorporating motivation and interest). The next propositions relate to the implications of an interpersonal or intrapersonal focus (with those taking an interpersonal more likely to focus on differentiated talent management strategies). The final propositions illustrate how talent can be measured and identified within talent management. They suggest that measurement of talent varies according to how it is operationalized (thus a focus on the ability component is likely to lead to use of standardized tests, whereas a focus on the affective element is more likely to use self-report measures). Furthermore, they support the view of others (e.g. De Vos & Dries, 2013) recommending that the definition of talent adopted by an organization should reflect its strategic goals. Thus, depending on strategy and culture, an interpersonal or

intrapersonal definition of talent may be adopted. For example, in my consulting work I have experienced a small start-up organization where every employee was encouraged and supported to be their intrapersonal best. I have also encountered a sales-focused competitive environment with a focus on being better than others, an interpersonal approach. Nijs *et al.* (2013) summarize with a call to provide focused activities to support 'developed ability' and to help individuals to identify their motivations and interests.

Thunnissen *et al.* (2013b) aimed to broaden the talent management debate to reflect the needs of the different actors involved and a recognition of the importance of context. They critiqued the dominant approaches for example, the focus on employment practices not work practices (Boxall & Macky, 2009). They also challenged the unitarist perspective which assumes that 'the organization' is one entity with everyone aligned behind the same goals, neglecting to explore potentially conflicting goals. Furthermore, they applied the managerialist criticisms of HRM to talent management, with talent management tools providing control to assist in the ultimate aim of making more money, an aim which may fit the purpose of some organizations but may be inappropriate to apply to other bodies such as public sector organizations. They proceeded to argue for a pluralist approach, whereby multiple perspectives are held and applied at the same time, complimenting each other. This, they suggest provides a more appropriate model of a complex organization, leading to a richer understanding. They propose three new perspectives which they advocate are used to extend current thinking on talent management. These are summarized in Table 3.2 below. Thunnissen *et al*. (2013a) position their paper as highly conceptual. They suggest further avenues for research including understanding how organizations are defining and operationalizing talent and expanding the scope of talent management research into organizations with aims which are not economic (e.g. voluntary organizations). They also suggest an exploration of talent management from an individual's perspective rather than just from the HR or manager perspective. Thunnissen (2016) conducted a study which included individual experiences of talent management, findings are discussed below in the section on mutuality. These three suggestions for research are partially addressed in the present study. A further suggestion, exploring the impact of talent management at a societal level is not explored.

Employment – work relationship	Recognise that the relationship between employer and employee is an exchange, covering both economic and social elements. This will broaden the activities and practices considered within talent management, for example, through increased consideration of the psychological contract.

Ongoing influence of actors at multiple levels	Rather than the current narrow focus on systems and instruments, recognize that the system influences the actors and vice versa. This encourages a clearer focus on the employee and the broader environment rather than concentrating solely on the organizational perspective.
Beyond economic view	Majority of talent management writers focus on economic value and assume that rational objectives are behind decisions and actions. However, there can also be non-rational objectives at play such as cultural norms, symbols and beliefs (as emphasized in Institutional theories) and wider social benefits could also be considered.

Table 3.2: Additional talent perspectives, adapted from Thunnissen *et al*. (2013a)

Another critical perspective is drawn from the Resource Based View (RBV) of strategy (e.g. Barney, 2001). This suggests that competitive advantage is not derived solely from market position, but rather from the ability to develop, use and protect core competencies which are important for the future (Hamel & Prahaled, 1994, in Stacey, 2011). The RBV holds that competitive advantage is difficult to replicate as it is situated in the history, culture, skills and practices of the organization. Bowman & Hird (2014) applied RBV to talent management, showing how it challenges the prevailing assumptions. For example, individual leaders will not be the primary source of competitive advantage and are unable to create value in isolation from the team and wider organizational context. Similarly, because value creation is contextualized, a leader who performs well in one environment may not be able to repeat this in another situation. They also highlight a risk that early talent identification reduces the diversity that is needed to enable an organization to continually adapt. Furthermore, they challenge the notion that talent in one firm will be of value to another firm as much of an individual's value lies in their tacit knowledge of the organization. They conclude with some implications for talent management practice. They recommend a focus on understanding what drives competitive advantage within the organization and recognizing that many contextual elements combine to create success. Alongside recognizing the contribution of talent, they point to the essential role of the '*solid citizens'* (Bowman & Hird, 2014: 86) who may be main drivers of competitive advantage.

The importance of context has emerged above (for example from Thunnissen, 2013a and the RBV). Other writers have also referenced the importance of a contextualized view to talent management (e.g. Collings, 2014b; Iles *et al.,* 2010; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014b; Thunnissen, 2016). However, context itself does not have a clear definition or taxonomy (Johns, 2006). It has been suggested (Capelli & Sherer, 1991) that context should be considered within all research as it is likely to have a significant influence on findings. Capelli & Sherer (1991) conceptualize context as taking

place at different levels with the external environment providing the context for the organization, and the organization providing context for individuals. Johns (2006) describes context as;

> *'situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables'*
>
> Johns (2006:386)

This description emphasizes the importance of considering both '*occurrence and meaning'* and recognizing that different elements will interact, including *'constraints and opportunities'*. Johns (2006) suggests that context should be embraced as an important element of research, rather than either ignored or included as a variable to be controlled for. Furthemore, he recommends having an open view on which contextual features will be relevant. However, there are some models of contextual features which can provide some indications of which elements of context to consider. Wilson & Woodburn (2014) provide a summary of the contextual features identified across a number of management literatures. For example, they cite Goodman & Haisley (2007) who identify four elements: task and technology infrastructure; organizational structure (including authority, communication, decision making and reward system); social infrastructure (including culture, norms and informal networks) and the uniqueness of the workforce (knowledge, skills and abilities). Others categorize the elements in different ways and include some additional aspects such as risk taking (Rice, 2006), organizational goals and purpose (Porter & McGloghin, 2006) and power and politics (Pardo *et al.*, 2011).

Within talent management, the influence of context has been considered in terms of national context. There have been a number of papers exploring this (for example, Cooke, 2011 on China; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014 on the Arab Gulf region; Vaiman & Holden, 2011 on Central and Eastern Europe). Context is also understood to apply to the organizational culture, or 'how things are done round here' (Drennan, 1992). This, however, has not been widely considered within talent management (e.g. Kontoghiorges, 2016; Thunnissen *et al*. 2013a). An exception is Garrow & Hirsh's (2008) paper on 'issues of focus and fit'. This explores the importance of alignment between organizational culture and talent management approach. For example, they reference the need for consistency in terms of transparency, selection, employee involvement and adoption of formal approaches. The issues of transparency are further explored in the section on psychological contract below. Cultural alignment is also identified as important by Martin & Groen-in't-Woud (2011) in their chapter on employer branding and talent management, relating this to both prospective and current employees. Using Schein's (e.g. Schein, 2010) definition of culture as the hidden values, assumptions and beliefs that shape organizational direction, they illustrate how this interacts with corporate

identity, employer brand signals, organizational identity and strategic choices to provide a context for talent management activities. An additional way to understand organizational culture is through the cultural web (Johnson *et al.,* 2008). This places the organizational paradigm (the taken for granted assumptions and beliefs) at the center with manifestations of this represented through routines and rituals, stories, symbols, power structures, organizational structures and control systems. Taking Garrow & Hirsh's (2008) approach, all of these should 'fit' with the talent management approach being adopted by the organization. Thus, they position talent management processes supporting the strategic objectives of the organization, reflecting the culture and supporting the psychological contract between the individual and the organization. Furthermore, they recommend that talent processes should integrate with existing HR processes and be consistent with the abilities of the organization to deliver (for example, within the capability of the line managers). Garrow & Hirsh (2008) also recognize that talent management may be used to challenge and shape the prevailing culture, a view echoed by Sparrow *et al.* (2014a).

The above summary of key perspectives illustrates the breadth of the talent management research background. A number of elements of this were influential in developing initial lines of enquiry for the present study, focused on understanding how the theories described here translate into practice within organizations, answering the call for such research by Thunnissen *et al.* (2013a). In particular, I want to consider how do organizations define and operationalize talent and talent management, and how does this reflect the approaches suggested by Collings & Mellahi (2009) and Niijs *et al.* (2013)? How are the different stakeholder perspectives represented in talent management approaches (Thunnissen, 2016)? In what ways does the approach to talent management seem to reflect (or shape) organizational strategy and culture (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014b)?

3.4 Talent management practice

Within talent management, practice based research has been more prevalent than academic oriented peer reviewed research (e.g. Dries, 2013; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014a; Thunnissen, 2016). There are a number of features of the practitioner research which should be considered when referencing this material within the context of academic study. In particular, it is important to recognize that the purpose of these papers is to extend professional practice, rather than to advance theory (Oliver, 2012). Therefore, they may show little concern for empirical research or the rigorous critical and theoretical thinking of an academic approach (Vaiman & Collings, 2013). For example, there are many

claims made regarding the extent of the return on investment which may not bear detailed scrutiny (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). This has led Reilly (2008) among others, to identify a risk of hyperbole in the field of talent management. However, with these caveats, a summary of some of the practitioner literature provides helpful information relevant to this study. Some sample approaches to talent management will be shared, followed by a particular focus on the emerging role of both HR and line managers within talent management. This will be followed by a critique of much talent management practice which has emerged from some of the academic papers (e.g. Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Sparrow *et al*., 2011). This review of the practitioner literature will help to broaden the lines of enquiry so far identified.

A number of practitioner books and articles describe overall frameworks and processes to help organizations to achieve their talent goals (for example, Ashton & Morton, 2005; Goldsmith & Carter, 2010; Silzer & Dowell, 2010). Often based on case studies, they recommend a number of steps or questions to guide an organization through the design and implementation of a talent strategy. Many of the practices are comparable with the descriptions of organizational career management described in chapter two. One comprehensive process is proposed by Barner, (2006) in his book 'Bench Strength' which draws on his experiences in the media industry. The approach covers a wider range of steps and considerations than many of the others, including a clear strategic focus on future requirements. The steps are summarized in Table 3.3 below and show a focus on identifying key positions (in this instance leadership positions). Although there is no discussion of talent definitions, the approach recommends systematic development to build on innate abilities, with a focus on those who will perform better than other individuals (interpersonal excellence). The focus throughout the book is on the ability element of talent with little reference to the importance of '*activities they like, find important and in which they want to invest energy*' (Nijs *et al.*, 2013:182). Furthermore, the model can be seen as expressing a managerialist and unitarist perspective as described above (Thunnissen *et al*., 2013a).

Step	Heading	Description
1	Identify organization's future business goals and environment	• Understanding the long term goals of the organization • Exploring significant changes in the market place which will impact on challenges and opportunities for the organization
2	Assess performance gap	• Identifying the key gaps in current organizational performance which will need to be addressed to meet the changing demands

3	Anticipate organizational transition	• Anticipated structural changes as the organization evolves • Identifying the most 'mission critical' leadership roles (p52) and parts of the organization which require totally new skills/knowledge and any areas which have a surplus of talent or require specific sets of knowledge, skill, attitude
4	Identify changing leadership requirements	• Develop understanding of the new requirements for leaders moving forward to achieve the goals, developing a template for leaders' future role, responsibility, technical and management competence and work experience
5	Perform talent capabilities assessment	• Evaluate each leader in terms of performance and potential, using clearly defined criteria • Assess the talent strength within each function/unit
6	Plan and implement action to close gap	• Develop a comprehensive plan to close the gap • Likely to include: acquire/develop/retain talent; restructure jobs; build talent management infrastructure

Table 3.3: Summary of talent management steps, adapted from Barner, (2006)

In addition to overall models such as Barner, much of the practitioner literature describes approaches taken by well-known multi-national corporations (MNCs). For example, HSBC and Proctor & Gamble (Ready & Congor, 2007), McDonalds and Microsoft, (in Goldsmith & Carter eds, 2010), Pepsico and Home Depot (in Silzer & Dowell eds. 2010), Blackrock and Tata group, (Ready *et al.*, 2014) are all referenced as case studies. The majority of these case studies refer to North American organizations, often operating in a multi-national context and in professional service (Vaiman & Collings, 2013). Indeed, taking an employer branding perspective, (e.g. Martin and Groen-in't-woud, 2011) these case studies could represent the way the organizations would like to be perceived as doing things, rather than the way they are doing things. However, some do take a more critical and reflective approach, highlighting the challenges they face. For example, Pepsico (Church & Waclawski, 2010), have an inclusive talent management programme, integrated with their wider talent sustainability framework. Officially introduced in 2007, the focus is on building the talent '*bench*' (Church & Waclawski, 2010: 619) and incorporates many activities which were already in place, either formally or informally. The model has two key elements. The first is the Career Growth Model which helps employees understand what they can do to build their career at Pepsico (i.e., have proven results; develop their leadership capability; develop functional expertise, business understanding and key experience). This demonstrates a clear message regarding transparency and accountability for career, two themes which will be considered below. The second element is the talent management

model with three phases of talent management: identify; develop readiness; movement. These elements are brought together in the people planning process. This model includes a recognition of both 'systematically developed' and 'innate' talent (from Nijs *et al.,* 2013). A key factor in the success of this process is recognized as '*the extent to which the people in the meeting truly know their employees*' (Church & Waclawski, 2010: 625). This highlights the role of the line manager, something the case study identifies as sometimes problematic, with many managers operating to their own implicit models of talent and potential.

The sample approaches described above tend to be owned by the HR function. Indeed, talent management tends to be positioned within the field of HR (Lewis & Heckman, 2006), with the function's contribution integral to the talent strategy. This is summed up by the CIPD (2016) as;

> *'HR professionals have an important role to play in providing support and guidance in the design and development of approaches to talent management that fit the needs of the organization. They need to understand the key challenges facing the organization in attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining talented people to meet immediate and future strategic objectives and business needs. It is also important to develop and signpost career opportunities for **all** employees and creative strategies for unleashing employee potential.'*
>
> CIPD (2016)

The CIPD proceeds to identify some of the tools which can be used by HR professionals in their role, for example, workforce planning, succession planning, assessment and development of potential. Many organizations seem to adopt similar processes. For example, the 'nine box' model is a common tool for plotting a person's perceived performance against their perceived potential, as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. The position on the grid is then used to describe if someone is a 'talent risk' 'future star' or 'consistent star' etc. This can then be used to determine the nature of investment and development offered to the individual. However, despite being used by many organizations, the purpose and underlying talent philosophy may be different (Sparrow *et al*., 2011).

The inclusion of '*opportunities for all employees'* in the above CIPD quotation is interesting. It addresses a concern raised by Ulrich & Brockbank (2005), that HR functions are overly focused on the 'strategic partner' role and are at risk of neglecting the 'employee champion role'. The HR role in global talent management has also been considered by Farndale *et al*. (2010) following a review of literature including case studies (e.g. Diageo). Having summarized the specific supply and demand challenges of global talent management they identified four talent management roles for corporate HR functions: champion of processes; guardian of culture; network leadership and intelligence; managers of internal

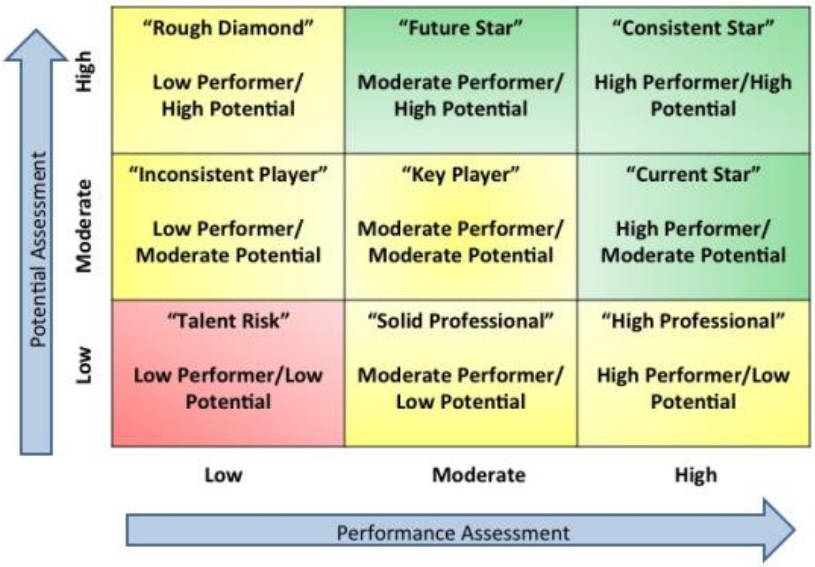


Figure 3.1: Nine box grid

receptivity. This role description goes further than the CIPD description and the key aspects of each element are summarized in Table 3.4 below. Whilst recognising that global talent management has some different challenges and draws from a different literature these four roles could be adapted to be relevant to a local as well as global context. A further consideration on the role of HR in talent management is the potential influence of the HR Director's own beliefs. Dries *et al.* (2014) explored the mindset of HR Directors and considered how this impacted on their preferred approaches and processes. They explored three 'dilemmas' of talent management: inclusive or exclusive; select or develop; standardize assessment or recognize it when you see it. They identified some cultural differences in mindset and practice, for example, a higher reliance on first impressions from Anglo and Eastern European cultures than in other cultures.

Champion of process	System monitoring and control across the organization to support consistent implementation. Includes providing clarity of what is meant by talent, what the strategic talent needs are and how talent can be assessed and calibrated across international boundaries.
Guardian of culture	Working to create a global, joined up talent management culture with clear values and employer brand. Encouraging mobility and designing practices to support improved decision making.

Network leadership and intelligence	Having visibility of internal and external trends so the context for the organization's global talent management is fully appreciated. Knowing the markets and having a network of people who can help provide solutions, facilitating collaboration.
Managers of internal receptivity	Supporting career management and the talent flow beyond the more traditional ex pat model. Developing new processes and challenging mindsets to unlock new sources of talent such as self-initiated ex-pats and alternative ways to develop international experience.

Table 3.4: Role of corporate HR in global talent management, adapted from Farndale *et al*., 2010.

Most talent management approaches position HR as providing information, processes and advice to enable better line management decision making. It therefore follows that line managers are critical to the successful enactment of talent management policy and practice. The importance of the line role is captured by Garrow & Hirsh (2008);

> *Probably the most important people are the line managers, who play pivotal roles in talent spotting, providing development opportunities, managing performance, giving feedback, and coaching and supporting employees who carry the burden of expectations once they are labelled as "talent.".*
>
> Garrow & Hirsh (2008: 399)

They call for line managers to be supported and encouraged in their role so they become advocates, not blockers of talent management. Some organizations do this through explicit expectations that the line manager will act as a coach and mentor and will develop talent for other parts of the organization (Stahl *et al.*, 2012). However, this may not be easy and some have identified potential conflicts between the role expected of line managers in driving organizational performance and their role in growing talent (e.g. Ready & Congor, 2007). For example, Stahl *et al*. (2007) identified that managers can be reluctant to support the use of development opportunities such as secondments for their team members, preferring to keep strong performers within their part of the organization. Wright & Nishii (2013) also suggest that line managers may not fulfill their part in talent management processes due to a lack of clear policy, a lack to time and a lack of support. Some of the general challenges of devolving HR activity to line managers were captured by Renwick (2003). Following interviews with 40 line managers he identified concerns including time for line managers to perform these activities, knowledge and competence to do HR work professionally and difficulties of line managers relationships with their HR function. He concluded that devolvement of HR practices is problematic and should be reassessed. Given the critical nature of the line manager role in talent management, this would seem to merit further research. This could draw on work in the career field as described in the career section of the literature review.

While describing talent management practice and the emerging roles of HR and line managers, some of the challenges have been considered. However, many additional challenges to talent management practice have been presented. Some of these have been highlighted in influential academic articles such as '7 myths of Global Talent Management', (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013) and 'Talent Management: Time to Question the Tablets of Stone?' (Sparrow *et al*., 2011). Challenges include the lack of a clear link to organizational performance (e.g. Minbaeva & Collings, 2013; Collings, 2014a), lack of data driven, structured decision making (e.g. Boudreau, 2010; Vaiman *et al.*, 2012) and the difficulty of implementation (e.g. Collings *et al.*, 2011). The unknown impact of culture (national, organizational and occupational) is highlighted by Dries (2014) as a complicating issue. Furthermore, there are a number of paradoxes which tend not to be considered, such as collective culture versus individuality; consistency versus agility; global versus local (Ready *et al.*, 2014). The typical talent management goal of minimizing turnover of talented people is also challenged. For example, Samaya & Williamson, (2011) recognize that inter-company careers are the norm and there are many potential advantages in employee turnover (for example, developing networks and collaboration with other organizations). The elitist nature of talent management is identified by Swailes (2013) who challenged the prescriptive tendency of practitioner research which '*overlooks issues such as class, gender, power and ethics*' (Swailes, 2013: 32). All of these issues combine to lead some to conclude that despite the clarity of many of the published talent management models, it seems that it is often not managed well (Collings *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, many of the reported case studies are based on the practices as reported by HR. It should be noted that there can often be a discrepancy between the intended and enacted process (Truss, 2001).

To overcome the above challenges, the importance of aligning the approach with the organization has been emphasized (e.g. Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Sparrow *et al*., 2014a). Stahl et al. (2012) conducted research with 33 multinational corporations who were recognized as having superior business performance and employer reputations. They identified six principles for talent management: alignment with strategy, internal consistency, cultural embeddedness, management involvement, balance of global and local needs and employer branding through differentiation. Citing IKEA as an example, they emphasize the importance of closely aligning talent management approach to the specific aims and context of the organization rather than blind adoption of what may appear as 'best practice'.

This review of talent management practice has confirmed my interest in understanding how organizations define and enact talent management. Some further 'lines of enquiry' for the current

study also emerge. In particular, how do HR view their role in talent management and to what extent do they see themselves as 'employee champion' (Farndale *et al.*, 2010)? What awareness is there of the potential impact of broader issues such as national and organizational culture (e.g. Dries, 2014) and gender and power (Swailes, 2013)? What is the role of the line manager in talent management and how able do they feel to deliver this (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008)?

3.5 Mutuality within talent management

As identified above, talent management tends to focus on meeting the organization's needs rather than the needs of talented employees (Dries & Pepperman, 2008). Indeed, Thunnissen (2016) states that;

> '*even though talent or talented employees are the central subjects in TM [talent management], there is little interest in their experiences and opinions*'
>
> Thunnissen (2016: 58).

Similarly, Collings (2014b) highlights the focus on shareholder returns leading to;

> '*HR systems which fail to effectively align individuals and organizations in the generation of value'*
>
> Collings (2014b: 301).

Yet, it Is widely accepted that to deliver sustainable performance an organization must meet employee needs (e.g. Paauwe, 2009), suggesting a relationship of alignment and mutuality. An overview of mutuality and alignment in talent management will be given, considering the challenges for both the organization and the individual. Mutuality will then be considered from the perspective of psychological contract, and capability. As with the other sections, this will help the development of further lines of enquiry for the present study.

A number of authors advocate an approach to talent management that meets both the needs of the individual and the organization. For example, balancing organizational and individual needs is core to the employment-work relationship suggested by Thunnissen *et al.*, (2013b) shown in Table 3.2 and to the affective element of talent as referred to in the Nijs *et al.* (2013) definition. Thunnissen (2016) cites Truss *et al.* (1997) in distinguishing between 'hard' production focused approaches to talent management and softer, 'people' approaches. The former is typified by a focus on measurement, control and performance whilst the latter is more concerned with meeting an individual's emotional needs in an environment of trust and inclusivity. By its nature the hard

approach is unlikely to consider an agenda of mutuality, whereas mutuality is likely to be central to the soft approach. Advocating the benefits of a 'soft' approach, Capelli (2008) suggests that engagement and retention of talented employees is aided by balancing the interests of the employer and the employee. Furthermore, Campbell & Smith's (2014) research on 'the view from the [talent] pipe' captured mutuality as one of their three recommendations;

> ***'Create a mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the talent****. Mutuality addresses the benefits individuals receive as employees of the organization, but also takes into account and makes explicit the benefits the organization receives from its employees. A mutually beneficial relationship means that high potentials receive the investment in development they want from their organization, and organizations receive not only a more committed and engaged group of leaders but also stronger performance and bottom-line results.'*
>
> Campbell & Smith (2014:24)

However, seeking a mutually beneficial relationship brings challenges to both the employer and the employee.

For the employer, a commitment to mutuality can be difficult. A fundamental challenge is that '*employees' choices may not align with the interests of the employer*' (Capelli, 2008:75). Ideally, as with organizational career management, the organization will support individuals to move towards roles which are aligned with their interests, creating a better fit between person and career (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). However, this may not meet the organization's strategic goals. Furthermore, to achieve alignment, the organization needs to communicate their thoughts on the contribution of the individual. However, such transparency from the organization may not be forthcoming. For example, Dries *et al*. (2014) found that individual employees were often unaware of the talent management approaches in their employing organization. They saw this as compounded by the lack of transparency of approaches, leading to a power imbalance in favour of the organization. A similar conclusion was reached by Silzer & Dowell, (2010a) who stated '*how much gets shared with the individual is still a controversial issue*' (Silzer & Dowell, 2010a: 760). Furthermore, a survey of 20 organizations (Silzer & Church, 2010) identified that most do not tell individuals if they are part of an identified high potential group. The lack of transparency in talent management may reduce an individual's commitment to the organization (Campbell & Smith, 2014; Ingham, 2006).

Within an environment of mutuality, individuals are able to work towards achieving their career aspirations. This is likely to involve work that is '*meaningful and challenging, matches personal*

interests, and gives a feeling of accomplishment' (Thunnissen et al., 2013b). To achieve this, the individual has accountability for articulating their motivations and aspirations to their manager and other decision makers (Nijs *et al*., 2013). However, as discussed in the career section of the literature review, individuals may not have engaged in career self-management so may not consciously be aware of their aspirations (e.g. Kreishok *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, they may (perhaps for reasons of power or control) choose not to share their thinking openly with the organization.

In addition to the role needs, individuals are likely to have further economic and non-economic needs (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013b; Thunnissen, 2016). The economic needs include financial reward and job security (e.g. Kalleberg & Marsden, 2012). The non-economic needs are varied. Cambell & Smith (2014) highlight the importance of clarity of career pathing and ongoing feedback and support. Thunnissen *et al.* (2013b) explore the importance of talent management being perceived as 'just and fair' by employees as an important part of meeting the non-economic needs. The perception of fairness is likely to be influenced by the employee's perception and interpretation of the approach being taken (Nishii *et al.*, 2008). For example, employees may question the aims of talent management. Is the organization embarking on this through a desire and commitment to grow employees or to control them? Is the driver a business rationale to reduce cost? To draw conclusions, employees will focus on the way a policy is enacted, not just the content of the written policy. Thus, the individual's needs may be considered broader than job role.

The challenge of achieving mutuality has also been framed through the lens of the psychological contract. As discussed in the preceding chapter on career literature, the psychological contract is considered to be '*promisory, implicit, reciprocal, perceptual and based on expectations*' (George, 2009:3). This is a helpful lens through which to represent the individual's perspective and is increasingly being applied to talent management (Thunnissen, 2016). For example, Hoglund (2012), suggested that talent management processes communicated the organization's talent goals and influenced a sense of employee obligation to develop skills. Similarly, Farndale *et al.* (2014) drew primarily on psychological contract theory in their review of international assignments within global talent management. They reported on two pilot studies exploring how to balance individual and organizational needs with the aim of seeking mutual benefits. They concluded that it was difficult to simultaneously meet the needs of both the organization and the individual and to do so required a commitment to individualization and a culture which supported flexibility rather than standardization.

An alternative mutuality perspective is offered Swailes (2013, and Downs & Swailes, 2013). This is based on Amartya Sen's influential Capability Approach. The Capability Approach has previously been applied to careers, (Cornelius & Skinner, 2008) and they summarized success within this framework as;

> '*something achieved by those who are able to pursue what they have reason to value, and are fully functioning and flourishing. Capabilities theory advocates an enhanced quality of life achieved through the widening of people's freedoms and choices'*
>
> Cornelius and Skinner, (2008: 148)

In talent management terms this alters the focus from organizational resources to individual freedoms. Accordingly, it challenges the prevailing discourse of scarcity of talent, focusing instead on abundance, and the role of organizations in creating the best conditions for all employees to flourish. This fundamentally changes the aims of talent management away from a mechanism to further the organization's aims, and instead, focuses it on the achieved freedoms for employees and other key stakeholders. Downs & Swailes (2013) also raise a concern of categorizing people as 'star' or 'human capital', taking the Capability Approach view that people are '*ends in themselves, that they matter for who they are, not what they can be used fo*r' (Downs & Swailes, 2013: 274). This is a challenging perspective and can be accounted for within much of the talent definition proposed by Nijs *et al*. (2013). For example, the Capability Approach focus on achieving functioning which a person values and has reason to value resonates with '*activities they like, find important and in which they want to invest energy*'. Similarly, the focus on the conditions for each employee to flourish demonstrates a generic talent approach and mirrors the operationalization of talent by Nijs et al. in terms of people '*performing consistently at their personal best'*. However, although the approach can be seen to fit within the definition of talent, it is one that to date has not been extensively referenced in the literature.

From the above it can be seen that whilst mutuality is often considered a desirable feature of talent management (e.g. Campbell & Smith, 2014; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013b), it can be difficult to achieve (e.g. Capelli, 2008). There are many potential challenges to finding mutual ground and aligning individual and organizational needs. There may be conflicting goals, but without genuine sharing of information there is a risk that both parties will have incomplete information to support decision making. For example, the organization may lack information on talent (the individual's motivation and aspirations), and individuals may lack information on potential opportunities for career growth and development (the talent plan). However, there is little research on what 'genuine sharing' could involve and the extent to which individual's needs are being met through talent

management. This informs two further lines of enquiry. What commitment is there from organizations and individuals to finding a mutually beneficial approach (Collings, 2014b)? How is this enacted and perceived by all stakeholders (Campbell & Smith, 2014; Thunnissen, 2016)?

3.6 Talent conversations

Talent conversations are rarely identified as a key tool of talent management (two exceptions being Campbell & Smith, 2010 and Clutterbuck, 2012, to be discussed below). However, the use of conversations in talent management is often implied or referenced in passing. For example, Capelli (2008) suggests negotiation as the mechanism for achieving individual and organizational alignment. Ready & Congor (2007) reference the importance of understanding an individual's needs and any restrictions, stating;

> '*this is why, in practice, it is critical for managers and HR professionals to have honest discussions with employees to fully understand their career interests and ambitions*'
>
> Ready & Congor (2007: 249).

Similarly, Ingham (2006) indicates a role for conversations in helping people to plan their careers;

> *'Through enabling open, honest conversations, these employers of choice need to encourage their talent to review their long-term career development needs and how these needs can best be met – internally or externally'*
>
> Ingham (2006:23)

Such conversations appear crucial to the premise of mutuality and an important element of all of the talent management processes discussed earlier in this chapter. So, who should take part in these conversations, what should they cover and what do they aim to achieve? Two different approaches are explored below.

Campbell & Smith (2010) referenced talent conversations in their paper 'the view from the pipe'. They suggested that a mutually beneficial relationship could, in part, be supported by giving those with high potential access to '*the right conversations at the right times*' (Campbell & Smith, 2010:19). Smith & Campbell (2011) subsequently produced a short practical guide for leaders on talent conversations, setting out what they were, why they mattered and how to do them. They suggest that line managers have significant influence on development of talent and that 'talent conversations' are a simple and effective mechanism. Furthermore, they indicate that these

conversations can be used as part of an organization's formal talent management approach or as an informal, locally driven process. They describe talent conversations as follows;

> *'A talent conversation builds on a relationship based on rapport, collaboration, and mutual commitment, which engender trust and enable one person to influence another toward improved performance, development and positive outcomes. Therefore, at its core a talent conversation is a mutual endeavor. A talent conversation is not done to someone but with someone'*
>
> Smith & Campbell (2011: 10)

This clearly positions the conversations as part of a mutuality approach. They provide a practical guide to four types of talent conversations according to a line manager's assessment of the individual on a nine-box grid (see Figure 3.1). They cluster the grid into four quadrants, each with a corresponding talent conversation. Thus, the high performance/high potential quadrant people are seen as candidates for a 'top talent' conversation. Meanwhile, the low performance/low potential quadrant people are considered to need the 'underperformer conversation'. Similarly, the 'solid performer' conversation relates to the high performance/low potential quadrant and the 'potential performer' conversation is targeted at the low performance/high potential quadrant. They structure the recommended conversations on the Centre for Creative Leadership's learning model, assessment, challenge support (ACS) which is summarized in Table 3.5 as applied to talent conversations.

Assessment	• Review of existing data from any talent review exercises • Review of data on organizational needs • Reflections on personal experiences working with this person • Review of current performance and strengths • Review of developmental needs in current situation • Find out what drives and motivates the person • Develop a summary of key points
Challenge	• Identify developmental experiences which will stretch the individual (skills, thinking, approaches) • Move the individual out of their comfort zone • Base the challenge on meeting individual and organizational needs • Provide a structured summary including clear goals and review of potential obstacles

Support	• Identify experiences which will enhance self-confidence and opportunities to use strengths • Tailor support offered to what the individual will find most helpful and motivational • Clarify the accountability the individual and the manager will take going forwards • Ongoing monitoring of the plan

Table 3.5: The ACS development model, adapted from Smith & Campbell (2011)

The guide does not include specific skills required in these conversations, but it does reference using coaching skills '*in order to ask the right questions, listen to understand, offer feedback, and identify goals'* Smith & Campbell (2011:27). This approach illustrates the practical nature of talent conversations as a mechanism for balancing individual and organizational needs.

A different approach is advocated by Clutterbuck (2012), who describes a series of conversations to align individual career and organizational talent goals. The approach encourages a generic talent perspective and focuses on an environment where people can grow their talent in the way they want to (reflecting the Nijs *et al.,* 2013 definition). The process is summarized in Table 3.6 below and is based on interviews with HR professionals, from which '*a picture has emerged of four critical conversations*' (Clutterbuck, 2012: 142).

Conversation 1: inner dialogue	• For the employee to create a sense of direction and aspiration for their working life, identifying potential barriers • Conversation may be supported by a mentor or coach to aid self-awareness and reflection
Conversation 2: Stakeholder dialogue	• Conversation between the employee and their immediate stakeholders within work (e.g. boss and peers) and outside work (e.g. family members) • Identify and agree how the stakeholders can support the employee towards their goals
Conversation 3: Organization and employees	• Organization engaging the talent wave and emerging talent encouraging and empowering them to develop collectively and individually • Sharing information on organizational direction and how to progress a career in this organization
Conversation 4: Between social networks	• Connecting individuals and the organization to the 'outside world' (p. 148) • Creating openness to new ideas, increasing agility and responsiveness to career opportunities and threats

Table 3.6: Summary of Critical Career conversations adapted from Clutterbuck (2012)

This approach has a wider involvement of stakeholders than that suggested by Smith & Campbell (2011). As such, it can be seen to be using a developmental network (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Furthermore, although positioned as part of talent management (the book is called 'Talent Wave') the process emphasizes the overlap between talent and career. For example, the 'conversation 1' can be compared with Hirsh (2008) individual career planning model, particularly the elements on 'thinking about careers'. Similarly, sharing information with employees on future opportunities is part of Yarnall's (1998) description of the role of the line manager in career development.

From the above it can be seen that there is an opportunity to relate conversations within talent management to the career conversations discussed in the previous chapter. However, it should be noted that within the field of talent, these conversations still lack empirical research. Clutterbuck's (2012) work contributes the HR view, and Smith & Campbell (2011) provide a line manager view. The individual's view is missing, as is an understanding of how these conversations relate to overall talent management practice. Building on the wider talent management literature it would be beneficial to understand more of the experiences of the individuals and line managers. Furthermore, it would be helpful to understand how these conversations, as a talent management tool are influenced by organizational context. This leads to the lines of enquiry. How do stakeholders view the contribution of career conversations within formal talent management practice and how are these conversations experienced by different stakeholders? In what ways are the conversations seen to be influenced by the context of the organization?

3.7 Summary and conclusion

This review of the current talent management literature has highlighted that talent management is a complex and emerging field. As a relatively new discipline there remains much debate regarding definition. However, there is common understanding that talent management is concerned with systematic approaches for attracting, retaining and developing the talent or skills needed to deliver organizational goals (e.g. Farndale *et al.*, 2010). There are a number of common approaches to talent management with different focuses seemingly selected according to the organizational goals (e.g. Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Many organizations are shown to apply a combination of approaches (e.g. Sparrow *et al.*, 2014b). It is generally assumed that the approach to talent management should reflect the context and culture of an organization in addition to its goals (e.g. De Vos & Dries, 2013; Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). Furthermore, national context is likely to have an

influence (e.g. Iles *et al.*, 2010). It should however be noted, that most research to date has been conducted from a North American perspective, so may not reflect wider cultural influences (e.g. Collings *et al.*, 2011; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014c).

The majority of talent management approaches are concerned with delivery of organizational benefits. However, some (e.g. Collings, 2014b; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013b) call for a broader set of aims which recognize wider stakeholder needs. This raises the question of how to balance the needs of the individual and the organization. Whilst many (e.g. Capelli, 2008; Thunnissen, 2016) suggest that mutuality is an important aim, few describe how this can be achieved. Talent conversations provide a potential tool for facilitating mutuality. Indeed, the approaches presented above (Clutterbuck, 2012; Smith & Campbell, 2011) illustrate how conversations can help to find a balance between individual and organizational needs.

A number of 'lines of enquiry' have emerged and are shown in Table 3.7 below. In particular, the case for researching alignment between individual career goals and organizational talent goals has been established. Furthermore, the importance of context and considering multiple stakeholder perspectives has been ascertained and the gap in research on talent conversations has been shown. In the next chapter, methodology, these lines of enquiry shall be consolidated with those emerging from the career literature review. This will show how the literature was used to inform the research questions and subsequent design of this study.

Research background	• How do organizations define and operationalize talent and talent management, and how does this reflect the approaches suggested by Collings & Mellahi (2009) and Niijs *et al.* (2013)? • How are the different stakeholder perspectives represented in talent management approaches (Thunnissen, 2016)? • In what ways does the approach to talent management seem to reflect (or shape) organizational strategy and culture (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014b)?
Talent management practice	• How do HR view their role in talent management and to what extent do they see themselves as 'employee champion' (Farndale *et al.*, 2010)? • What awareness is there of the potential impact of broader issues such as national and organizational culture (e.g. Dries, 2014) and gender and power (Swailes, 2013)? • What is the role of the line manager in talent management and how able do they feel to deliver this (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008)?

Mutuality within talent management	• What commitment is there from organizations and individuals to finding a mutually beneficial approach (Collings, 2014b)? • How is this enacted and perceived by all stakeholders (Campbell & Smith, 2014; Thunnissen, 2016)?
Talent conversations	• How do stakeholders view the contribution of career conversations within formal talent management practice and how are these conversations experienced by different stakeholders? • In what ways are the conversations seen to be influenced by the context of the organization?

Table 3.7: Talent literature review lines of enquiry

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Throughout the literature review a number of lines of enquiry were identified. These were reviewed and formed into the research questions for the present study and are described below. This is followed by an overview of the study design which includes reference to the ontological and epistemological approach. This study was conducted in two phases. Each phase of the study is described with phase one covering the research with the HR and OD professionals and phase two covering the work with line managers and individuals in the five case study organizations. These descriptions include the approach taken to data collection and analysis with more detailed accounts and examples provided in the Appendix. The chapter concludes with some of the study limitations. The intention of this chapter is to help others to follow my journey so the quality and trustworthiness of my research can be assessed by others (Checkland and Holwell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Before reporting my methodological process, I wish to provide some context. Firstly, I find the metaphor of social researchers as "journeymen, wayfarer, fellow traveller or craftsmen" [sic], (Pirrie & Macleod, 2010: 367) to be a powerful description of the research process. This recognizes that along the journey of the research there will be changes to the route or the destination and this is part of the natural reflexive process that is research. Secondly, my approach to research is influenced by complexity theory and social constructionism. Accordingly, I am interested in taking a systemic view and considering the context within which events occur. I do not believe there is one 'reality' and thus I am seeking to describe a range of perceptions, thoughts and interpretations rather than a 'single truth'. Furthermore, I am cognisant that I am not an objective researcher, rather, my interpretation of the data will be influenced by my own experiences and beliefs. Accordingly, I shall describe the research approach using the first person rather than the (perhaps) more conventional third person. However, it should be noted that whilst I conducted and led the research, the approach, methods and findings were discussed with my supervisors (Professor John Arnold and Dr Andrew Rothwell). Thus, terms such as 'I decided' relate to my decisions following discussion with others.

4.2 Research questions and study design

As described in chapter 1, this research emerged from my interest in alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals. The literature review confirmed that this was an area of interest to both academics and practitioners. A number of potential lines of enquiry were identified throughout the literature review and these were then clustered to create the four main research questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4). The grouping of lines of enquiry and subsequent research questions are shown in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below. This provides the source of the question (career or talent literature review), the chapter section (in brackets) and the resulting research question.

Table 4.1 illustrates the large number of lines of enquiry related to alignment. These questions captured the perceived aims of talent management and career development from an organizational and individual perspective. They also covered the expected roles and the intended/experienced practices. These strands were summarized in RQ1, '*In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals*?'. Within the development of this question I recognised that the finding could be that 'they don't [seek alignment between organisational talent and individual career goals]'. The supplementary questions within RQ1 were: what are the aims of each stakeholder group?; what are the expected roles?; what practices do they engage in? how are these practices perceived by other stakeholders? It was anticipated that context would influence the responses to these questions. Issues of context were specifically captured in RQ4, illustrating the links between the questions.

RQ1: In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals?
Aims
• To what extent do organizations view alignment between individual and organizational goals as desirable? (career, 2.4) • Do organizations have different aims for different groups of employees (career 2.4) • What commitment is there from organizations and individuals to finding a mutually beneficial approach? (talent 3.5) • How do organizations define and operationalize talent and talent management? (talent 3.3) • In what ways does this [the definition and operationalization of talent management] seem to reflect (or shape) organizational strategy and culture? (talent 3.3)

Intended and experienced practices
• How do people experience an organizational career? (career 2.2) • What discourses do people use to describe alignment of individual and organizational goals? (career 2.2) • How do individuals engage in career self-management? (career 2.3) • How do people explore the 'careerscope' which they encounter (from Inkson *et al.*, 2015: 294)? (career 2.3) • What formal and informal Organizational Career Management practices are being used and what is seen as the contribution of these? (career 2.4) • How is the role of the line manager enacted? (career 2.5) • In what ways are other parties seen to shape careers (career 2.5) • How do career self-concept and career world-view seem to influence career actions? (career 2.3) • Who do people seek career support from beyond their line-manager? (career 2.5)
Intended roles
• What do individuals want and expect from their employer in terms of career support and opportunities? (career 2.2) • What do stakeholders see as the role of the individual in managing their career? (career 2.3) • What do stakeholders see as the role of the line manager in career development and talent management and how able do they feel to do this? (career 2.5/talent 3.4) • How do HR view their role in talent management and to what extent do they see themselves as 'employee champion'? (talent 3.4)

Table 4.1: From lines of enquiry to research question one.

In forming RQ1, attention was paid to the language used. Whilst much of the talent and career literature refers to 'mutuality', I decided that this study would explore 'alignment'. These terms are closely related yet there are subtle differences. Definitions from the Cambridge dictionary (business) dictionary on the root words are as follows:

> **Mutual:** *used to describe something that is done or felt by all or both people in a group:*
> *by mutual agreement/consent, 'He has now left the company by mutual agreement'.*
> *mutual benefit/advantage, 'Firms often do business together for purposes of mutual benefit'.*
> *mutual respect/understanding/interest, 'Ours will be a partnership based on fairness and mutual respect'. A mutual decision.*
>
> ***Align**: to change something so that it has a correct relationship to something else,*
> *'Later this year, the company will introduce a price platform for its home insurance contracts, and will align all its prices'.*

To align something with something else, 'More scientific methods of aligning boardroom pay with shareholder returns are needed'. 'The manufacturing processes, whether designed for cost efficiency, speed, or quality are in alignment with company objectives.

Cambridge business dictionary, (2017)

Thus, it can be seen that the term 'mutuality' implies a close relationship and exploration of goals so that all parties are confident that (in this case), both employer, employee and line manager needs are being met. Alignment however, may be achieved without such detailed understanding of the other party's needs. My experience of working with organizations indicated that mutuality was rare, yet alignment was more common. I therefore decided to focus on alignment which was, I believed, more likely within organizations, yet still afforded the opportunity of identifying mutuality if it was described.

Whilst RQ1 provided an overview of career and talent in terms of alignment, roles and practices, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4 provided greater focus on career conversations and context. As described in the literature review, these areas have been less researched and hence fewer lines of enquiry emerged at the outset of the research (see Table 4.2). However, as the field work began, additional questions and areas of interest arose as part of the iterative research process. This evolution is described as part of the data collection process.

RQ2: In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?
• What do different stakeholders see as the contribution of career conversations? (career 2.6) • How do stakeholders view the contribution of career conversations within formal talent management practice? (talent 3.6)
RQ3: What types of career conversations are seen to make positive contributions to people's career development?
• What types of conversations are valued by each stakeholder group? (career 2.6) • How are these conversations experienced by individuals and line managers (talent 3.6)
RQ4: In what ways does organizational context seem to influence the alignment of organizational talent needs with individual career goals and the nature of career conversations?
• In what ways do conversations and talent approaches seem to be influenced by organizational context, culture and strategy? (career 2.6/talent 3.6) • What awareness is there of the potential impact of broader issues such as national and organizational culture, gender and power (talent 3.4)

Table 4.2: From lines of enquiry to RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4

The study had two distinct phases of field work, both exploring all four RQ's. Phase one of this research focused on the views of HR Professionals as stakeholders and representatives of the organizational view. There is an established tradition of seeking and reporting their views (e.g. De Vos & Meganck, 2008; Sparrow *et al.*, 2013). Phase one of this research followed that tradition and sought understanding of senior HR and OD professionals views on alignment of talent management and career development and the contribution of workplace career conversations. These perceptions were collected through a series of individual semi-structured interviews. The focus of the interviews was workplace career conversations within the context of talent management. The talent management context was chosen for two primary reasons. Firstly, the talent management agenda has received significant academic attention over recent years. Within this, career conversations have been cited as an important opportunity for combining individual and organizational goals (e.g. Ready & Congor, 2007; Silzer & Church, 2010). Secondly, talent management is typically a high priority for senior HR professionals (e.g. Deloitte, 2017), and there are a significant number of case studies, articles and books on the topic. According to Hirsh (2008), this focus on talent management has led to career development activities being more embedded within talent management processes than within the wider organization.

Phase two of the research focused on the views of managers and individuals with direct experience of workplace career conversations. This was conducted with five organizations which had also been involved in phase one. Thus, each of these organizations represented a case (Buchanan, 2012). For these five case studies it was possible to collect perceptions from HR (as outlined above) and from line managers and individuals. This represented three important stakeholders within workplace career conversations, combining data from phase one and phase two. Semi-structured interviews were used and they all started by asking the person to share their career story to date. This wider personal context was an important feature of the research, ensuring perceptions were positioned with the participant's career narrative rather than considered in isolation (Bosley *et al.*, 2009; Cohen & Mallon, 2001). The primary focus of the exploration of career conversations was on the individual as a 'receiver' of these conversations. However, those who had line management roles were also asked about their actions as a line manager. I considered the possibility of speaking to 'dyads' of managers and individuals (e.g. Kram, 1985). However, I was keen to explore a range of conversations which were taking place rather than restricting the research to line manager and team member. Furthermore, my approach enabled a collection of rich data on the organizational cultural elements which are recognised as an important, yet under-researched area (e.g. Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013a).

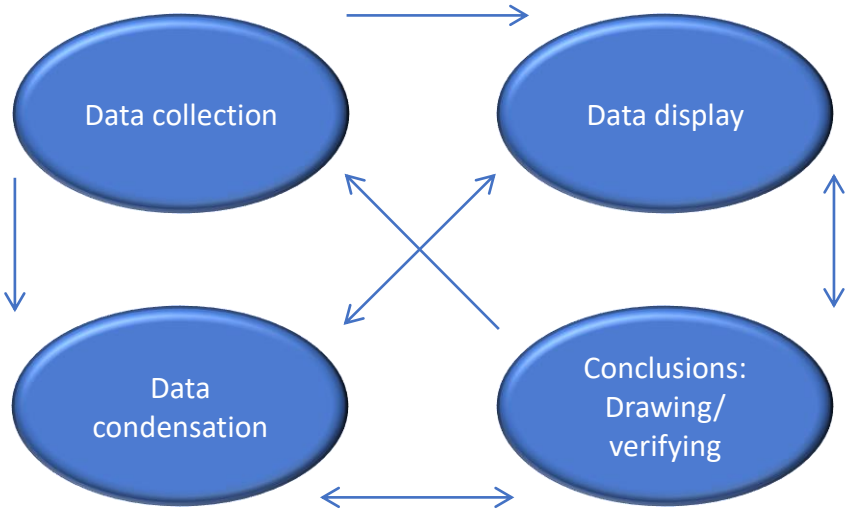


Figure 4.1: Components of data analysis, interactive model from Miles & Huberman, (1994)

In keeping with my research approach the interviews were positioned with participants as a 'discussion' and 'exploration' rather than an interview. Comprehensive notes were produced following each discussion (phase one and phase two) and these were given to the participant so they could edit, correct or develop the record of the conversation. A research diary was used to capture thoughts, reflections and decisions as the research progressed. This was a reflexive process and captured some of the decisions, methodological and theoretical considerations of the research journey (Haynes, 2012). The structure of the discussions evolved as the research advanced, reflecting an interactive model of data collection and analysis (see Figure 4.1. above). The description of this research will be structured by separating phases one and phase two and by using the headings of data collection, data condensation, data display and conclusions. However, as shown in Figure 4.1, the steps are iterative rather than sequential. This iterative nature will be captured within each of the headings, illustrating how the approach evolved. However, first the overall data collection approach will be positioned.

The intention in this study was to collect the views, perceptions and experiences of the different stakeholder groups. The research questions were developed to encourage a broad exploration. Furthermore, there was no existing conceptual or theoretical framework to be explored and the aim was to develop a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). Given this aim I recognised that a survey or structured interview would not provide the data being sought. One option I considered and

discounted was focus groups. Whilst these have been successfully used within talent management research (for example Skuza *et al.*, 2013), there would have been a logistical challenge trying to get a number of participants to the same location at the same time. Furthermore, participants may have been less inclined to openly discuss their experiences. The most commonly used approach for qualitative studies is interviews (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012; Silverman, 2005). This trend is also apparent within interpretive studies on talent management and organizational career management where the semi-structured interview has been widely used (e.g. Dries & Peppermans, 2008; Hoglund, 2012; Sparrow *et al.*, 2013; Stahl *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, the flexibility of a semi-structured interview was consistent with my overall research approach. This therefore seemed a pragmatic choice for this research, enabling flexibility of location and timing, making it easier for participants to be involved with minimal personal disruption.

Having decided to conduct semi-structured interviews, some further decisions needed to be made. Firstly, how would the conversations be recorded? Many researchers use an audio recording of the interview which is then transcribed and used for analysis. Whilst there are many benefits of capturing this record I was concerned that the act of turning on a recorder could inhibit the natural flow of the conversation. Furthermore, I had developed a technique of comprehensive note-taking which included a number of verbatim comments. This skill had been acquired over the preceding 20 years of consulting work, particularly when conducting in depth interviews of candidates for senior positions. Furthermore, I noted that Kidd *et al.* (2003) described their approach as follows;

'*verbatim notes were taken of behaviours and outcomes described*'

Kidd *et al.* (2003: 124)

This indicated that they had not recorded and transcribed the interviews for their study on career conversations. I therefore decided that the recording of the interviews was not needed. A second decision concerned the mechanism for checking the accuracy of the notes. I decided that a copy of the notes would be shared with each participant following their interview. This provided the opportunity for them to check the content and to edit it or add to it if they wished, following the example of Thunnissen (2016). This created further involvement of the participants and was in keeping with the overall research approach.

Despite the popularity of interviews as a tool for data collection, it was important to be aware of the problems inherent with the approach. Wengraf, (2001) draws attention to the need for careful preparation, design, skill and analysis in order for interviews to produce quality research. Furthermore, many have suggested that data collected through interviews should be considered as

socially constructed rather than representation of a truth (e.g. Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012; Coupland, 2004). Atkinson, *et al*., (2008) sum up this challenge of interpretation, recognising that data collected are;

> *"social phenomena and have to be seen in the social and cultural context, just as myths, legends, atrocity stories, jokes and autobiographies have to be analyzed as social and cultural phenomena"*
>
> Atkinson *et al.*, 2008: 90

This reinforces the need to analyse the accounts carefully, considering motive and action to help build understanding of how and why the accounts are constructed in a particular way, (the language structure as well as the content), rather than taking them at face value.

The design of this study is clearly positioned as interpretive (rather than positivist), seeking to gain understanding rather than find a 'truth' (e.g. Duberley *et al.*, 2012). Within interpretive research there are a number of methodologies and philosophies (e.g. Duberley *et al.*, 2012; Miles *et al.*, 2014). However, key features are generally considered to include an awareness of context, a desire for participant involvement and voice, and an iterative process of data collection and analysis (e.g. Thomas, 2009; Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, the researcher is seen as within the research rather than as an objective observer. Thus, the researcher's world view can be seen '*echoing, competing and colliding with the versions represented by [our] participants'* (Cohen *et al.*, 2004: 410). It is therefore important that the researcher is cognisant of '*motives, presuppositions, and personal history that leads him or her toward, and subsequently shapes, a particular inquiry*' (Caelli *et al.*, 2003: 5). Awareness of this enables the researcher to reflect on the way this has affected the research approach, data collection and analysis (Haynes, 2012). In chapter 1, I described some of my personal history that led me to an interest in this study. I provide further reflections on my motives below. My presuppositions are then described, referencing the influence of social constructionism and complexity theory and illustrating how my study is influenced by these approaches. In positioning this research as interpretive I do not intend to suggest that positivist research is 'wrong'. Rather, I subscribe to the view that both have a place, contributing different perspectives (e.g. Lee, 1999). Some further implications for this study arising from my research approach are discussed in the final chapter, conclusions.

My decision to undertake PhD research was formed through an exploration of my own career aims. I was aware that I wanted to continue to grow and develop my professional knowledge and skills. Moreover, I felt that as a consultant I had broad knowledge of many areas, but not one

specialism where I could contribute in-depth knowledge. Having considered a number of career options (for example, retraining as a teacher or returning to an employed position), I felt that a PhD would provide a stimulating, challenging and structured way of learning. I also recognised that such research would create an opportunity to bring together practitioner and academic thinking, something which had interested me since completing my MSc (in 1994). Furthermore, I saw that such a qualification could potentially help me to develop new opportunities for paid and unpaid engagements in both academia and consulting. However, throughout my research it feels that my primary motivator has been the learning process itself. Indeed, when describing my PhD experience to others I have frequently referred to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). This concept captures my feelings of absorption, engagement and fulfilment. These motivations will have shaped my research in a number of ways. For example, I initially commenced a PhD in a Faculty of Education (University of Cambridge), looking at teacher wellbeing. Thus, some of my understanding of the research process was shaped by current and historic discourse in educational research (e.g. Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Sherman & Webb, 1988). In addition, because of my interest in the learning process I have taken some diversions into areas which do not feature in my final research (such as Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry). My consulting background has also influenced the approach I have taken throughout the research. For example, it influenced my access to research participants (discussed in study limitations later in this chapter). I also tended to gravitate towards analytical approaches that I had previously encountered (such as thematic analysis) albeit conducted in a more rigorous and critical way than previously. Finally, I wish to continue the learning journey. Consequently, I see opportunities to build on this research, finding ways to share it with practitioners and to conduct further studies on talent management, career development, career conversations and the context within which these are enacted.

I recognise that my research (and my consultancy work) is influenced by a social constructionist approach. The social constructionist approach has been described as an umbrella term, with a '*family resemblance'* rather than a specific set of principles and methods (Burr, 2003: 2). Burr (2003) suggests a number of key assumptions which are likely to be shared to a greater or lesser extent by those who could be labelled as social constructionist. Firstly, there is a critical stance to the dominant discourse or '*taken-for-granted knowledge'* (Burr, 2003:2). Secondly, the cultural and historical influence on our beliefs is recognised and they are seen as cultural artefacts, with no greater insight than alternative views. Thirdly, knowledge and action are seen as interwoven such that action is likely to change according to the way that knowledge is construed. These assumptions are consistent with the approach taken within this study. For example, the dominant talent discourses

are challenged through the involvement of stakeholders other than just the HR 'owners' of talent. The context is a main element of data collection with the talent management context a focus for phase one and career narratives a focus for phase two. The nature of the data collected is also recognised as socially constructed accounts rather than definitive statements of what has occurred. Social constructionist approaches have often been used to explore power relations. This is particularly relevant to the study of career as it has been suggested that current career discourses favour those with privilege and access, reinforcing existing power structures (e.g. Blustein *et al.*, 2004). Whilst recognising that participants for my study were largely those considered to have privilege (managers), I was keen to understand the implications of power and control on their career experiences. In embarking on the research I acknowledge that I had some *'presuppositions'* (Caelli *et al.*, 2003: 5). In particular, I have frequently found myself frustrated by the lack of questioning by HR professionals of the dominant HR discourses. For example, many of the HR professionals I work with seem content to accept rather than challenge 'best practice' approaches to topics such as performance management, recruitment, change management and, in the context of this study, talent management.

My approach to this study was also informed by complexity theory. In common with the social constructionist approach, this emphasizes challenging underlying assumptions and recognising that dominant discourses are a product of current context (cultural, political, historical) and power relations (e.g. Stacey, 2011). For example, one dominant discourse is that managers and leaders have the power to choose the future of their organisation and that a variety of tools and techniques can unlock the door to success. Stacey (2011) contests this, pointing to a number of global changes (such as the internet), which have emerged without any grand plan or strategic direction. He invites the reader to reflect on what the '*insistence on tools and techniques is all about*' (Stacey, 2011: 4). Suggesting that the dominant 'scientific' approach has little evidence and is '*largely an ideology which sustains particular power relations between managers and other groups in society',* Stacey (2011: 14). The complexity approach encourages a focus on interconnected systems and the emerging relationships between these systems. There is also an emphasis on positioning knowledge within its context (e.g. Haggis, 2008). Furthermore, there is a recognition of the importance of informal process which can '*offer a more adaptive approach than formal ones based on notions of control*', (McMillan, 2008: 83). This philosophy influenced my research approach in terms of exploring the context of career and talent, questioning the dominant scientific approach to talent management and exploring informal approaches alongside formal. The intention was to understand how the elements of the system could be seen to interact and my expectation at the start of the research was that there would be a number of different influences.

4.3 Phase One – data collection

The data collection for this study had a number of elements: participants and their recruitment; structure of discussions; review of the notes. Each of these elements is described below, showing how it evolved as the research progressed.

Participants were approached from within my existing network. This professional network was built from my Human Resources and Organization Development work within organizations from 1988 – 1997 and since then as a consultant. The network included a wide range of organizations and whilst predominantly UK centric it did include some internationally based people. The initial intention was to hold discussions with approximately 15 senior HR professionals and 5 OD professionals. However, the conversion of those invited to participate to those who did participate was higher than expected. This indicated an interest in the topic and a willingness to engage in research on it. A number of participants also suggested people within their networks who would be interested in being involved. The final numbers grew to 23 senior HR professionals and 7 OD professionals; 17 of the participants were female, 13 were male. A summary of participant profiles can be found in Appendix 1. Of the 30 involved, 6 were referrals outside my immediate network. In total only two invitees did not respond and a further four were unable to schedule a suitable time for a discussion within the research timeframe. The majority (25) of the interviews took place face-to-face. A further four were conducted by telephone and the final interview was conducted via skype. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, with most lasting for one hour.

The HR professionals were all employed within organizations in a variety of roles. Within the larger organizations the HR professionals tended to be people with a specific focus on talent management (e.g. Global Head of Talent Management and OD at an organization employing 250 000 people). Within the smaller organizations they tended to have a generic HR role which included talent management (for example, HR Director at an organization employing 650 people within the UK). A breakdown of the organizations represented is shown in Table 4.3 below. Each of these participants spoke primarily of their experiences within their current organization, but also referred to other experiences or organizations where they felt it was appropriate.

Sector	
Banking and financial services	7
Public sector	5
FMCG/food and agriculture	4
Manufacturing	2
Other (e.g. retail, IT, engineering, utilities)	5
OD, career and HR consultants	7
Geography of organizations represented by HR professionals	
Primarily UK and Ireland	10
European	2
International	11
Number of employees of organizations represented by HR professionals	
100 – 500	3
501 – 2 500	6
2 501 – 10 000	5
10 001 – 20 000	3
20 001 plus	6

Table 4.3: Breakdown of organizations represented in the research

The participants referred to as 'OD professionals' were consultants and coaches primarily working within small organizations or on a self-employed basis. They were able to provide insights on client organizations they worked with and also from the organizations they had previously been employed by. Furthermore, they were also able to represent some of the experiences of individuals within organizations who had experienced (or not experienced) workplace career conversations. The OD professionals fell into three broad groups according to their interest within the field of workplace career conversations. Three of the OD professionals operated as OD, leadership and change consultants, which included executive assessment. Two operated as HR consultants and the final two were career and outplacement consultants.

Before agreeing to be involved all participants were sent an information sheet about the research (see Appendix 2). This outlined the purpose of the study, provided brief background on me as the researcher, stated what was involved and provided information on confidentiality, the right to withdraw and what to do if they were unhappy with the way the research was conducted. They were also informed that all participants would receive a report of the findings. The benefit of involvement was positioned to the participants as follows; '*It is hoped that the report will provide a useful source of information on career conversations in other organizations, potentially acting as a catalyst for new approaches*'. At the start of the meeting the research was described again, there was an opportunity

to ask any questions and informed consent was sought and recorded (see Appendix 3 for a sample of the informed consent form). The intention was to conduct the research within a relationship of reciprocity (Lincoln, 1995). Feedback following the conversations and the circulation of the report indicated that participants felt that this had been achieved.

Structure of discussions

As preparation for the discussions I developed a loose structure. This captured 'topics' for discussion and was based on the research questions which had emerged from the literature review (see Figure 4.2 below). Each discussion started with an introduction. This revisited the purpose of the research and went through the informed consent documentation. Participants were then invited to choose a pseudonym and to agree how their organization could be referred to (i.e. were they happy for the organization to be named or did they wish to agree a generic description of the organization). Depending on my existing relationship with the participant, there was also a brief clarification of roles – that this was a piece of research, and separate to any consulting or coaching work which may have previously been completed. The opening topic was the purpose and processes of talent management within the organization with the other topics following. Using this as a framework the aim was then to move into career conversations within this context. There was no set order for the discussion, rather it was hoped that the topics would be raised by the participant or be introduced by me as a natural extension of the conversation (Breakwell, 1995).

Improving Workplace Career Conversations
Phase 1 – HR and OD Perspectives

Participant information and informed consent,
Agree pseudonym and brief description of the organization

Discussion prompts:

- What does talent management (TM) mean for you? (who is covered, what does it aim to achieve, what does it encompass)
- What are the formal processes of TM in your organization?
- What seems to work/not work?
- In what ways are an individual's aspirations taken account of?
- What is the role of career conversations within TM and more generally?
    - What is the purpose
    - What works/doesn't work
    - What would you like to change
    - What are the barriers to good conversations
    - What are the different interests and how can they be met

- How skilled are the managers
- What support is there to help individual's clarify career goals
- Openness, power, diversity, common goals

- As a manager (if appropriate) how do you find career conversations with your team?

Figure 4.2: Phase 1 - Initial discussion prompts

Evolution of the discussions

Throughout the discussions I kept a research diary to encourage reflexivity (Haynes, 2012). Whilst I was not disciplined in filling it in regularly, it did provide a record of some of my reflections, observations and research practice. A review of my research diary highlighted some of the ways in which the discussions evolved (see Appendix 4 for an extract).

The first discussion was challenging. The conversation seemed more of a judgement on the problems of the organization and the participant's observations of what should be happening (the organization did not seem to be doing any proactive talent or career management which was frustrating the participant). If questions were phrased in a certain way it was felt that the participant could have become very defensive (for example, regarding her role in changing the situation or when exploring issues of power and control). After the first discussion, three key observations emerged which informed the rest of the discussions. Firstly, if the focus was on the participant's perceptions, then I needed to be careful where issues were driven by my agenda rather than what was emerging from the participant. I was concerned that I might 'lead' people by inadvertently conveying a 'preferred response' which could influence the ways in which they chose to demonstrate their credibility (Cassell & Symon, 2011). This was particularly the case for asking in what ways the individual employee's aspirations were accounted for and the issues of power and control. I therefore decided to keep these as topics to explore in the next interviews, but to see how they emerged from the participant's frame of reference rather than introducing them from my interest. Secondly, whilst the intention had been to have a conversation, it was clear that within the discussions I was not sharing my views, and therefore there was limited 'sense making together'. However, the naturalistic approach was still similar to a conversational style. Through active listening and regular summarising, the conversations did provide an opportunity for the participant to clarify their own thinking. Finally, although there had been concern about the ease with which I could keep the research conversation separate from previous work conversations, this felt surprisingly easy.

The discussions continued and after 13 interviews a more structured review took place alongside some initial analysis (following the iterative process described in Figure 4.1 above). Subsequently some consistent changes were adopted (see Figure 4.3. below). This review was also considered in the context of the RQ's emerging from the literature review. These two activities led to a refined set of interview prompts, shown in Figure 4.4 below. However, each discussion remained unique, with the prompts used if topics did not naturally occur. Each interview included probing questions around the topics, examples of probing questions can be found in Appendix 5.

- The topic of informal career conversations did not generate much information/interest from the HR participants – it was therefore dropped as a specific area for exploration.
- Issue of power and control – I had been cautious about exploring this following first interview. This did not seem to be part of the considerations for the participants, so it was not explored unless they raised it.
- One comment a number of participants made concerned 'good line managers'. There were a number of interesting potential lines of enquiry from this (for example, how did they judge they were 'good', did these people have more talent in their teams?). However, it was felt that this could be a diversion from the main purpose of the research and so probing was limited to very specific information on career development.
- It was noted that starting the discussions with asking about Talent Management provided helpful context. However, it could take a considerable amount of time. Therefore, the in-depth exploration of talent management was reduced to enable more time on career conversations.
- The importance of context was emerging from interviews –prompting further exploration of the ways in which the career and talent approaches reflected or shaped culture and strategy
- A diagram started to be developed as a way of organising and displaying the emerging data on some of the perceived influences on career conversations (see Figure 4.4.). As the discussions continued, the emerging diagram was used to indicate areas to explore more and it was also used as a mechanism for summarising the conversation. Feedback was sought on the structure to contribute to its development.

Figure 4.3: Phase 1 - Adaptations in the discussion approach

Improving Workplace Career Conversations – updated questions
Phase 1 – HR and OD Perspectives

Participant information and informed consent,
Agree pseudonym and brief description of the organization

Discussion prompts:

- **Process** – what does TM mean to you and how is it practiced in your organization? (explore which employee groups are included in what ways)

- **Purpose** – what is the overall purpose of TM for your organization (explore which stakeholder views are represented)
- **Impact** – what seems to be working and not working and how do you know? (explore thinking behind this and who is driving the TM agenda)
- **Individual needs** – in what ways do you take account of individual needs and aspirations? (explore approaches and how well they are seen to be working)
- **Career conversations** - what do you see as the contribution of career conversations to TM and individual career development? (formal and informal)
- **Roles** – what do you see as the roles of the organization, the individual and the line manager? (explore consistency of this with the approach described)
- **Context** – in what ways does context seem to influence TM and career development in your organization (explore internal and external, seek examples)
- **Broader** – how do your experiences in this organization compare with other places you have worked (explore why they think they are similar/different)

Figure 4.4: Phase 1 – Refined discussion prompts

Notes and check back

An important part of this data collection process was the note taking and checking these notes back with the participants. Field notes from each interview were written up as comprehensive notes including many verbatim comments. The notes followed the flow of the conversation rather than being summarized under themes. They were written up with bullet points to show each comment. Headings were used to help with following the conversation flow, but questions I had asked were not included in the notes.

The notes were written up within 3 days of the conversation and sent to the participant asking them to amend/add to the notes. They were also asked to check/amend the description of their organization. This provided an opportunity for participants to be involved in reviewing their data (Lincoln & Guba, 1987). Most of the participants responded quickly to the request for checking the notes, often making small editing changes, taking out some information which they felt could identify them and adding some further context as requested (e.g. numbers/links between different parts of the conversation). Some of the participants also changed some of the wording to create a more authoritative tone, reflecting 'identity work' (Rapley, 2004) to demonstrate their credibility (Cassell & Symon, 2011). Some participants needed 'chasing' to provide confirmation of changes to the notes. This was done via email and a full record of contact was kept. Agreed notes were clearly labelled and these were the versions used for all subsequent analysis. One participant did not confirm the notes. She was sent a final reminder, stating that she could withdraw from the study if she wished, but if no further contact was made the researcher would assume that the notes could be used, but there would

be no direct reference or quotes from the data. Nothing was heard from this participant, so her data were included within the parameters set out.

4.4 Phase one - analysing the data

As indicated in Figure 4.1., data analysis can be seen as an iterative process involving data collection, data condensation, data display and drawing/verifying conclusions. The approach to data collection has been described above, indicating the way in which the data collection was influenced by the emerging findings. This section provides more detail on the processes of condensing the data and data display. The element of drawing and verifying conclusions will be covered in the following section.

During the research

As discussed, the data analysis started during data collection. Reflections on the early interviews (recorded in the research diary) indicated that there seemed to be 3 types of approach to the talent management and workplace career being described: 1 - part of how things done round here; 2 - part of a formal process with a strong push from HR; 3 - ad hoc approach with things largely left to the local/line manager. Having condensed the data into these broad categories, some questions were considered, for example: what was the link between talent management aims and career conversations? how did this relate to the interest in alignment? how did this relate to wider cultural and contextual features? From this review, an initial way of displaying the data started to emerge in terms of some simple headings as shown in Figure 4.5. The majority of organizations seemed to be in the HR push category.

1. Part of how we do things	2. HR push	3. Ad hoc
• Existing high feedback culture • Shared ownership of career • Little formal process • High flexibility	• Process driven • Focus on organizational goals • Link to TM, assessment and succession • Desire to be better at it • Line manager skills and culture seen as a barrier	• Not part of bigger view • Depended on line manager skill and commitment • Not seen as critically important for the organization

Figure 4.5: Early data display

As the research progressed, an embryonic diagram was created (see Figure 4.6). This display captured the things which seemed to influence organizational talent management and (to a lesser extent), individual career development. This diagram seemed to represent data from all three types of organizations (part of how we do things, HR push and ad hoc). This development of this diagram influenced the way that the data were understood and had an impact on the further interviews (see Appendix 6). Questions started to be asked which resulted from the initial analysis, enabling exploration of some specific areas. For example, a more detailed exploration of line manager's skills led to more discussion regarding the importance of line manager commitment. Likewise, as people were asked more about 'cultural alignment', transparency emerged as an issue. This was then further explored, illustrating the iterative nature of the data collection and analysis. By the end of the interviews few new themes were emerging, perhaps indicating the saturation principle (Miles & Huberman, 1994), that a representative sample of thinking and experiences had been collected. However, it should be noted that the scale of the study was not intended to create widely generalizable results, rather to support increased understanding with the potential to support additional theorizing (e.g. Farndale *et al.*, 2014).

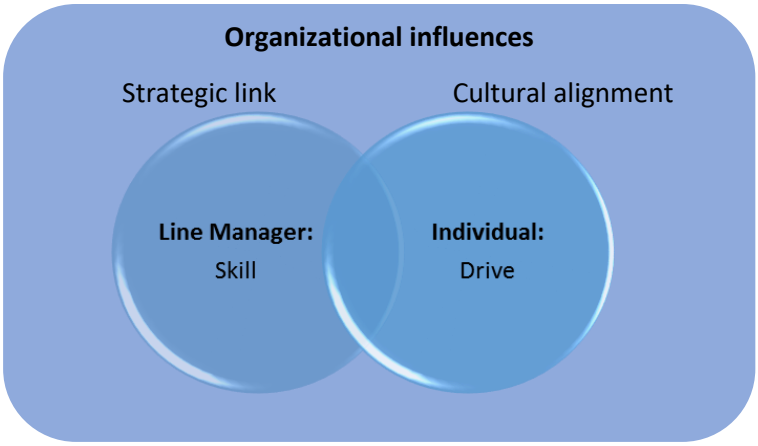


Figure 4.6: Embryonic data display diagram

The interviews with the OD professionals evolved in a different way to the interviews with the HR participants. These were more varied than the HR interviews, as the OD professionals had exposure to different elements of talent management and workplace career conversations. Their contribution tended to be more focused on the macro level (strategic aims) and also on the individual (their wants, frustrations and challenges). This provided an interesting balance to the 'within organization view' and provided some insight into the influences on the individual which were largely

absent in the HR professionals' accounts. In particular, these interviews contributed to the individual career development perspective which was then built on in phase two.

Post research

Having completed the data collection for phase one, a full review of the data could commence. Thematic analysis was used, but as stated by King (2012), there are many approaches to thematic analysis, ranging from '*bottom up*' to '*top down*' (King, 2012: 430). Within this study the analysis started as *'bottom* up', with data coding, which was seen as a 'heuristic' process of discovery rather than reduction (Miles *et al.*, 2014: 73). However, it should be noted that this discovery process was informed by existing literature which had shaped the content of the interviews and it therefore differs from a grounded theory approach (e.g. Kenealy, 2012). Accordingly, some broad headings (such as talent management, roles, alignment and career conversations) were pre-determined.

I began the analysis by reading through the interview notes and capturing data on a mindmap using the headings of the emerging diagram. This process included immersion in the data, noting themes, making sense using informed intuition and clustering (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was a highly iterative process whereby constant comparisons were made between scripts to refine and develop a coding structure. Where data did not fit these headings they were written on a separate sheet (somewhat ironically labelled a 'big bucket of other'). This process was completed with six of the participant notes, but the mindmap became too large to continue with this as a method. However, it did provide some tentative labels for coding the data, commonly referred to as first cycle coding (Miles *et al.*, 2014). These labels were applied, and as the 'big bucket of other' grew, this was reviewed to identify any further coding headings. A list of the initial codes can be found in Appendix 7. Final codes are presented in Table 4.4 below. The diagram illustrates some hierarchy within the coding structure with the more detailed level of coding shown in brackets.

Coding Category	Sub-categories
Talent Management	• TM definition • Management of TM agenda • Understanding future business needs • Role of assessment (definitions of performance, potential and talent; internal vs external assessment; information on individual aspirations; issues of consistency) • Development • Measuring impact • Alternative perspectives

	• Other

Career conversations	• Aims • Vision of great conversations • Links with process • Example projects to improve • Challenging perspectives • Other
Context – local dynamics	• Line manager (commitment, skill, access to resources) • Individual (drive, engagement, self-awareness) • Trust • Challenging perspectives • Other
Context – organizational dynamics	• Strategic imperative • Cultural alignment • Structural opportunities • Transparency (roles, career paths and development opportunities, openness and honesty) • Challenging perspectives • Other
Context – wider influences	• Cultural heritage • Professional identity • Generational differences • Technological changes • Other

Table 4.4: Phase 1 – Final coding

Some data were also captured specifically against the research questions. For example, as part of question one (in what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals), the aims, expected roles and intended practices from all participants were collated and counting was used to identify key themes across the interviews. The data showing perceived influences on organizational talent management and individual career development were represented in a diagram, later named a 'contextual map' (see Figure 4.7). However, the distinctions between some of the codes were not clear, and there could have been some overlap (i.e. the codes did not refer to completely discrete ideas). King (2012) recognises this challenge and suggests that;

> *'To be useful, themes must be relatively distinct from each other. Some overlap is inevitable, but an extensive blurring of boundaries between themes is to be avoided'*
>
> King (2012:431)

However, whilst this is a potential issue, (discussed in the study limitations section below), it was recognised that this was phase one of a larger study and that further work would be needed to refine and develop the findings. The findings are fully described in chapter 7. A 'participant report' was then written and sent to all those involved in the research. This was structured with an introduction to set the context and then using the diagram to structure the findings. Two versions of the participant report were produced, a full version of 43 pages and a summary version of 8 pages (both are available upon request).

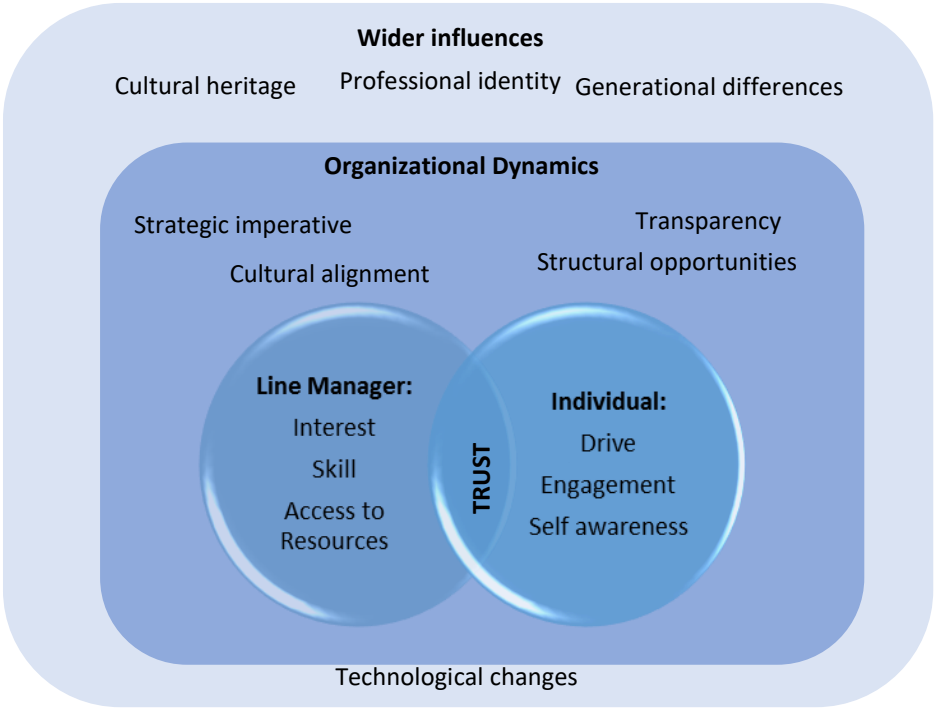


Figure 4.7. Contextual map of influences on organizational talent management and individual career development.

Drawing and verifying conclusions

Drawing and verifying conclusions is an important process to illustrate the trustworthiness and quality of the research (Caelli *et al.*, 2003; Kidd, 2004). Within this research there were a number of ways through which conclusions were drawn and verified and this remains an ongoing process. Firstly, the preliminary findings were explored within the context of existing literature to pose additional questions and encourage fresh insights. Secondly, following the completion of phase two of the study, the findings were explored through the lens of other stakeholders, particularly within the case study organizations. It is the combination of these approaches to drawing and verifying conclusions that is presented in the following chapters as the findings. Thirdly, there were some follow-up conversations with participants and clients regarding the findings. This provided a practical

way to explore the potential utility of the findings and reinforced the commitment to reciprocity (Lincoln, 1995). These follow-up activities are reported in chapter 8 of this thesis, conclusions.

As part of drawing and verifying conclusions it is also helpful to consider alternative explanations for the findings. Given the research approach it is recognised that a different researcher may have coded the data in a different way, leading to alternative themes and conclusions (King, 2012). For example, my predisposition towards complexity is likely to have influenced me to develop the contextual map as an illustration of interacting elements of a system. This is an example of the findings '*colliding*' with my own interests as suggested above (Cohen *et al.* 2004: 410). Furthermore, had the data been reviewed primarily from an alternative lens such as power and control, additional insights may have emerged. Such analysis may have expanded findings relating to the influence of gender or agency. Such analysis of the data could be conducted at a later stage to generate additional insights. However, within this thesis I had to make decisions regarding which areas to explore in more detail, and critically, which not to explore further. A list of areas discounted for further analysis within this study (covering phase one and phase two) can be found in Appendix 8. For example, the influence of the background of the HR participant was not analysed as biographical data had not been collected.

The findings from phase one represented the views and experiences of HR and OD professionals. As identified in the literature review and subsequent research questions, one of the contributions of this study was to take a stakeholder perspective. The findings from phase one were therefore used to inform the next phase of the research. Important in the second phase was the direct representation of individuals and line managers so their perspective could be more fully accounted for. It was also intended to provide an opportunity to further develop the contextual map within the setting of case study organizations.

4.5 Phase two – data collection

The purpose of phase two of the study was to collect perspectives from other stakeholders within the case study organisations. This included input from line managers and individuals, ensuring that their voices were present within the research (Lincoln, 1995). As with phase one, the data collection had a number of iterative stages: participants and their recruitment; structure of discussions; review of the notes. Each of these elements is described below, showing how it evolved as the research progressed.

Twenty-one of the organizations involved in phase one were invited to take part in phase two of the research. All those approached had a significant UK presence (those not approached had most of their operations overseas). As this was an exploratory study I was keen to include a variety of organizations. This was in contrast to some research in this field which has specifically focused on organizations which are considered to be positive examples of talent management (e.g. Stahl, 2012) or career development (e.g. Kidd *et al*., 2003). Therefore, the invitation was clear that even if they agreed to be involved, they may not be chosen. All those invited were sent information on the study as shown in Appendix 9. Of those invited a number responded to say that the timing was not appropriate (either due to large scale organizational change, restructures or volume of other work). In the event, five organizations elected to be involved. I was able to conduct research with each of these, so I did not need to select which organizations to involve. Furthermore, the organizations wanting to be involved represented a variety of industries and scale as shown in Table 4.5. Each organization was assigned a name of two initials as shown in Table 4.5.

Once the case study organizations had been identified there was a variation in how the participants were recruited according to the preferences of the HR contact. The HR contacts were asked to provide access to people with a range of career experiences who they expected to have a variety of views and experiences of workplace career conversations. My desire to access people with a range of perspectives was an important feature of the research and was different from the approach adopted by Kidd *et al.* (2004) who were keen to specifically recruit people with positive experiences of career conversations. The broader request in this research was appropriate to help to make visible issues of culture and context (not a primary research focus for Kidd *et al.)*. There was also a request that some of the participants (approximately half) were line managers. The internal recruitment of participants varied by case study as shown in Table 4.5. This variation in participant recruitment is consistent with other research (e.g. Kidd *et al.*, 2004). All those invited to participate were sent information as shown in Appendix 10. This information provided answers to questions and also stated that a summary of the findings would be sent to them personally and also to their HR contact. This was to enable their organization to benefit from the research as part of the ethos of reciprocity described above.

Case study organization	Brief description (industry, size, geographical spread)	Approach to recruiting participants
JW	Design, manufacture and sale of niche leisure product. Strong history of growth and innovation. Employing approximately 2 000 people worldwide	Individuals approached by Head of learning and development who then scheduled the meetings
HX	Technology and engineering company. Family owned, employing approximately 250 people across the UK and key Asia sites (China, Japan, India, Korea) and the US.	Individuals approached by HR Director who then scheduled the meetings
MT	UK based FMCG business, a well-known brand and part of a larger group. The UK operation employing just over 100 people in sales, marketing, supply chain and support functions.	Email sent from researcher to people who may have been interested. They were then asked to contact the researcher directly to schedule the meeting
SB	Financial services organization providing a range of consumer services. Strong financial performance, history of organic growth and some acquisition. Approximately 3 500 employees mostly UK, but some in Northern Europe.	Email sent from the Head of Talent whose PA scheduled the meetings from those who were interested in being involved
IH	Large NHS Trust with 3 city sites and a strong research heritage. Employing over 11 000 people	Email sent from researcher to people who may have been interested. They were then asked to contact someone in the training and development team who scheduled the meetings

Table 4.5: Phase 2 - Overview of case study organizations and participant recruitment

Three of the case study organizations were not existing or previous clients of mine (they were involved in the research through the network referrals described in phase one). One of the case studies, (SB), was an existing client, but none of the participants were known to me. The final case study (MT) was a client and I had previously run workshop sessions in which two of the participants had been involved. These were during a project on organizational change and did not cover career issues.

Once participants had decided to be involved in the research, meetings were scheduled. Overall, 27 of the meetings took place face to face and the remaining 13 were conducted by telephone. Whilst the preference was for face to face conversations, the telephone meetings worked well and are an established way of collecting data when face to face interviews are not possible (e.g. Kidd *et al.*, 2004). There was no follow-up with participants who indicated an interest in being involved but

where meetings were not scheduled (unlike Kidd *et al.*, 2004 who sent out a short questionnaire to collect their views). A summary showing the number of responses, number of participants, gender representation and locations of the conversations for each case study organization can be found in Table 4.6 below.

Case study	Number positive responses	Number of research interviews	Gender (F = female; M = male)	Location of conversations
JW	Not known	9	F = 1 M = 8	9 face to face meetings at their Head Office
HX	Not known	10	F = 4 M = 6	9 face to face meetings at their Head Office 1 telephone meeting
MT	9	8	F = 3 M = 5	4 face to face meeting at their head office 4 telephone meetings
SB	13	9	F = 5 M = 4	1 face to face meeting at their London office 4 face to face meetings at their Head Office 4 telephone meetings
IH	9	4	F = 3 M = 1	4 face to face meetings at one of the major sites

Table 4.6: Phase 2 - Number of positive responses, number of participants and location of conversations

The choice of note taking versus recording and transcribing was revisited prior to the start of phase two. The benefits of each were reviewed in the research diary and are summarised in Table 4.7 below. My conclusion was that note taking remained an appropriate approach. I recognised that the notes from the interviews produced different data to transcribed interviews. However, in accordance with a constructionist perspective, it can be argued that data from recorded interviews were no 'more true' than data from comprehensive notes which had been reviewed by the participant.

Benefits of note taking	Benefits of recording and transcribing
• Comprehensive notes with a number of verbatim comments • Informality of note taking rather than recording	• Full record including the questions asked making it easier to follow the research journey • Full record of questions and prompts asked by the interviewer

• Opportunity for participant to reflect and edit creating additional involvement and potential for participant 'sense-making' following the conversation • Scale of the research (40 interviews) would make recording and transcribing an onerous task • Processing data while interviewing and writing up shortly afterwards – provided an immediate opportunity to check back and seek clarification on points.	• Additional data in terms of how things are said, pauses, tone, emotion etc. • Credibility as an established approach • The detail of the data supports in-depth analysis of language and linguistic features used to construct meaning (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1995)

Table 4.7: Phase 2 - Reflections on recording and transcribing versus note taking

Structure of discussions

Prior to commencing the interviews a number of 'discussion prompts' were developed. These are summarized in Table 4.8 below and a full version can be found in Appendix 11. These were separated out into the stakeholder groups with one set of prompts for individuals and one for line managers. These started with a narrative section, asking the participant to share a summary of their career then moved into some general areas regarding career development roles and thoughts on how things could be improved in their organization. These prompts were informed by the RQ's, for example, exploring roles and alignment. Some specific prompts were also included to explore the findings from phase one (e.g. transparency, culture, strategic importance and structural opportunities). Prior to the first interviews I held a pilot discussion with a colleague to get a sense of the flow of the discussion. This highlighted a challenge of scope, with the interviews attempting to cover more than was realistic within an hour. Consequently, the structure was adapted with an intention to separate the time with half an hour on the career narrative and the second half hour exploring the other topics

Discussion prompts - Individuals	
Introduction	• Context and informed consent
Narrative	• Summary of career including description of key events and conversations
General	• Roles and satisfaction with how this works • Perceived level of alignment
Specific	• Transparency, sharing of information, clarity about how to get on • Freedom to be self • Line manager support • Career self-development • Organization support

Discussion prompts-Line Managers	
Introduction	• Context and informed consent
Narrative	• Summary of career management roles and experiences of supporting team members with their career
General	• Roles and satisfaction with how this works • Perceived level of alignment
Specific	• Tensions between the needs of the different stakeholders • Transparency • Line manager support given to you • Individual the things that make a difference generally and from your experience (including conversations) • Organisation support

Table 4.8: Phase 2 – interview prompts for individuals and line managers

I started each discussion with an introduction. This revisited the purpose of the research and went through the informed consent documentation. Each participant was then invited to choose a pseudonym. Most participants opted to keep their own name, which was later substituted for initials (not their actual initials). It was hoped that the discussions would be a positive experience for participants (as a different type of career conversation). Feedback from participants at the end of the conversations (and often via email when confirming notes) was that they found it helpful to talk through their career and to think about their career story and what they wanted to do next. This provided confidence that the interviews were achieving a degree of reciprocity as discussed above. After the introduction, I asked all participants to describe their career story to date. As they shared their career story, many of them described key encounters and conversations which had influenced them. Some of these were then explored in more detail straight away, others were explored later in the interview. As with other research using a narrative approach, the participants selected what they felt was most important to share (e.g. Clarke, 2013). All participants described their career history as a sequence of roles over time (consistent with the Arthur & Rousseau, 1996 definition set out in chapter 2). Some started with very factual information on roles, organizations and promotions whilst others gave a more detailed description of their learning, challenges and emotional response to different situations. This variation is a normal feature of life history, with participants free to introduce

issues which they feel are relevant to their personal story (e.g. Polkinghorne, 1995). After the career story, additional topics were explored as indicated in Table 4.8.

Evolution of the discussions

The first research conversation lasted about 50 minutes and confirmed the value of starting with the career narrative. The focus was mostly on the participant's own experiences with some about him as a line manager. The role he took in providing support to peers was not explored due to time. As the rest of the interviews were held within the first case study, the discussion prompts evolved as summarised in Figure 4.8 below. Throughout, the discussions the prompts were just for guidance and as a memory aid. Each interview was different and I endeavoured to maintain a conversational style to the interviews. Consequently, some career conversations were described by participants without being probed in great detail. This was a conscious choice to enable the participants to provide meaning and share the information which they felt to be most relevant, rather than working from my own frame of reference to explore specific elements of each career conversation (such as relationship, duration and outcome). However, much of these data were shared naturally by participants in their descriptions. Towards the end of the discussion I said that there may be some additional areas I wanted to cover and that I would just check my notes. This then provided an opportunity to ask about other areas if appropriate (and if time allowed). Most of the conversations were not clearly differentiated between the career narrative and other topics, rather, it felt like a natural conversation combining both.

Changes to interview prompts during phase 2

- Have a standard start for the interviews for individuals and line managers – people were keen to talk about their own experiences so this was done for all participants, with line managers then asked some additional questions about their role and specific conversations as a line manager later in the discussion
- If someone shared a particular conversation during their career narrative, use that as an opportunity to explore it – e.g. probing to find out more, 'can you tell me a bit more about that?'
- The specific question prompts following from phase one of the research felt too directive within the context of the rest of the interview (e.g. regarding transparency and strategic imperative). They were therefore substituted with a more general 'what do you think is working well round here and what do you think could change?' If they raised things like culture, then explore in more detail

Figure 4.8: Phase 2 - Changes to interview prompts during research process

Review of notes and checkback

As with phase one, the meeting notes were written up and a copy was sent to the participant via email. Once again, the notes followed the flow of the conversation rather than being summarized under themes. They were written up with bullet points to show each comment, headings were used to help with following the conversation flow, but questions asked by the researcher were not included in the notes. Where the interviewer notes weren't clear (for example, chronology of employment), a comment was included in the notes asking for clarification. Participants were asked to return their notes to the researcher by a specified date and that if no changes were given then the notes would be used in their initial format. Half of the participants confirmed their notes (either with no changes or with edits). Edits tended to be minor, although two participants (both in HR) added considerably more detail to their career history than had been discussed in the research interview. As discussed above, this could have been an example of 'identity work' (Rapley, 2004).

4.6 Phase two - analysing the data

As with phase one (and as indicated in Figure 4.1), data analysis can be seen as an iterative process. This section provides more detail on the processes of condensing the data and data display. The element of drawing and verifying conclusions will be covered in the following section.

During the research

On completion of the interviews for the first case study, all the interview scripts were reviewed. This led to the development of first cycle coding categories as shown in Table 4.9. These headings were used to produce a summary for this case study which also included some of my own reflections (see Appendix 12). The synthesis of data to produce this summary were done through mindmaps and lists, with one for each of the coding headings (see Appendix 13 for an example). The initial coding emerged from the data and was largely descriptive, but included some evaluation (e.g. what was seen to be helping and hindering career). My initial coding was case oriented. However, as this coding was applied (and further developed) to the other cases, the coding was often variable oriented to synthesize the data across cases (Miles *et al.*, 2014; Yin, 2009). Following case study two, a more detailed version of the coding was developed as shown in Appendix 14. In particular, the second version provided more structure to the analysis of the personal narratives and the career conversations. However, within this I was keen to retain the sense of the story for each participant, an essential feature of narratives (Maitlis, 2012). A simple descriptive summary of each case study

was also produced to share with the participants and the HR contact. This was not done in the IH case study as the numbers involved were too small to be confident that comments were non-attributable.

Business context	Perceived roles	Line manager perspective	Helping career	Hindering career
• Goals • Structure • Culture	• Individual • Line manager • Organization	• Goals • Process • Examples	• Individual • Organizational	• Individual • Organizational

Table 4.9: Phase 2 – First cycle coding post case study one.

Post research

On completion of all the interviews a more comprehensive analytical process began. This was particularly focused on capturing data about the career conversations which had been described by participants. The initial coding and the immersion in the interview scripts enabled the development of draft categories. These draft categories were then reviewed against previous research related to career conversations (the career discussion work of Kidd *et al.*, 2001; and the career encounter work of Bosley *et al.*, 2009). This identified some additional categories to explore, particularly with regard to career shaper roles. These data were represented in a conversation analysis matrix which was produced using an excel spreadsheet. The codes used for developing this are given in Table 4.10 below and a screenshot of the spreadsheet can be seen in Appendix 15.

Category	Coding
Conversation Trigger	1 = appraisal; 2 = restructure; 3=specific job opportunity; 4 = boredom; 5 = personal development; 6 = other
Conversation Instigator	1 = individual; 2 = own line manager; 3 = HR/academy; 4 = other
Other party	1 = colleague; 2 = own line manager; 3 = internal hr/training; 4 = neMTrk; 5 = external development expert; 6 = other
Process	1 = informal or adhoc; 2 = formal or part of structured process
Outcome	1 = positive; 2 = neutral; 3 = negative
Primary impact	1 = career self concept; 2 = career world-view; 3 = career aspiration, direction and action
Shaper role	Advisor, Informant, Witness, Gatekeeper, Intermediary
One-off conversation or series	1 = one-off; 2 = part of ongoing conversations

Table 4.10: Phase 2 – Coding of career conversations

As the data were coded, further refinements were made to ensure consistent application of the codes. All decisions were captured with examples to support ongoing comparisons. The notes I made during this process can be seen in Appendix 16. In particular, the definition of a conversation was important to be clear on. I decided that it would only be coded as a conversation if it was

communication which had clearly been conducted as a conversation (rather than via email for example). Thus, a generic comment from CL, regarding '*strong influential bosses who believed in me and helped me develop'* was not counted as a conversation as they could have supported CL's development through role modelling or training opportunities. However, if the situation was within an appraisal or a one-to-one it was assumed that it was part of a conversation and was therefore included in the conversation analysis.

As the data were further analysed some of the codes were refined. For example, the trigger code of 'boredom' only had two counts and was therefore combined as part of the 'other' category. Within the trigger code of 'personal development' however, it became apparent that there were two distinctly different types of conversations, one based on current role and another based on future career options. An additional category was therefore introduced as explained in chapter 6. Producing the data in this way enabled easy comparison of categories through counts. As indicated by Miles *et al.* (2014), this helps in *'keeping yourself honest'* (Miles *et al.*,2014:284), ensuring that intuition and insights are appropriately combined with the frequencies found in the data. However, in drawing conclusions from these data, the limitations need to be kept in mind. For example, a different researcher could have made different coding decisions leading to different conclusions. Furthermore, two conversations could have the same coding but be different in other ways, so the limitations of the data should be recognised.

As with phase one, a participant report was written and sent to all participants. This 11 page report was based on the themes emerging from the research, but without detailed reference to the conversations or differences between the case study organizations. It was written to be accessible and relevant to the audience, covering themes from the research such as 'what generally helps people develop in their career', 'how do career conversations help' and 'what changes would you like to see'. A copy of this report is available on request.

Drawing and verifying conclusions

The process of drawing and verifying conclusions was highly iterative. In the early stages, a number of decisions were made regarding themes not to pursue in detail. A list of these can be found in Appendix 8. One of these related to the prevalence to be given to the line manager perspective. At the start of phase two it was anticipated that some participants would be interviewed primarily as 'line managers'. However, most participants were very engaged in describing their experiences as 'receivers' of conversations. The discussion on their role as line manager tended to be towards the

end of the meeting and was generally not explored in as much detail. It was therefore decided that whilst these data provided some input from the line manager as a stakeholder, it would not be given the same prominence as the HR and individual perspectives. Another decision related to the exploration of career capital (Iellatchitch *et al.*, 2003) and its potential influence on people's experience of career conversations. Whilst it was recognized as an interesting and important area of influence on an individual's career, there was limited data on this, so it was not examined in detail.

On completion of the field work the analysis was variable oriented, building a rich picture relating to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 (regarding alignment of goals, the contribution of career conversations and the nature of positive career conversations respectively). This related directly to the 'local dynamics' section of the contextual map (see Figure 4.5) and enabled a review of the helpfulness of this. The analysis also included comparisons against previous research which helped to inform the analysis. For example, Kidd *et al.*, (2003) separated out the analysis of positive discussion experiences for their reporting. The same approach was done for this study which enabled direct comparisons to be made. In this way, the findings were positioned against existing research, identifying the ways in which they supported, extended or challenged previous findings.

Once the variable analysis was largely complete, a separate process of 'case oriented' analysis was conducted. This compared each of the case study organizations and related directly to RQ4 (the influence of organizational context). Starting with the nature of specific conversations described (and captured in the conversation analysis matrix), differences between case studies were then considered. The strategy and culture of each organization was also reviewed using frameworks explored in the literature review (e.g. Schein, 2010). Throughout this process the findings from phase one were used to support the analysis. For example, the contextual map was used to help to organize data and the organization's perspective was reviewed using the appropriate data from the case study's phase one participant (i.e. the matching HR participant).

4.7 Study features and limitations

Before proceeding to the findings, some features and limitations of the study should be considered. Firstly, there were a number of potential limitations with the sample. Secondly, there were limitations inherent with the method of data collection and analysis. Finally, as discussed earlier

in this chapter, there are limitations due to my '*positionality*' (Lincoln, 1995: 280). Each of these areas is considered briefly below.

The sample for phase one was selected primarily from within my existing network. This could have had a number of implications, both positive and disruptive. Some positive observations about the participants related to the broad range of organizations which they represented. The organizations were from public and private sector, publically quoted, family owned and private equity funded. Some of the organizations were quite small, others were amongst the largest organizations on a global scale. For the purpose of this study, such diversity of participants was a strength as it enabled a wide selection of views and experience to be included in the research. Furthermore, because most participants had an existing relationship with me it was easier to build trust and this potentially made it more likely that the participant would be honest in the discussion. Alternatively, it could be argued that being part of my network and agreeing to take part in the study illustrated a similarity between the participants which was counter to the intention of seeking a broad range of perspectives. However, the purpose of this study was an initial exploration of the perceptions of HR and OD professionals. Whilst keen to involve a wide range of organizations, there was no attempt to select a representative sample of HR and OD people. Therefore, whilst relevant to the lack of generalizability of the findings, it is not an appropriate critique of the research.

A second critique relates to the insights provided by the HR perspective. Nishii *et al.*, (2008) identified a discrepancy between the HR and employee view of HR practices. Thus, the HR perspective may represent an idealised version of what is happening, a perspective that may not be shared by other stakeholders. Within this study I noted that such a discrepancy could be a particular feature of the accounts of two of the phase one participants not subsequently involved in phase two. They described the talent and career environment of their organizations in very positive ways, identifying few challenges. This was in contrast to most other phase one participants who were very open about a perceived disconnect between policy and practice. For example, many highlighted that although things are 'meant to happen', they don't. Furthermore, within the case study organizations the HR views were largely consistent with the views of other stakeholders. Therefore, although some of the phase one participants may have been inclined to describe only the positives, this did not seem to be a feature of the overall research.

The participants for phase two were invited through the HR contact in their organization. Whilst I had asked for people with a variety of views and experiences, the HR contact may have

(consciously or subconsciously) invited people who were likely to portray a certain image. This may suggest that only certain views were captured, influencing the conclusions drawn. However, a range of different accounts were shared in each case study, illustrating a diversity of experience. Moreover, participants seemed very willing to share negative events and influences as well as positive. Thus, even if the participants were selected with a specific intention, they still described a range of experiences. It is however recognized that there is no way of knowing how the experiences they chose to share in the interview differed from other experiences they may have been through.

A number of potential limitations emerged from the way in which the data were collected and analysed. Some of these were inherent in the method of semi structured interview and others related to specific approaches used in this study.

Firstly, one common critique of semi-structured interviews is the lack of consistency and reliability. However, if taking a constructionist lens, these terms become inappropriate – the data collected in an interview should be considered within the context within which they were created (Silverman, 2006). The context of the interviews will have set an environment for the discussion which is likely to have influenced the account that the participant expressed. As Coupland (2004) states, we try to make our account *'plausible, legitimate, coherent and likely to be believed in the interaction taking place*' (Coupland, 2004: 519). From this perspective, the interview becomes an active process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) whereby in the act of talking, the participant constructs new meaning rather than simply relaying existing ideas. This process was commented on within this research by several of the participants who at the end of the interview indicated that the conversation had helped them think things through and they were now clearer on what they wanted to do to address their concerns. Throughout the analysis and interpretation of the data it is therefore important to frame the findings as accounts and representations rather than 'fact' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1998).

Participants had the opportunity to check their notes, to edit and amend them. This provided a chance to ensure that participants were comfortable with the account being used in the research. These notes were then used for all the quotations referenced in the subsequent analysis. It is recognised that this checking back process could have provided an opportunity for participants to screen out candid comments or to create a more coherent narrative. However, the edits tended to be minor, so this did not seem to be the case. I would have liked to involve the participants more in the analysis of the findings, to co-create the analysis and meaning from the discussions. It was difficult to create an opportunity for this involvement. The participants were all sent a copy of the initial report

and feedback was very positive that the report summarised their thoughts and provided clarity. However, Bloor (1978) points out that respondents are only likely to confirm the findings if they fit within their existing self-image. Given the aims of both participant reports, this did not represent a challenge – the reports were intended as a description of the perceptions of the stakeholder's views. However, as further analysis was conducted and some of the links to existing research were explored, the participants may not see themselves as much in the findings.

The method of recording the interviews is a further potential limitation of the study. Whilst it was a conscious decision not to record and transcribe the interviews this did have some consequences. As shown in Table 4.7 above, the benefits of note taking included increasing the number of interviews that were possible and the quick turnaround between the interview taking place and the notes being checked by participants. However, as the process of data analysis deepened, I found that I wanted to know the specific questions I had asked that had prompted a response. I would also have been interested in conducting analysis on the structure of participants' responses, the way in which they told their stories and the language they used (e.g. Coupland, 2004). This could have helped me to explore how different participants constructed their understanding of career, their own role and their expectations of their manager and organization. However, the decision not to record and transcribe the interviews limited the opportunity for this type of analysis (e.g. discourse analysis, Potter & Wetherell, 1995). Furthermore, I was left with an impression of the emotional response of participants to certain descriptions or realisations. However, without a recording it was difficult to capture specific evidence to support these impressions. For example, when summarizing the HR discussions in my research diary I commented on a significant difference in the way the HR participants had described alignment in terms of talent management and career conversations. My memory was that whilst being business focused in describing talent management, they were more interested in partnership and mutuality in their descriptions of career conversations. For me, this was a perfect illustration of Truss's (1997) comparison of hard and soft approaches. However, when looking in detail through my interview notes, it was difficult to find evidence for this being a major theme of the research.

One part of the data analysis was the further development of the contextual map (see Figure 4.7 for a version created during initial analysis). This summarised the way in which participants described the influences on organizational talent management and individual career development. However, as mentioned above, the distinctions between some of the labels were not clear, and there could have been some overlap (i.e. the codes did not refer to completely discrete ideas). This

limitation could have been addressed by involving another researcher more in the analytical process. This would have encouraged debate about the different labels, the definitions and the boundaries.

A further limitation of the research is the influence of my existing views, beliefs and experiences (e.g. Symon & Cassell, 2012). I was researching within an environment that I am very familiar with, so I entered the research with some existing thoughts (which will have shaped the study as described above). I therefore had to work hard to listen in a non-judgemental way when conducting the research interviews so that I was open to accounts which were counter to my previous thoughts. Additionally, when analysing the data it was helpful to use a structured approach to avoid a heavy reliance on my previous experiences. These steps were helped by the use of a research diary to develop my reflexive practice (e.g. Engin, 2011; Haynes, 2012). An excerpt from the diary can be seen in Appendix 4, showing how this was used as an informal log for updates, questions and thoughts. Furthermore, much thinking and reflection took place at other times (such as when walking the dog). There are some voice memo records of these reflections, (for example, my deliberations regarding the words 'alignment' and mutuality' as discussed earlier in this chapter) but they were not captured in a structured way. Throughout this chapter some reference has been made to the usefulness of the research diary. However, I was not as disciplined in keeping it as I had intended. This has made it more difficult to unpick some of the decisions which were made. I have learnt that a more structured approach to diary keeping would have helped me. A checklist of simple questions to review at least weekly would have helped me to be more reflexive about theory, methods, assumptions and emerging findings. Some of the other influences of my existing views and beliefs will be explored throughout the findings chapters and revisited in the final chapter on conclusions.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research approach taken in this study. The literature review was used to develop four research questions:

RQ1: In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals?

RQ2: In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?

RQ3: What types of career conversations are seen to make positive contributions to people's career development?

RQ4: In what ways does organizational context seem to influence the alignment of organizational talent needs with individual career goals and the nature of career conversations?

These RQ's were explored through a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews with senior HR and OD professionals formed phase one of the study. Phase two involved semi-structured interviews with line managers and individuals from five case study organizations which had also been represented in phase one. Initial data analysis for each phase was conducted separately. However, for the discussion of the findings the data are considered as one study, albeit representing different stakeholder views and different case study organizations.

Having completed the analysis described in this chapter, various ways of presenting the findings were considered. For example, focusing on each stakeholder perspective in turn or starting with the case study findings. After trying out a number of options (see diagrams in Appendix 18), I decided to group RQ 1 and 2 together to provide some initial context on alignment between the organization and individual and the contribution of career conversations. These findings are presented in chapter 5. The analysis then became more specific as the data for RQ3 on specific career conversations were explored and these findings are shown in chapter 6. The case study approach of RQ4 is then taken, with the findings on influences of organizational context shared in chapter 7. Throughout these chapters the results for this study are discussed within the context of previous studies, showing how they support, extend or challenge existing literature. The conclusion chapter (chapter 8) provides the opportunity to reflect on the overall research themes and contribution.

Chapter 5: Alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development

RQ1: In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals?

RQ2: In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the findings which relate to RQ1 and RQ2. These questions shall be considered from a stakeholder perspective with conclusions then drawn to identify similarities and differences in views between the different stakeholder groups. Firstly, the organizational perspective will be reviewed as provided by the HR participants in phase one, with a focus on organizational talent management. Secondly, the employee as a stakeholder will be discussed as represented by the individuals in phase two of the study, with a focus on individual career development. Some of these individuals also described their experiences as line managers and these too will be discussed showing how they support or challenge other stakeholder perspectives. Within each stakeholder group the context for alignment will first be set through an exploration of RQ1: *'In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals'*. The discussion of findings for RQ1 will draw directly on the development of the question from the literature review. Thus, the perceived aims will be considered, followed by intended and experienced practices and finally the expected roles. Having established stakeholder interest and activities in relation to alignment, the contribution of career conversations (RQ2) will then be considered: '*In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?'.* Throughout the chapter the findings are related to previous research, the majority of which was introduced in chapter 2 (career literature review) or chapter 3 (talent literature review).

The discussion in this chapter enables conclusions to be drawn on the level of alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development and the 'dance' between them (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). The findings show that the HR participants did not consider alignment with individual goals as one of their major aims, thus supporting the findings of Thunnissen, (2013b). Moreover, the intended formal talent processes of organizations did little to

support alignment, focusing almost exclusively on the organization's agenda. However, most HR participants were of the view that individuals were accountable for their own career development and thus, outside talent management they engaged in little formal career support. Line managers and individuals however, expressed a desire to find alignment and described some of the actions they took to seek a partnership approach, supporting the 'new organizational career' Clarke (2013).

RQ2 focuses on workplace career conversations. The focus in this chapter is on the intended aims and contribution of these conversations from the perspective of the different stakeholders. A more detailed analysis of what happens within these conversations is given in chapter 6 and contextual influences are explored in chapter 7. The findings show that for most organizations career conversations were not a prominent feature of their formal talent management approach. However, the HR participants had an expectation that line managers were discussing career issues with their team members and that they would therefore have an awareness of their team member's aspirations and motivations. All stakeholders agreed that whilst some line managers seemed very committed and capable to conduct these conversations, many did not. Line managers and individuals in particular were very clear that career conversations provided an opportunity to discuss and agree alignment between organizational and individual needs.

5.2 Organizational talent management – aims

The HR and OD interviews were positioned by the researcher within the context of talent management. Participants were asked in the first instance to describe what talent management meant to them and their organization. Within this research the majority (20 of the 23 HR people working within organizations) described talent management as a way to manage and retain valued human capital, covering all aspects of the employee lifecycle. The dominance of this 'resources' view was consistent with the sample described by Parker & Inkson, (1999). Furthermore, the discourse was primarily one of scarcity rather than abundance of talent (e.g. Swailes, 2013). For example, Hermione somewhat sarcastically built on the talent pool metaphor when describing the limited number of people with capability to drive the organizational change agenda;

> *'The same seven names keep coming up and being nominated for involvement in all our changes. Having such a limited group is hurting the business. We may be ignoring some good people – or we may have a talent puddle instead of a pool!'*
>
> Hermione

Within the interviews the HR participants began by describing the importance of meeting organizational performance needs (Capelli, 2008), with little consideration of the aspirations of the individual as a stakeholder. For example, Peter (in a global talent role), described the organization needing to transform to respond to a new economic environment. An aim for his talent management approach was to deliver a change in the way leaders acted and behaved, moving from transactional leadership to more visionary, building new capabilities in areas such as '*corporate curiosity*' and '*cross-functional working*'. A number of others, such as Julie, were in the process of building the talent approach. Her aspiration was that talent management would deliver improved resourcing;

> *'It will be about moving resources across and through the organization, having appropriate career frameworks and a fast track to senior roles so we have capability in the right places…getting the right people in the right job at the right time, planning for gaps with succession planning, having actions to fill any gaps and knowing where we may have gaps in the future.'*
>
> Julie

Only one of the HR participants explicitly referenced the individual in their initial summary, positioning talent management as jointly owned;

> *'I see talent management as a range of things – not a single process, but holistic, driven by the business and the individual'*
>
> Jessica

One other participant, Marcus, clearly identified an approach which was also intended to meet the individual's needs, describing a '*joint project'* and *win-win'*. These two examples demonstrated a more 'mutual benefits' approach (Farndale et al, 2014). This focus from most participants on the aims of the organization rather than the individual was consistent with the observations of the HR and OD consultants. For example, John, a career coach (and previously an HR Director) stated;

> *'A lot of organizations are simply financially driven, a picture of the people is totally absent – it's more, 'you're lucky to have a job'.'*
>
> John

Thus, it can be seen that in terms of the over-riding aims of talent management described by the HR participants, there was little attention to an agenda of alignment with the individual.

Many of the HR participants were unable to articulate the meaning of 'potential' or 'talent' for their organization. This difficulty of definition echoed the problems of definition discussed within the talent literature (e.g. Sparrow *et al.*, 2014a). Often the words were used interchangeably, as

something someone had which could be further developed given the right support (reflecting the innate and developed elements of Nijs' *et al.* 2013 definition). Over a quarter, (six of the 23 organizations), had specifically linked strategic needs to the talent agenda, defining their future skills needs (as with Peter, above). These definitions did not reference individual needs or aspirations. The lack of reference to an individual's agenda within these conceptualisations of talent could suggest little interest in seeking alignment. However, five of the HR participants gave more generic definitions which did recognize the influence of aspiration or ambition on someone's potential or talent. For example;

'Potential for us is the ability and ambition to work at one level up'

Sue

These definitions did capture some of the affective elements of the Nijs' *et al.* (2013) talent definition, suggesting that there could be an interest in seeking alignment. Some participants were also aware that different people within the talent management process would be operating to different definitions of talent and potential. For example, Sindy described *'disagreement about what talent is and what good looks like'.* In addition to this potentially undermining the talent process with people looking for different things, it could indicate that seeking alignment is dependent on personal views of those involved in talent management rather than being driven by policy.

Most of the organizations involved in the research approached talent management using more than one of the approaches described by Collings & Mellahi (2009). A summary is given in Table 5.1 below. As can be seen, the emphasis was largely on people identified as having 'talent' or 'potential', often described as 'high potentials'. The dangers of this approach were identified by Simon, who described the risk of '*hero worship'*, followed by surprise when they *'fail at something else'.* Simon supported his views by referencing the importance of the team and work environment which would influence someone's success in a role. Thus, he was alluding to the Resource Based View as suggested by Bowman & Hird (2014). There were also a number of identified talent pools such as graduates and senior leader populations. Key positions were also identified by five of the organizations, involving succession for the most senior roles and also succession for specific strategic roles such as branch managers for the banking participants. There was often differential treatment of the groups, particularly in terms of access to development opportunities and in some cases there was a financial distinction in terms of additional bonus payments for those formally recognised as high potential. This differential treatment seemed to be based on a belief that these people made a particularly strong contribution to the organization (or could do in the future), thus representing an example of a people approach (e.g. Collings & Mellahi, 2009). However, in many instances there was

a lack of transparency regarding people's membership of different groups (such as 'high potential' or 'successor') and how membership was decided. This point will be considered below.

Approach	Numbers
People: A focus on star performers who are expected to make a differential contribution to organizational success. Marcus: *'The talent management approach involves identifying those who are and are not on the succession plan…for us that's about 10 people'*	9
Practices: Competitive advantage seen as driven by implementation and adherence to excellent practice.	0
Key positions: Focus on key positions throughout the organization which will have a major impact on ongoing competitive advantage. Sue: *'Our focus is on critical business roles which are fairly generic, for example, Ward Manager or Business Manager'*	5
Strategic talent pools: Strategically important groupings or clusters of talent needed to meet unknown future needs. Peter: *'We are adopting a more segmented approach. For us, one segment is our senior leaders'*	7
No formal approach: No specific talent management approach beyond standard performance management practices such as appraisal. Julia: *'We have no formal strategy or policy on talent management, and there's no drive for a policy'*	6

Table 5.1: Talent management approaches adopted by HR participants

Whilst most organizations had an exclusive view of talent, some adopted a more inclusive view of generic talent (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). For example, Suzanne described it as *'all people who are employed',* with one segment those people considered to have high potential. Six of the organizations did not have a formal approach. Within four of these organizations it was a conscious decision that formal talent management did not fit the culture or current aims of the organization. All of these organizations expected the line manager to play a key role in career development, with three of them having an organizational culture which was described as encouraging open career conversations between the individual and the line manager (to be further discussed below). The remaining two organizations with no formal approach were intending to develop a formal talent management approach over the next one to two years.

From the above it can be seen that achievement of the organization's goals dominated the approaches to talent management. Whilst participants were not directly asked if they saw alignment between individual and organizational goals as desirable, their descriptions indicated that for most, alignment was not a priority. Accordingly, there was no clear commitment from these organizations

to finding a mutually beneficial approach. Definitions of talent and talent management were generally vague, again, with little reference to individual aims and goals and aims. The lack of reference to individual aims applied across employee groups, seemingly conflicted with the intention of increasing retention. Thus, returning to the sub questions for RQ1 (as found in Table 4.1) it was found that most organizations did not actively consider the alignment of individual and organizational goals as important and consequently there seemed little commitment to finding a mutually beneficial approach. They did have different aims for different employee groups and some of the participants were able to describe clear links between their talent management approach and the strategy and culture of their organization (points that shall be further expanded in following sections).

5.3 Organizational talent management – intended practices

The second part of RQ1 relates to intended and experienced practices. While considering the HR view as stakeholders it is possible to consider the intended practices, the experienced practices will be explored within the description of the individual and line manager perspective. Most of the HR participants described their organization's talent management approach through the practices which were used. The benefits of these practices were seen as supporting consistency/fairness and managing organizational risk in terms of retention and succession. Three elements of talent management practice seemed particularly relevant to the ways in which stakeholder alignment was being sought as part of talent management. Firstly, the way in which an individual's aspirations were discussed and included within the talent management process. Secondly, the degree of transparency and openness from the organization to enable the individual to exercise agency based on complete information. Thirdly, the extent to which an individual was seen as accountable for their career and the type of support available to them. These shall each be considered below. However, an overview of some of the other talent management practices will be given first to provide context for the practices on aspirations, transparency and individual accountability.

Many of the described practices replicated those in published case studies. For example, the nine-box grid (described in the talent literature review) was used by over half of the organizations (13 out of 23 HR participants). Nearly half of the organizations described formal calibration sessions (11 of the 23) whereby a group of senior managers discussed the performance and potential scores of a population with the aim of ensuring consistency of ratings. Furthermore, many (10 of the 23) described a formal succession planning approach whereby individuals were formally recorded as

potential successors for different roles often with a time frame to indicate when they would be ready to take the role. The organizations with little (or embryonic) approaches to talent management relied heavily on appraisals as a mechanism to collect information on performance and potential. For example, Nicky described developing the appraisal approach to give '*more structure on performance and career'* as a step towards a fuller talent programme. Despite the many approaches which were described, most of the participants recognised that their approach was not integrated, supporting the findings of Vaiman & Collings (2013). For example, Sindy described different elements of the approach being done *'in isolation',* with little action resulting from the activity.

Further challenges of these approaches were described, perhaps demonstrating a gap between the exaggerated promises of talent management (Reilly, 2008) and their experiences. This was captured by Steve;

> *'Despite the flaws, if I were to write this up as a case study it could look very impressive. We have planning at 3 levels; a talent identification programme; the capabilities are articulated; we have partners for assessment. But if you were to ask people how they experience the process you would get a different view'*
>
> Steve

Similarly, Jessica referred to her experience in a previous organization which had a prescriptive, practices driven approach, with a consistent global timetable. She described the approach as having a *'disconnect between the rhetoric and the reality'.* This dissatisfaction was leading some of those with more established approaches to reconsider what they wanted to achieve and how to deliver it. However, this reconsideration of approach did not include reference to seeking greater alignment with individual needs.

When specifically asked about individual aspirations many participants stated that collecting information on these was an important part of talent management. Over a third (eight out of 23) described a formal approach for gathering these data. For example, some used development centres or line manager led conversations. Gareth described including observations of people's involvement in extra-curricular activities as a measure of commitment. However, there were widely recognized challenges with collecting information on what people wanted from their career. For example, Richard described the expectation that people would say they were ambitious and globally mobile, even if they weren't. Many participants described line managers' discomfort with having these, more personal conversations about aspirations. For example, Lisa reflected on the managers in her organization;

'Some managers… they are excellent at what they do, but they don't find it easy to act in the world of feelings or emotions'

Lisa

Other organizations did not collect this information. In some instances, this was because it was a small population and it was felt that their expectations were well known. The potential consequences of not having accurate information on people's aspirations were illustrated by Steve who described people on succession plans who *'didn't want the job'* and thus created a business continuity risk. However, this recognition of the poor quality of data on aspirations was not translated into attempts to build a deeper understanding of what individuals '*like, find important and want to invest energy* in' (Nijs *et al*., 2013: 182). Some of these challenges were summed up by Gillian, an HR consultant, reflecting on her experience;

'Trust is also a big issue. Are you going to trust the organization if you open up and talk about your long- term plans? The company is really just interested in you doing a good job'

Gillian

These views suggest difficulties with collecting information on aspirations, either because the individual is unwilling to share their views, or because the organization does not ask in a meaningful way. Without this information being shared it is difficult to see how alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development can be achieved. The individual and line manager's perspective on this will be considered later in this chapter.

Another aspect of organizational practices is the extent of openness with the individual included within any talent management process. There are different elements of transparency. Firstly, the way in which data on the individual and planning about their future are shared and secondly, the degree of transparency regarding 'how to get on round here'. Openness regarding data and plans shall be considered below. The wider issue of transparency regarding 'how to get on round here' will be considered as part of the contextual influences on talent management in chapter 7.

Many organizations had significant data and plans on how individuals were viewed and possible future career options. However, the level of openness regarding sharing these organizational data with the individual tended to be low. For example, only three of the participants described being transparent regarding the business view of someone's potential and succession opportunities. A further nine were clear that they would not be open. The remaining five indicated that it varied according to the situation and the line manager (the final six did not have formal talent management processes so were not included in this count). The reasons for not being open varied. For those with

a 'people' approach (Collings & Mellahi, 2009), it was often framed as a concern regarding negative impact on those not included within the talent group. For example, Gareth said;

> *'we're culturally not mature enough for total transparency – it could be too demotivating for highly valued performers who aren't recognized as future talent'*
>
> Gareth

Such a comment raises many questions regarding culture and alignment of talent management with other activities. Whilst Gareth's organization did not form one of the case studies, these issues will be explored in chapter 7. These comments also reflected the findings of Gelens *et al.* (2013) of a potentially negative impact on those not included in the high potential category. One organization was particularly concerned about the potentially demotivating impact of people being told they were not high potential. To overcome this they included an additional box on the nine-box model. This additional box enabled managers to tell people they were in the high potential/high performance category although for the purposes of organizational planning this box was not included. Three of the organizations were also aware that letting people know they were part of a high potential group could increase their expectations of support which may not be delivered. Although not framed as psychological contract, they were expressing a concern regarding potential breech of the contract. These data support the findings of Silzer & Church (2010) who found that in a survey of 20 organizations most did not tell individuals if they were part of a high potential group. Furthermore, they illustrate the informational asymmetry described by Dries & De Gieter (2014) whereby the organization does not share all of the information, thereby influencing the power dynamics between the individual and the organization. The potential consequences of this may include an impact on the psychological contract and a concern that processes are not 'just and fair' (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013b). Moreover, they are likely to make it more difficult to establish a climate where stakeholders seek alignment.

The majority of practices described by the HR participants focused primarily on the organizational aim of ensuring sustainability of people with appropriate skills. Indeed, the main way of evaluating talent management effectiveness was through a robust succession plan. This was consistent with the dominance of the organizational agenda as described by Hirsh & Jackson (2004). However, two participants described processes specifically aimed at supporting the individual with their career self-management. A further three described some actions and a desire to do more on this as part of encouraging the individual to take greater accountability for their own career. The most comprehensive approach was described by Charlie, working within a large international organization of autonomous business divisions. Survey data from the top 500 employees (in hierarchy terms within

a group of approximately 150 000 employees) indicated a problem. These people were keen to stay within the organization to develop their careers, but they did not know how to navigate their career beyond their own division. Follow-up internal research indicated three particular issues: a lack of quality career conversations; a lack of transparency regarding cross- divisional career paths; limited networks across the group to know about development opportunities. Charlie subsequently led a project team to improve access to quality career conversations, to provide transparent information on career pathways and to build networks across the organization. These activities were all designed to reinforce the principle that the individual was accountable for their career, with the organization supporting and facilitating this. When interviewed, Charlie stated it was too soon to judge the impact of the project. However, the business response had been very positive and new tools were being well used. Meanwhile, Steve also spoke of implementing some career resources but without such positive results. He described lots of self-help resources available on the intranet, for example, job information, self-assessment, personal development plans, but found that the usage rate was low. This interest in providing more targeted career self-management support could reflect a recognition of new forms of organizational career (Clarke, 2013), a point further considered under expected roles. Moreover, increasing individual accountability for career self-management could provide an opportunity for supporting alignment between organizational and individual goals.

5.4 Organizational talent management – intended roles

The third part of RQ1 related to the roles participants expected the individual, the line manager and the organization to play in talent management and career development. It also included the way the HR participants viewed their own contribution, particularly in terms of 'employee champion' (Farndale *et al.*, 2010).

All of the phase one participants were asked to share their view on what they thought the role of the individual and the organization should be in terms of career and talent. The intended role of the individual and the organization varied considerably between the participants. When asked to put a figure on it, the numbers ranged from 80% organizationally driven / 20% individually driven to 100% individually driven. Many of the participants described a desire to shift the balance of accountability, encouraging and supporting individuals to drive things more themselves, with less reliance on the organization. A key part of this was seen as making the roles clearer so that people understood 'the deal' in terms of what they could do to drive their own career. This intended transition of

accountability illustrates one way in which organizations were responding to the 'new career environment' by expecting individuals to take more responsibility and the organization to take less (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007).

The intended roles described by the HR participants for the individual and the organization are summarised in Table 5.2 below. Each of the main points was described by at least ten of the participants. The points in italics were mentioned by between five and ten participants but were not considered to be major themes. The organizational role tended to be driven by the HR (or equivalent) function although in some organizations, the processes were seen as part of ongoing business management. In these cases, line managers were more directly involved and activities were integrated with more general management practices as found in the organizational career management case study of Lips-Wiersma & Hall (2007).

Intended role of the individual	• Take ownership for their career • Seek feedback from others • Be honest about their aspirations • Proactively work on their development plan • Seek involvement in wider business activities • *Be curious and open to all forms of learning* • *Be willing to work harder, putting in more effort* • *Build a network across the organization*
Intended role of the organization	• Deliver quality processes to support ongoing talent supply • Provide opportunities for growth and development • Give feedback on current performance • Facilitate conversations about moves • Clarify expectations of managers in terms of developing their people • Clarify expectations with employees • *Provide tools and resources to support individual accountability for career* • *Give financial recognition for people seen as high potential* • *Provide clarity on career pathways* • *Provide clear view of the future direction and skills needs of the organization*

Table 5.2: Intended role of the individual and the organization, HR participants

The intended role of the individual echoes published research on career self-management. For example, seeking feedback and being honest about aspirations (Hirsh, 2008) and ongoing learning and seeking new experiences as part of developing career agility (Inkson *et al*., 2015). The inclusion of networking by some of the participants also supports studies on career self-management (e.g.

Sturges *et al.*, 2002). There was some recognition that networking was easier for some than for others. For example, Steve described some of the cultural differences in career capital (Iellatchitch *et al.*, 2003) in his organization;

> *'There's a cultural overlay to this [networking]. If you're Anglo Saxon with access to the UK to meet the right people it is easier.'*
>
> Steve

The consistent emphasis on the individual's ownership of their career seemed to contradict the practices which, as described above largely focused attention on the organization's processes and actions. This contradiction was recognised by some, for example:

> *'We tell people they need to plan and take ownership [of their career], but they see that the organization takes control – it's a bit dysfunctional'.*
>
> Suzanne
>
> 'T*he language of the organization is that you drive your own development - but the experience is that the organization drives it and manages it for you through patronage – there is a mismatch between what's spoken and the reality'*
>
> Richard

The lack of existing support for individual career planning was reinforced by Caroline's observations as a career counsellor.

> *'Mostly people are left to their own devices in terms of career – no one talks with them about their career development.'*
>
> Caroline

There was also some recognition of the 'virtuous circle' of career self-help and career management help (Sturges *et al.*, 2002), with a number of people, for example Nicky, commenting that people with clear goals would '*find a way [to develop their career] by investing time and effort in their own development'*. The role for the individual was considered appropriate for all employees, not just those captured within the organization's definition of 'talent'. This further emphasizes the overlap between organizational career development and organizational talent management.

Within the intended organization's role, most participants felt that they were doing well at providing opportunities for growth and development (either through formal development programmes or informal on-the-job learning). They were aware that feedback on performance was mixed, often depending on the ability of the line manager, but with some more formal assessment for employees considered as high potential. However, they mostly described being poor at fulfilling the

other elements of their role. For example, there were limited proactive conversations about moves and opportunities. Similarly, there were few examples of clarifying expectations with employees, and this was mostly done though written documentation rather than more engaging mechanisms and there was an understanding that this made it difficult for employees to understand the 'career deal' (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995). A number of participants were also working to increase the clarity of career pathways, which according to Cambell & Smith (2014) would be of value to individuals. The list of the organization's role has clear similarities with the work of Sturges *et al.* (2002). Indeed, despite different language, all of the formal practices of the Sturges *et al.* (2002) list are included. However, there was no mention of the informal practices such as the provision of impartial career advice or being introduced to people to help the career. Furthermore, making the comparison to the Hirsh (2008) information on organizational career management, none of the participants referenced career workshops and only one had trained internal career coaches.

There was a general frustration with line managers not being seen to be playing their part in delivering the talent management processes. This often manifested as the need to frequently chase for action, Lisa illustrated this;

'It's difficult. It took blood sweat and tears to get quality career plans for 30 people'.

Lisa

Furthermore, 16 of the 23 participants cited poor line manager skills as one of the barriers to better talent management. This was considered to be a problem of time as well as skills, confidence, understanding or commitment. For example, Nicky identified managers feeling uncomfortable not having an answer;

'Line managers can struggle when they haven't got opportunities to offer. They see it in a narrow way… they lack confidence in what to say – thinking they have to have the solution, to be able to sort it out.'

Nicky

However, although many recognized that line managers were integral to the success of the process, few had provided significant support to help managers understand and perform their role. The support provided to line managers tended to be written documentation and briefing sessions. There was some interest in doing more, but a concern that managers did not see the value and were therefore not motivated to engage in these activities. In talking about the line manager role there was some reference to the potential conflict of rewards for line managers between keeping and developing people (Ready & Congor, 2007). For example, Suzanne said;

'If line managers think that developing talent for the organization is not their role, or that it is actually detrimental to them – this mindset needs to be addressed first'.

Suzanne

However, there seemed little consideration of a potential conflict of career and talent goals between the organization and the individual (Silzer & Dowell, 2010).

The discussion on roles encouraged some participants to think beyond the typical talent management processes and practices. For example, the mixed messages regarding individual accountability and organizational action only seemed to occurr to some participants during the research conversation. Some reflected on being frustrated at playing the 'HR push' role identified in the early analysis. This could be equated to the 'guardian of the process' role described by Farndale *et al.* (2010). Aaron, an HR consultant, described HR focusing on processes because *'there's a fear that if it's not formalised it won't happen'.* Some participants were keen to move into other roles, in particular where they could become 'champion of the culture' Farndale *et al.* (2010). However, most believed that the processes needed to be in place first. For example, Hermione stated;

'this year our focus is on getting the process in… the next 2 – 3 years will be about enabling the conversation to be good quality and to provide solutions where possible'

Hermione

For the organizations with less focus on formal practices the approach was very different. They were keen to develop an appropriate culture which they hoped would mean that they did not need the processes. Three organizations took this approach and positioned themselves as 'champion of the culture'. For example, Jessica described her organization's approach as informal rather than formal, with a culture of empowerment, openness and self-development. Ian described his approach to talent management;

'I gave it some thought and it came down to talent management being all about the conversations people need to have/should be having about talent. So really the approach needs to be all about how to get the conversation working, rather than focusing on policy/procedure/ or task and finish groups etc'.

Ian

Overall, the HR participants described their role in talent management as work in progress. None were satisfied with their current approach and all were very open about the challenges they experienced. However, there was little discussion of how they evaluated the impact of their talent management approaches. The measures that were described tended to be based on compliance with process, especially the completion of a succession plan to show that the organization had people ready

for moves. Additional measures were a reduction in regretted leavers and an improvement in survey results to any questions relating to career. Evaluation was generally seen as something to be worked on. For example, Peter described an interest in analytics and '*putting a $ value on human capital'* but had only just started working on this. Meanwhile, Sue was aware that measurable results were needed;

> *'there are still no results yet and we need to show a win. So far it's been a leap of faith'*
>
> Sue

As the interviews progressed a few of the HR participants reflected that they were becoming more aware of the challenges of genuinely meeting individual needs within an approach built on prioritising organizational goals. For example, Hermione reflected that the approach was currently *'very much business based'* as there was no mechanism for supporting individuals, but that this would be needed in the future. Similarly, Julie, who had described a purely business driven approach to talent management saw *'understanding what people's needs and requirements are'* as an important part of the organization's role. This indicated that some thinking on talent management was developed as a product of the social interaction of the interview, a social constructionist view, (e.g. Burr, 2003). These participants started to recognise the contradiction that by disregarding individual needs they could negatively impact on engagement (as suggested by Birkenshaw et al, 2014) and thereby paradoxically inhibit achievement of the organizational goals they were seeking to achieve. However, they were not confident that this was currently achievable for their organizations. For example, Sindy cited a fear held by senior managers that encouraging people to talk openly about their career aspirations would increase expectations and dissatisfaction with current career, thereby increasing the likelihood of someone leaving. These concerns support the view of Inkson et al (2015) that the

> *'individualization of career raises major problems for organizations with a 'resources' approach to career as they grapple with the problem of building an organization based on careers that they are not able to 'manage''*
>
> Inkson et al (2015: 343)

This expressed desire to find a '*mutually beneficial relationship between the organization and the talent*' (Campbell & Smith, 2010: 23) was further evidenced when describing career conversations. However, as shall be discussed, whilst some were aware of a paradox between this and their approach to talent management, many were not.

From the above discussion, the HR perspective to the roles element of RQ1 can be summarized. It can be seen that most of the HR participants described the individual as having significant and increasing accountability for managing their own career. They recognised the important role that line managers played in supporting individuals, but few provided specific help to the line managers. Indeed, there was widespread criticism of the way in which this was being delivered. The HR participants were also largely critical of the overall organizational contribution, recognising that more could be done to provide feedback, clarify the career deal and engage in conversations about future opportunities. The focus was largely on the formal mechanisms and processes of roles, with little reference to the contribution of informal approaches. The HR contribution was positioned as 'guardian of the process' rather than 'employee champion' (Farndale *et al.*, 2010).

5.5. Organizational talent management – career conversations

Having described their approach to talent management, the HR professionals were then asked about career conversations. This related to RQ2, '*In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?*' Within this, the sub questions related to the perceived contribution of career conversations generally and within the context of talent management.

Many did not use the term 'career conversation', but all participants described events where there was an opportunity for some or all individuals to talk with someone about their career and their future development. For the purposes of this research all such opportunities (formal and informal) were included under the umbrella of 'career conversation'. Differences between these conversations are explored in chapter 6. Workplace career conversations were seen by most of the participants as an important element of delivering their talent management practices. Accordingly, the primary purpose of the conversations varied between organizations with some focusing largely on successors, others on developing skills for the future and others a combination. However, these conversations were consistently recognised as being applicable to all employees, not just those considered as 'talent'. Three of the organizations without formal talent management practices were specifically focused on career conversations as their main organizational career development tool. For example, Ian summarised it by saying;

'It's all about the conversations people need to have/should be having about talent, so really the approach needs to be all about how to get the conversation working rather than focusing on policy/procedure etc.'

Ian

Across the participants, few were fully satisfied with how these career conversations were currently operating. Most felt that whilst there were some very constructive conversations taking place, there was a lot of inconsistency and the way the conversations were enacted depended a great deal on the line manager. Five of the participants had taken specific action to improve the conversations either through targeted training, provision of briefing information or HR coaching before and during specific conversations. For example, Lisa said;

'career conversations are a key part of this [processes and tools for talent management] and we've prepared guides to help people prepare and deliver them. The goal is for managers to have honest conversations with their team members. Some leaders are really good. Others aren't.'

Lisa

Approaches to career conversations were hugely varied – from highly structured to highly informal; from line manager led to HR led; from a small part of an annual review to a separate career discussion; from completely open to highly selective sharing of information. Despite these differences, the participants saw common aims for the conversations. These are described in Table. 5.3 below, with each element identified by at least eight of the participants. The emphasis however varied depending on the organization's strategic aims and culture, to be discussed in chapter 7.

Aspirations	Exploring the individual's aspirations, sense of direction for their career and their level of engagement in pursuing their career within the organization (sometimes done as a separate session as input to the talent review including issues such as mobility). This varied from a structured conversation on aspirations to a vague sense of 'ask them what they want', but this tended to be the least structured element of the conversations. Ruth: *'the conversation itself covers where they see themselves, what they're interested in doing, how far they want to go'*

Feedback	Providing feedback on how these aspirations matched the organization's view on potential and future career options (often incorporating feedback from the talent review, assessment or calibration session). The level of feedback varied from sharing everything to sharing just some information. Much of this element was based on giving feedback from the organization rather than encouraging self-feedback. Charlie: *'honest feedback is fundamental if people are to have realistic expectations'*
Planning	Developing a plan to support the development of skills, knowledge and experiences to support the achievement of future career (the output, which may then be centrally recorded). The degree of planning also varied from a detailed development plan for the next 12 – 18 months to some 'general' areas to work on. Marcus: *'All this [understanding business needs, personal aspiration and current performance] leads into the development plan'*

Table. 5.3: Aims of career conversations, HR participants

When discussing career conversations some identified that these conversations could be highly motivating for individuals. Furthermore, the absence of these conversations was seen as potentially demotivating. Some recognised that career conversations were a mechanism to connect individual and organizational agendas. This was in contrast to the limited interest in individual agendas when discussing the broader aims of talent management. For example, Peter spoke of 'leadership conversations';

> *'We see leadership conversations as the opportunity to bring things together – you can have isolated conversations about goal setting, career, aspiration and development. We're trying to encourage managers to take an holistic view of these things'*
>
> Peter

This was seen to bring a benefit to the employer in terms of increased employee engagement and satisfaction. For example, Ruth referenced quality career conversations as a tool to respond to low employee satisfaction with career opportunities (as identified through an employee survey). This was a further perspective which had been absent in the earlier parts of the research discussions. However, on the whole, the rationale for conducting career conversations remained clearly within the resource agenda of finding, retaining and developing great people to meet current and future resourcing needs, or as Sue described it, *'it all links to the resourcing plan'*. This viewpoint was also emphasized by the

HR and OD consultants. For example, Caroline described organizations being more concerned about being seen to provide support rather than the quality or value of that support.

Four of the HR participants described being committed to the value of career conversations operating largely outside any formal process. Jessica described these conversations as a core expectation of managers, with conversations involving all employees;

> '*you know your team, you give them feedback, you manage them well and you help them to take accountability for driving their own career*'.
>
> Jessica

Managers were described as having ongoing conversations about the future of the organization and asking people '*what's your part in making this work and how can we help you to develop towards this?*' Marcus and Jim also described ongoing conversations leading to moves and projects for people to further their careers. They both said that face to face conversations were key to how their businesses operated, but both also had a formal 'wrap up' in an annual appraisal. As Marcus put it, '*the informal side is the most important*'.

In the research discussion, some of the HR participants described how they ideally wanted career conversations to work within their organization. Some of this data emerged from describing the conversations they wanted to encourage and some emerged from describing the problems they wanted to avoid. There was a lot of similarity and a summary is presented in Table 5.4. Within the descriptions, the idea of 'relationship' was very evident. This indicated the opportunity for career conversations to provide a vital link between the needs of the organization and the individual. There was also reference to the role of informal conversations and approaches which had not been evident earlier in the research interviews. Furthermore, the described views of career conversations were largely consistent with the 'mutual endeavor' conversations described by Smith & Campbell (2011). However, this focus on mutuality was once again in contrast to the primary focus of talent management which had been initially presented as meeting organizational needs with no reference to individual needs (apart from the one participant, Jessica who referenced talent management as jointly owned). The vision for career conversations was described by many as feeling a '*long way off*' (Hermione). A number commented that they had yet to come across an organization which '*does this really well*' (Suzanne). This was consistent with Yarnall's (2008) observation that there is a general lack of quality conversations regarding careers.

Ownership	Conversations to be owned by line managers without constant 'nagging' from HR and without HR 'policing' the conversations. Sue: *'We want them [career conversations] to develop to be more part of the DNA'*
Partnership	Conversations to embody a real sense of partnership between the individual and the line manager/organization, creating the career plan as a joint project. Hermione: *'They [conversations] need to be collaborative – it needs to be open and honest so we can see how we can meet needs'*
Relationship	Conversations to take place as part of a genuinely trusting and open relationship where individuals feel free to talk honestly about their careers without concerns about any negative implications. Julie: *'The manager needs to quickly establish trust and confidence so people can be open'*
Consistency	Conversations to be carried out consistently by all managers for a target population, providing all these employees with the opportunity to benefit from great conversations about their future. Lisa: *'The goal is for all managers to be having these honest conversations [as set out in the conversation guide] with their team members'*
Action	Conversations to have a consequence - a clear commitment to action with things actually happening as a result of the conversation. Charlie: *'The career conversation is an opportunity to join up succession and career and close any gaps'*

Table 5.4: Summary of vision for career conversations, HR participants

From the above it can be seen that career conversations were viewed differently to talent management. Whilst seen as a helpful mechanism within talent management, they were recognised as having a contribution to make to all employees, potentially leading to increased engagement. In particular, these conversations were seen as an opportunity to discuss individual needs, provide feedback and develop action plans. Thus, relating the findings back to RQ2, the HR participants viewed career conversations as a potential way to align organizational and individual needs.

The HR perspective has now been considered in terms of RQ1 and RQ2. A number of contradictions in the participant descriptions have emerged, and many of these were openly shared by the participants. For example, participants described a gap between policy and practice and a disconnect between individual accountability for career and organizational actions. However, the apparent contradiction between organizationally focused talent management goals and partnership

focused career conversation goals was not on the whole raised by participants. This contradiction could be seen as an example of 'doublethink' as described by El-Sawad *et al.* (2004). This is explained as occurring '*when one individual holds simultaneously two (or more) conflicting beliefs'* (El-Sawad *et al.*, 2004: 1189), and importantly, the individual does not seem aware of the contradiction. El-Sawad *et al.* (2004) consider why such doublethink may take place. Citing the work of Giddens (1991), they refer to a process of 'bracketing'. As such, it is possible that the HR participants have different 'compartments' for talent management and individual career development. Accordingly, they were able to consider them separately without a perceived need to resolve apparent contradictions. These differences could also be considered as an example of Truss *et al.'s* (1997) contrast between hard and soft approaches. In this scenario, talent management is managed through a hard approach and career conversations through a soft approach.

5.6. Individual career development – career narratives

The interviews with individuals were developed around their individual career narratives. A feature of these data are that they are widely varied, representing the sense-making of the participant rather than the researcher (Cohen *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, they did not fit neatly into the headings used to analyse the organizational stakeholder perspective. Moreover, given the researcher's commitment to situate career within an overall story, it would not be appropriate to then reduce it to headings developed from the literature review. Therefore, in this section, an overview of people's career stories will be shared, highlighting their aims and the processes they had found helpful in managing their careers to date. Their perceptions on the roles of the individual, the line manager and the organization will then be discussed, followed by the perceived contribution of career conversations. Throughout this section, the individual's perspective will be contrasted with the perspective of the line manager as a stakeholder where these data exist.

All the research interviews started with participants describing their career story. The career stories varied greatly. They were mostly described as a simple timeline, using a journey metaphor, describing their career goal as satisfaction and interest rather than a specific role or level of seniority. For example, FW described her career goals as;

> '*I'm not hugely ambitious, I like a challenge and I want to thrive, but I don't want to be on a succession plan'.*
>
> FW

Most of the career changes were described as rational moves and there was some description of the motivation for making a change, for example, moving for a promotion within a clearly defined career path (such as finance and marketing), or wanting to build particular technical expertise. However, some also indicated that their career had taken unexpected turns. For example;

> *'Originally, I saw my career as linear – staying within retail, keeping on that path – but I diverted from this, I got opportunities and made decisions when I hadn't expected to… I thought I wouldn't mind doing something different and saw a role that used lots of skills that I had, so I had some conversations with people about it and applied [and was successful]'*
>
> PG

Some participants mentioned the role of luck in their career to date, for example, '*I was lucky to have the opportunity to progress fast'.* However, as Wiseman, (2004) points out, some people create more opportunities to be in the right place at the right time, so luck should not be overestimated.

Some participants displayed a clear career self-concept (Bosley *et al.* 2009). For example, one participant had a narrative about doing things that were a bit out of the norm;

> *'getting involved in things which are not the core of the business…I enjoy things which are slightly off-piste and then when they're set up and working they are brought into the mainstream of the business…I enjoy trailblazing, the art of the possible'*
>
> BJ

Others viewed themselves as a '*serial troubleshooter'* (IS) or someone who needed ongoing change and challenges, '*I get fidgety'* (CE).

Career self-management was a theme that emerged from a number of the participants. They positioned themselves as consciously engaging in career self-management behaviour, for example;

> *'I've always been very explicit about my ambitions and goals. I take care to position myself always for the next role'*
>
> HW

Others described actively building a career network, growing skills and using a variety of career helpers to develop their thinking. These activities demonstrated elements of thinking about career and career action (Hirsh, 2008). Some participants described a less deliberate approach to managing their career, for example, BW stated, '*I am not very planful in my career, I'm more of an opportunist'.* This is consistent with career planning as a largely unconscious and intuitive process (e.g. Kreishok *et al.*, 2009). However, although the career management activity was not described as conscious, that does not mean that it wasn't happening (Sternberg, 2000). Indeed, for some, the act of the research

interview prompted reflection and a desire to engage in more conscious career management. For example, FL stated,

> '*It's been helpful to have a conversation. I've got a one-to-one with my manager tomorrow and I will think how I can best use it [to discuss my career]'.*
>
> FL

There was also some reference to changes in the way that careers needed to be managed. In particular, the impact of flatter structures on career pathways was highlighted (as stated by Kelly *et al.*, 2003). It was felt that both individuals and organizations needed to be creative to find ways to develop skills and experiences to help people move upwards within their organization as the stepping stone roles were no longer available. For example, HW described the lack of structural opportunities for people to develop the skills needed in more senior roles with a resulting '*risk to the business of losing people because of the lack of opportunities'.* Similarly, IR described the challenge of *'no middle roles'* which limited his opportunity to prepare for a senior position.

As discussed in the literature review, Clarke (2013), suggested a new form of organizational career. This concept builds on some of the tenets of the boundaryless and protean career, but looks at the way these can apply within organizations. The career histories of the participants from this study can be considered in terms of the type of career they have had to date regarding number of employing organizations and the extent to which they have remained within one functional area. These data are shown in Table 5.5. This shows that a significant proportion of participants (70%), had worked for more than one organization, however, only 15% had worked for three or more organizations. The majority of participants described their career in organizational terms, feeling a commitment to the organizations they had worked for, positioning their employment as relational rather than transactional. For example, RM described how he felt about his role;

> *I feel part of the fabric of the place. It's very welcome and friendly. People go the extra mile for you, I feel very lucky to be part of it'*
>
> RM

Furthermore, a large proportion (75%) of participants had moved between functions. Half of these changes had happened within the employing organization and the others were part of a conscious career change (for example from the civil service to a commercial role). These data would seem to support Clarke's (2013) propositions one and two (that organizational careers can be 'flexible, challenging and mobile' and that they can 'provide opportunities for employee development'). Furthermore, participants were largely describing a desire for a core relationship with their employer based on a mutually beneficial relationship with ongoing investment from both parties (Rousseau &

Wade-Benzoni, 1995). Indeed, some described leaving previous employers when they felt the relationship with their employer was no longer what they wanted, potentially illustrating a breach in the psychological contract. For example, ID described leaving his previous employer after the culture of the organization changed as a result of a new senior leadership team. However, some were more transactional in their approach. For example, AK was clear that if he was not promoted or given a salary increase it could *'lead to me looking elsewhere'.*

Number of employing organizations (post education)	Functionally based career	Cross functional career	Total
1	3	9	12
2	3	10	13
3	2	7	9
>3	2	4	6
Total	**10**	**30**	**40**

Table 5.5: Number of employing organizations and functional or cross functional career.

Generally, participants described good alignment between their personal aspirations and the needs of their organization. Indeed, only two of the 40 participants described themselves as unhappy in their current role (although many described some difficult times during their career). Whilst recognising that this happiness may have described their feelings, it may have been influenced by a desire to portray a particular image throughout the interviews (e.g. Coupland, 2004) and may also have been influenced by their career self-concept (Bosley *et al.*, 2009). For some, the sense of alignment was very strong, for example, HW said;

> '*I feel as if my ambitions and the organizations are very aligned and my ambition matches their view of my potential'.*
>
> HW

Some participants were very trusting that their manager/organization would look after their best interests. For example, FP had experienced many career moves with the same employer. When asked how his own interests had been taken into account, he shared some of his story.

> *'I was once asked 'if you had an option would you chose to work in US or UK?', but apart from that they've never asked me [what I want to do]… should they have asked? I'm not sure I could have given them a definitive answer, my history has been largely to do what needs to be done. Some friends say I'm an idiot to let the business have this control – they say the business will fuck me over – but my driver is helping the business'*
>
> FP

Others however, even if describing themselves as happy overall, felt that their organization was taking advantage of them. This was particularly the case in organizations with cost pressures where people felt *'lucky to have a job'(LH)* and reluctant to take on a new role as it could put them at risk of redundancy. A lack of alignment was also described by two people who had previously had career moves blocked because their skills were needed in their existing roles. In these (few) situations the power was seen to be held by the organization and there was seen to be little alignment on career development. However, as IM pointed out, even in that situation the individual had some power;

'*it's my choice to work here, I know there are opportunities to leave – I'm not a prisoner'.*

IM

There were also examples of people using their personal power by withholding information. This confirmed the view expressed by the HR participants, that individuals may not always share their real career aims and aspirations. For individuals, this non-disclosure seemed to be particularly noticeable when they felt their aims would be in conflict with what the organization wanted. For example, IS described applying for a new role;

'I knew I wanted worklife balance but I wasn't that direct with them'

IS

Similarly, PB described his standard response to a question about global mobility,

'the common line was to say 'I'm mobile depending on timing and location' but there was an unwritten three strikes and you're out - because you may be seen as a blocker of other high potential people, they needed to keep moving people through'

PB

In this example, the interplay between structure and agency can be seen as in Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens, 1976). One party does not hold all the power as whilst PB is able to withhold information, the organization still retains some power through the 'unwritten' three strikes approach. Thus, these power dynamics seem to influence whether or not alignment is sought.

Despite the generally positive sense of alignment, there were few examples of careers being 'jointly managed', the third proposition by Clarke (2013). Most participants were unsure how their career would develop next. Some were happy about this, with a sense that '*something might pop up and then I'll think if it's something I'd like to do' (*YK). However, others wanted a clearer sense of future direction and to understand some of the options open to them. As will be seen in chapter 6, this desire for greater clarity was a driver for some of the career conversations. There were some

examples of interactions based on a jointly managed career, particularly in some of the conversations which were reported. These were analysed separately and are discussed in the next chapter as 'collaborator' conversations.

Having described their career story, participants were asked to reflect on what had helped them to develop their career to date. This gave insight into the 'career world view' of participants (Bosley *et al.*, 2009). Despite the variation in experiences, a number of consistent themes emerged and are summarised in Table 5.6 below. These themes are comparable with much previous research. For example, 'changing career goals' and 'ongoing learning' are key elements of career agility (Inkson *et al.*, 2015: 297). The importance of networking and challenging learning opportunities have also been widely referenced (e.g. Sturges *et al.*, 2002). These themes illustrate the interplay between organizational role, line manager style and individual action in career development. Furthermore, these can be seen as occurring informally rather than as part of a formal talent management or organizational career management strategy.

In at the deep end	Many participants described roles or projects where they felt they had been put 'in at the deep end' to 'sink or swim'. They were not always as well supported as CL in the example below. They described these experiences as sometimes painful but very important for fast tracking learning and career. CL *'At xxco I worked with someone who believed in me and gave me opportunities. For example, going to France a week after joining the company. Their belief in me and letting me get on with it in an unstructured type of way really helped me…my role was really sink or swim*'
Changing career goals	Many people described a shift in their career goals as they became more senior or further through their career. For example, they described an early career of looking to progress rapidly followed by a desire for interesting and worthwhile work rather than further upward progression *LH 'As I get older this [what I want from my career] kind of seems to develop and change. If I was destined to be a leading light in terms of a senior manager I'd be there by now. So really what I want is to recognise that I'm adding value, that other people want me to be part of their journey'*

Who you know	Networking (internally or externally) played a key role in many people moving roles – and a surprisingly high number of people had moved roles many times with no formal interview, the classic 'tap on the shoulder' TM '*I used to scoff at the idea of a network, but now I see it's true…I haven't applied properly for a job since my first job in the graduate scheme'*
Ongoing learning	A commitment to personal development and ongoing learning was seen as positioning people to be ready for new opportunities and for a number of people a specific learning activity had been pivotal in shaping their career growth CE '*I guess I'm ambitious – not in terms of wanting to progress, but looking for stimulus, for challenge and enjoyment, wanting to feel that I've learnt something every day and that I've managed to do something I thought I couldn't*'

Table 5.6: Perspectives on what had helped career development

5.7 Individual career development – expected roles

As with the HR professionals, individuals were asked to share their thoughts on the roles of each key stakeholder in terms of career and talent development. Whereas the HR and OD professionals described the roles of two stakeholder groups (individual and organization), in the second phase of research, line managers were included as an additional stakeholder group. In commenting on the career development roles participants were asked to think of what they wanted as individuals, but also what they expected to offer as line managers (26 of the participants described their line accountability). Despite the differences in the organizational cultures and approaches (see chapter 7 for a full exploration), there was a consistency of views. These are summarised in Table 5.7 below.

Individual	• Self-awareness of career aims, personal strengths and weaknesses • Focusing on personal development, seeking feedback • Building a career network and instigating conversations about how you can add more value • Keeping up to date with what's happening within your profession and your organization GJ: *'If you don't look after yourself no one else will do it for you'*

Line manager	• Understanding individual and organizational needs and matching them • Building self-awareness through feedback • Providing ongoing learning and development opportunities on and off the job • Managing expectations, being honest KP: *'the line manager should be great at recognising potential, harnessing this and having great conversations – they need to guide, support and find opportunities and experiences – they have responsibility to help this to happen'*
Organization	• Articulating the future needs of the organization in terms of people and opportunities and illustrating how people can get there • Providing opportunities for people to build experiences and skills, e.g. access to secondments, training programmes • Encouraging managers to develop their people • Creating an environment that empowers and motivates people to develop JD: *'the organization needs to provide tools for the leader, support the leaders' development and give them an armoury and mechanics to help them map successes'*

Table 5.7: Perceived career development roles, individual and line manager

Participants were very clear that it was their responsibility to drive their own career development. Their aims were to achieve their own goals, fitting with the description of career responsibility by Mirvis & Hall, '*to achieve goals that are personally meaningful to the individual, rather than those set by parents, peers, an organization, or society*' (Mirvis & Hall, 1994: 138). This personal accountability and focus on development through feedback, self-development and learning were consistent with the HR perspective described in Table 5.2. However, there were also differences with the HR perspective. Firstly, most of the individuals described networking as part of their role, using the network to explore opportunities. This compares with the HR participants' responses where networking was only mentioned by a small number. Furthermore, they saw it as their role to be aware of developments within the profession and within the organization to enable them to prepare for any changes. This element of the role was not apparent in the HR participants' description of the individual's career development role. Some of the participants described this in terms of finding common ground between their own goals and the organizational needs. For example, IR said;

> *'I see it as my responsibility to lead the discussion, to capture the information and to identify where there is scope for me to work and improve. My aim is finding the sweet spot between what I want and what the business needs'*
>
> IR

The degree of self-direction was seen to increase with seniority and experience. For example, in early career there tended to be a clear structure and more obvious development steps and support (such as graduate programmes). However, as people became more experienced they felt that the individual had to be the driving force. One person challenged this view stating;

> *'I don't fully buy that the individual drives their own development. They have a role in the execution and delivery – they can create that vision and take them and their family on that journey – but there's a real problem because there can be self-limiting beliefs and that's a flaw and there can also be some who are delusional [about their potential].'*
>
> IW

Finding common ground was also a theme of the way the line manager's role was positioned. For example, GJ suggested that the line manager was the '*broker*' with responsibility for finding a '*match*' that satisfied all needs. This suggested a strong desire for alignment between individual and organizational needs. Furthermore, for the individuals and the line managers the 'work' of career development was seen as largely occurring between them, with the organization's role positioned as setting the climate and providing some structured development opportunities for building skills and experiences. Some of the line managers were asked about potential conflict in their role. Some felt there was no conflict, for example, HD stated;

> *'I don't really see conflicts in my role as a line manager between what the organization and the individual needs. If I developed someone and they leave, then that's a key measure of success'*
>
> HD

However, others were aware that they could be penalised if they developed someone who left and their department's performance subsequently dropped. This potential conflict of interests for line managers is further discussed in chapter 6.

Noticeably, very few participants mentioned formal processes or talent management as part of the career development roles. When this was explored in the interview the focus was on appraisal as a tracking process, but this was not seen as having any significant influence on career development. A few of the participants had been part of formal career development programmes which had been useful, but most people were not aware of such activities. Overall it was felt to be the informal conversations that were most important. This was summarised by FW;

'*the nature of these conversations is all different – tailored to the individual and what they need. You can't force the moment or the time'*.

FW

The extent to which participants felt that the talent and career roles were being successfully delivered was explored in the interviews. Many recognised that they personally could do more, that despite understanding how to manage their own career, they did not actively engage in it. The success of line managers in delivering their role was seen as hugely varied with some line managers described as exemplars in supporting career development and others viewed as blockers. This was consistent with the perspective of the HR participants. Generally, people felt that the organization could do more to help them to drive their own careers, but this was not generally positioned as a breach of the psychological contract. In particular, they were keen to increase their understanding of the organization's needs, helping them to identify the potential opportunities for common ground. They felt this information would also enable them to navigate their career with their current employer, providing the context for 'how to get on round here', the informal rules that govern career development in the workplace (Inkson *et al*., 2015). Recognised as a career skill, this understanding of informal rules has been described by Sternberg (2000) as tacit knowledge, but perhaps due to the changing career environment, participants were keen for this information to be more transparent. The theme of transparency will be explored in more detail in chapter 6. Many were also frustrated by the lack of opportunities for building experience through cross functional moves and secondments (however, this varied by organization as shall be discussed in chapter 7). Participants also expressed a view that the role of managers in developing their teams could be more explicit and could be encouraged. For example, they suggested training support and recognition for line managers who are very strong at developing people.

Perhaps the biggest frustration expressed by participants was the lack of information about future development and career opportunities. This theme is discussed in chapter 6. Confirming the observations of the HR participants, the perceived contradiction between the words and the actions was also raised. For example, thinking about his line manager role, CL stated;

'*The challenge is that we say we want people to take control of their careers but the culture is different because we don't give control over people's own job* '

CL

Overall, individuals expressed their desire to take accountability for their career. However, they wanted help and support to make the most of opportunities which would help them in their career

growth. In summary, they expressed a desire for the organization to '*facilitate their career development''* (Inkson *et al.*2015: 343).

5.8 Individual career development - career conversations

All participants were able to describe at least one conversation which they had had about their career. In total, 172 conversations were described by participants, with 63% of these being described as positive experiences, shaping career development thinking and action (Hirsh, 2008). More detail of these conversations will be explored in chapter 6, discussing who the conversations were with, what the trigger was and what was happening within the conversation. Cultural and contextual influences on the conversations will then be considered in chapter 7, making comparisons between the different organizations. For the current discussion, it is useful to consider the perceived purpose of these conversations so their contribution to alignment between organizational and individual needs can be considered.

The contribution of these conversations for career development was explored within the interviews. The emerging themes (see Table 5.8 below) are parallel to Egan's skilled helper model: exploring the current scenario; the preferred scenario and taking action (e.g. Egan, 2013). Variants of this have previously been applied to career counselling (e.g. Kidd, 2007). My personal familiarity with this model may have influenced the analysis. However, similarities can also be seen to many management formulas and business planning models (such as plan, organize, lead, control, Inkson *et al.*, 2015) which could have influenced the mental models of the participants. Conversations described by participants did not tend to cover all of these areas in one go – often they were spread out over a number of conversations or covered just one area. The more detailed analysis of specific conversations in chapter 6 illustrates that many participants were keen to have more conversations about 'where am I going'. Although a few people did career planning on their own, for most it was an activity which was largely conducted through conversations which were seen as important in helping them to build their understanding and commitment to action.

Where am I now?	Facilitating self-awareness through reflection, challenge and feedback, building shared understanding of key strengths and contribution as well as weaknesses. JP: *'it was very useful to be taken out of the environment to build self-awareness, to be very open to feedback'*

Where am I going?	Helping to clarify goals/direction through exploring personal motivations and aspirations and sharing the likely future business needs to understand options for how to add value in the future. ZT: *'what can I do next? What can the business offer me?'*
How do I get there?	Exploring specific job opportunities and development activities, agreeing a specific plan of action to fill any gaps between 'where am I now?' and 'where am I going?' ZM: *'I continued working through my personal development plan actions and had regular update meetings with my own group director'*

Table 5.8: Perceived contribution of conversations to career development.

Within these themes the role of career conversations in clarifying 'where am I going' is particularly relevant in terms of alignment. Participants saw this as the opportunity to share their aspirations and understand the options which were likely to be available for them. This further illustrates the desire of individuals to find common ground and to build on it, matching their career aspirations to the needs of the organization. For example, BF described a conversation with her boss;

> *'The business was creating new roles. She [line manager] was interested in how I felt and what I wanted to do. I've now got a great job, it really is ideal and I'm happier than ever… What she did brilliantly was work out what's important to her and to the business and what I'm great at and then finding ways of making it work together – for her, the business and me'*
>
> BF

However, these conversations were not seen as always working well. In particular, many participants were frustrated with the lack of conversations regarding future career direction to be discussed in the next chapter.

5.9 Summary

This chapter has described the findings related to *RQ1:* In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals? And *RQ2:* In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals? The findings show that the majority of HR participants did not actively seek alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development. The emphasis tended to be on processes which served the organization and whilst aware of the limitations of their current approach, there seemed little appetite for a fundamental rethink of the role of HR

within talent and career. Indeed, some of the practices (such as lack of transparency and narrow definitions of talent) were likely to be counter to a relationship with employees which encouraged alignment. It appeared that the HR participants were largely committed to their role as an '*acquirer, developer and controller of a company 'owned' labour force'*, rather than re-envisioning their role as '*a broker between firms evolving boundaryless strategies and individuals pursuing boundaryless careers*', (Parker & Inkson, 1999: 84). Indeed, despite a discourse of talent scarcity, they did not describe actions to use talent management as a tool to entice 'boundaryless' talent to join their organizations. However, career conversations were seen as a wider career management activity and the HR participants described an ideal of these being based on mutuality, partnership and alignment. Moreover, the benefits of the mutual approach were recognised in terms of motivation and engagement. This apparent contradiction did not seem to concern the participants. It is therefore suggested that this was an example of doublethink (El-Sawad *et al.*, 2004).

Individuals and line managers saw alignment between individual and organizational goals as a fundamental part of an organizational career. Rather than focusing on formal, HR driven approaches, both groups described career development as largely taking place at a local level, between the individual and their local management or others within the network. Furthermore, individuals were keen to take accountability for their careers and they saw career conversations as a key element of career self-management. There was however, a desire for support from the organization in terms of providing a climate to support career development, greater transparency of the 'career deal' (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995) and increasing the skills of line managers to deliver career support.

The findings also illustrate a largely poor level of understanding and respect between the HR participants and the line managers. Both stakeholders seemed to view the contribution of the other as inadequate. Firstly, line managers tended to make very little reference to HR and the comments they made were often negative (e.g. with regard to appraisals, '*nothing happens'*). Secondly, HR tended to take a negative stance on the skills and commitment of line managers with regard to developing their team members. According to Renwick & MacNeil, (2002) senior HR professionals are often critical of line manager capability as '*such statements justify their specialist 'expert' role and help to keep their power base alive*' (Renwick & MacNeil, 2002: 411). Furthermore, if the line managers are seen as fully capable it undermines the legitimacy of HR having a policing role.

Chapter 6: The nature of positive career conversations

RQ3: What types of career conversations are seen to make positive contributions to people's career development?

6.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the workplace career conversations participants described receiving. The purpose is to develop understanding of the conversations which were seen to make a positive contribution to career development. The focus is on the 'local dynamics' (the relationship, approach and perceived outcome for these conversations between the individual and the other party) rather than the organisational dynamics which are considered in chapter 7. Some of these conversations were shared as a natural part of the career narrative that participants described at the start of their research interview. Other conversations were explained in response to a specific prompt by the interviewer asking about any particular conversations or series of conversations which they felt had shaped their career - typically after the participant had described their career story to date. As noted in the methodology chapter it is important to recognise that the conversations described by participants may not be representative of all of the career conversations that they had experienced. However, they do illustrate the conversations which most readily came to mind and they chose to share. Moreover, it represents their subjective experience of these conversations (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2014).

Conversations will be reviewed by firstly considering the conversation set-up (who the conversation was with, who instigated it, what the trigger was, what the setting was) and secondly the perceived contribution of the conversation in career terms. Interpersonal relationships of the conversations will then be considered in terms of trust and power. The conversation set-up section draws on the work of Hirsh *et al.* (2001) to provide a structure. Meanwhile, the perceived contribution findings are specifically related to the career shaper typology proposed by Bosley *et al.* (2009). Throughout the chapter the primary focus is on the perspective of the individual 'receivers' of the conversations. However, these are compared with the views of the other stakeholders in this research (the line managers and HR). This draws on other findings from this study for example the 'local dynamics' framework which emerged during analysis of phase one of the research and the perceived

roles of each stakeholder. As these data are described they will be considered in relation to existing literature, establishing how they support, extend or challenge other research.

6.2 Conversation set-up

The conversation set-up includes the trigger (or intended purpose) for the conversation, the instigator, the formality and the people involved. Consistent with Kidd *et al.* (2004), the data for conversations deemed positive by the participants were analysed separately from the other conversations (with outcomes deemed to be neutral, negative or unclear). Conversations were coded as positive if they led to action positioned as positive (such as a meeting, training or a new role) or if a positive emotion was described. The participant was not asked to categorize the conversation themselves. For example, JT was given the greater responsibility she had asked for, and PG described a conversation helping him to clarify his career goals. Meanwhile, CE described the outcome of a conversation as reassurance. The conversations coded as negative had a clear negative outcome such as being ignored, not listened to or undermined. For example, RG described feeling he had been '*told off*' when being given some feedback, and RC described being told to '*go home and think what I [he] was going to do'* when what he had wanted was support. The conversations coded as unclear represented those which had mixed outcomes, or where the participant had not indicated if they saw the outcome as positive or negative. For example, IR described the outcome of a conversation as *'I needed to prove myself so he would be able to recommend a potential programme'.* One difficulty with the categorization of the conversations as positive, neutral or negative is that the perspective of the conversation may have changed over time. For example, had IR subsequently been recommended to be part of the potential programme, he may have described that conversation as positive. Thus, the descriptions of the outcomes of the conversations should be recognised as socially constructed rather than clearly positive, negative or neutral.

As outlined in chapter 4, a total of 172 workplace career conversations were shared during the research. Participants described positive outcomes for the majority (63%) of the conversations. A further 24% were described as having neutral or unclear outcomes and the remainder, (13%) were depicted as having a negative impact on the participant. These data had a lower percentage of positive conversations than the research by Kidd *et al.* (2004), which identified 83% positive conversations. This difference is to be expected given that their sample comprised people who particularly responded to the opportunity to discuss '*effective career discussion*' experiences (Kidd *et al*., 2004:234). The data

for this study were further divided to separate 'single' conversations from those which were described as part of a series of conversations on a similar theme. This recognised that these two types of conversation could be very different. For example, a one-off conversation regarding a specific job role felt very different to a description of an ongoing developmental relationship with a series of conversations. Thus, I decided to report on single conversations separately from a series of themed conversations.

The data are described first in numerical terms to create a picture of the types of conversations which were depicted. Extracts from conversations are then introduced to illustrate the ways in which the set-up of these career conversations were described by participants. This is then compared with the views of the other stakeholders and previous research. The data from all conversations are illustrated in Table 6.1 below. The set-up features of the positive conversation are then summarised in Table 6.2 below. This shows how many of these conversations were instigated by the individual, were informal and were held with the boss (the most common categories). These data are then discussed.

Trigger	**All conversations**		**Single conversation**		**Series of themed conversations**	
	Total	**Positive**	**Total**	**Positive**	**Total**	**Positive**
Personal development	62	51	15	13	47	38
Specific job role	49	33	37	23	12	10
Exploring career options	23	11	12	6	11	5
Appraisal	10	3	2		8	3
Other	28	10	19	4	9	6
Total	**172**	**108**	**85**	**46**	**87**	**62**

Table 6.1: Summary of career conversations showing the number of positive 'single' and 'themed'

Trigger	'Single' positive conversations				'Series of themed' positive conversations			
	Total	Instigated by individual	Informal	With boss	Total	Instigated by individual	Informal	With boss
Personal development	13	6	9	5	38	7	19	17
Specific job role	23	1	22	7	10	4	10	1
Exploring career options	6	3	5	3	5	3	3	2
Appraisal					3			3
Other	4	3	4	1	6	1	2	5
TOTAL	**46**	13	40	16	**62**	15	37	25

Table 6.2: Set-up features of positive conversations

Conversation trigger

Each conversation was coded with the trigger or reason for the conversations taking place. Table 6.1 shows that the majority of positive career conversations were triggered by an interest in personal development (47%) or a discussion regarding a specific job role (31%). Positive conversations about specific job roles were especially prevalent within the single conversations described by participants (representing 50% of these conversations), and personal development conversations were a notable feature of the series of themed conversations (representing 61% of these conversations). This contrasts with appraisal which was a trigger for less than 3% of the positive workplace career conversations, a similarly low figure to that from Hirsh *et al.* (2001), which indicated that 7% of positive career conversations took place within an appraisal or development review setting. Each trigger shall be considered below.

Personal development. The biggest trigger for the described career conversations, particularly positive ones, was personal development. This had a broad definition including any informal conversations in the context of learning or feedback and more formal coaching or mentoring. As shown in Table 6.3, the personal development conversations covered 'where am I now?', 'where am I going?' and 'how do I get there?'. There was a high level of satisfaction with the personal development conversations described, with 82% being seen as positive (18% as neutral or unclear and only 5% as negative).

	Where am I now	Where am I going	How do I get there
Personal development	✔	✔	✔
Specific job role		✔	
Exploring career options		✔	
Appraisal	✔		

Table 6.3: Conversation trigger and primary described contribution

For some participants their personal development was the end goal. For others, it was part of a longer-term plan to secure a promotion or a new role. For example, YK, had held a number of sales based roles within the same organisation and described the role of the learning team in helping him;

> *'I would informally go and sit with them and have a chat – it really helped with my self-awareness – knowing my strengths and how to use them and avoiding temptations which I know can be destructive… My focus is now on what I can change in myself'*
>
> YK

However, for BT, her personal development was focused on her desire to progress upwards. She joined her current company because of the career opportunities and she described working with her manager to formalise her development.

> *'I have had quite a few conversations with the MD, he knows I'm keen to progress upwards and I'm working to a personal development plan. It's part of the agenda and we identify development areas and we're working on this. As a result, I'm getting coaching as part of a [formal] programme and this has all emerged from the conversations'*
>
> BT

Bosses were the largest 'giver' of the personal development conversations. In many cases the boss was performing a mentor type role, similar to that found in Kram's (1985) research. Other people involved in these conversations were external coaches and mentors or groups of people including colleagues and other managers. Only one of the personal development conversations with a boss was considered negative, and a further seven (14%) were either neutral or unclear.

Kidd *et al*. (2003), reviewed the perceived outcomes of the positive career conversations they studied. Participants could describe a number of outcomes and these were subsequently clustered into 12 categories, including self-insight and skill development which form part of the personal development category in this study. Whilst recognising the difference between perceived outcomes and the 'trigger' or intended purpose of conversations, some comparisons can be made. The Kidd *et al.* (2003) study reported 61% of conversations having an outcome on self-insight and 22% on development. These figures are slightly higher than those in the current study in which 47% of the positive discussions were triggered by personal development. However, the findings in this study support the importance of self-development as a reason for these conversations.

The prominence of personal development as a trigger for career conversations was consistent with the participant's view that ongoing learning was an important feature of career development (as discussed in chapter 5). Furthermore, it was also consistent with the expectation of the HR and OD professionals. As discussed in the previous chapter, they described personal development as a key output from career conversations. However, the level of satisfaction that participants expressed with these conversations was not anticipated by these stakeholders. They had expressed concern about managers' skills in holding such conversations. These findings confirm other research. For example, the perceived value of informal, organizationally based learning (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005). Furthermore, the described focus of these conversations was intrapersonal talent development (being the best I can be), rather than interpersonal (being better than others) (Sparrow & Makram, 2015).

Specific job role. A specific job opportunity was the trigger for 28% of the described conversations and was clearly described as part of the 'where am I going' contribution as shown in Table 6.3. Of these, 67% were considered as positive conversations, (often with the individual being offered a new role). Many of these conversations were different from other conversations described by participants as by their nature they tended to have a narrower agenda. In most instances these conversations were held with the person's line manager or another manager inviting them to apply for (or move to) a new role. For example;

> *'The next key conversation was a couple of years later. They were setting up a new business and there was a role in the customer people team. They said 'we think you'd be right for the job'*
>
> IS

These findings appear to be consistent with the research of Kidd *et al.* (2003), which found that 35% of the positive conversations led to a job move, prospect or application which had not been agreed before the discussion. However, this type of career conversation was not raised by the HR stakeholders. This could be due to the majority (97%) of these conversations being considered informal and therefore outside the process which the HR stakeholders were discussing. This observation could have wider implications in terms of equal opportunities and perceived fairness (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013b). In particular, this approach could favour those with high social capital (Iellatchitch *et al.*, 2003) and could discourage diversity.

Exploring Career Options. The category of exploring career options was initially considered as part of personal development. However, when these conversations were considered in more depth they had a very specific intention to build understanding of future career opportunities or options (thus being part of 'where am I going?'). They were therefore separated into a new category, representing 13% of all of the conversations described. For example, BC had enjoyed a varied career since joining the company 17 years earlier. He described conversations about *'what you could see yourself doing in the future'.* Similarly, IR, who was in a specialist role with no obvious next step, had *'a discussion with xxx on progression, looking at what's next for me'*. These positive conversations were examples of the desire for conversations which helped people to clarify '*where am I going'* and for managers to identify the '*sweet spot'* of overlap between individual aspirations and organisational needs as discussed in chapter 5.

Overall, these conversations were not as positively perceived by recipients, with only 48% of the conversations considered positive, 43% considered neutral and 9% being viewed as negative. Just under half of these conversations (43%) were held with the line manager and the two negative conversations both took place with line managers. In most instances the conversation was perceived as negative or neutral because the other party was unable or unwilling to engage in the conversation. For example, after a secondment MC did not want to return to her previous role but described being told *'it was that or nothing'*. Others had a neutral response, describing that conversations had taken place, but there was little impact. For example;

> *'I did have some conversations with my line manager about what it could look like for the next role, but there wasn't a lot of foresight'.*
>
> BW

For one of the participants the future conversation was negative for very different reasons. Her boss was trying to be proactive and explore career options with her, but these were not aligned with her career self-concept. She described her feelings about a recent conversation;

> *'he has an idea that this career might be good for me…he wants to push me in this direction and is trying to develop me in this. But it doesn't seem that relevant and I'm not interested…he wants something different from me, from what I want*'
>
> FW

These data would seem to indicate a lower overall occurrence of conversations on the future than found by Kidd *et al*. (2003). Their reported outcomes of positive career conversations indicated that 65% resulted in exploration of particular career options (compared with 10% in the current study). This difference in results could be influenced by a number of things. Firstly, it could result from the difference in the sample. The sample in the Kidd *et al.* (2003) study may have been involved in more of these discussions (all people in the sample had experienced positive career discussions and were from target groups within organisations which were part of a consortium interested in career development). Secondly, taking a narrative approach may have created a different recall experience, with fewer of these conversations described within the context of an overall career. Thirdly, the results may indicate a general trend for fewer of these future oriented conversations to be taking place. This could reflect changes in an organization's willingness to commit to a 'core' or long-term relational attachment with employees (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1995). However, research has identified this type of input as part of the line manager role. For example, Yarnall's (1988) description of the line manager role includes '*providing information on future opportunities within the organization*' and '*supporting individuals that are examining their career goals and plans*'.

The dissatisfaction with conversations on future career options is important in the context of alignment between individual aspirations and organisational needs. This theme will be further explored under the section below looking at the contribution of the conversation.

Appraisal. Consistent with other research (e.g. Kidd *et al.*, 2004), career conversations as part of an appraisal were largely viewed as having a neutral or negative effect. For example;

'Generally, as part of the annual appraisal managers have asked me what I want to do (for example, I'd like to develop this knowledge, do this type of role), but it's more form filling than an actual conversation. The appraisal gets written down and sent to HR but nothing happens'

FJ

However, as indicated in the table above, there were some positive experiences,

'the annual review is really the only opportunity to talk about career. My conversations have been quite open and [my manager] does listen and communicate up the hierarchy – but it does depend on your line manager'

RJ

These findings concur with the perspective given by the HR and OD professionals who consistently expressed their frustration with the way in which performance reviews tended to be implemented by line managers and the high level of variation according to line manager skills.

There was little reference to formal organizational career or talent management as a trigger for career conversations. Some of the participants were aware that they were considered to be 'high potential' or 'talent', but they did not reference specific activities or conversations that were taking place as a result of this. Indeed, YK had a series of moves and summarised it by saying;

'I sense that there was planning, but I wasn't told anything until I was tapped on the shoulder, [for each specific role] and then not told the whole story'

YK

However, there was one exception. PB described largely positive experiences of conversations as part of talent management at a previous employer;

'Conversations at [previous employer] made me feel recognised and invested in and listened to - it was clear where I was headed. It was a bit of playing the game and being up for the discussion but it was good to know that people were talking positively about me and I knew I was in the top right hand corner box [9 box model of potential and performance]. … They also used secondments as development opportunities with projects- for example going to Paris on the project was a halfway house, it felt really good. There were some downsides - you could feel that you were being judged or written off if you weren't globally mobile but I can't really think of big downsides'

PB

The lack of reference to formal talent management as an instigator of career conversations is an interesting feature of these results. Although the HR stakeholders acknowledged the importance of the informal, there was general consensus amongst them that helpful career conversations would be structured. Moreover, they expected them to be sequential, moving from aspirations to feedback and then to planning (as discussed in chapter 5). These data from individuals and line managers however indicate that many of the positive conversations did not follow this type of structure. As discussed in chapter 5, this could be a symptom of the low level of line manager engagement in talent management described by the HR stakeholders resulting in little talent management activity impacting them. These issues will be further discussed in chapter 7, exploring the impact of the organisational context.

Conversation instigator

Within this research the instigator of many of the conversations was identified. This was considered an important element of the conversation, with individuals who instigated career conversations demonstrating that they were engaging in career self-management. For the 'single' conversations, 70% had a clear instigator, and of these, 41% were instigated by the individual, with 28% instigated by a line manager. However, with the 'series of themed conversations' these data were often unclear, with only 56% of the conversations having a specific initiator. Of these, 43% were initiated by the individual and 40% were initiated by the line manager. The percentage of a clear initiator is comparable with the findings of Hirsh *et al.* (2001) who identified a clear initiator in 60% of their recorded conversations. However, the current research indicates a much lower percentage of positive conversations initiated by the individual (26% rather than 66%). This point will be discussed below in the context of individual career narratives.

Many of the conversation instigators described a proactive approach towards their wider career development. For example, OA described a very varied career with lots of career moves between organisations. He explained the importance of conversations as part of his career self-management;

> *'My philosophy is going to talk to people and it's amazing what opportunities emerge. I always have 2 -3 people and opportunities that I'm talking about'*
>
> OA

Similarly, CE had enjoyed rapid career progression since relocating to the UK 7 years earlier. She described her career in terms of her energy, commitment to learning, work ethic and willingness to put herself forwards. For example,

'I knew that I couldn't jump up to a more senior role straight away so I wanted to get some broader experience. I had a conversation with the site manager about what I should be doing if one day I wanted that role. They gave me sound advice and it confirmed what I already thought. So, I took a role in the product area'

CE

Another example of career self-management was shared by *RG* who used his network as a sounding board for his career reflections;

'I regularly (every 6 -12 months) reflect on my career and think where am I going. I draw a circle and mark how happy I am with different parts of my life and think what am I going to do about it. I also think what do I like? (your job must be something you like as otherwise it has an impact on other things in your circle); what am I good at? what market value does this have? I do the prep on my own and then I go and talk to some other people about it – 5 or 6 people who I really trust and will give me a different perspective…these people are trusted friends and confidants'

RG

These examples illustrate the 'networking' actions of career self-management, seeking formal and informal help (Inkson *et al*., 2015; Sturges *et al*., 2010), for example, making contact with senior people asking for career advice and building contacts with people in areas of interest for future career. Furthermore, these people were demonstrating the use of their social capital to support their career development (Zhang *et al.,* 2010), using the resources that were available to them to create opportunities for career conversations. These findings also demonstrate that many were taking the action they had described as being part of the individual's role (as discussed in chapter 5). Furthermore, this was illustrative of individual career ownership described by the HR stakeholders as being an important influence on successful conversations.

However, for some, this self-initiated action was not sufficient to create positive outcomes. LC had changed career direction and retrained to her current profession 10 years before. She consistently described her actions in terms of her ownership for making things happen. For example, she was unhappy in her role so applied to attend a leadership programme for time out of the office. She later initiated a 12 month secondment and attendance on other development programmes, she summarised her approach saying, '*I have constantly taken on more*'. However, despite this self-drive,

there was something missing for LC. Her self-initiated actions had helped her to secure development, but she felt that there was something that needed to come from her employer too;

> *'[My employer] has spent a lot of money on me, I've had study leave, but they've not said where is our five-year plan with you…It would be reasonable for the organisation to demand more from me, more payback…I don't have any specific aspirations, but I want to do more, to give more back, I want to be challenged and pushed'*
>
> LC

She felt that she was fulfilling her part of the psychological contract, but that her employer was not fulfilling their obligations (a breach with potential impact on her level of trust, commitment and investment, Conway & Briner, 2002). She wanted a mentor or someone to talk with to help her to create a longer-term plan for developing her career and increasing her contribution. However, within her network she said, 'I *don't know who to turn to'*. She seemed to be seeking someone to work with her through understanding her skills and current situation then looking at preferred options and a plan. This is consistent with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and research indicating that those who take more career self-management initiative expect more career support from their employer (DeVos *et al.*, 2009).

Conversation setting

The style of the conversation, part of a formal or ongoing process (such as appraisal, and diarised meetings with a mentor, manager or coach) or informal and ad-hoc was also captured and is shown in Table 6.4 below. From this Table it can be seen that 64% of all conversations described were categorized as informal. A slightly higher proportion of informal conversations were considered positive than formal conversations (70% of informal conversations were considered positive, 60 % of formal). Therefore, whilst informal approaches were described far more often than formal, they were not significantly more positive. However, whereas less than 10% of informal conversations were described as negative, 20% of formal conversations were described as negative. This could be due to people having different expectations of formal and informal conversations, or only seeking out informal conversations with people they expected to be supportive.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral/unknown	Total
Informal	77	10	23	110
Formal	15	5	5	25
Unknown	16	12	9	37
Total	108	27	37	172

Table 6.4: Setting of conversations with different outcomes

These data do not provide clear support for other findings on the value of informal approaches above formal approaches. For example, research on mentoring has suggested that informal mentoring relationships can be more effective than formal (Eby *et al*., 2010; *Kidd et al*., 2004). However, the varied approaches to mentoring and the differences between mentoring and career conversations make direct comparisons difficult. Indeed, Ragins *et al.* (2000) have suggested that success is more about the relationship than the setting, a line of argument to be considered in section 6.4 below. However, these data do illustrate that informal approaches make an important contribution to career development, a contribution largely overlooked by the HR participants.

Within the current research, some conversations seemed to naturally lend themselves to an informal setting. For example, IS had held a number of roles within the same industry. She described using her network informally;

> *'I've worked with some inspirational people and had some great chats – they've really influenced me. Some of it has been quite informal – having a coffee, sharing knowledge and from this I learnt and got the sense that nothing can stop you – you can be yourself'*
>
> IS

For some, these informal conversations had a significant impact. For example, PG had worked across a number of functions within the same organisation. He described the outcome of an informal conversation;

> *'he [a senior leader] asked me what I wanted and I said that I wanted a position to help me to build more relationships and broaden my experience. 3 months later I was in a global role – he had talked to me about it over coffee. If I hadn't had the conversation with him I may not have applied for it – the conversation helped me to clarify my goals and what I was looking for'*
>
> PG

These examples illustrate the importance of informal career support, as previously highlighted in other research (e.g. Bosley *et al*., 2009, Kidd *et al.*, 2004).

However, some participants described informal conversations being used when they would have preferred a more formal approach. For example, for PB, the informality of a series of conversations led to differing expectations between him and his manager. Having joined with a view to becoming a director, a structure change reduced his career development opportunities. He spoke to his boss about this but when another role became available, he was told he didn't have the experience. He took on board the feedback and worked on his development, but when the role became vacant again, someone else was appointed. This then prompted him to take a more structured approach to feedback and planning;

> *'through this process I realise that I've become a busy fool, I haven't prioritised my development – now I have, I get it, it's fine…It hurt a bit, … the episode could have been handled better though, it felt very unstructured and that false promises were made'*
>
> PB

Overall these data illustrate the perceived value of the informal and adhoc in addition to the more structured approaches. As such, these contrast with the HR stakeholder view from chapter 5 that career conversations should be consistent. These data also challenge the focus on structured conversations suggested by Smith & Campbell (2010), and Clutterbuck (2012) in the talent literature and Hirsh *et al.* (2001) in the career literature. Rather, they indicate the varied nature of conversations as a strength of the approach.

Other party in the conversation

Across the positive conversations described by participants 38% took place with the individual's own line manager (35% of the 'single' conversations and 40% of the 'ongoing' conversations). A further 14% took place with a senior leader within the organisation who was not the individual's boss. Few (6.5%) of the described conversations involved HR or internal learning/development people. Other people involved in the conversations included internal or external mentors and coaches, colleagues and people within a wider network. These data are different from the findings of Kidd *et al.* (2004) which indicated that 21% of the described positive conversations were with a line manager. As previously indicated, this could be due to the narrative approach through which people attributed career impact to a wider range of conversations.

Direct managers were often credited with having a significant positive impact on learning through ongoing developmental conversations. For example, FW described conversations with her boss;

> *'My discussions with him [line manager] were not clear or planned, but I was learning all the time – I didn't go on courses. My development was responding to what the business needed, for example I was taking more accountability, being part of the top team. He recognised my potential and gave me adhoc projects on my PDR – and that continued for 8 years!'*
>
> FW

In this instance, the line manager is an obvious person to have this conversation with because of their role in defining objectives and priorities. This is consistent with previous research which has identified that a line manager often takes on a mentoring role (Day & Allen, 2004; Eby & Mcmanus, 2004; Kram, 1985). However, as noted by Garvey, (2004) the developmental relationship with a manager has a risk of being influenced by issues of power. This will be explored as part of the interpersonal relationships section (section 6.4). The importance of the line manager as the other party in these conversations is consistent with the description of roles given by both the HR and line managers as stakeholders.

In other situations, people had to more actively search for the right person to speak with. When doing this they seemed to consider a number of things, for example, the person's credibility to make a valuable contribution and their perceived trustworthiness. For example, MC described being well networked with the senior leaders having joined the business as a graduate trainee more than 15 years previously;

> *'I have open conversations and engage with the CEO – people in the senior team are willing to talk – they have a great deal of knowledge and offer support. This is mostly informal – it happens through building the relationships and it's driven by me not anyone else'*
>
> MC

This example illustrates credibility arising from the relationship between the helper and the structure, whereby they can offer power, influence and structural knowledge (Bosley *et al.*, 2007). Other aspects of helper credibility suggested by Bosley *et al.* (2007), which arise from the relationship between the helper and the receiver will be considered in section 6.4 on interpersonal relationships.

6.3 Contribution of the career conversation

The conversations described by people were largely conceptualised in terms of the contribution they were seen to have made to their career. In some cases, the outcome was direct action (such as a new role or a planned development activity), but in many others, as with Kidd *et al*. (2004), the outcome was not linked to a specific action plan. In these instances, the contribution can be seen through a constructionist perspective of aiding understanding and building insight, providing a space for 'sense making'. This benefit was captured by MC;

> *'I don't really want advice as I don't want other people to shape my thinking. But I do want to unload my brain, to rehearse and clarify my own thinking and interest – it's this rather than their input. As my career has progressed I've looked for something different from support – now it's a pair of ears.'*
>
> *MC*

As discussed in chapter 2 (career literature review), the career shapers typology (Bosley *et al*., 2009) is a useful way to categorise and explore the contribution of different career conversations. Recognising that the typology may not be complete, Bosley *et al*. (2009) identified five career shaper categories based on narrative interviews with non-managerial employees, focused on career 'encounters'. Many of their respondents described the value of directive and practical support and it is therefore interesting to see how these categories applied to a largely managerial and professional participant group. The career shaper categories were all apparent within the current study. As with the original study, many conversations illustrated how a number of career shaper roles can operate within one conversation. The shaper typology is applied to the current research below and an additional two shaper categories are then proposed.

Advisor. The advisor is someone who offers 'opinions, suggestions or recommendations' which are perceived to shape the person's career (Bosley *et al.*, 2009:1501). This role was found to largely impact on career world-view (understanding of how careers work) and career direction/opportunities (but not on career self-concept). Within this, participants described advisors making two types of contribution. Firstly, developing their career world-view regarding how to manage a career within the particular organisational context. For example, ZM described her leader as helping her to '*navigate and read the political situations'.* Secondly within this research, advisors helped to clarify career options. However, this was often described as a two-way exchange rather

than the 'advice giving' approach indicated in the original research. This observed difference in how advice was offered within the career conversations contributed to the development of an additional proposed shaper category 'collaborator' to be described below.

Both HR and line manager stakeholders saw offering advice on career options and 'how to get on round here' as part of the line manager's role. However, RJ highlighted a difficulty with this, '*Managers don't know what the opportunities are so they can't really provide support'*. Furthermore, when asked about suggested improvements in career conversations, many participants indicated a desire for more advice, particularly regarding how they could progress and the future career options discussed above. These observations are discussed in chapter 7 in the context of specific organizations.

Informant. The informant is considered as an impartial provider of information about specific jobs and more general careers in terms of occupational requirements. Whilst there was some mention of informants, this was not a large contribution from the career conversations discussed in this research. The references to it tended to be regarding alternative career directions, largely given by friends or colleagues. This is perhaps because other parties (such as managers or head hunters) were considered to have an agenda or be seeking to influence. Additionally, most of the participants were already established in their career and did not express an interest in this type of support. However, some of the HR stakeholders identified clarity of career pathways as part of the role of the organisation. This was mirrored by the individuals who described the organisation's role in terms of 'illustrating how people can get there'. All stakeholders identified this as an opportunity to improve, to be discussed within the organisational context in chapter 7.

Witness. The witness career shaper makes their contribution through feedback, communicating their '*perceptions of participants' skills and personal qualities, both their weaknesses and their strengths'* (Bosley *et al.*, 2009: 1504). This was one of the most prevalent contributions within the present study. Feedback was a feature of many of the conversations, particularly those triggered by personal development. As already discussed, the line manager was involved in many of these. Often this feedback was seen as challenging, encouraging the participant to do more, or to extend themselves in new ways, thus impacting on their career self-concept. For example, PB described some specific feedback;

'I got very clear feedback for example on my strategic visioning, that I was not as reflective as he was (and could be emotional), and about being people and team orientated, rather than tougher minded'

PB

However, not all witness activity was well received. For example, to be considered helpful, feedback needed to be specific;

'I did have feedback through 360 that I needed to be more strategic but I wasn't sure what they meant – I needed them to be more specific. So, I had conversations about what it meant and how I could build experiences and challenge people's perceptions – I wanted them to see me as an excellent deliverer and also very strategic'

JP

The witness contribution was identified by all stakeholder groups as being an important part of the line manager's role. For example, line managers saw that they had a contribution to build self-awareness through feedback and to manage expectations, being honest. For the HR stakeholders, the manager's skill at giving feedback was seen to influence the individual's self-awareness. They were concerned that managers often had poor feedback skills. However, on the whole within this research the experiences participants shared of receiving feedback were positive.

As with the advisor role discussed above, the enactment of the witness role appeared often to be more two-way in the present research than it was in the original career shaper research. For example, witnesses were described as encouraging reflection and self-feedback as well as giving feedback. This provided a further indication that an additional shaper category could help with the application of the typology to a different (managerial and professional) population. Furthermore, some witnesses were described as having a very large impact on career self-concept. This was explored and an additional category was considered to capture this, tentatively called 'catalyst' (see below).

Gatekeeper. Gatekeepers have the power to '*provide or deny access to jobs, internal promotions or developmental opportunities'* (Bosley *et al.*, 2009:1506). They are conceived as proactive or responsive. Many gatekeeper activities were referenced in the career conversations in this research, often connected to applying for a specific role. However, there were also a lot of combined gatekeeper and witness contributions to support personal development. For example, there were many examples of line managers sharing some feedback and then exploring how a change could be supported. IH described one of his early career managers;

> *'My first manager at xxx stands out… she was supportive and challenging, taking me out of my comfort zone…she gave me great exposure and learning…and her network was helpful'*
>
> IH

Many of the gatekeepers described took a proactive role in finding opportunities for career development. For example, AM had applied for a job (which she didn't get). The application raised her profile with a senior leader who started to take an interest in her development, which opened new opportunities for her;

> *'that process put me on the MD's radar, it meant that he took an interest in my personal development plan,… and that unlocked my ability to work with a more senior mentor'*
>
> AM

Other gatekeeper examples were shared which took a collaborative approach, seeking to find opportunities which clearly supported the person's aspirations. These will be considered as part of the proposed new shaper category, collaborator. Similarly, gatekeeper activities were an important contributor to the second proposed new shaper category, catalyst.

Many of the negative conversations reported by participants seemed to be a result of gatekeepers '*hindering*' (Bosley *et al*., 2009:1507). For example, PJ was in a role which he didn't enjoy and had told his manager that he wanted to return to technical rather than sales work. He despondently stated '*I don't know what he did with that information…I feel a bit stuck in this role'*. More direct gatekeeper hindering was encountered by IS, who had a job move blocked and by AK whose boss in a previous organisation had penalised him for his out of work study (completing a Masters), telling him to '*stop thinking about this shit and do something useful'.*

The role of gatekeeper was recognised as important by all of the stakeholders. It was seen as part of the line manager and the organisation's role to provide access to development opportunities. Many line managers reported how they acted as gatekeepers for their team members, demonstrating how they tried to be proactive. The examples they shared tended to demonstrate their success at this and are explored in the section below on the proposed new shaper category, catalyst.

The potentially political aspect of a gatekeeper's role was raised by Bosley *et al.* (2009). This is explored in the section on interpersonal relationships.

Intermediary. An intermediary is seen to advocate and sponsor, they are influencers rather than having direct control as a gatekeeper would. Bosley *et al.* (2009) found that whilst intermediaries were a common part of participants' career world-view, they found few specific examples. Similarly, this research identified few specific examples of intermediaries. Furthermore, in some instances it was difficult to distinguish between an intermediary and a gatekeeper. For example, RC described a conversation with the HR Director which led to a job move. It is likely that the HR Director was both an initial gatekeeper and then an intermediary to make the case for his move. Similarly, the role of a head hunter is to be an initial gatekeeper and then to influence and advocate later in the process.

The role of intermediaries is linked in the original typology to a network of people who can act on your behalf. Some of the Bosley *et al*. (2009) participants disclosed that they felt that the lack of intermediaries had limited their career progression. This was not a feature in the current research. This difference could be as a result of the different participant groups, with the managerial and professional group feeling more confident to directly engage with a gatekeeper who could then advocate for them.

***Collaborator- a proposed additional category*.** As described above, a number of the conversations described indicated a higher level of collaboration than evidenced in the Bosley *et al.* (2009) research. Therefore, an additional shaper category of 'collaborator' is proposed. This captures a variety of shaper activities which could include witness, gatekeeper, advisor or intermediary. The distinguishing feature is that there is a clear intention to seek alignment between the individual's and organisation's interests. This category has been described in the literature, for example, talent conversations as a *'mutual endeavour'* (Smith & Campbell, 2011: 10). The HR stakeholders also alluded to this type of conversation when describing their desire for career conversations based on

partnership between the individual and the line manager/organisation, with a resulting joint career plan. Furthermore, the line managers as stakeholders identified the importance of finding the 'sweet spot' between the individual and the organisation, seeing this as an important part of their role. Indeed, these are the types of conversations which seem most likely to support alignment as discussed in chapter 5.

From the conversations described in this research, 20 (12% of all conversations, 19% of the positive conversations) were categorized as collaborative in nature. To be categorized as 'collaborator conversations', they were explicitly positioned as meeting the individual's needs as well as those of the organisation within the conversation itself. Other conversations may have also done this, but if that was not how they were explained in the research, they were not included in the category. Examples of this positioning include: '*really focused on <u>what you want to do</u>,'* (CE); '*conversation about <u>my plans, about what I want to do'</u> (IR); 'she was interested in <u>how I felt and what I wanted to do</u>' (BF);* '*she's good at <u>matching business and individual needs</u>, she knows what the right thing to do is' (IM).*

These conversations were largely held with the line manager (40%) or another senior leader (40%). Personal development was the trigger for nearly two thirds (65%) of the conversations. Exploring future opportunities was a trigger for a fifth (20%) and the others were triggered by a specific job or an appraisal based conversation. The outcomes of the conversations were varied and included ongoing coaching with the boss, a planned follow-up conversation regarding career options and taking up a new role. Only three of the 20 conversations (15%) took place as part of a structured process. Two of these were as part of an appraisal discussion and the third was part of an HR driven programme to assess and develop people's potential which was part of the organization's talent management approach.

Participants gave a clear sense of valuing these conversations, which were positioned as taking place within strong, trusting relationships. For example, IS summarised some of her experiences;

> *'the great managers really understood me. They accepted I was a bit different to others in the business. They understood my drivers and listened, it was a two-way relationship. They looked at what I wanted from life and career and had a genuine interest in where I was coming from…'*
>
> IS

HW described his boss as '*great at having conversations and aligning action during development*'. When asked what made her so good, he described her approach;

> *'She really cares very deeply about people working for her - she wants to make a meaningful difference to helping them grow. She's got a keen eye to understand how to help people with their development, it really is fantastic. She asked lots of questions to understand - she wanted to know about me and my drivers and then she got back on this helping me to push things forward'*
>
> HW

These examples illustrate credibility on the basis of the relationship between the helper and the receiver (Bosley *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, these extracts also create a sense of someone who is on their side, part of the partiality element of Bosley *et al.'s* (2007) anatomy of credibility. These examples also illustrate a developmental approach to career support (Inkson *et al.*, 2015). The manager can be seen helping people through developing understanding of the individual's aspirations and motivations. The examples can also be considered through the lens of attachment theory, with the line manager as caregiver, involved in collaborative career planning (Crawshaw & Game, 2015).

Further examples of collaborative conversations were described from the line manager's perspective. It is possible that the team member involved may not have viewed these conversations as collaborative. However, these examples do indicate the value that managers placed on achieving these types of conversations. RM described a series of conversations he was having with a team member. They were exploring together how to meet her desire for growth alongside her restrictions on location. He summarised the situation;

> *'We need to agree how we can help her to grow in her own role and expand the scope. This person, she is very motivated, she loves the business, she wants to stay, wants to grow, we need to catch this and keep her motivated. We've been giving her projects, things that give her the opportunity to develop skills – it helps me and her'.*
>
> RM

However, one line manager commented that not all team members want this type of relationship and support. GB described the difference in her approach to two team members, one of whom was very keen to develop and instigated a lot of new challenges, resulting in a positive and

collaborative relationship. The other team member had asked to do something, and this was then delegated to them, '*but it was painful because they were not really interested'.*

Some wider issues emerged in terms of the collaborator conversations. There is a clear link to power and whether it is really possible for a manager (or other senior leader) to genuinely balance the needs of the individual and the organisation. This will be explored as part of the interpersonal relationships section below. One of the perceived barriers to collaborator conversations was considered by both HR and line manager stakeholder to be the cultural environment. The impact of this will be explored in chapter 7.

***Catalyst - a proposed additional category*.** A group of participants described the significant positive influence that one particular manager had had on their career. This manager was credited with helping the individual to see new possibilities in themselves. This support is suggested as a new category of career helper. The distinguishing feature of the catalyst is that they are credited with significant influence on career self-concept and subsequent career aspiration and direction through a proactive and challenging approach. Whilst not always emerging as part of specific conversations the perceived impact of these managers was described in the career narrative. This contribution may not have been noticed at the time, but it was assigned significance in subsequent descriptions of career. As such, this support was positioned as an important part of career narrative. The word catalyst was chosen to describe this category for two reasons. Firstly, it provided a powerful descriptor of creating or accelerating change and transformation. Secondly, the metaphor was accessible and clear, and therefore consistent with the labels selected for the other categories (such as gatekeeper). However, one feature of a catalyst does not fit as well. A catalyst does not itself change as a result of the change it creates. This may not be the case with career catalysts, but this was not explored in this research.

Analysis showed that the catalyst contribution was a consistent theme, with 25% of the participants describing this type of career influence. The manager's career shaper role was part witness and part proactive gatekeeper. However, it was delivered in a way that was often described as tough and challenging, pushing the person to do more, giving them opportunities to test themselves and demonstrating strong belief in their abilities. Many of these experiences were summarised in the 'in at the deep-end' comments on what had contributed to career success described in chapter 5. The manager seemed motivated by their own view of the person's potential rather than an aspiration being expressed by the individual, and as such, it was not necessarily a collaborative experience.

Indeed, a number of the participants described it as uncomfortable, although with hindsight they were very appreciative.

> *'I didn't realise at the time just how good he was, he was really good and fair and would challenge, but not in a personal way. There was lots of feedback and you would be anxious about performance meetings, because you wanted to do well – you would rise to the challenge he'd set…it was about respect, confidence, he toughened us up. One of my weaknesses was that I wasn't resilient, he made me be resilient to things… he had a huge impact as a line manager. It's really hard to direct your career for yourself'*
>
> UM

> *'He was pushing me at all times – sometimes it was uncomfortable…I was learning all the time, being held to account– he always wanted me to be better, it was very competitive, it brought this out in me'*
>
> FW

> *'She was supportive and challenging, taking me out of my comfort zone, she helped to unlock skills that her immediate team were good at and showed great confidence in what we were doing'*
>
> RM

This level of discomfort has also emerged in other literature. For example, Correia *et al.* (2016), conducted a longitudinal study of the coach/coachee relationship. They described a process of identifying beliefs, re-framing and increasing self-awareness as being uncomfortable, leading to continually questioning self. Similarly, Kidd *et al.* (2004) identify that 'challenge and advice' may involve people feeling pushed out of their comfort zone.

The described cluster of behaviours, activities and outcomes seems to be notably different from the existing shaper categories and therefore the additional category of 'catalyst' is proposed. As stated above, this is likely to be a role taken by line managers who are also able to be gatekeepers and open up new opportunities and experiences which would not normally be available to a person in that role. There may also be downsides to the role. Within the present research there were no negative experiences shared. However, it is recognised that some of the behaviours could, in a different environment, be received as unwanted and even verging on bullying, particularly given the power

issues at play. The relationship between the line manager and the individual is likely to be a key influence on how the catalyst behaviour is perceived. For example, as part of a trusting relationship the behaviour is likely to be viewed as constructive (as with the above examples). However, if taking place without trust and respect, the behaviour may be perceived very differently.

The catalyst role was also described by participants in their role as line managers. A number of managers took great pride in sharing their stories of helping others in this way. This tended to be described as something that they personally valued, rather than something driven by an HR process. As such, it supports the finding that personal motivation rather than policy or targets is frequently the motivation for managers to be involved in 'personnel activity' (e.g. McGovern *et al.*, 1997; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). For example, CL described his contribution to his team;

> *'I try to measure my success by what I have been able to positively impact on in terms of the organisation and also what impact I have had on talented individuals to help unlock their potential. There are some that I have had a positive impact on and they are now outstandingly successful. The actions I did was supporting them in their development, giving them the opportunity. I feel pleased if I played a small part – and this is a key part of the role and of my satisfaction in it. Growing talent to help fulfil potential helps the individual and as a side benefit it helps the employer'*
>
> CL

Similarly, BJ spoke of helping an individual who was about to be made redundant and did not have a good reputation in the business:

> *'I have a history of recruiting 'waifs and strays', historically I often seem to be the first person to really give them feedback about their impact and why things were not going well for them. I'm also happy to give them a genuine opportunity to develop and grow and give people the chance to change their opinion of the person'*
>
> BJ

The person moved to a new role where they were very successful.

The evidence of line managers regarding the catalyst role should be treated with caution. It is possible that the team members they were working with may not have perceived the contribution as that of a catalyst. For example, Smith & Campbell (2011) indicate, line managers may overestimate

their contribution in the development of their team. Similarly, Truss (2001) described a disconnect between what the managers intend and the received impact on team members. This discrepancy in perspectives was also picked up on by some of the HR stakeholders. For example, Bridget stated that;

> *'the managers feel they are doing it well- - which isn't the perception of their team members – there's a mismatch*!'.
>
> Bridget

Not all managers saw catalyst activities as part of their role, with a number describing that the '*spark*' needs to come from the individual (MC). In these instances, the line manager is likely to be a responsive gatekeeper and therefore not a catalyst.

The career catalyst seemed to be a consistent theme of individual and line manager narratives. It would be interesting to research this further as a possible category of career shaper. For example, was there any evidence of a catalyst category within the original research? What are the perceived downsides (for the individual, the line manager and the organisation) to career catalyst role? How does the power dynamic play out in these relationships and what are the implications for equality of opportunity?

From the above descriptions, it can be seen that the shaper categories (Bosley *et al.*, 2009) provided a helpful taxonomy for describing the different types of career conversation. The findings in this research have also indicated that two additional categories could be helpful, collaborator and career catalyst.

6.4 Perceived interpersonal relationships

This section explores what was going on within the conversations in terms of the behaviours and nature of the relationship. The importance of relationship has been previously identified in many studies (e.g. Bosley *et al.*, 2007; Kidd *et al.*, 2003; Ragins *et al.*, 2000). Due to the research approach for this study, information on the relationships between those involved in career conversations was not consistently collected. Rather, this information is only available for conversations where the participant chose to share it in response to an open question such as 'tell me more about that', or

'what was it that made this so helpful'. This is in contrast to Kidd *et al*., (2004) who collected this information through the structure of their interviews. The focus in this section is particularly on issues of trust and power which emerged from the conversation descriptions (although it should be noted that these were not labelled by the participants as power issues).

Trust was described by a number of participants as an important contributor to helpful conversations. Personal disclosure, or asking for help was particularly associated with trust. For example, UM spoke in general terms about her experiences;

'The desire to open up to have these conversations is down to the individual, you have to trust the person and make yourself vulnerable'

UM

Often participants described selecting someone to talk to based on their trust in them. For example, RC went through a very difficult period in his career and was planning to leave the business, but decided instead to have a conversation;

'I knew and trusted the HRD – she listened, understood and identified an opportunity for a job which I could love not hate'.

RC

The absence, or breakdown of trust was also mentioned by some in both specific and general terms;

'I felt that she was weak to let me take it. She didn't defend me I lost a lot of trust and respect'

BF

'The tightly managed approach has consequences, because people don't feel trusted'

CL

The importance of trust was also frequently referenced by the HR stakeholders. Indeed, it emerged in the initial analysis as a key feature of the local dynamics of the contextual map (to be discussed in more detail in chapter 7). Across the HR interviews, three elements of trust were described. Firstly, mutuality (as discussed under the collaborator role) was referenced with the approach working '*for the individual and the business'* (Jessica). Secondly, honesty was identified, with an awareness that this could be difficult for both parties. For example, Richard observed that it

can be '*culturally expected*' that individuals will say that they want to progress and are mobile, and they may not feel able to be honest if this is not the case. Similarly, managers may not want to be honest about someone's likely career path for fear of demotivating them. Thirdly, Suzanne raised the issue of interpersonal style, with some managers tending to adopt a prescriptive approach with comments like '*we think this would be good for you*', which was not seen as a good starting point for mutual trust and openness.

A further area of trust was raised by the OD consultants who questioned the role of internal versus external career support. Many of the OD consultants were involved in providing external coaching support and saw benefits of this approach to the individual and the organisation. They felt that it was far easier to establish trust, enabling more openness and that an external person could be an advocate in a way that was difficult for an internal person. This was summarised by Gillian;

> *'Trust is a big issue - are you going to trust the organisation if you open up and talk about your long term plans? The company is really just interested in you doing a good job.'*
>
> Gillian

The importance of trusting relationships as a precursor to positive career conversations is a consistent theme in the literature. For example, Hirsh *et al*. (2001) refer to trust in the conversation giver's motives;

> '*it was important that the giver had the individual's best interests at heart and no particular agenda of their own'*
>
> Hirsh *et al*. (2001: 15)

This is consistent with the findings of Bosley *et al.*, (2007) which described one type of career helper credibility emerging from a personal knowledge, with knowledge, understanding and care. Trust is also a wider theme in the research on dialogue (e.g. Bokeno, 2007) and psychological contract (e.g. Guest, 2004). Given the prevalence of 'trust' as an ascribed contributor to successful conversations, it was surprising that it was not a more common feature of the descriptions by participants. This could be because the specific question was not asked, or because it was assumed it was a natural part of the conversations they were describing. However, it could also illustrate that for some types of career conversation trust is not seen as an important feature. For example, if someone is a gatekeeper, it may be that they make their contribution through their position, not because of a trusting

relationship. In these instances, the person's credibility as a helper was likely to be established through their structural role or knowledge. Thus, these findings could be seen to support the proposition that credibility may emerge from either structural role, relationship or both (Bosley *et al.*, 2007).

Power dynamics in the context of careers were considered in the literature review. This highlighted the potential negative impact of power within coaching and mentoring relationships (e.g. Garvey, 2004; Rostron, 2009) and the potential conflicts for line managers when developing team members (e.g. Gibb, 2003; Nixon & Carroll, 1994). Elements of power were discussed in chapter 5 when looking at alignment. In particular, this considered organizational transparency and the balance between individual and organizational needs in talent management and career development. The perceived impact of power as it emerged in individual's descriptions of career conversations has been considered at various points in this chapter (for example, as part of the discussion on the career catalyst and collaborator and when discussing the line manager's role).

Additional references to power dynamics in the career conversations are described below. For example, JP described her relationship with a previous boss. She knew she was part of high potential group;

> '*but I never had a truly clear conversation about the long-term, for example about my interest in the marketing director role.'*
>
> JP

She described that her boss needed her to be a '*capable pair of hands'*, and she later had a conversation about whether she wanted to be a marketing director or '*an excellent number 2'.* When describing this JP gave no indication that she found her boss manipulative, or that he was using his power to limit her career options. However, her comment about the relationship that her boss was '*very reliant on me, it was odd but healthy',* indicates that he may have been exerting power to further his own goals rather than those of JP. Similarly, FL gave her power to her boss, '*He's the boss, I should do what he wants*'. For FL, her primary aim was to please her boss and thus she would buy in to whatever he suggested (as described by Riddle & Ting, 2006).

6.5 Summary

In this chapter career conversations have been discussed from the perspective of the way they are set up, the contribution of the conversation and the relationship between the parties involved in the conversation.

Supporting the work of Kidd *et al*. (2004), many different types of career conversations were considered to be helpful. Participants reported positive conversations about personal development, and there were also lots of positive conversations regarding specific job roles. However, there were fewer conversations (and a lower proportion of positive conversations) looking at future career options when compared with Kidd *et al.* (2004). Many of the positive conversations described in this research were informal and took place with the line manager. Rather than benefitting from a prescribed type of career conversation, people seemed to find different types of conversation helpful at different times, possibly linked to different stages in their career cycle (Inkson *et al.*, 2015). This is contrary to the view of many of the HR stakeholders who, despite saying they recognised the value of the informal, expressed a desire for consistent, structured conversations which took place regularly. The value of informal, ad hoc conversations is also omitted from many of the recommendations which appear in the talent management literature.

Within the current study there was evidence to support for all five of the career shaper categories described by Bosley *et al*. (2009). However, within this sample, there seemed to be two additional categories. Firstly, a 'collaborator' category is proposed. This captures the career shaper who is genuinely working to match the needs of the individual and the organisation. As such, this is the category which can potentially help careers to be jointly managed (Clarke, 2013), acting as a bridge between the organizational talent and individual career agendas. Secondly, a 'catalyst' category is proposed. This is a line manager who challenges an individual to develop a new career self-concept and provides opportunities to support this. There was evidence of both new categories and they were also described by the other stakeholder groups. It is suggested that further research is conducted to develop greater insight into these categories to understand how common they are and how they can contribute to career development and talent management practice.

The impact of interpersonal relationships highlighted that trust is an important feature of many career conversations. However, it was not positioned as an essential element of all

conversations. Issues of power were also seen to impact on career conversations, but the influence of this seemed to be varied, illustrating the complex and interacting nature of power relationships.

Chapter 7: The influence of organizational context

Question four: In what ways does organizational context seem to influence the alignment of organizational talent needs with individual career goals, and the nature of career conversations?

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in the literature review, there have been calls for talent management to be studied within its social and organizational context (e.g. Collings, 2014; Iles *et al.,* 2010). However, these influences remain under-researched within talent management (Thunnissen *et al*., 2013a) and more generally (Johns, 2006). The present study aimed to make a contribution in this area. Firstly, this was done through analysing the HR and OD perspectives of context. Secondly, the five case study organizations provided data on contextual influences on talent management and career development from the stakeholder perspectives of line managers and individuals. The inclusion of specific conversations and general comments enabled a review of the perceived and experienced impact of culture on career conversations within these organizations.

The HR and OD perspectives will be introduced first. This will build on the analysis of phase one of the research and will describe the contextual map which was introduced in chapter 4 (methodology). Each case study organization will then be briefly introduced. This will include reference to the perceived purpose of talent management, the participants involved in the research, the formality of talent management structures (from De Vos et al, 2009), the culture with reference to career and talent (based on Schein cultural layers, e.g. 2010). Experienced career conversations from each case study will then be considered to understand any organizational differences which emerge in terms of trigger, instigator, set-up, contribution and relationship. For this section, the data for each case study were separated from other conversations described by each participant which happened with previous employers. Wider views from each case study are then considered to build understanding of what people perceived to be working well and what they thought could be improved. Throughout there is reference to the different stakeholder perspectives and published research, linking this to the contextual map.

7.2 HR and OD perspective on contextual influences

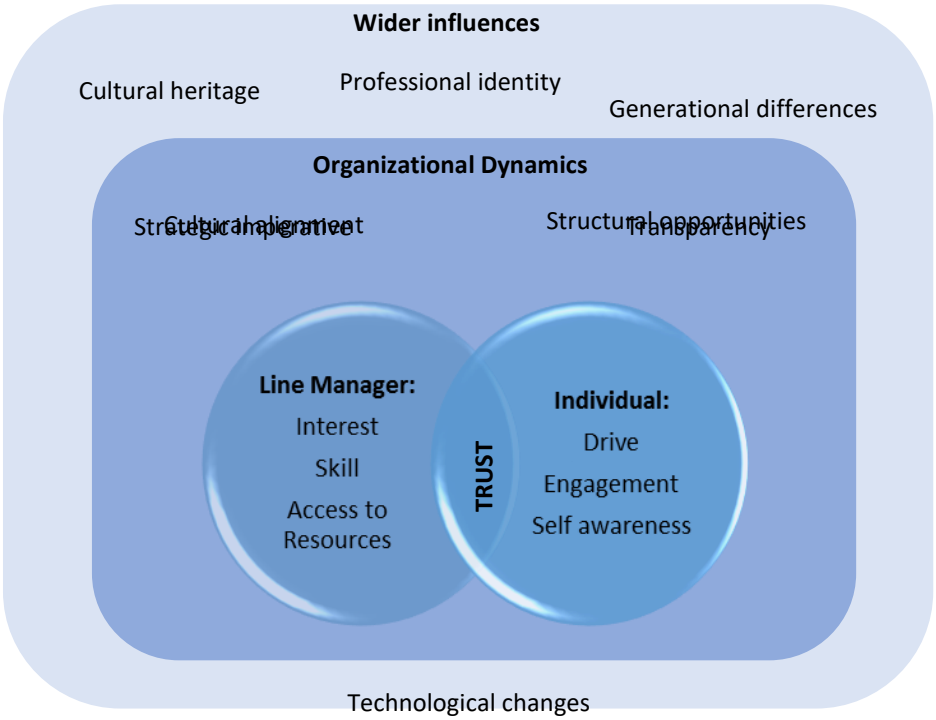


Figure 7.1. Contextual map of talent and career influences.

The HR participants' views of contextual influences were reviewed as the research was being conducted. As described in chapter 4 (methodology) these data were formed into a 'contextual map' illustrating the different dynamic relationships which were described as influencing organizational talent management and individual career development. The metaphor of a map is widely used in academic work (e.g. the attachment map, Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni, 1995; or the conceptual map for career counselling, McMahon & Patton, 2006). The map metaphor seems an appropriate way of considering the contextual influences in this study, indicating a representation or perspective of the territory. The contextual map emerging in this study (recreated as Figure 7.1) shows a 'local dynamic', an 'organizational dynamic' and 'wider influences'. The positioning of these three levels is intended to illustrate that at the local level of the individual and the line manager there are a number of things which are seen to influence career development and talent management. This relationship takes place within the context of the organization, with a number of potential influences at this level. Beyond this there were seen to be wider influences which could have some bearing on the talent management and career development and are represented as the 'wider context'. This conceptualization of different levels of context is consistent with the approach suggested by Johns

(2006). The interactive nature of the relationships is not shown in the diagram itself, but is captured in the use of the label 'dynamics'. All of the headings within the diagram emerged from the interviews, with at least five participants observing that it was an important influence which they had noted. The headings with the lowest frequency of discussion were technological changes and individual self-awareness. Some of the headings (for example cultural alignment and line manager skills) were raised and discussed by most participants. Each area is discussed below, drawing out the possible implications for alignment between organizational and individual needs in general and for career conversations in particular.

Local dynamics

The local dynamics refers to the interaction between the individual, the line manager and their relationship. They were described as dynamic parts of a system. Thus, if the line manager was committed to supporting the career development of a team member, they were likely to invest more time in this which was seen as likely to then increase the drive, engagement and self-awareness of the individual. Similarly, if the individual was highly driven in career terms, it was felt that they would lead their line manager and make proactive requests for support and resources. Thus, regardless of the organizational dynamics it was seen that a driven individual or a committed line manager could create an environment of positive individual career development. The focus of local dynamics was seen as primarily individual career development and enactment of some organizational talent management processes.

Individual	
Drive	• A desire to progress and grow with a willingness to invest time and energy to make it happen, normally accompanied by a sense of direction
Engagement	• Interest and desire to grow their career within the current organization rather than exploring external options
Self-awareness	• Awareness of: personal strengths and weaknesses; how to motivate self and how to influence others
Line manager	
Interest	• The commitment and interest to proactively support the development of team members through conversations, feedback and opportunities
Skill	• The interpersonal skills to make assessments, give feedback, explore career aspirations and create development plans
Access to resources	• The line manager's ability to create development opportunities through their network, knowledge, informal and formal learning activities

Trust	
Relationship	• Created through mutual respect, honesty and openness with a belief that the other party will provide genuine help

Table 7.1: Description of local dynamics, HR participants

A number of other points emerged in the development of the local dynamics, but were not raised by sufficient numbers of people to be included in the contextual map. Network was considered by Charlie as her biggest 'aha' moment when exploring how to help people develop wider careers. Some of the actions on her project were subsequently focused on helping people to develop a balanced and purposeful network. Career helpers other than line managers were also raised by some people. For example, Marie, an OD consultant drew a parallel with mentoring;

> *'most successful people will identify one or more critical people who can hold doors open – relationships of high trust, showing the way, enabling and protecting. The informal can be more valuable and the individual will often find the mentor they need'*
>
> Marie

The local dynamics illustrate a number of parallels with previously published research on career self-management and the line manager's role. For example, it encompasses providing feedback and supporting personal development (e.g. Yarnall, 1998), and a recognition of the importance of line manager skill (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008). Similarly, reference to engagement can be seen to relate to career self-management activity which is 'intra-organizationally' focused rather than 'inter-organizationally' driven. However, some elements described in previous literature were not evident from this research. In particular, there was no specific mention of the line manager's role in providing information on future skills needs of the organization (e.g. Yarnall, 1998). This is an interesting omission in the context of looking at alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development. This could have been implicit, but was not specifically identified.

Organizational dynamics

Some of the organizational dynamics were discussed in chapter 5 in terms of the perceived aims of talent management. As with the local dynamics, these were considered to interact with each other. Furthermore, where the organizational dynamics were supportive of individual career

development, it was expected that this would positively influence the local dynamics. A summary of the organizational dynamics is given in Table 7.2.

Strategic imperative	• Why the organization wants to invest in talent management activities, influencing the top level engagement, the definition of talent (people, positions, pools) and the degree of urgency
Cultural alignment	• The extent to which the talent management activities were consistent with the existing culture. For example, alignment in terms of the skills being looked for, the formal assessment approaches, feedback, sharing of information and commitment to following processes
Structural opportunities	• Opportunities for learning and development within role and in other roles across the organization through training, secondment, projects, lateral moves and promotions
Transparency	• Clarity regarding the roles and processes for career development and talent management with all parties having a shared understanding of how you get on round here or the 'career deal', including pathways

Table 7.2: Description of organizational dynamics, HR participants

The organizational dynamics were seen to influence talent management and career development in many ways. For example, Simon described the importance in his organization of people who were highly competitive and would always deliver their targets;

> '*We want people who don't need lots of support and are turned on by doing new things – real entrepreneurs. We have a clear culture of being competitive against peers – comparing your success with theirs and our approach to careers and talent reflects this*. *Our premise is that great people don't need help – they will find their way to the top'*.
>
> Simon

This was reflected in their talent approach which gave financial reward for those identified as talent and gave lots of stretch assignments but little development support. In contrast, Jessica described her organization as focused on long-term strategic goals. They provided lots of apprenticeships, coaching, secondments and other development opportunities. It was described as taking place within a highly supportive environment where people were encouraged to shape their own future in line with their aspirations.

Many of the participants saw structural opportunities as the biggest challenge. For example, Rod referred to successive de-layering of the hierarchy which meant that there were '*fewer stepping stone roles'* for people to broaden experience in preparation for the more senior positions. Steve used metaphor to explain the challenge;

'There's a challenge with career pathways as roles often go missing – so we have lots of junior people and then chasms to the next roles with few bridges'

Steve

The lack of promotional opportunities was seen as a significant restriction on the organization's ability to meet individual aspirations. This, in turn was influenced in some organizations by a culture of risk aversion. Consequently, these organizations tended to favour external candidates because the internal ones were not considered to be ready. This was seen as having a negative impact on individual commitment (an example of a breach of the psychological contract). Furthermore, Hugo, an OD consultant, linked this to a focus on transactional relationships and short-term goals which reduced an organization's interest in investing in longer-term development activities.

Transparency of the 'career deal' was mentioned earlier. This was seen as including clarity on roles, clarity on routes for progression and the level of openness and honesty discussed in chapter 5. Most of the participants felt that this was an area for improvement. Although there was often clarity on advertising of positions, the wider issue of how to progress was often seen as opaque. This would make it difficult for individuals to build a *'career world view'* (Bosley *et al.*, 2009) that reflected how things generally happened in a given organization. For example, Richard described his previous organization;

'there was a lot of favouritism, it wasn't clear to individuals how they could get on'

Richard

Similarly, John, a career coach, agreed that this could be improved, stating *'there's often little clarity about the 'deal' on career ownership'*. Furthermore, Marie, an OD consultant referred to one organization which talked about a '*self-serve'* model for career development, but the experience of the people was that it was '*all about tribes and patronage'*. This is unlikely to be viewed as *'just and fair'* Thunnissen *et al.* (2013b). A number of participants were aware that there was a lot of unfairness in the way people progressed. This was evidenced in the high number of informal conversations about specific job roles as described in chapter six and may have negatively impacted on perception of psychological contract fulfilment (Conway & Briner, 2002). However, this reported unfairness was in contrast to the hope that consistent talent management practices would increase fairness, and transparency of decision making. Meanwhile, some organizations did have some very clear expectations. For example, Stephen, an OD consultant, described a client which was very clear that in order to be a country Managing Director you needed to first be a director in another country. This demonstrated high clarity of the career path for this role.

Other issues and concerns were also raised. For example, the challenge when the career deal changed was identified. Hermione discussed a previous employer who attracted people to join with the promise of exciting career development opportunities. They were able to satisfy these expectations until they experienced a down-turn in business and had no opportunities to offer. They tried to communicate a new career deal, but they weren't entirely successful and turnover increased dramatically as people looked elsewhere for their career growth. Similarly, Suzanne referenced employer branding and the need to ensure that the career deal given at recruitment could be delivered when people joined.

All of the elements identified within organizational context have also emerged in previous research. In particular, these findings support Garrow & Hirsh's (2008) paper on 'focus and fit' in terms of the organizational dynamics and the fit to both culture and strategy. Furthermore, some of the language used by the HR and OD participants is directly comparable to Stahl *et al.'s* (2012) six principles of talent. These six principles include alignment with strategy, internal consistency and cultural embeddedness and management involvement (as indicated in the local dynamics). Two of the principles did not emerge as strong themes in this research: balance of local and global needs and employer branding through differentiation. The issue of local versus global needs was raised by three participants who worked in global environments and employer branding was identified by a different three participants, but these lower frequencies meant that these issues were not included in the contextual map.

Wider influences

Wider influences were also identified by a number of the participants. These captured influences outside the organization and were seen as having a significant impact. For example, cultural heritage was seen to influence career expectations, feedback style and openness. Professional identity (particularly in engineering and medicine) was seen to influence career aspirations and career pathways beyond the organization. Generational differences were also identified with some concerns that younger people wanted a different career deal. These were not extensively analysed within this study. However, it is interesting to note that all of these themes are consistent with previously published research. For example, research on cultural differences (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2014; Vaiman & Holden, 2011) and professional identity (Garrow & Hirsh, 2008).

The contextual map presented here can be seen to build on the work of both Garrow & Hirsh (2008) and Stahl *et al.* (2012), offering a visual way of considering the context. Furthermore, the map illustrates a way in which influences on organizational talent management and individual career development can be combined and represented in one diagram. This potentially provides a practical way of combining the perspectives. However, at present the map just reflects the perspective of the HR and OD participants. As the case studies are considered in the rest of this chapter, the application of the map to specific settings and the perspective of the individual and line manager will be considered. This will enable further refinement of the contextual map.

7.3 Case study one – JW

JW has been established for over 30 years. It is committed to excellence in customer service and aims to deliver slow, sustainable growth rather than short term profit. The business has been through a number of phases of growth and at the time of the research employed approximately 2000 people worldwide. It prided itself on having an idiosyncratic culture with high trust and high empowerment. This was partly evidenced through there being few formal processes within the business and a lot of the day to day work being conducted through conversation rather than through formal meetings and reporting. RJ summed this up saying;

> '*we have lots of conversations and a five minute report. The conversations are the currency'.*
>
> RJ

This informal approach had previously applied to their people processes too. However, over the previous 3 – 4 years, they had implemented a more structured approach. This included the advertising of all positions, a set format for role profiles, a focus on attitude and drive rather than skill and a commitment to quarterly reviews. There was a high degree of consistency in the way the culture was described from all stakeholder perspectives.

The culture was described by the senior people leader (not called HR) as following a coaching approach;

> '*asking great questions, listening and exploring; keeping conversations going is the most important thing and throughout it needs to link back to the culture'*.
>
> JW senior people leader

This approach matched their stated commitment to internal development. It was also consistent with their quadrant 1 position on the HR architecture model - high value, high uniqueness (Lepak & Snell,

1999) as emphasized by the difficulty they described in finding suitable experienced hires. Furthermore, continuity of personnel for the future was considered very important, as illustrated by the comment from the senior people leader, '*we expect our people to be running our business for the next 10 – 20 years'.* Research by De Vos & Dries (2013), found that organizations with a high desire for continuity were more likely to value intra-organizational mobility and to have a high number of formalised career management practices. The findings from JW partially support this. Evidence showed a high commitment to intra-organizational careers, with seven of the nine participants having only worked within this business in their professional working life (average length of service over 16 years). Furthermore, eight of the participants had experienced cross-functional careers, and the one who had remained within the same function had completed an overseas assignment. However, rather than a high number of formalised career management practices, often associated with a paternalistic approach, (Arnold & Cohen, 2008), JW operated with very few (see Appendix 19 showing the career management practices for each of the case study organizations). This was consistent with their overall culture, which as described above, was low on process and policy.

Trigger	**Case study 1 JW N = 9**		**Case study 2 HX N = 10**		**Case study 3 MT N = 8**		**Case study 4 SB N = 9**		**Case study 5 IH N = 4**	
	Total	+ ve	Total	+ ve	Total	+ ve	Total	+ ve	Total	+ ve
Personal development	19	16	8	4	4	3	12	10	5	3
Specific job role	25	19	4	1	8	5	5	3		
Exploring career options	3	2	2		7	2	2	2	2	2
Appraisal	2	1	4	1	1	1	1		2	
Other	7	4	8	2	3	1	5	2	1	1
Total	**56**	**42**	**26**	**8**	**23**	**12**	**25**	**17**	**10**	**6**

Table 7.3: Comparison of conversation triggers for each case study organization

Conversations at JW

More than twice as many conversations per participant were described by those at JW compared with the other case study organizations (see Table 7.3). This was likely to be partly due the high length of service but also the high incidence of conversations about specific job roles. The conversations about specific job opportunities were more than three times higher at JW than at the other organizations and represented nearly half of all of the JW conversations described. These data illustrate the different approach JW took to these direct conversations about job vacancies. However, following feedback (approximately two years before this research) that the approach was not fair, there was a conscious decision to change the policy and stop the 'tap on the shoulder' approach. The change was described by one of the participants;

> *'It wasn't secretive before, more of a bulldozer, and I suppose, not very inclusive. We used to spend a lot of time on succession planning (may be that was a bit secretive). But now we spend very little – it [tap on the shoulder] is not consistent with advertising all roles'*
>
> AJ

This change of policy seemed to have a dramatic influence on the nature of career conversations taking place. Since the change, there were few informal conversations about specific job opportunities which had previously been so prevalent. There were however, reportedly, an increased number of personal development conversations. The impact of this policy change can be seen in terms of Schein's (2010) cultural layers as illustrated in Figure 7.2 below. The previous approach seemed to be based on the assumption that people would go where they were asked. The values of this seemed to be that the organization took control, with low levels of transparency. This in turn had a visible impact on the nature of career conversations, with lots of informal conversations to invite people to move into new roles via a 'tap on the shoulder. This was described as changing dramatically when the value of fairness was incorporated into the career approach. There were no longer taps on the shoulder, rather all roles were advertised and anyone could apply. This example illustrates how culture can influence individual career development experiences and career conversations. When the research took place, this change was still relatively recent so the longer-term impact on career moves and career development could not be explored.

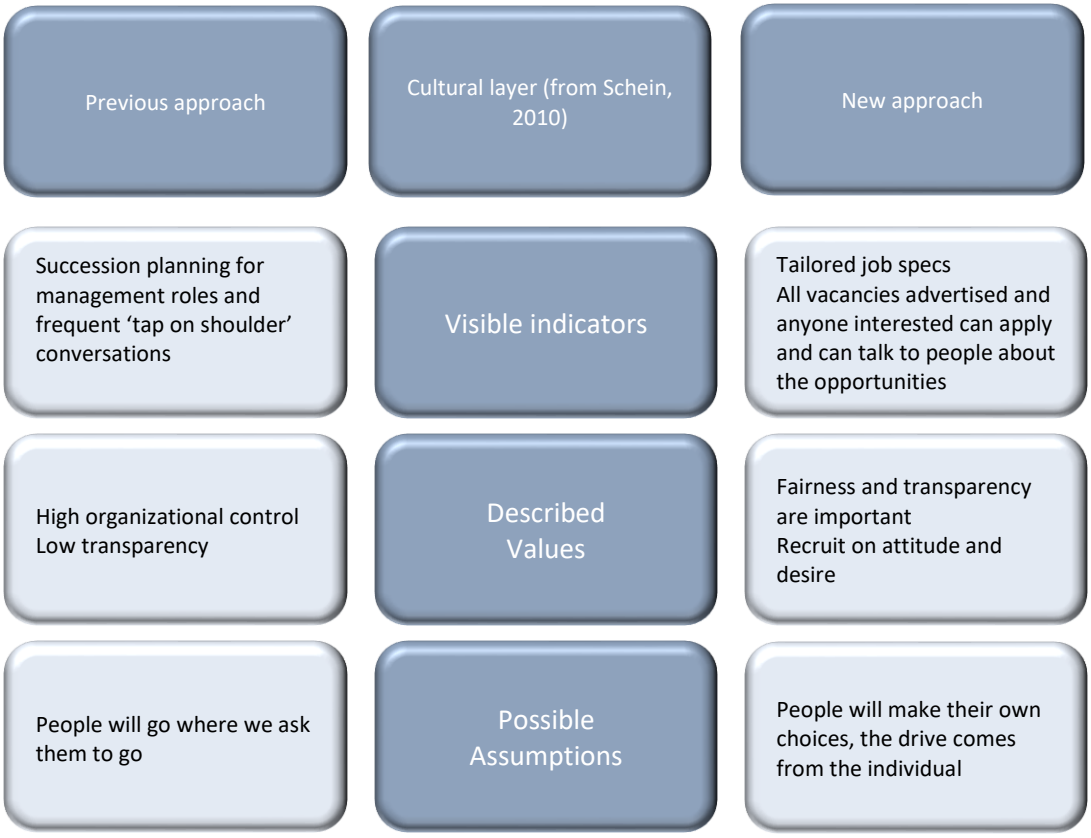


Figure 7.2: Impact of policy change at JW

Data for other conversations showed a similar pattern to those described in chapter 6 with a few exceptions. One difference was a wider range of people reported as involved in the participants' discussions on personal development when compared with the other case studies. Of the 16 positive conversations described, only 25% involved the direct boss (compared with 43% across all of the positive conversations). Other parties included peers through informal learning sets, senior leaders, either informally or as a mentor/coach and the learning function. This was summed up by CE, '*everyone is approachable, you can confide in them*'. This breadth of involvement indicates a wide availability of people to talk with. This is consistent with the organizational factors Kram (1985) found were likely to encourage mentoring, particularly the opportunity for frequent and open interactions between people in different parts of the organization.

The described conversations at JW made a similar contribution to those depicted within the other case study organizations with a range of advisor, witness, gatekeeper, informant and intermediary roles. There were two examples of collaborator conversations, but there was little

mention of the organization responding to what the individual wanted. Rather, career development was described as being managed by the organization (albeit without the support of formal processes). This supports the hypothesis put forward by De Vos & Dries, (2013) that in organizations with a high desire for continuity there would be an interest in organizational outcomes rather than individual ones and that the organization would take accountability for career management rather than encouraging personal accountability. The change within JW to individuals needing to apply to roles may be an example of a shift towards a more protean view of careers as discussed by De Vos & Dries (2013) in response to their hypothesis not being supported by the data they collected. There were two descriptions of a manager as a catalyst within JW. In addition to this, a number of examples were shared of the internal learning and development team or peers taking on a very positive mentoring and coaching role. However, there was a consistent message from all participants that the '*spark*' (MC) for growth had to come from the individual (reflecting the 'drive' captured in the local dynamics of the contextual map).

Participants were all asked about what they thought was working well in terms of career development in their business, and what they saw as challenges/areas for improvement. The findings are summarised in Table 7.4 below. This demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with how things were being managed. As can be seen, the focus on personal development was considered a key strength of the business. The importance of this was summed up by BP;

> *'people who are switched into personal development typically have more conversations with people, attend more programmes and workshops, apply for more roles and learn more about the business and what would suit them'*
>
> BP.

This approach was backed up by a significant focus on personal development as described by all stakeholder groups. Within this, individuals were expected to take accountability for their own development, with opportunities for development and progression offered to those keen to do more. Some opportunities were also provided more formally by the organization, for example a quarterly 'management skills camp' for the top 40 – 50 managers in the business to talk about personal development. The internal development function was very highly spoken of and was credited with supporting the development of many of the participants.

One of the areas identified for improvement was developing the appropriate level of process to support career development. Elements of their approach were described as now being highly structured, for example the job specs and the recently introduced quarterly reviews which included

standard questions. However, there was caution about embracing structured approaches in an organization which was managed largely through trust and informal mechanisms;

> *'the challenge is how to create enough formality about career progression, succession planning and performance management, but not too much. If there's too much then it becomes just about the admin, but if there's not enough then it varies too much and becomes woolly'*
>
> RC

This was confirmed by the senior people person, who recognised the need to continue to evolve and that '*we haven't got it all right'.*

Seen to be working well	**Challenges or could be improved**
• Focus on personal development rather than career • Willingness to take risks moving people into new roles and across functions • Ability for individuals to shape their own role or for the organization to adapt roles • Accessibility of people to talk to about development • Commitment to internal promotions and seen as positive if someone in your team moves on • Alignment from the top to set a climate for development including feedback and honesty • Line manager support for their team members • Clarity of expectations through the job specs • Lots of diverse opportunities for people with the drive • Commitment to long term growth not short term profit	• Balancing flexibility and consistency/fairness • New style adverts are not always easy to understand • Could make sure consistent messages are cascaded so everyone understands how to get on round here

Table 7.4: Participant perceptions of career development at JW.

One feature of the results at JW was that few people seemed to engage in conversations about future career options, particularly in terms of what they wanted (see Table 7.3). From the nine participants only LT mentioned conversations he'd had which actively sought to develop a picture for

the future. Furthermore, whilst one participant was happy to '*put it on the radar'* (PG), one participant described being cautious;

> *'because if I raise it they may assume that I'm not happy in my current role which isn't the case. But I think I'd like to talk about it'.*
>
> FP.

More common, seemed to be a trust that interesting opportunities would continue to emerge and that the organization had their best interests at heart. Many explicitly put the interests of the organization above their own. For example, YK stated, *'if the business needs me to do something I will'*. The interviews suggested a very strong relationally based psychological contract influencing many of the participants. However, it could also be seen as an extension of the people who thrive in a relatively unstructured environment often not wanting to plan ahead. The broader cultural dynamics of the JW case study could be further analysed, for example to explore potential incidents of 'double think' (El-Sawad *et al.*, 2004) on the level of mutuality, however, that is beyond the scope of the current study.

The JW case study can be seen to reflect the contextual map particularly in terms of cultural alignment of the organizational dynamics. The strategic imperative at JW was sustainable growth. This was consistent with the described long-term investment in personal development. Furthermore, this supported structural opportunities for people to move between functions as part of their career development. Culturally the approach to talent and career was aligned with the wider organizational culture with few formal processes. Transparency had previously not been aligned with the approach, but this had been consciously addressed by the senior team. This organizational context seemed to encourage line managers to be supportive of the career development of their team. There was also strong evidence of the importance of individuals displaying both drive and self-awareness. However, the relationships were with a broader range of people than just the line manager which is indicated in the local dynamics part of the contextual map.

7.4 Case study two - HX

HX is an engineering and technology business, employing 250 people in the UK, Asia and the USA. Established for over 25 years, it is family owned and retains many of its founder's entrepreneurial approaches. As such, they are highly flexible, constantly evolving and exploring new opportunities. This creates a constant flux in organizational structure and many of the participants observed that

they were unclear on the strategy. Many of the senior team and managers have been employed for their technical skill and have little experience of managing people. They were slowly introducing management training and clarifying the role and expectations of managers. An externally conducted employee survey indicated a generally positive level of engagement. However, responses to a question on career progression indicated that this was an area the organization could improve on. The HR Director was aware of a gap between how things should be done and how they were being done for all people management. Furthermore, she described cultural differences across the geographies, making alignment of policy and practice more difficult (as indicated by the 'cultural heritage' label in the wider influences layer of the contextual map).

Employing highly qualified people, the HR Director positioned the purpose of talent management as developing and retaining these people for the future. They took an inclusive view, '*for us, most people fall into the category of talent'*. They had experienced more 'regretted leavers' than they would like and had often found it difficult to successfully recruit from outside the organization. Therefore, they had decided that they needed to focus on internal development as a strategic priority. They did not have a history of this, which was summarised by the HR Director;

> *'There is no real history of people developing upwards and progressing through the organization – the culture of the business has been one of few structures, with people not clear who they work for and not knowing who works where'*
>
> HX HR Director

Thus, as with JW above, they had high value, highly unique employees and continuity was a key aim. Having been very adhoc in their approach to people policy and practice, at the time of the research they had started adding more formality. For example, the senior team had begun talking about talent management and using the nine-box grid to identify those with potential to progress to more senior roles. An on-line appraisal process had also been launched which included prompt questions on aspirations.

Conversations at HX

Ten participants from HX shared their experiences of career conversations. However, one of these was from the HR function and largely shared her professional perspective rather than describing her personal experiences. She did not describe any career conversations taking place at HX (although she described some at a previous employer). The length of service for the participants ranged from one and a half to ten years, with an average of six years.

The conversations described by participants at HX were more negative than those described within the other case study organizations. This is summarised in Table 7.5 below. A chi square calculation was completed on these data to see if there was a significantly higher proportion of negative conversations described by HX participants than participants from the other case studies. Accordingly, the negative conversations were compared with all other conversations. The chi square calculation showed a value of 5.48. This was significant at $p < 0.05$. Further analysis of the data indicated some other differences when compared with conversations in other organizations. In particular, comparatively few positive conversations were reported between participants and their line managers at 33%. This compares with the other organizations which reported an average of 60% manager conversations as positive. This could be seen to confirm the HR Director's concern in the abilities of line managers to conduct these conversations. The other participants also viewed this as a problem, with one saying;

> *'most managers don't know how to manage and don't really want to do it – they don't have time so they give it lip service'*
>
> IJ

As can be seen in Table 7.3, there were more incidents of conversations triggered by appraisal than most other organizations. For HX 15% of conversation were triggered by appraisal, compared with less than 5% in the other organizations. The IH case study has been omitted from this comparison due to the low numbers. Furthermore, there was a lower percentage of conversations described as informal (42%, compared with between 59% and 78% for the other organizations except IH case study). This seems to reflect an environment where fewer career conversations took place outside of formal processes than many other organizations. Indeed, the HR Director linked this to the culture;

> *'career conversations don't fit comfortably within the culture as lots of our people are introverted and avoid conversations'*
>
> HX HR Director

	Positive	**Neutral**	**Negative**
Conversations at HX	8 (31%)	11 (42%)	7 (27%)
All other conversations	100 (68%)	31 (21%)	15 (10%)
Total of all conversations	108 (63%)	42 (24%)	22 (13%)

Table 7.5: Comparison of perceived conversation outcomes HX and all other conversations

Within HX there were three examples of collaborator conversations. Two of these were based around appraisal discussions, whilst the third was personal development based. All three of these conversations took place with the line manager and represented half of the positive conversations reported with line managers at HX. Although only referenced in three of the conversations, there was a sense that HX was a place where you could develop and had the scope to fulfil personal goals. Participants spoke very positively of the technical challenges and most saw an overlap between their aspirations to take on interesting technical work and the organization's ability to provide this type of work. For example, despite being unhappy about aspects of his current role, PJ stated;

'*it feels as if there's an overlap between my aspirations and what HX needs*'

PJ

However, many of them felt that they were not asked enough about what they wanted and that restructures were imposed without considering their personal career goals. For example, KT spoke of the last restructure, saying;

'sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. It doesn't seem to be communicated well. The last one was imposed from the top – it didn't feel that people were listening to us'

JT

There were no examples given of managers acting as career catalysts at HX.

Participants were asked to share their reflections on career conversations and career development at HX, highlighting what they thought was working well and what the challenges/areas for improvement were. The themes emerging are summarised in Table 7.6.

Seen to be working well	**Challenges or could be improved**
• The opportunity to take on challenging work • Opportunity for individuals to shape and influence their role and career • Enjoyable work environment • Freedom to pursue own interests	• Lack of visible career paths • Lack of transparency about how to get on • Lack of clear and stable strategic direction combined with frequent restructures making career planning difficult • Lack of consistency regarding advertising new posts • Annual discussion about career at appraisal isn't enough • Many managers don't have the skills to manage others well or to have quality conversations, a lack of consistency

	• Culture does not encourage open feedback and discussion on aspirations

Table 7.6: Participant perceptions of career development at HX.

The ability to shape your own role was identified by a number of people as a big strength of the organization and a way to progress. For example, BB said;

> *'you can be self-directed and expand your role and it can give you the opportunity to get promoted. A few people do this – but not everyone… some people realise this is how you get on, but new people may not realise'*
>
> BB

As he suggested, a number of people did not realise this was a way to progress. Whilst three people felt it was clear 'how to get on round here', the others described the lack of clarity and transparency as a frustration. Difficulties with understanding about progression were linked the changing strategy and structures, the size of the company and the flat structure. There was a recognition that there needed to be a balance – people appreciated the flexibility and did not want too much structure, just a little more than they currently had. For example, LM stated;

> '*generally, it's lacking in strategy and structure…too much structure can be stifling, but the balance at the moment is probably a little out – there's too little structure'*
>
> LM

The HX case study was also reviewed with regards to the contextual map. Firstly, the wider influences were identified by the HR Director. This was particularly in terms of the cultural differences between the geographies and the impact of professional identity for engineers whereby technical work was preferred over people management and leadership. Secondly, the influences of changing strategies and structures were seen by individuals to make it difficult to engage in career planning. Furthermore, the lack of transparency regarding 'how to get on round here' was seen to inhibit career self-management. The organizational dynamics could provide a helpful way of categorizing the improvements individuals wanted to see (as summarized in Table 7.6). Despite the organizational dynamics not being generally conducive to organizational talent management or individual career development, there were some positive experiences. This illustrated that local dynamics could operate independently of organizational dynamics and enable positive career development experiences.

7.5 Case study three - MT

MT is a UK based FMCG organization employing just over 100 people. The business is ambitious and has delivered consistently high growth. Whilst it is part of a larger group it is described by those in the organization and the group as having its own distinctive culture and being committed to creating an engaging and empowering place to work. The financial success has been delivered in tandem with awards for its positive culture. Participants all spoke very positively of the culture, describing it in emotional terms, for example, '*I fell in love with the place… I feel a real affinity to things here*' RM. The culture is a source of pride for the organization and cultural fit is considered important in new recruits. People are valued and recognised for being entrepreneurial, for finding ways to deliver and for investing a lot of themselves in the business. These are indicators that the business has a high proportion of high value, high uniqueness employees (Lepak & Snell, 1999). The participants had a varied length of service between 1 year and 11 years, with a mean of 6 years.

The HR Director described talent management as covering the whole employee journey. There was a focus on people considered high potential, which included key performers as well as those who were seen as having potential to progress. Being part of this high potential group created additional group wide development opportunities. People were not told if they were part of this group or not (an example of what Dries & De Geiter, 2014 termed 'information asymmetry'). The rationale for this was a desire not to demotivate or devalue people not in the group. Furthermore, they didn't want to be dishonest and invite people to apply for roles when they had already identified a preferred candidate. However, there was a move to be more transparent about job moves, to communicate more and to have better discussions with people about where they could go. Some people highlighted that the secrecy of high potentials was '*a little bit out of the culture'* (RM).

Conversations at MT

The most striking feature of the MT conversations was the different balance of personal development and future career options when compared with the other case study organizations. Positive conversations on future career options were higher at MT, (30%, compared with less than 12% for the other organizations except IH). These figures are illustrated in Table 7.3. A chi square calculation was completed. This compared the number of conversations about future career at MT with the conversations about this at the other case study organizations (see Table 7.7 below). This showed a chi value of 6.02 which was significant at $p < 0.05$. A similar calculation was done for the

number of development conversations. This was not significant. However, the percentages indicated some variance, with 17% of MT conversations being triggered by personal development, but within other case studies this was 38%.

Trigger	MT	Other case study organizations
Personal development	4	44
Future career options	7	9
Total number of conversations	23	117

Table 7.7: Comparison of frequency of positive conversations on personal development and future career options

Six of the eight participants had been involved in discussions on future career, trying to understand the options they had to develop their career. In keeping with the company policy, none of them knew if they were part of a high potential group or not and they were unsure if such a group existed. However, only two of these conversations had been considered to have a positive outcome (with one clearly seen as negative and the others neutral). The two positive conversations were both collaborative in nature, clearly seeking to align individual and organizational goals. For one person, the outcome was a role that was tailored for her, for the other person the outcome was a focused development plan to start working now on skills, knowledge and experiences which would be helpful for the future.

In contrast to the high number of conversations reported to be about future opportunities, there were comparatively few conversations regarding broader personal development. Within the reported conversations there was less focus on feedback, self-awareness and general development than there was in the other organizations. This was further evidenced by the ratio of career shaper activity. Within MT conversations for every witness contribution there were two gatekeeper contributions. However, for the other organizations there was a higher proportion of witness contributions, a ratio of approximately 2:3 of HX and SB and a ration of approximately 1:1 for JW.

These data seemed to reflect MT concerns raised by the HR Director. Firstly, that people within the business tended to have a narrow definition of career development, focusing on vertical career progression rather than broader development. Secondly, as a result of the culture, some people found it difficult to give clear and direct feedback. Interestingly, whilst people reported

receiving little feedback in their own career conversations, a number of them mentioned the feedback they shared in their role as line manager. However, it should be noted that this may not have been received as feedback by the team member.

Another feature of the MT conversations was the high percentage of the conversations reported as informal (78% compared to 60% or less for other organizations). This was explained in some of the comments which described the culture as very friendly, with everyone being willing to give their time to talk with someone else.

> *'At MT people give you time, they will want to talk about it. It is fundamentally different to xxx [previous employer]. I can be open and honest about the conversation and they will listen'.*
>
> IR

This accessibility of a wide range of people to talk with was greatly appreciated (see table 7.8 below). Furthermore, it was considered acceptable to approach senior people (within the business and the group) directly, without needing to go through your own manager. As with JW above, this could provide a positive environment for informal mentoring (Kram, 1985). However, it should be noted that although people described the culture as 'open and honest', the organization was not transparent regarding talent management activities.

Seen to be working well	**Challenges or could be improved**
• High engagement, people want to stay • Accessibility of people who are happy to have conversations with you • Open to moving people across functions • Open and honest environment • Feel supported and valued • Informal, value the 'whole person' • Flexibility to create roles if there is a business case	• Line managers varied in their skills and ability to have conversations and give clear feedback • Moves seen as adhoc and reactive rather than planned • Focus on short-term performance can reduce the willingness to create development opportunities • Size and structure means that there are big jumps between levels • Greater clarity on what the career development roles are for the individual, the manager and the organization • Greater collaboration with the group company to broaden development opportunities • Frequent changes of manager can reduce quality of conversation

	• Help to give people a clearer sense of progression and growth in-role

Table 7.8: Participant perceptions of career development at MT.

One of the challenges at MT was seen as the size of the business in headcount terms. This limited the structural opportunities for progression, particularly once people had reached a management or leadership role. Everyone commented on this as a difficulty. For example, JR stated;

I want to progress upwards, but there are no middle roles'

IR

A concern about how to progress, (with few obvious routes) may partially explain the high number of conversations regarding future opportunities. Some felt that the lack of structural opportunities was made worse by a risk averse approach to job moves. Possibly due to the ambitious growth plans;

'*the business is very cautious of moving people too fast*'

BW

The business had historically been seen to bring in external people rather than to promote internally if someone was not considered completely ready. The HR Director felt that the structural challenge of limited promotion opportunities was one of the inhibitors for managers having career conversations.

'managers are afraid to have the conversation because they can't magic a role for people, so they think, 'what can we do?''

MT HR Director

She was keen therefore to change the people's thoughts on what a career is, helping them to look more widely at development and growth rather than hierarchical progression. To support this, she was planning some organizational support to build confidence and skills at having these conversations and really understanding what people want from their career in the broadest sense.

During the research discussions, a number of people reflected on how they wanted to take greater accountability for their career. This represented their career world-view impacting on their career action (Bosley *et al.*, 2009). For example, having identified that individuals needed to take a high level of responsibility for their career, BW stated;

I need to start to be more proactive about conversations to talk through opportunities. I need to start conversations about where I might go, to understand people's thinking. I don't do enough of this.'

Indeed, six of the eight participants demonstrated how they were taking accountability for their career development.

As with the other case studies, MT can be considered in terms of the contextual map. This illustrates the interactive influence of the organizational dynamics. For example, the strategy of high growth seemed to limit the desire to move people into roles before they were considered to be completely ready, thus avoiding 'in at the deep-end' experiences. This, in turn, seemed to influence the local dynamics. Firstly, in terms of individual's recognizing the lack of obvious career moves and thus wanting more of the conversations to clarify options. Secondly, the HR Director felt that these dynamics influenced the line manager's interest and commitment to these conversations as they were concerned that they couldn't offer any solutions. Furthermore, this case study seems to illustrate the influence of an individual's level of engagement. Individuals described themselves as committed to the organization, wanting to stay and therefore keen to engage in conversations regarding their future. However, as with JW, the contextual map heading of 'line manager' did not adequately reflect the nature of career support people were receiving from the wider network.

7.6 Case study four – SB

SB is a financial services organization providing a range of consumer services. It has a history of strong financial performance with organic growth and some acquisition. At the time of the research they employed approximately 3500 people, mostly in the UK, but some in Northern Europe. The Head of Talent was recently appointed (joining from another organization). SB had a reputation for its fast pace, people took pride in the agility of the organization and the speed at which change was introduced. They had consistently had very high engagement scores (measured through an independently run employee survey), but like MT, they tended to be marked lower on questions relating to career development opportunities. Whilst people spoke positively of much of the culture, there was a dislike of what was seen as a generally status driven and hierarchical approach. The position of SB on the HR Architecture model (Lepak & Snell, 1999) was not clear. People were certainly seen as high value, but the uniqueness was sometimes communicated as high (for example, messages that '*it is such a strong culture that it is easy not to fit in – some people just won't survive',* IS*),* and yet a significant external recruitment into senior roles indicated a lower level of uniqueness.

Talent management was viewed by the Head of Talent as an inclusive term, so that '*all people have the opportunity to accelerate'.* One segment of talent was the people deemed to have high potential and the executive team had expressed concern about having a '*narrow pipeline'* of talent for the future. The aims of talent management were positioned in terms of becoming an employer of choice and having greater insight into employees' wants and needs to help drive performance. Enablers of this were seen to be increasing the levels of trust and transparency. The Head of Talent felt that the current approach needed to shift to be more involving of individuals;

> *'the conversation [at the moment] is <u>about</u> the individual rather than <u>with</u> them – and it covers a snap shot in time rather than an ongoing dialogue – we need the individual driving more of the agenda about their wants and needs'*
>
> SB Head of Talent

She was concerned that whilst some processes had been developed to support this, managers still had a mindset that it was not their role to develop talent. Furthermore, she felt that some even saw developing talent as detrimental to them personally and professionally. She indicated that they felt that if people were developed and then left it could limit their personal ability to meet their objectives. Her views on this highlighted a potential role conflict as indicated by Purcell & Hutchinson (2007).

Nine people were interviewed. The length of service ranged from 2 years to 10 years, with an average of five and a half years.

Conversations at SB

A feature of the conversations at SB was the high percentage which were triggered by personal development (as shown in Table 7.3). These represented 48% of the conversations compared with less than 33% for the others (with the exception of the IH case study). The results also showed that a high percentage of the conversations were self-instigated, representing 40% of the reported conversations compared with an average of 22% for the other case study organizations. Furthermore, a high proportion (78%) were described as informal, which was counter to the generally formal approach taken within the organization. SB also had the highest number of collaborator conversations with six being described by participants.

The above results seemed counter to the picture shared by the Head of Talent. However, the general comments people made about career conversations within the organization were more consistent with her view and highlighted some interesting cultural dynamics and their perceived

impact on career conversations. Within this case study it seems as if the reported conversations were not typical of how participants saw things generally operating within the organization. This could be partly due to the group of people who were interviewed. The majority of them were active in managing their career and felt that they understood 'how to get on round here'. Many of them also felt that they had a strong line manager, and were keen to highlight that a lot depended on your particular line manager. Therefore, this sample may not have been representative of the wider organization. The observed discrepancy could also be partly due to a gap between the perceived culture as held in the stories of how things happened and the culture as experienced through day to day work. For example, the organization was consistently described as highly demanding and fast paced and this belief was widely shared. However, there was less evidence regarding the ways this manifested.

One visible cultural indicator (Schein, 2010) was the large number of external senior recruits. This was attributed to a focus on high delivery, creating a perceived risk when appointing internal people, who may not be seen as quite ready. This was interpreted by some as unfair, with '*external hires coming in at lower quality in senior roles, despite them having unknown weaknesses*' (RM). The proportion of external senior recruits was seen to limit development opportunities for existing employees. Furthermore, the delivery focus and high demands were seen by some to reduce the time available to invest in personal development. There were also examples of people's career progression being blocked as they were considered '*too valuable'* (IS) in their current role. These cultural examples indicate a potential breach of the psychological contract (Conway & Briner, 2002; George, 2009). Employees described joining the organization expecting a different deal with more opportunities to develop, grow and progress. Furthermore, the lack of perceived fairness and consistency, with few formal processes could further reduce satisfaction (Slay & Taylor, 2007).

The organizational environment and propensity for recruiting externally had impacted on the career world-view of some of the participants. They described a career self-management strategy of networking (Sturges *et al.,* 2002) to help them to progress. The function of this approach was also recognised by the Head of Talent;

> '*if someone is highly ambitious they hope to get the attention of someone senior who will give them development opportunities'*
>
> SB Head of Talent

In practice, many sought patronage, with a senior person acting as a gatekeeper and advocate. For example, one participant actively cultivated her relationships with senior stakeholders and recognised

the value that had created for her in terms of an extensive network of senior advocates. She summed it up saying;

> *It is important to be aware of the cultural and political context… part of that is working hard, profile raising and getting visible. Because of the structure being in business units you need to network to get visibility – there are lots of bright and proactive and determined people. You need to think how to get noticed beyond working hard and this is another dynamic you have to use'*
>
> BM

Another participant had not adapted her career world-view to the SB environment. She did not identify the importance of networking within the culture and had not been helped to understand what she could do to grow her career. There was a sadness in her description of her recent career;

> *'Since joining SB [eight years previously] I have not been promoted. I have some frustration at not having anyone in the business I could seek advice from about this about my career but I did speak to HR. I do observe others moving around not necessarily having seen a role that's been advertised, I can't see how it happened but some people do seem to move'*
>
> LH

A number of participants described mixed messages regarding the culture generally and career development in particular. It was described by the Head of Talent as *'schizophrenic'.* One of the other individuals described messages that the individual was accountable for driving their career, but the organization was seen to be taking control.

> *'At the moment it's parent child 'we think this will be good for you'. We tell people that they need to plan, but people observe that the organization takes control – it's a bit dysfunctional'*
>
> OA

This was positioned by this participant as being connected to the low risk environment, such that despite talk of empowerment and innovation it was difficult because of a '*philosophy that you need to get things one hundred percent right'* (OA). Furthermore, there were stories within the organization of people who had tried and got it wrong who had then left, creating a culture of 'play it safe' (OA). It has been suggested (Holbeche, 1995) that if the organizational style is autocratic then it is very difficult to encourage staff to take accountability for their career. This appeared to be part of the challenge at SB.

Seen to be working well	Challenges or could be improved
• People observe a lot of strong talent around them • Increasing number of development opportunities • HR seen as supportive • Financial support for qualifications • Fast growing and moving business with interesting opportunities	• Hierarchy and business structure makes it difficult to progress upwards • Little movement between business units • Appraisal focuses on delivery and short-term issues not career • Inconsistent approaches to assessment and development depending on line manager • Business units can have parochial view and want to retain their talent • Some people have more to offer but felt it was not being tapped into • Lack of development opportunities and visibility of career opportunities • Patronage favours those with networking skills and makes it difficult for those who don't invest in this

Table 7.9: Participant perceptions of career development at SB.

A summary of what was seen to be working well and opportunities for improvement is given in Table 7.9. Given this cultural background it is interesting to note that there were some examples of very positive career conversations. This would seem to indicate that despite a seemingly unconducive prevailing culture, when the local dynamics (between the line manager and the individual) were aligned, then positive career conversations could take place. Furthermore, this case study indicated that whilst there was a stated desire to understand more about employee wants and needs and respond to them, this was not currently aligned with the organizational dynamics. For example, the existing culture seemed to limit promotion opportunities for internal candidates. Furthermore, the 'career deal' seemed based on patronage and competition rather than transparent processes. Moreover, there were examples of the organization's strategic needs taking clear priority over individual needs through the blocking of career moves.

7.7 Case study five – IH

IH is a large NHS Trust, employing over 11 000 people across a number of sites. According to the Head of Learning and Development, the Trust had *'a big OD [Organizational Development] agenda'.* As part of this they had invested time thinking through and rolling out work on values and behaviours. It was described as a positive and energetic place, with a shared commitment to do the best for the patients. Part of the work on values was an emphasis on having quality conversations, which was seen as an important message to improve the employment experience of teams which had been shown to link to providing a good experience for patients. The focus on quality conversations was seen as more important than the development and implementation of policies (for talent management and other people management areas). Indeed, the Head of Learning and Development described them as '*still in the early stages*' on implementation of talent management. The conversation approach was being encouraged through training and briefings, with some more in depth work taking place in collaboration with areas which had a specific interest in working on this. Some of the work was also supported by NHS wide resources on maximising the talent conversation.

The Head of Learning and Development described two workshops he had conducted within the Trust on talent management. He also shared some feedback from an employee survey. These both illustrated the variety of perspectives and sub-cultures operating within the Trust. These findings were supported in the current study. For example, in some areas feedback indicated that development and career opportunities were shared and everyone had access to them. However, in other areas some indicated that the process for progression was opaque and based on patronage rather than capability. For example, LC stated, '*it's sheer luck, sometimes it's about who you know*'. The Head of Learning and Development indicated that local leadership had a big impact on the culture and access to development opportunities. Furthermore, he described the lack of formal structures and reporting arrangements which could make things feel chaotic, making it difficult for people to know how they could get on.

Four people from IH took part in the research. Six other participants had agreed to be involved, but cancelled their meetings at short notice. Unfortunately, my host was unable to support rescheduling these meetings as he was about to leave the organization on a six month secondment. However, I decided to proceed with the research and to include this information as one of the case studies. Despite the low numbers, the case study does provide some additional insights on the contextual influences on alignment.

Each of the participants worked in a different area of the Trust, three were in support functions and one was in a clinical role. The length of service was from 4 years to 13 years with an average of just under eight years.

Conversations at IH

The four participants shared ten specific workplace career conversations that had taken place at IH. Of these, 60% were described as positive and 50% were triggered by personal development. Two of the conversations took place as part of appraisal and both were viewed as negative. Given the small number of conversations it is difficult to draw any conclusions from these data. However, the general comments did provide some interesting insight as outlined below.

The power of sub-cultures and the impact of local leadership was demonstrated by some of the comments. For example, JH worked in a support area which had no defined career path. Aware that this made things difficult for his large team, he had proactively developed a training programme to provide greater structure for personal and career development. He was also keen to work collaboratively with other Trusts and encourage a cross-organizational career pathway. He felt that such a pathway would make it easier to attract professional staff and also easier to develop and retain them. He was working on this with some input from his boss, but he did not mention any involvement of HR or Learning and Development. Interestingly this idea of cross organizational collaboration on career pathways had also been raised by an HR Director in one of the other NHS Trusts involved in phase one of this research.

Corporate strategy was highlighted by one participant as an influence on career. She worked in a support area which was under pressure to reduce costs. She described the impact of this on her career self-management;

> *'having a career conversation can feel selfish when others are losing their jobs. You have to tread carefully and be aware of not putting yourself at risk… I can't afford not to have a job, so to an extent I need to self-protect'*
>
> IM

The impact of cost pressure was also raised by UM. She felt that those who were able to cope were given more to do and this gave them less time to invest in their own development and growth.

The lack of formal career support and structures was seen as a challenge by two of the participants. VM had previously had a boss who had been a catalyst for her career. He had challenged her and proactively given her new opportunities. However, she now had a boss who was not proactive and she didn't know how she could influence things. She knew there were lots of opportunities but the lack of formal structure meant she had no visibility of the opportunities and therefore felt unable to access them. LC had been able to attend lots of development events, and learn through a variety of secondments, but she was also frustrated by the lack of structured support. She wanted to know how the Trust could use all of her learning;

> *'The Trust have spent a lot of money on me and I've had study leave. But they've not said where is our five year plan with you…I would like to give more back…I do question how it all links up, there's lots of opportunities in an organization like ours that don't seem to be realised. It would be reasonable for the organization to demand more from me, more payback'.*
>
> LC

Whilst accepting she had some accountability to work this out, she wanted help with this and was unsure where to turn for this help.

Due to the small sample size and varied experiences there were no consistent themes on what was seen to be working well and challenges /things to improve. A table of these data for IH has therefore not been produced. Similarly, consistent with the observation regarding sub-cultures, there was no common description of talent management or career development in IH which could be reviewed with reference to the contextual map.

7.8 Summary

Taking a view from the different case studies has shown considerable differences in the types of career development and career conversation reported by participants in each organization. In particular, there were differences in the trigger, the setting (formal or informal) and the perceived contribution. This supports the findings from the HR and OD professionals that 'organizational dynamics' will influence the nature of talent management and career development. The HR and OD participants had identified influences in terms of strategic imperative, cultural alignment, transparency and structural opportunities. The data from the individuals and line managers reinforced the view that these parts of organizational context influenced the experience of career development. Furthermore, specific examples of these influences were provided. These data were used to refine

the descriptions of the organizational dynamics elements of the contextual map first described in Table 7.2. The updated descriptions are shown in Table 7.10 below and an updated diagram is presented in Figure 7.3. An additional heading has also been identified, to capture the formal talent and career processes which were part of the individuals' and line managers' experiences (albeit largely through appraisal and generally not particularly positive).

Organizational Dynamics	**Elements**
Strategic imperative	• Availability of skilled people to meet future resource demands (internally and externally) • Strategic time horizon • Risk taking appetite for development opportunities in deployment • Desire for employment continuity
Cultural alignment	• Availability of people to talk with • Feedback quality and regularity • Degree of formal or informal people processes • Level of interest in career development and personal development
Structural opportunities	• Size of the organization • Opportunities of role changes • Number of levels and 'gaps' between levels • Secondment and development opportunities • Formal training opportunities
Transparency	• Visibility of job opportunities • Expectations of individual and line manager (roles) • Openness regarding talent management processes • Clarity of 'how to get on round here'
Formal talent and career processes	• Process for applying for jobs • Formal feedback/discussion on strengths and career opportunities • Additional processes such as career planning workshops, succession planning, development centres and formal career conversations

Table 7.10: Elements of organizational dynamics

These case study data also helped to develop understanding of the local dynamics element of the contextual map. This was influenced by the findings in chapter 6, looking specifically at the nature of helpful career conversations. The initial descriptions can be found in Table 7.1. The additional input from the individuals and line managers confirmed these descriptions with two minor changes. Firstly, the 'line manager' category was shown to be too restrictive as many individuals described a range of people involved in their career development conversations. Accordingly, the 'line manager' category

has been broadened to capture others who may influence an individual's career development. The heading of 'career shaper' has been used, borrowed from the work of Bosley *et al.*, (2009) to represent a wide range of relationships which may support an individual's career development. Secondly, the reference to a trusting relationship has been removed. Whilst recognizing that trust emerged as an important part of some career development support (such as a collaborator conversation), it was not positioned as an essential element for other support. There were also two additional headings identified, one for the 'career shaper' and one for the individual. The additional career shaper heading references the contribution they make by understanding the organization's future skills and resourcing needs. This was often not seen to be done well, but did emerge as part of the line manager's role. For the individual, networking was seen as an important part of managing their own career and is thus included as a fourth element.

In addition to the above changes, the interactions between the local dynamics were illustrated by participants. This showed that rather than positioning interest, skill and access to resources as all present in the ideal career shaper, some career shapers will be targeted to provide just one element of this support. This is counter to the view expressed by the HR and OD participants but is consistent with the findings of Bosley *et al.* (2009).

The evidence from the present research indicated that the contextual influences on talent management and career development are complex. This supports a systems perspective of an organization rather than a simple model with cause and effect. An updated version of the contextual map is shown in Figure 7.3 and is offered as a way of illustrating these influences on three levels: local, organizational and wider. The assertion here is not that these are the only things that influence talent management and career development or that these are discrete, separate elements of context. Rather, these descriptions represent the language and described experiences of the stakeholders in this study. As described in this chapter, these elements of organizational dynamics can be used to illustrate differences between case study organizations. Further research is suggested to consider the value of the contextual map as a diagnostic or planning tool. This could also explore the utility of the contextual map in environments, such as IH where there are considered to be a number of sub-cultures operating. Similarly, the ways in which the local dynamics shape individual careers and any differences according to the career shaper typology (Bosley *et al.*, 2009) could be explored.

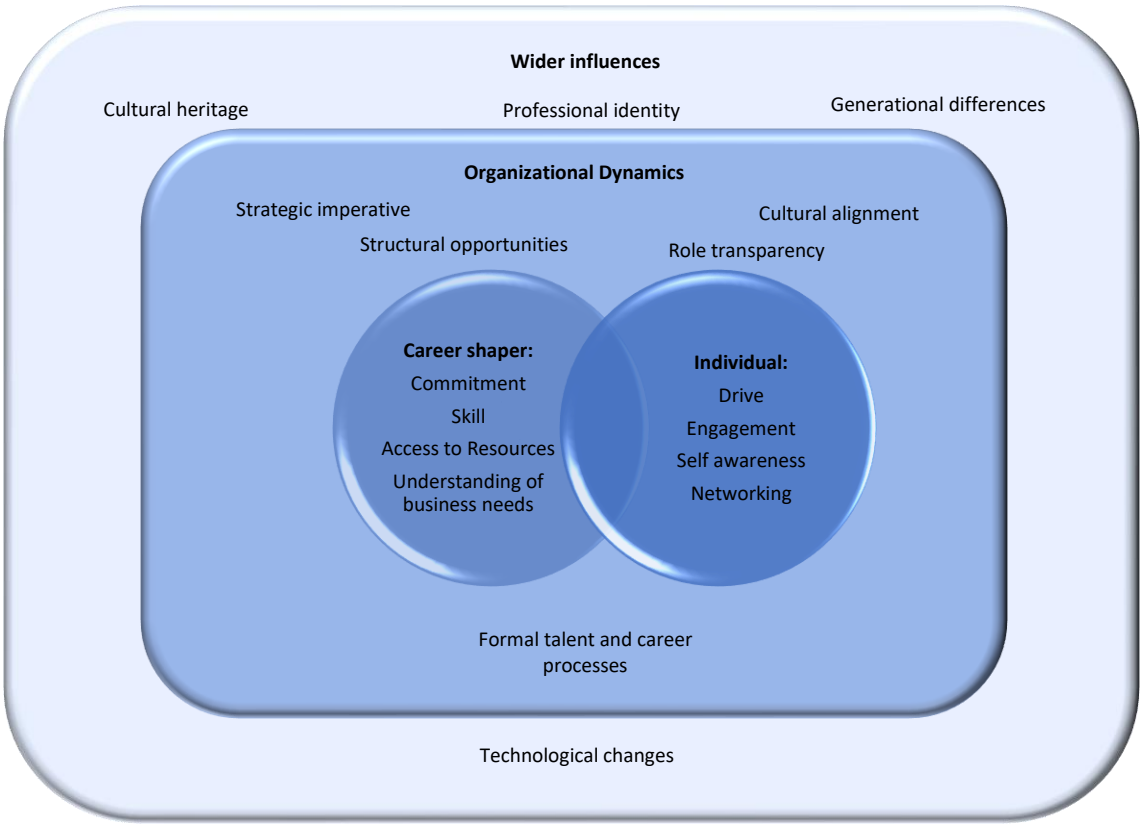


Figure 7.3: Revised contextual map of talent and career influences.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to build understanding of potential alignment between organizational talent management and individual career development. The role of workplace career conversations in supporting possible alignment was an area of particular interest. The study was designed to build contextualised knowledge from a variety of stakeholder perspectives. As with many qualitative studies, a large volume of data was created. This thesis has followed the exploration of four research questions.

RQ1: In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals?

RQ2: In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?

RQ3: What types of career conversations are seen to make positive contributions to people's career development?

RQ4: In what ways does organizational context seem to influence the alignment of organizational talent needs with individual career goals and the nature of career conversations?

The research methodology was described in chapter 4, and the findings related to each research question were described in chapters 5, 6 and 7. This chapter aims to summarise the findings for each of the research questions and to look across these to identify contribution of this study. The research questions will be considered first, summarizing the findings, rather than relating them back to the previous research (which has been extensively done in the preceding chapters). Some overall themes will then be offered to draw out the contribution of this research. Some 'testing out' of these themes with clients and leaders will then be described as a further way in which I drew out and verified the conclusions (as illustrated in chapter 4, methodology, Figure 4.1). As positioned in chapter 1 (introduction), I shall then reflect on the findings from a consultancy perspective, to illustrate a possible organizational response to the findings. The implications of this study from the perspective of talent and career theory will then be discussed. This will summarize how the findings in this study

support, extend or challenge other research and discuss possible avenues for further research. Finally, my reflections on the research journey will be shared.

8.2 Review of research questions

RQ1: **In what ways do stakeholders seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career goals?**

The exploration of findings to this research question includes a consideration of the aims of talent management and career development, the intended and experienced practices, and the intended roles.

The findings illustrated that for most of the HR participants involved in the study there was little connection between organizational talent management and individual career development. The aims of their talent management strategy were to secure resources to meet the organization's future needs. However, there was little formal evaluation of the extent to which these aims were achieved. Many of the HR participants described a number of talent practices. However, there were few attempts to genuinely understand individual needs and HR participants were generally dissatisfied with the effectiveness of the tools they had for understanding aspirations and motivations. The talent management practices adopted by participants tended to be formal and were not designed with an agenda of alignment. Furthermore, some of the practices, particularly regarding transparency, may have deterred the type of relationships which could support alignment. The HR participants clearly positioned individuals as accountable for their own career development. However, they were aware that they could do more to support them.

The other stakeholders involved in the study (individuals and line managers) however, positioned alignment between individual and organizational goals as very important. In particular, the manager's role was seen as being a 'broker' to help find the common ground and develop plans to meet all parties' needs. Accordingly, individuals and line managers both described activities to build understanding of needs as a precursor to alignment. For example, line managers described investing time in understanding individual goals and individuals described building their network to find out more about the organization's needs.

Thus, with a few exceptions, the HR participants did not describe actively seeking alignment between organizational and individual goals, but the line managers and individuals did.

RQ2: **In what ways do stakeholders see career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals?**

For the HR participants, career conversations appeared to be a very different subject to talent management. These conversations were viewed as largely taking place within the line relationship with a focus on partnership and shared goals. Furthermore, whereas many of the HR participants had an exclusive view of talent management, career conversations were seen as a tool for all employees. There was an expressed desire to improve the quality of these conversations and to equip managers with greater skills so all employees could benefit from them. However, concerns were expressed that these conversations were difficult to get right, and that managers may struggle to be competent.

For the line managers and individuals these conversations came across as a natural extension of their desire for alignment. They saw ongoing conversations with managers and others as the way in which individuals could further their careers and line managers could support the development of team members. They identified three types of conversation which could support their career development: 'where am I now?'; 'where am I going?' and 'how will I get there?'.

Thus, it can be seen that all stakeholder groups saw career conversations as an opportunity to align organizational talent needs and individual career goals.

RQ3: **What types of career conversations are seen to make positive contributions to people's career development?**

A wide range of career conversations were described as making a positive contribution to people's career development. These conversations were often informal, largely taking place outside of organizational processes. Indeed, feedback on conversations taking place within the appraisal process indicated that these did not tend to help career development. A variety of people were involved in these conversations, and many participants actively sought the people they wanted to speak with. Descriptions of the conversations with line managers were largely positive, and line managers were the biggest giver of personal development conversations. A number of participants were keen to have more conversations regarding future career options and building their understanding of the organization's needs. This clearly links to their desire to find alignment as discussed above.

Overall, rather than there being a specific type of conversation which is seen as positive, the value seemed to be from being able to have different types of conversations at different times, depending on needs.

RQ4: **In what ways does organizational context seem to influence the alignment of organizational talent needs with individual career goals and the nature of career conversations?**

The findings on context illustrated some of the ways in which setting may influence the alignment of organizational talent and individual career needs. These influences were positioned on three levels: local dynamics (between line manager or other career shaper and the individual); organizational dynamics (strategic imperative, cultural alignment, transparency and formal talent processes) and wider influences (cultural heritage, professional identity, generational differences and technological changes). The HR and OD participants illustrated the influence of each of these elements. The case studies then provided specific examples and contributed to a refinement of what was meant by each of the headings. For example, the case studies highlighted a difference in the 'strategic imperative' part of organizational dynamics in terms of their strategic time horizon. Case study JW had a clear goal to deliver slow and sustainable growth. This seemed to encourage long term investment in people, with lots of cross functional moves and internal promotions. In contrast, case study SB and MT were both aiming to deliver significant year on year growth. They were less likely to support cross functional moves and both organizations had a tendency to recruit externally rather than promote from within.

Thus, it was found that organizational context had multiple influences on alignment in general and career conversations in particular.

8.3 Overall contribution

Drawing together themes across a whole study is an important part of identifying the overall contribution of the research. This process almost inevitably involves some intuition and subjectivity. The following contributions are therefore offered in the recognition that a different researcher could make a different selection. For me, a review of the findings surfaced the following macro themes: there tends to be a disconnect between organizational talent management and individual career development; talent management is generally focused on formal process rather than broader context; individuals are seen as accountable for their career, but they are not helped in this and in some instances their interests may be disregarded. Each of these shall be explored below.

The findings demonstrated the separation between organizational talent management and individual career development within most of the organizations involved in the study. The HR participants focused predominantly on talent management and the organization's needs with little reference to meaningful exploration of the individual's wants or needs. However, when describing

career conversations, they offered a very different perspective, with an emphasis on partnership and relationships. Individuals and line managers meanwhile seemed focused on finding the common ground between organizational and individual needs. Furthermore, organizational talent management was largely conceived in terms of formal processes, whereas individual career development was largely described in terms of informal approaches with little reference to talent management. Thus, it seemed that, for most organizations, talent management and career development were operating in parallel with little cross over. However, both would seem to be inextricably linked. Individuals are the subject of talent management, and without their development, deployment and retention, the organization will not deliver its talent management aims. It therefore seems appropriate to take a more joined up view across organizational talent and individual career. Such an approach was described by one of the HR participants, but this was not one of the case study organizations, so the view from the individuals and line managers was not explored.

As described above, the talent management focus was described by HR participants largely in terms of formal process. There was an awareness of the wider context and the way this influenced the enactment of these processes, but there were few examples of actions to address these (for example the challenges presented by reduced structural layers). However, as shown in the case studies, the context had considerable influence both on the enactment of policy and on the way in which individuals developed their career. The ability of an organization to achieve its talent goals through a singular focus on formal process is therefore questioned. Rather, it would seem helpful to adopt a more systems based approach, taking a broader perspective on talent management practices, such as the systemic approach suggested by Lips-Wiersma and Hall (2007). This could, for example, include activities to support informal approaches at the local level. Furthermore, it could include clarifying structural opportunities or reviewing barriers to internal promotions to provide more 'in at the deep-end' experiences.

A third theme related to individual accountability for career. The majority of participants from all stakeholder groups described the individual as accountable for their own career. However, whilst some individuals had an understanding of the 'career deal', many were confused and did not understand what they could do to develop their career. This had a number of potential consequences, particularly in terms of fairness. For example, there was a risk that those with higher social capital were advantaged which could have a negative impact on diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, many organizations were giving 'mixed messages' with statements of individual accountability, but actions taken by the organization. There was a recognition from all stakeholder groups that it would be helpful to make it easier for individuals to take ownership of their career. It was felt this could be

done through greater clarity of the roles and expectations of the individual, the line manager and the organization. The aim was to provide the information and tools needed for everyone to understand how to progress (in their current role or an alternative role).

8.4 Drawing and verifying conclusions

A number of activities helped the ongoing drawing and verifying of conclusions. Firstly, the participant reports provided feedback on how the descriptive findings were received. Secondly, parts of the findings were presented at three different conferences. Thirdly, the contextual map was used with two clients as a way of exploring their talent strategy. Finally, taking a consultant perspective, the implications of the study were considered. The insights from each of these activities will be described below.

Two participant reports were written. The first provided a description of the findings from the HR and OD professionals. The feedback on this was very positive. People found it very helpful to hear about the practices used by other organizations. Furthermore, follow-up conversations with two of the participants suggested that the contextual map was a very helpful way of thinking about the influence of context. A further two of the organizations had completed internal research on career and leadership conversations and stated that the diagram echoed their internal findings. The usefulness of the diagram was further indicated by a number of requests from participants to share the findings with colleagues. The report for individuals and line managers was shared with these participants and also with the HR and OD participants. A number of the HR people made contact following the report indicating that it had been very helpful and they were sharing it with other HR colleagues to build understanding of the value of career conversations. Specifically, the value of 'in at the deep end' experiences and networking were commented on as providing a helpful perspective. Furthermore, the description of three elements of career conversations (where am I now, where am I going and how do I get there) was found to be helpful. Again, this indicated that this report of the findings provided some new insights of value to the readers.

Some of the findings were shared in sessions at three conferences: a British Academy of Management (BAM) interest group on talent management, an Institute of Leadership (ILM) conference and the annual Association for Business Psychology (ABP) conference. Time in these sessions was limited, but again the findings were positively received. The BAM conference focused on presenting the initial version of contextual map and was conducted before the other stakeholders'

input had been received. Whilst feedback was positive, the conclusions drawn were narrow due to only covering the HR and OD perspective. Furthermore, the key themes from a theoretical and practical standpoint were not clearly made. Consequently, additional analysis was conducted to bring greater clarity to the themes and the ways in which the findings supported, extended and challenged other research. The ILM and ABP conference attendees were leaders and consultants rather than academics. They responded very positively to the concept of a new type of career based on partnership (as per Clarke, 2013). They were very engaged in the idea of career shapers as 'catalysts' and 'collaborators' and were quickly able to relate the ideas to their own experiences and to challenges they faced.

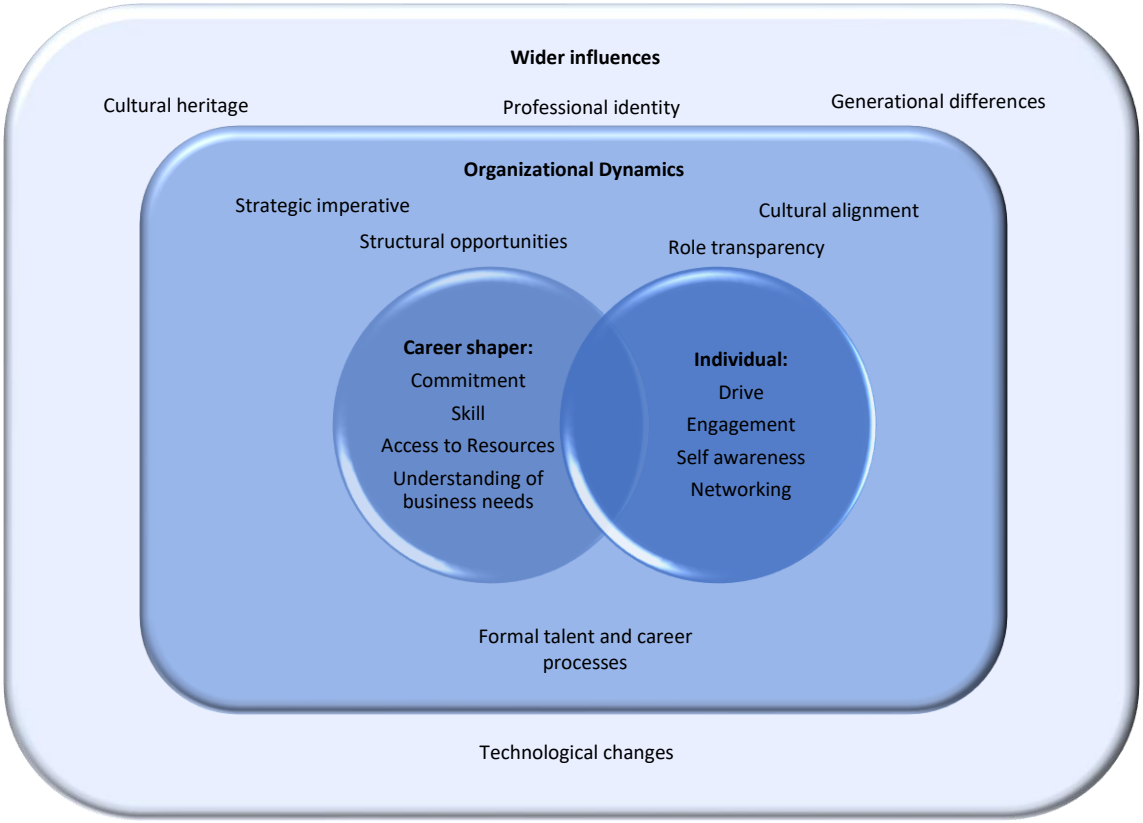


Figure 8.1 Contextual map of talent and career influences

Thirdly, the contextual map has twice been used with clients as part of a conversation on talent strategy. In the first instance, an early version (see Figure 7.1) was used, positioned with the client as a diagram 'in development'. The headings were used to facilitate discussion on career conversations and the way in which different elements of the context were seen to help or hinder these conversations. This led to a number of new insights, particularly the importance of involving the stakeholders to understand their perspective on transparency and cultural alignment. The second

time was exploring a broader talent strategy, using the later version of the contextual map (see Figure 8.1). Again, the headings were used as points for discussion, starting with the strategic goals for talent management. For this client, the activity highlighted the broader influences on the enactment of talent management. They were planning to invest more time in building individual understanding of the career deal and providing resources to support career self-management. These two client experiences reinforced the value of the contextual map as a stimulus for conversation.

The client facing examples above have given some indication of ways in which the findings could be used in a consulting capacity with organizations. Since completing the research, I have had some further consultancy conversations on the findings. These have encouraged clients to join their thinking on talent management and career development and to think more clearly about an individual's needs. Whilst recognizing the contribution of formal processes, greater attention to the informal and contextual features has been suggested. For example, this could be done by finding examples of career catalysts within the organization and recognizing them and creating educational material on career self-management for individuals. A summary of some discussion points I now cover with clients in the context of talent management is given in Table 8.1.

Strategic imperative	• What are your business needs? • How important is alignment to you? • How can you evaluate and measure the impact of your activities?
Structural opportunities	• How to communicate emerging organizational needs to help shape people's thinking on 'where am I going?' • What opportunities can you create for people to develop skills and experiences in the absence of the 'stepping stone' roles?
Cultural alignment	• How open do you want to be about the talent agenda and processes? • What are the implications and consequences of this? • What informal approaches can you support?
Role transparency	• How to increase the transparency of the career deal and make roles transparent to all
Formal talent and career processes	• Which formal processes support your strategy? • How can you collect quality information on people's aspirations?
Career shapers	• How can you support people in giving great conversations • How can you engage and support these people (not just through written communications)
Individuals	• How to provide greater support for individuals in terms of career self-management

Table 8.1: Discussion points for how to improve organizational talent management.

8.5 Implications for talent and career theory

This study has referenced widely varied research and theory as shown in the chapters reporting the findings. In the same way as some 'big themes' were selected from the findings, some have also been selected from a theoretical perspective. A number of implications will be considered below: the overlap between talent management and career development; the new organizational career; career shaper roles; the influence of context; local dynamics; the varied nature of helpful career conversations and methodological approaches. Possible avenues for further research will also be introduced as appropriate.

A starting point for this study was the observation of an apparent disconnect between organizational talent management and individual career development. This had also been referenced in academic literature, for example De Vos & Dries (2013). The HR participants' explanations of talent management illustrated that organizational talent and career activities tended to all be conducted under the umbrella of 'talent management'. This supported the suggestion by Yarnall (2008), that talent management was 'rebadged' organizational career management. A number of writers in the field of talent have recommended the benefits of mutuality between the organization and the individual (e.g. Campbell & Smith, 2014; Capelli, 2008). However, the results from this study indicate that there is little reference to mutuality or alignment within talent management practice. In contrast, when discussing career conversations, the HR participants described an interest in a partnership approach to individual careers. This illustrated a separation between the way talent and career were viewed by the HR stakeholders, potentially an example of bracketing (Giddens, 1991). Furthermore, it indicates a contrast between a 'hard' approach to talent management and a 'soft' approach to career development (Truss, *et al.*, 1997). This raises a number of questions. Firstly, do organizations genuinely want to achieve a more mutual or aligned approach to talent management? If so, what can they do from a context and practice point of view to fully engage with individual career aims? If an organization does want a more aligned approach it seems appropriate to draw on the extensive literature on career, in particular the literatures on organizational career and career self-management. Thus, this research supports the suggestion by Inkson (2008) that there are benefits in bringing the two approaches together. It is therefore suggested that further research is conducted to combine the approaches from the fields of talent and career.

The new organizational career was suggested by Clarke (2013). Within this study, Clarke's propositions were partially supported. In particular, there was strong evidence that people described experiencing flexible, varied and challenging organizational careers. Moreover, many individuals had

enjoyed development experiences. However, there was limited evidence of jointly managed career conversations and career experiences, and there were no examples of 'jointly managed careers' over a longer time frame. Furthermore, whilst there were some examples of 'balanced relationships', these tended to be between individuals and their line manager (or a trusted other person) rather than with the whole organization. In this thesis, the JW case study perhaps came close to this, but the lack of conversations about the future indicated that perhaps the organization tended to retain control. However, the propositions of 'jointly managed career' and 'balanced relationships' were described by individuals as how they would like things to be. Further research, looking for individual examples of jointly managed careers and organizations which tend to have a high number of these would provide greater understanding of the new organizational career from a context and process perspective.

The career shaper roles (Bosley *et al.*, 2009) were used within the analysis of this research. As discussed in chapters 6 and 7, two additional career shaper categories have been proposed; collaborator and catalyst. These conversations were valued by the individuals, and line managers also indicated that they enjoyed supporting people in these ways. These categories may be specifically appropriate to the management and professional population in this study, but could also be more widely visible. As with any typology, these categories could have a number of applications. Firstly, they can provide a helpful way to classify behaviours in future research, building increased understanding of how (and if) these categories contribute to career development. Furthermore, differences between organizations could be explored to understand the environments in which these types of conversations are most likely to take place. These areas would both be interesting lines of enquiry for future research. Secondly, the typology could be applied in a training setting, helping career shapers to build understanding and skills to support them in their career development roles. Thirdly, it could be helpful for individuals to consider the types of conversation they currently have and the types of conversation they may want to initiate in the future.

The influence of organizational context has been referenced by many writers (e.g. Collings, 2014, Iles et al 2010, Thunnissen et al 2013a). The current study was designed to further understanding of the ways in which context was seen to influence talent and career. The resulting contextual map (Figure 8.1) provides a way of describing these influences. Whilst developed from the data, the contextual map was clearly shown to relate to other research (e.g. Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Johns, 2006; Stahl *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, the inclusion of the local dynamics brings in some of the existing literature from career. These include the manager's role in career development (e.g. Yarnall, 1998) and approaches to individual career self-management (e.g. Seibert *et al.*, 2001). The contextual

map offers a number of possible avenues for further research. In particular, it could be used as a research tool with other case study organizations to explore its generalizability. Beyond this, each element could be clarified in more detail and potentially developed to include a diagnostic set of questions or points for discussion. It would also be interesting to compare a number of organizations and see if there are any patterns of organizations with certain strategies, cultures etc.

Within this study the local dynamics (interaction between the individual and a career shaper) emerged as perhaps the most important element of individual career development. However, within talent research this relationship tends to have been overlooked. It is therefore suggested that this offers an opportunity for further research. Once more, this would provide an opportunity for cross-fertilization of ideas between academic disciplines such as mentoring and career. It would be particularly interesting to conduct research with dyads (in a similar way to Kram, 1985). A longitudinal study could be particularly valuable to build understanding of how these shaper roles develop and how organizations can support such informal interactions.

The varied nature of helpful career conversations in this research was consistent with the findings of Kidd *et al.*, (2001). In particular, the informal conversations were seen to support career development. This was summed up by a client in one of the context sessions as '*on demand, not on time*'. The value of the informal, unscripted conversations challenges the recommendations by Smith & Campbell (2010) and Clutterbuck (2012). Their suggestion of a set format for career conversations was not supported by this research. Furthermore, the observation that these conversations did not always take place within trusting relationships seems contrary to much received wisdom. These findings would be interesting to explore further. In particular, it might be useful to examine how to help individuals seek out the conversations they want with the people who can add value.

Finally, this study has responded to previous calls for research. Firstly, as discussed above, it has taken a contextualised approach (at individual and organizational level). This has answered calls from a number of writers including Collings (2014) and Iles *et al.* (2010). Secondly, the research involved input from three stakeholder groups, thus fulfilling suggestions from Clarke (2013) and Thunnissen *et al.*, (2013a). Finally, the approach combined talent and career literature, thus illustrating the overlap and benefits of working across these boundaries (De Vos & Dries, 2013; Inkson, 2008). Thus, the study could provide a model for other research which aims to capture contextual influences, represent stakeholder perspectives and combine different literatures.

8.6 Study limitations and surprises

As discussed in chapter 4, there are a number of limitations with this study (as with all other research). The limitations as a result of the sample, the methods and the analysis will not be revisited here. However, the limitations due to my '*positionality*' (Lincoln, 1995) are important to revisit in the light of the findings. My previous experiences and beliefs have inevitably shaped the findings (Cassell & Symon, 2012). Throughout the preceding chapters some of these influences have been highlighted. For example, the similarity of the perceived contributions of career conversations with Egan's skilled helper model (e.g. Egan, 2013) was identified. Similarly, the development of the contextual map was recognised as influenced by complexity theory. One influence which has not hitherto been discussed is my pre-existing frustration with many HR professionals who do not apply a critical lens to their practice (an issue raised in chapter 4). This research has, in many ways added to this sense of frustration. Indeed, I have been surprised by the extent to which thinking seems to be 'bracketed' (Giddens, 1991). For example, there seemed little thinking of the potential consequences of a lack of transparency (beyond justifying the approach being taken). Similarly, whilst many of the HR participants were engaged in initiatives to increase engagement, few had considered how to use talent management or career development as vehicles for this. Furthermore, the consequences of the 'mixed messages' on career development (the individual as accountable, but not being given the tools) had not been considered by many participants. Finally, the low level of awareness of the influence of power and politics surprised me. For example, an acceptance by many of the HR participants that patronage existed but was not a concern. Overall, I was disappointed by the extent to which the HR participants focused on a 'guardian of the process' rather than 'employee champion' role (Farndale *et al.*, 2010).

However, not all of the findings have confirmed my previous assumptions and views. During a presentation of my research at a Loughborough University student colloquium (May 2015), I was asked by Professor Christine Coupland what had surprised me thus far in terms of my results. The question struck me, and at the time I found it difficult to answer. However, I now summarise some of the findings which have surprised me, thus illustrating how my findings (and the research process) have encouraged me to challenge my own taken for granted knowledge (Burr, 2003).

The number of positive conversations reported by individuals was a pleasant surprise for me. I had not expected to hear so many experiences of positive conversations. However, all individuals were able to describe positive experiences and many of these had taken place with their line manager. Similarly, the commitment and awareness shown by line managers was a very positive surprise. Many

managers described themselves as very engaged in supporting the careers of their team members, with a particular interest in seeking alignment. Whilst recognising that there could be a gap between their descriptions and their actions, and they may have engaged in 'identity work' (Rapley, 2004), the way they described their interest was very credible. Perhaps, like the HR participants, I was too ready to assume that most line managers did not have the skills or interest to conduct constructive conversations.

I was also surprised by the lack of mutual appreciation shown between the HR functions and the line managers. Neither seemed to really understand or appreciate the contribution of the other. For example, as indicated above, the HR participants tended to assume that line managers were uncommitted and unskilled in terms of developing their people. Furthermore, the line managers tended to be negative when describing the contribution of HR in general and HR processes in particular. This has a potential implication in terms of alignment and highlights the importance of taking all stakeholder views and needs into account.

The level of informal conversations was also unexpected. Throughout my career I have been involved in implementation of many performance management and coaching programmes. Whilst recognizing the limitations of these, I have tended to feel that they add value. However, the focus on informal conversations as a vehicle for career development was greater than I had anticipated. Such informal approaches are consistent with an emergent complexity approach. The findings are making me question the role of formal processes and how they can be improved (if there is a role for them).

A further surprise was the number of people who had experienced cross-functional moves within an organization. I had assumed that this was still quite rare, albeit something to be encouraged. However, the findings illustrated that many individuals were experiencing a flexible and challenging career, with many opportunities for development as suggested by Clarke's new organizational career (Clarke, 2013). However, I was not surprised by the lack of jointly managed careers which are another proposition of Clarke's new organizational career.

The final big surprise was how little things appear to have changed. It seems that over the past 20 years the language of talent management has replaced that of organizational career management. However, the issues and debates seem to be the same. For example, the recommendations from Herriot & Pemberton's 1995 book, 'New Deals: The revolution in Managerial Careers' resonate with the findings from this study. Albeit set against a different set of economic and

global challenges, the suggestion of clear contracting on the career deal applies equally in today's climate and is a clear recommendation emerging from this study. Similarly, some of the issues raised by Hirsh & Jackson (1996) echoed findings from this study. For example, their findings are summarised as follows;

> *'The case studies indicated that sustainable career development requires a degree of alignment between messages regarding employment and development. Despite the general rhetoric of career development, employers appeared to be focusing their career development efforts on senior managers and "high-potential" staff, while leaving the wider work force to manage their own career development'*
>
> Hirsh & Jackson (1996:1)

In addition to being an interesting observation, this was also somewhat sobering. Despite all of the attention to talent management, and the rhetoric about the need to urgently address these issues, there seem to have been few advances in practice. Perhaps such rhetoric on talent management is equivalent to the rhetoric on the death of organizational careers: a lot of talk, but little evidence to support a fundamental change (e.g. Arnold & Cohen, 2008).

8.7 Reflections

This chapter has attempted to draw together the themes and findings from across the study. The potential contribution of this research to both practice and theory has been shown. The central theme of the thesis has been alignment of individual and organizational goals. The findings suggest that HR professionals do not tend to seek alignment between organizational talent and individual career. Line managers and individuals however are keen to create opportunities for alignment. Career conversations are seen as an opportunity to align organizational and individual goals. A wide variety of conversations are seen as contributing to individual career development, many of these are informal and take place with the line manager. There seem to be a number of contextual influences on talent management and career development. These have been represented as taking place at different interacting levels: wider; organizational and local.

Completing this thesis has been an exciting and enjoyable learning journey. I have learnt a lot about the research process and were I to start again there are things I would do differently. The experience has fulfilled my desire for structured learning and for developing an in-depth knowledge of one particular topic. However, I have not yet reached my destination. Rather, I see this thesis as

an initial venture, one in which I have looked at the terrain and developed an overview of the environment. My next adventure will take me into more detail on one of the roads I have seen… perhaps building on the contextual map or developing approaches to encourage more informal career conversations. I don't yet know, but I do know that I will continue to bring together academic and practitioner thinking.

References

A. AGARWAL, U., 2014. Linking justice, trust and innovative work behaviour to work engagement. *Personnel Review,* **43**(1), pp. 41-73.

AGGARWAL, U. and BHARGAVA, S., 2009. Reviewing the relationship between human resource practices and psychological contract and their impact on employee attitude and behaviours: A conceptual model. *Journal of European Industrial Training,* **33**(1), pp. 4-31.

AL ARISS, A., CASCIO, W.F. and PAAUWE, J., 2014. Talent management: Current theories and future research directions. *Journal of World Business,* **49**(2), pp. 173-179.

ALVESSON, M. and ASHCRAFT, K., 2012. Interviews. In: G. SYMON and C. CASSELL, eds. *Qualitative Organizational Research, Core methods and current challenges.* Sage, pp. 239-257

ARNOLD, J. and COHEN, L., 2013. Careers in organizations. In: WALSH, B.; SAVICKAS, M.; HARTUNG, P., eds. *Handbook of Vocational Psychology: Theory, Research, and Practice.* Routledge**,** pp. 273-304.

ARNOLD, J., 1997. Nineteen propositions concerning the nature of effective thinking for career management in a turbulent world. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* **25**(4), pp. 447-462.

ARNOLD, J. and COHEN, L., 2008. 1 The Psychology of Careers in Industrial and Organizational Settings: A Critical But Appreciative Analysis. *International review of industrial and organizational psychology,* **23**, pp. 1 – 44.

ARTHUR, M.B. and ROUSSEAU, D.M., 1996. *The boundaryless career.* Oxford University Press.

ARYEE, S., BUDHWAR, P.S. and CHEN, Z.X., 2002. Trust as a mediator of the relationship between organizational justice and work outcomes: Test of a social exchange model. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **23**(3), pp. 267-285.

ASHTON, C. and MORTON, L., 2005. Managing talent for competitive advantage: Taking a systemic approach to talent management. *Strategic HR Review,* **4**(5), pp. 28-31.

ATKINSON, P., DELAMONT, S. and HOUSLEY, W., 2008. *Contours of culture: Complex ethnography and the ethnography of complexity.* Rowman Altamira.

BAGDADLI, S., 2007. Designing career systems. Are we ready for it. In: GUNZ, H. AND PEIPERL, M., eds. *Handbook of career studies. Sage,* pp. 497-501.

BAILYN, L., 1989. Understanding individual experience at work: comments on the theory and practice of careers. In ARTHUR, M., HALL T., LAWRENCE, B. eds. *Handbook of career theory.* Cambridge University Press, pp. 477 - 489.

BARNER, R., 2006. *Bench Strength: Developing the Depth and Versatility of Your Organization's Leadership Talent.* New York: AMACOM American Management Association.

BARNEY, J.B., 2001. Resource-based theories of competitive advantage: A ten-year retrospective on the resource-based view. *Journal of management,* **27**(6), pp. 643-650.

BARUCH, Y., 2006. Career development in organizations and beyond: Balancing traditional and contemporary viewpoints. *Human resource management review,* **16**(2), pp. 125-138.

BARUCH, Y., 2004. Transforming careers: from linear to multidirectional career paths: organizational and individual perspectives. *Career development international,* **9**(1), pp. 58-73.

BARUCH, Y., 2003. Career systems in transition: A normative model for organizational career practices. *Personnel review,* **32**(2), pp. 231-251.

BERG, P., 1999. The effects of high performance work practices on job satisfaction in the United States steel industry. *Relations industrielles/Industrial relations,* , pp. 111-135.

BIRKINSHAW, J., FOSS, N., LINDENBERG, S., Spring 2014. *Combining profits with purpose*. MIT Sloan Management Review, pp. 49 – 56.

BIRKINSHAW, J., HEALEY, M.P., SUDDABY, R. and WEBER, K., 2014. Debating the future of management research. *Journal of Management Studies,* **51**(1), pp. 38-55.

BLAU, P.M., 1964. *Exchange and power in social life.* Transaction Publishers.

BLOOR, M., 1978. On the analysis of observational data: a discussion of the worth and uses of inductive techniques and respondent validation. *Sociology,* **12**(3), pp. 545-552.

BLUSTEIN, D.L., SCHULTHEISS, D.E.P. and FLUM, H., 2004. Toward a relational perspective of the psychology of careers and working: A social constructionist analysis. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **64**(3), pp. 423-440.

BOKENO, R.M., 2007. Dialogue at work? What it is and isn't. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal,* **21**(1), pp. 9-11.

BOSLEY, S.L., ARNOLD, J. and COHEN, L., 2009. How other people shape our careers: A typology drawn from career narratives. *Human Relations,* **62**(10), pp. 1487-1520.

BOSLEY, S., ARNOLD, J. and COHEN, L., 2007. The anatomy of credibility: A conceptual framework of valued career helper attributes. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **70**(1), pp. 116-134.

BOUDREAU, J.W., 2010. *IBM's Global Talent Management Strategy: The Vision of the Globally Integrated Enterprise.* Alexandria, VA: Society for Human Resource Management.

BOURDIEU, P., 1986. The Forms of Capital. In: RICHARDSON, J. *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Greenwood Publishing Group, pp. 241 - 258

BOWLBY, J., 2005. *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory.* Taylor & Francis.

BOWMAN, C., HIRD, M., 2014. A resource based view of talent management. In SPARROW, P., SCULLION, H. and TARIQUE, I., *Strategic talent management: Contemporary issues in international context.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

BOXALL, P. and MACKY, K., 2009. Research and theory on high-performance work systems: progressing the high-involvement stream. *Human Resource Management Journal,* **19**(1), pp. 3-23.

BREAKWELL, G., 1995. Interviewing. In: BREAKWELL, GM, HAMMOND, S. AND FIFE-SCHAW, C., eds. *Research methods in psychology.* London: Sage, pp. 230 – 242.

BUCHANAN, D., 2004. Getting the story straight: illusions and delusions in the organizational change process. Tamara: the journal of critical postmodern organization science, **2**(4), pp. 7-21.

BUCHANAN, D.A., 2012. Case studies in organizational research. *Qualitative organizational research,* , pp. 351-370.

BURR, V., 2003. *Social constructionism*. London and New York: Routledge.

CAELLI, K., RAY, L. and MILL, J., 2003. 'Clear as mud': toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative methods,* **2**(2), pp. 1-13.

CAMBRIDGE BUSINESS DICTIONARY, . Available: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/align [03/30, 2017].

CAMBRIDGE BUSINESS DIRECTORY, . Available: http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mutual [03/30, 2017].

CAMPBELL, M. and SMITH, R., 2010. High-potential talent: A view from inside the leadership pipeline. *Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership*.

CAPPELLI, P., 2009. Talent on Demand–Managing Talent in an Age of Uncertainty. *Strategic Direction.* Harvard Business Press, Boston.

CAPPELLI, P., 2008. Talent management for the twenty-first century. *Harvard business review,* **86**(3).

CAPPELLI, P. and SHERER, P.D., 1991. The missing role of context in OB-the need for a meso-level approach. *Research in organizational behavior,* **13**, pp. 55-110.

CASCIO, W., 2007. Trends, paradoxes, and some directions for research in career studies. *Handbook of career studies,* , pp. 549-557.

CASSELL, C. and SYMON, G., 2011. Assessing 'good' qualitative research in the work psychology field: A narrative analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* **84**(4), pp. 633-650.

CHAMBERS, E.G., FOULON, M., HANDFIELD-JONES, H., HANKIN, S.M. and MICHAELS, E.G., 1998. The war for talent. *McKinsey Quarterly,* pp. 44-57.

CHECKLAND, P. and HOLWELL, S., 1998. Action research: its nature and validity. *Systemic Practice and Action Research,* **11**(1), pp. 9-21.

CHURCH, A. and WACLAWSKI, J., 2010. Taking the Pepsi Challenge: Talent Development at Pepsico. In: R. SILZER and B. DOWELL, eds. *Strategy-Driven Talent Management: A Leadership Imperative.* pp. 617-640.

CIPD, 2016-last update, Talent Management CIPD Viewpoint. Available: https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/resourcing/talent-factsheet#7241 [02,27, 2017].

CLARKE, M., 2013. The organizational career: not dead but in need of redefinition. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **24**(4), pp. 684-703.

CLINTON, M.E. and GUEST, D.E., 2014. Psychological contract breach and voluntary turnover: Testing a multiple mediation model. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* **87**(1), pp. 200-207.

CLUTTERBUCK, D., 2012. *The Talent Wave: Why succession planning fails and what to do about it.* Kogan Page Publishers.

COHEN, L. and MANION, L., K. Morrison (2007) Research Methods in Education. Routledge, Abingdon

COHEN, L., DUBERLEY, J. and MALLON, M., 2004. Social constructionism in the study of career: Accessing the parts that other approaches cannot reach. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **64**(3), pp. 407-422.

COHEN, L. and EL-SAWAD, A., 2007. Lived experiences of offshoring: An examination of UK and Indian financial service employees' accounts of themselves and one another. *Human Relations,* **60**(8), pp. 1235-1262.

COHEN, L. and MALLON, M., 2001. My brilliant career? Using stories as a methodological tool in careers research. *International Studies of Management & Organization,* **31**(3), pp. 48-68.

COLLINGS, D.G., 2014a. Integrating global mobility and global talent management: Exploring the challenges and strategic opportunities. *Journal of World Business,* **49**(2), pp. 253-261.

COLLINGS, D.G., 2014b. Toward mature talent management: Beyond shareholder value. *Human Resource Development Quarterly,* **25**(3), pp. 301-319.

COLLINGS, D.G. and MELLAHI, K., 2009. Strategic talent management: A review and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review,* **19**(4), pp. 304-313.

CONWAY, N. and BRINER, R.B., 2005. *Understanding psychological contracts at work: A critical evaluation of theory and research.* Oxford University Press.

CONWAY, N. and BRINER, R.B., 2002. A daily diary study of affective responses to psychological contract breach and exceeded promises. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **23**(3), pp. 287-302.

CONWAY, N., KIEFER, T., HARTLEY, J. and BRINER, R.B., 2014. Doing more with less? Employee reactions to psychological contract breach via target similarity or spillover during public sector organizational change. *British Journal of Management,* **25**(4), pp. 737-754.

COOKE, F.L., 2011. Talent management in China. *Global talent management,* , pp. 132-153.

CORNELIUS, N. and SKINNER, D., 2008. The careers of senior men and women–A capabilities theory perspective. *British Journal of Management,* **19**(s1), pp. 141-149.

CORREIA, MC, SANTOS, NR AND PASSMORE J. (2016)., 2016. Understanding the coach-coachee-client relationship: A conceptual framework for executive coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review,* **11**(1), pp. 6-23.

COUPLAND, C., 2004. Career definition and denial: A discourse analysis of graduate trainees' accounts of career. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **64**(3), pp. 515-532.

CRAWSHAW, J.R. and GAME, A., 2015. The role of line managers in employee career management: an attachment theory perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **26**(9), pp. 1182-1203.

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, M. and CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, I.S., 1992. *Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness.* Cambridge university press.

DAMODARAN, L. and OLPHERT, W., 2000. Barriers and facilitators to the use of knowledge management systems. *Behaviour & Information Technology,* **19**(6), pp. 405-413.

DANY, F., MALLON, M. and ARTHUR, M., 2003. The odyssey of career and the opportunity for international comparison. *International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **14**(5), pp. 705-712.

DAVIES, B. and DAVIES, B.J., 2010. Talent management in academies. *International Journal of Educational Management,* **24**(5), pp. 418-426.

DE VOS, A., BUYENS, D. and SCHALK, R., 2003. Psychological contract development during organizational socialization: Adaptation to reality and the role of reciprocity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **24**(5), pp. 537-559.

DE VOS, A., DEWETTINCK, K. and BUYENS, D., 2009. The professional career on the right track: A study on the interaction between career self-management and organizational career management in explaining employee outcomes. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology,* **18**(1), pp. 55-80.

DE VOS, A. and DRIES, N., 2013. Applying a talent management lens to career management: The role of human capital composition and continuity. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **24**(9), pp. 1816-1831.

DE VOS, A. and MEGANCK, A., 2008. What HR managers do versus what employees value: Exploring both parties' views on retention management from a psychological contract perspective. *Personnel Review,* **38**(1), pp. 45-60.

DELOITTE, 2017-last update, Global Human Capital Trends 2017: rewriting the rules for the digital age [Homepage of Deloitte University Press], [Online]. Available: file:///C:/Users/Maggi/Downloads/hc-2017-global-human-capital-trends-gx.pdf.

DOUGHERTY, T.W. and DREHER, G.F., 2007. Mentoring and career outcomes. *The handbook of mentoring at work. Theory, research, and practice,* pp. 51-93.

DOUGHERTY, T.W., TURBAN, D.B. and HAGGARD, D.L., 2007. Naturally occurring mentoring relationships involving workplace employees. In: ALLEN, T, and EBY, L. eds., *The Blackwell handbook of mentoring: A multiple perspectives approach.* pp. 139-158.

DOWNS, Y. and SWAILES, S., 2013. A capability approach to organizational talent management. *Human Resource Development International,* **16**(3), pp. 267-281.

DRENNAN, D., 1992. *Transforming Company Culture.* Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill.

DRIES, N., 2014. *Conference Paper: Towards more inclusive and transparent talent management practices* Conference: UN Career Development Roundtable 2014, At Oslo, Norway: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268224445_Towards_more_inclusive_and_transparent_talent_management_practices.

DRIES, N., 2013. The psychology of talent management: A review and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review,* **23**(4), pp. 272-285.

DRIES, N., 2011. The meaning of career success: avoiding reification through a closer inspection of historical, cultural, and ideological contexts. *Career Development International,* **16**(4), pp. 364-384.

DRIES, N., COTTON, R.D., BAGDADLI, S. and DE OLIVEIRA, M.Z., 2014. HR directors' understanding of 'talent': a cross-cultural study. *Global Talent Management.* Springer, pp. 15-28.

DRIES, N. and DE GIETER, S., 2014. Information asymmetry in high potential programs: A potential risk for psychological contract breach. *Personnel Review,* **43**(1), pp. 136-162.

DRIES, N. and PEPERMANS, R., 2007. "Real" high-potential careers: An empirical study into the perspectives of organisations and high potentials. *Personnel Review,* **37**(1), pp. 85-108.

DUBERLEY, J., JOHNSON, P. and CASSELL, C., 2012. Philosophies underpinning qualitative research. In: SYMON, G and CASSELL, C. eds., *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges,* pp15 - 34.

EBY, L.T., BUTTS, M., AND LOCKWOOD, A., 2003. Predictors of Success in the Era of the Boundaryless Career. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **24** (6), pp. 689-708.

EBY, L.T., BUTTS, M.M., DURLEY, J. and RAGINS, B.R., 2010. Are bad experiences stronger than good ones in mentoring relationships? Evidence from the protégé and mentor perspective. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **77**(1), pp. 81-92.

EBY, L.T. and MCMANUS, S.E., 2004. The protégé's role in negative mentoring experiences. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **65**(2), pp. 255-275.

EBY, L.T., RHODES, J.E. and ALLEN, T.D., 2007. *Definition and evolution of mentoring.* Wiley-Blackwell.

EGAN, G., 2013. *The skilled helper: A problem-management and opportunity-development approach to helping.* Cengage Learning.

EL-SAWAD, A., ARNOLD, J. and COHEN, L., 2004. 'Doublethink': The prevalence and function of contradiction in accounts of organizational life. *Human Relations,* **57**(9), pp. 1179-1203.

ENGIN, M., 2011. Research diary: A tool for scaffolding. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* **10**(3), pp. 296-306.

FARNDALE, E., PAI, A., SPARROW, P. and SCULLION, H., 2014. Balancing individual and organizational goals in global talent management: A mutual-benefits perspective. *Journal of World Business,* **49**(2), pp. 204-214.

FARNDALE, E., PAI, A., SPARROW, P. and SCULLION, H., 2014. Balancing individual and organizational goals in global talent management: A mutual-benefits perspective. *Journal of World Business,* **49**(2), pp. 204-214.

FARNDALE, E., SCULLION, H. and SPARROW, P., 2010. The role of the corporate HR function in global talent management. *Journal of World Business,* **45**(2), pp. 161-168.

FELDMAN, D.C., 1988. *Managing careers in organizations.* Scott Foresman & Company.

FOUCAULT, M., 1982. The subject and power. *Critical inquiry,* **8**(4), pp. 777-795.

GARROW, V. and HIRSH, W., 2008. Talent management: Issues of focus and fit. *Public Personnel Management,* **37**(4), pp. 389-402.

GARVEY, B., 2004. The mentoring/counseling/coaching debate: call a rose by any other name and perhaps it's a bramble? *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal,* **18**(2), pp. 6-8.

GEERTZ, C., 1973. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays.* 1 edn. New York: Basic Books.

GELENS, J., DRIES, N., HOFMANS, J. and PEPERMANS, R., 2013. The role of perceived organizational justice in shaping the outcomes of talent management: A research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review,* **23**(4), pp. 341-353.

GEORGE, C., 2009. *The psychological contract: managing and developing professional groups.* McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

GIBB, S., 2003. Line manager involvement in learning and development: small beer or big deal? *Employee Relations,* **25**(3), pp. 281-293.

GIDDENS, A., 1991. Structuration theory. Past, Present and Future. In: BRYANT, C. and JARY, D. eds. *Giddens' Theory of Structuration. A Critical Appreciation.* London: Routledge.

GIDDENS, A., 1976. *New Rules of Sociological Method: a positive critique of interpretative sociologies.* London: Hutchinson.

GOLDSMITH, M. and CARTER, L., 2009. *Best Practices in Talent Management: How the World's Leading Corporations Manage, Develop, and Retain Top Talent.* John Wiley & Sons.

GOODMAN, P.S. and HAISLEY, E., 2007. Social comparison processes in an organizational context: New directions. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes,* **102**(1), pp. 109-125.

GORDON, G., GILLEY, A., AVERY, S., GILLEY, J.W. and BARBER, A., 2014. Employee perceptions of the manager behaviors that create follower-leader trust. *Management and Organizational Studies,* **1**(2), pp. 44.

GREENHAUS, J.H., CALLANAN, G.A. and GODSHALK, V.M., 2009. *Career management.* Sage.

GREY, C., 1994. Career as a project of the self and labour process discipline. *Sociology,* **28**(2), pp. 479-497.

GUBRIUM, J.F. and HOLSTEIN, J.A., 1997. *The new language of qualitative method.* Oxford University Press on Demand.

GUEST, D.E., 2004. The psychology of the employment relationship: An analysis based on the psychological contract. *Applied Psychology,* **53**(4), pp. 541-555.

GUEST, D.E. and CONWAY, N., 1998. *Fairness and work and the psychological contract.* Institute of Personnel and Development London.

GUNZ, H.P. and PEIPERL, M., 2007. Taxonomy of career studies. In: GUNZ, H.P. and PEIPERL, M., eds. *Handbook of career studies.* SAGE publications. pp. 39 – 54.

HAGGIS, T., 2008. 'Knowledge Must Be Contextual': Some possible implications of complexity and dynamic systems theories for educational research. *Educational philosophy and theory,* **40**(1), pp. 158-176.

HALL, D.T., 2004. The protean career: A quarter-century journey. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **65**(1), pp. 1-13.

HALL, D.T., 1996. *The Career Is Dead--Long Live the Career. A Relational Approach to Careers. The Jossey-Bass Business & Management Series.* ERIC.

HAMEL, G. AND C.K. PRAHALAD, 1994. *Competing for the future: Breakthrough strategies for seizing control of your industries and creating the markets of tomorrow. Harvard Business school Press.* Harvard Business school Press.

HAMMERSLEY, M. and ATKINSON, P., 1998. *Ethnographic research: A critical guide*. Longman, New York.

HARRIS, J.I., WINSKOWSKI, A.M. and ENGDAHL, B.E., 2007. Types of workplace social support in the prediction of job satisfaction. *The Career Development Quarterly,* **56**(2), pp. 150-156.

HAYNES, K., 2012. Reflexivity in qualitative research. In: SYMON, G. and CASSELL, C. eds. *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges.* pp. 72-89.

HERRIOT, P., 1992. *The career management challenge: Balancing individual and organizational needs.* Sage.

HERRIOT, P., BEVAN, S., HIRSH, W. and REILLY, P.A., 1998. *Trust and transition: Managing today's employment relationship.* Wiley.

HERRIOT, P. and PEMBERTON, C., 1997. Facilitating new deals. *Human resource management journal,* **7**(1), pp. 45-56.

HERRIOT, P. and PEMBERTON, C., 1996. Contracting careers. *Human Relations,* **49**(6), pp. 757-790.

HERRIOT, P. and PEMBERTON, C., 1995. *New deals: The revolution in managerial careers.* John Wiley & Son Ltd.

HIGGINS, M.C., CHANDLER, D.E. and KRAM, K.E., 2007. Developmental initiation and developmental networks. In: RAGINS, B. and KRAM, K. eds. *The handbook of mentoring at work: Theory, research, and practice.* pp. 349-372.

HIGGINS, M.C. and KRAM, K.E., 2001. Reconceptualizing mentoring at work: A developmental network perspective. *Academy of management review,* **26**(2), pp. 264-288.

HIRSH, W., 2008. *Career development in employing organisations: practices and challenges from a UK perspective.* London: Institute for employment Studies.

HIRSH, W. and JACKSON, C., 2004. Corporate partners research programme. *Managing careers in large organizations. London: The Work Foundation.*

HIRSH, W. and JACKSON, C., 1996. Strategies for Career Development: Promise, Practice and Pretence. Report 305. Institute for Employment Studies

HIRSH, W., JACKSON, C. and KIDD, J.M., 2001. *Straight talking: effective career discussions at work.* National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling.

HÖGLUND, M., 2012. Quid pro quo? Examining talent management through the lens of psychological contracts. *Personnel Review,* **41**(2), pp. 126-142.

HOLSTEIN, J.A. and GUBRIUM, J.F., 2004. The active interview. *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice,* **2**, pp. 140-161.

HUGH SCULLION, DR VLAD VAIMAN AND PROFESSOR DAVID G. COLLINGS, PROFESSOR and THUNNISSEN, M., 2016. Talent management: For what, how and how well? An empirical exploration of talent management in practice. *Employee Relations,* **38**(1), pp. 57-72.

IELLATCHITCH, A., MAYRHOFER, W. and MEYER, M., 2003. Career fields: a small step towards a grand career theory? *International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **14**(5), pp. 728-750.

ILES, P., PREECE, D. and CHUAI, X., 2010. Talent management as a management fashion in HRD: towards a research agenda. *Human Resource Development International,* **13**(2), pp. 125-145.

INGHAM, J., 2006. Closing the talent management gap: Harnessing your employees' talent to deliver optimum business performance. *Strategic HR Review,* **5**(3), pp. 20-23.

INKSON, K., 2008. Are humans resources? *Career Development International,* **13**(3), pp. 270-279.

INKSON, K., DRIES, N. and ARNOLD, J., 2014. *Understanding careers: Metaphors of working lives.* Sage.

INKSON, K., HEISING, A. and ROUSSEAU, D.M., 2001. The Interim manager: Prototype of the 21 st-century worker? *Human Relations,* **54**(3), pp. 259-284.

JOHNS, G., 2006. The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of management review,* **31**(2), pp. 386-408.

JOHNSON, G., SCHOLES, K. and WHITTINGTON, R., 2008. *Exploring corporate strategy: text & cases.* Pearson Education.

KALLEBERG, A.L. and MARSDEN, P.V., 2012. Labor force insecurity and US work attitudes, 1970s–2006. *Social Trends in American Life: Findings for the Genderal Social Survey Since 1972,* , pp. 315-337.

KAMOCHE, K., PANG, M. and WONG, A.L., 2011. Career development and knowledge appropriation: A genealogical critique. *Organization Studies,* **32**(12), pp. 1665-1679.

KELLY, A., BRANNICK, T., HULPKE, J., LEVINE, J. and TO, M., 2003. Linking organisational training and development practices with new forms of career structure: a cross-national exploration. *Journal of European Industrial Training,* **27**(2/3/4), pp. 160-168.

KENEALY, G.J., 2012. Grounded theory: A theory building approach. In: SYMON, G. and CASSELL, C., eds. *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges.* pp. 408-425.

KIDD, J.M., 2007. Career counseling. In: GUNZ, H., and PEIPERL, M., eds. *Handbook of career studies.* pp. 59-78.

KIDD, J.M., 2004. Emotion in career contexts: Challenges for theory and research. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **64**(3), pp. 441-454.

KIDD, J.M., HIRSH, W. and JACKSON, C., 2004. Straight talking: The nature of effective career discussion at work. *Journal of Career Development,* **30**(4), pp. 231-245.

KIDD, J.M., JACKSON, C. and HIRSH, W., 2003. The outcomes of effective career discussion at work. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **62**(1), pp. 119-133.

KING, N., 2012. Doing template analysis. In: G. SYMON and C. CASSELL EDS. *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges.* pp. 426 – 450.

KING, Z., 2004. Career self-management: Its nature, causes and consequences. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **65**(1), pp. 112-133.

KONTOGHIORGHES, C., 2016. Linking high performance organizational culture and talent management: satisfaction/motivation and organizational commitment as mediators. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **27**(16), pp. 1833-1853.

KRAM, K.E., 1996. A relational approach to career development. In: D.T. HALL, ed, *The career is dead—Long live the career.* San Fancisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 132-157.

KRAM, K.E., 1985. Improving the mentoring process. *Training & Development Journal,* **39** (4) pp. 40 – 43.

KRIESHOK, T.S., BLACK, M.D. and MCKAY, R.A., 2009. Career decision making: The limits of rationality and the abundance of non-conscious processes. *Journal of vocational behavior,* **75**(3), pp. 275-290.

LEE, T.W., 1999. *Using qualitative methods in organizational research.* Sage.

LEPAK, D.P. and SNELL, S.A., 1999. The human resource architecture: Toward a theory of human capital allocation and development. *Academy of management review,* **24**(1), pp. 31-48.

LEWIS, R.E. and HECKMAN, R.J., 2006. Talent management: A critical review. *Human Resource Management Review,* **16**(2), pp. 139-154.

LINCOLN, Y.S., 1995. Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative inquiry,* **1**(3), pp. 275-289.

LINCOLN, Y.S. and GUBA, E.G., 1987. *Ethics: the failure of positivist science*. Paper prepared for annual meeting of American Educational Research Association, Washington DC, April, 1987.

LINCOLN, Y.S. and GUBA, E.G., 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry.* Sage.

LIPS-WIERSMA, M. and HALL, D.T., 2007. Organizational career development is not dead: A case study on managing the new career during organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **28**(6), pp. 771-792.

MAITLIS, S., 2012. Narrative analysis. In: G. SYMON and C. CASSELL, eds, *Qualitative Organizational Research.* Sage Publication, pp. 492-511.

MARTIN, G. and GROEN-IN'T-WOUD, S., 2011. Employer branding and corporate reputation management in global companies: A signaling model and case illustration. In: SCULLION, H., and COLLINGS, D., eds. *Global talent management.* Routledge pp. 87-110.

MCCARTHY, G. and MILNER, J., 2013. Managerial coaching: challenges, opportunities and training. *Journal of Management Development,* **32**(7), pp. 768-779.

MCGOVERN, P., GRATTON, L., HOPE-HAILEY, V., STILES, P. and TRUSS, C., 1997. Human resource management on the line? *Human Resource Management Journal,* **7**(4), pp. 12-29.

MCMAHON, M.L. and PATTON, W.A., 2006. The systems theory framework: A conceptual and practical map for career counselling. *Career counselling: Constructivist approaches.* Routledge, pp. 94-109.

MCMILLAN, E., 2008. *Complexity, management and the dynamics of change: Challenges for practice.* Routledge.

MILES, M.B. and HUBERMAN, A.M., 1994. Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook. *Beverly Hills: Sage Publications,* .

MILES, M.B., HUBERMAN, A.M. and SALDANA, J., 2014. *Qualitative data analysis.* 3rd edn. Sage.

MINBAEVA, D. and COLLINGS, D.G., 2013. Seven myths of global talent management. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **24**(9), pp. 1762-1776.

MIRVIS, P.H. and HALL, D.T., 1994. Psychological success and the boundaryless career. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **15**(4), pp. 365-380.

NIJS, S., GALLARDO-GALLARDO, E., DRIES, N. and SELS, L., 2013. A multidisciplinary review into the definition, operationalization, and measurement of talent. *Journal of World Business,* .

NISHII, L.H., LEPAK, D.P. and SCHNEIDER, B., 2008. Employee attributions of the "why" of HR practices: Their effects on employee attitudes and behaviors, and customer satisfaction. *Personnel Psychology,* **61**(3), pp. 503-545.

NIXON, J. and CARROLL, M., 1994. Can a line manager also be a counsellor? *Employee Counselling Today,* **6**(1), pp. 10-15.

OLIVER, P., 2012. *Succeeding With Your Literature Review: A Handbook For Students: A Handbook for Students.* McGraw-Hill International.

PAAUWE, J., 2009. HRM and performance: Achievements, methodological issues and prospects. *Journal of Management studies,* **46**(1), pp. 129-142.

PARDO, C., MISSIRILIAN, O., PORTIER, P. and SALLE, R., 2011. Barriers to the "key supplierization" of the firm. *Industrial Marketing Management,* **40**(6), pp. 853-861.

PARKER, P., HALL, D.T. and KRAM, K.E., 2008. Peer coaching: A relational process for accelerating career learning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education,* **7**(4), pp. 487-503.

PARKER, P. and INKSON, K., 1999. New forms of career: The challenge to human resource management. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources,* **37**(1), pp. 76-85.

PARSONS, F., 1909. *Choosing a vocation.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

PAUSTIAN-UNDERDAHL, S.C., SHANOCK, L.R., ROGELBERG, S.G., W SCOTT, C., JUSTICE, L. and ALTMAN, D.G., 2013. Antecedents to supportive supervision: An examination of biographical data. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* **86**(3), pp. 288-309.

PEIPERL, M. and GUNZ, H., 2007. Taxonomy of career studies. In: H.P. GUNZ and M. PEIPERL, eds., *Handbook of career studies.* SAGE publications, pp. 39-54.

PERRY, E.L. and KULIK, C.T., 2008. The devolution of HR to the line: Implications for perceptions of people management effectiveness. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **19**(2), pp. 262-273.

PFEFFER, J., 2001. Fighting the war for talent is hazardous to your organization's health. *Organizational Dynamics,* **29**(4), pp. 248-259.

PIRRIE, A. and MACLEOD, G., 2010. Tripping, slipping and losing the way: moving beyond methodological difficulties in social research. *British Educational Research Journal,* **36**(3), pp. 367-378.

POLKINGHORNE, D.E., 1995. Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International journal of qualitative studies in education,* **8**(1), pp. 5-23.

PORTER, L.W. and MCLAUGHLIN, G.B., 2006. Leadership and the organizational context: Like the weather? *The Leadership Quarterly,* **17**(6), pp. 559-576.

POTTER, J. and WETHERELL, M., 1995. Discourse analysis. In: SMITH, J., HARRE, R., VAN LANGENHOVE, L. eds. *Rethinking methods in psychology.* Sage, pp. 80 – 92.

PURCELL, J. and HUTCHINSON, S., 2007. Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: theory, analysis and evidence. *Human Resource management journal,* **17**(1), pp. 3-20.

RAGINS, B.R. and COTTON, J.L., 1999. Mentor functions and outcomes: a comparison of men and women in formal and informal mentoring relationships. *Journal of applied psychology,* **84**(4), pp. 529.

RAGINS, B.R., COTTON, J.L. and MILLER, J.S., 2000. Marginal mentoring: The effects of type of mentor, quality of relationship, and program design on work and career attitudes. *Academy of management journal,* **43**(6), pp. 1177-1194.

RAPLEY, T., 2004. Interviews. In: C. SEALE, G. GOBO, J.F. GUBRIUM and D. SILVERMAN, eds. *Qualitative research practice.* Sage, pp. 15-33.

READY, D.A. and CONGER, J.A., 2007. Make your company a talent factory. *Harvard business review,* **85**(6).

READY, D.A., HILL, L.A. and THOMAS, R.J., 2014. Building a Game-Changing Talent Strategy (Digest Summary). *Harvard business review,* **92**(1/2), pp. 63-68.

REILLY, P., 2008. Identifying the right course for talent management. *Public Personnel Management,* **37**(4), pp. 381-388.

RENWICK, D., 2003. Line manager involvement in HRM: an inside view. *Employee Relations,* **25**(3), pp. 262-280.

RENWICK, D. and MACNEIL, C.M., 2002. Line manager involvement in careers. *Career Development International,* **7**(7), pp. 407-414.

RICE, G., 2006. Individual values, organizational context, and self-perceptions of employee creativity: Evidence from Egyptian organizations. *Journal of Business Research,* **59**(2), pp. 233-241.

RIGHT MANAGEMENT, 2010. *Advancing career, driving results.* Right Management.

ROBINSON, S.L. and ROUSSEAU, D.M., 1994. Violating the psychological contract: Not the exception but the norm. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **15**(3), pp. 245-259.

ROBINSON, S.L. and ROUSSEAU, D.M., 1994. Violating the psychological contract: Not the exception but the norm. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **15**(3), pp. 245-259.

ROSTRON, S.S., 2009. The global initiatives in the coaching field. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice,* **2**(1), pp. 76-85.

ROTHWELL, A. and ARNOLD, J., 2005. How HR professionals rate 'continuing professional development'. *Human Resource Management Journal,* **15**(3), pp. 18-32.

ROUSSEAU, D., 1995. *Psychological contracts in organizations: Understanding written and unwritten agreements.* Sage Publications.

ROUSSEAU, D.M., 1998. The 'problem' of the psychological contract considered. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **19** (S1), pp. 665-671.

ROUSSEAU, D.M. and WADE-BENZONI, K.A., 1995. Changing individual–organization attachments: A two-way street.

SAVICKAS, M. L., & LENT, R. W, *Convergence in career development theories: Implications for science and practice.* Palo Alto, CA: CPP Books.

SCHEIN, E.H., 2010. *Organizational culture and leadership.* John Wiley & Sons.

SCHEIN, E.H., 1978. The role of the consultant: content expert or process facilitator? *Journal of Counseling & Development,* **56**(6), pp. 339-343.

SCULLION, H. and COLLINGS, D., 2011. Global talent management: introduction*. In: SCULLION, H., and COLLINGS, D., Global talent management*. Routledge.

SEIBERT, S.E., KRAIMER, M.L., HOLTOM, B.C. and PIEROTTI, A.J., 2013. Even the best laid plans sometimes go askew: Career self-management processes, career shocks, and the decision to pursue graduate education. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* **98**(1), pp. 169.

SHERMAN, R.R. and WEBB, R.B., 1988. Qualitative research in education: A focus. *Qualitative research in education: Focus and methods.* pp. 2-21.

SIDANI, Y. and AL ARISS, A., 2014. Institutional and corporate drivers of global talent management: Evidence from the Arab Gulf region. *Journal of World Business,* **49**(2), pp. 215-224.

SILVERMAN, D., 2006. *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction.* Sage.

SILZER, R. and CHURCH, A., 2010. Identifying and Assessing High-Potential Talent: Current Organizational Practices. In: R. SILZER and B. DOWELL, eds., *Strategy-Driven Talent Management: A Leadership Imperative.* San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 213-280.

SILZER, R. and DOWELL, B., 2010. Building Sustainable Talent Through Talent Management: Benefits, Challenges and Future Directions. In: R. SILZER and B. DOWELL, eds., *Strategy-Driven Talent Management: A Leadership Imperative.* pp. 745-766.

SILZER, R. and DOWELL, B.E., 2010. Strategic talent management matters. In: R. SILZER and B. DOWELL, eds. *Strategy-driven talent management: A leadership imperative.* pp. 3-72.

SKUZA, A., SCULLION, H. and MCDONNELL, A., 2013. An analysis of the talent management challenges in a post-communist country: The case of Poland. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **24**(3), pp. 453-470.

SLAY, H.S. and TAYLOR, M.S., 2007. Career systems and psychological contracts. In: GUNZ, H. and PEIPERL, M. eds. *Handbook of Career Studies, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA,* pp. 377-398.

SMITH, R. AND CAMPBELL, M., 2011. *Talent Conversations: what they are, why they're crucial and how to do them right.* 1 edn. Greensboro, North Carolina: Centre for Creative Leadership.

SMITH, R.B. and CAMPBELL, M., 2010. C-Suite Challenges and the Economic Meltdown: What's Next for Senior Leaders? *People and Strategy,* **33**(4), pp. 22.

SOMAYA, D. and WILLIAMSON, I., 2011. Embracing turnover: moving beyond the "war for talent". In: SCULLION, H. and COLLINGS, D., eds. *Global talent management.* Routledge New York.

SONNENFELD, J.A. and PEIPERL, M.A., 1988. Staffing policy as a strategic response: A typology of career systems. *Academy of Management Review,* **13**(4), pp. 588-600.

SPARROW, P.R. and MAKRAM, H., 2015. What is the value of talent management? Building value-driven processes within a talent management architecture. *Human resource management review,* **25**(3), pp. 249-263.

SPARROW, P., FARNDALE, E. and SCULLION, H., 2013. An empirical study of the role of the corporate HR function in global talent management in professional and financial service firms in the global financial crisis. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **24**(9), pp. 1777-1798.

SPARROW, P., HIRD, M. and BALAIN, S., 2011. *Time to question the tablets of stone?* Centre for performance led HR. Lancaster University Management School.

SPARROW, P., SCULLION, H. and FARNDALE, E., 2011. Global talent management: New roles for the corporate HR function. *Global Talent Management, Abingdon: Routledge,* pp. 39-55.

SPARROW, P., SCULLION, H. and TARIQUE, I., 2014a. Introduction: challenges for the field of strategic management. In: P. SPARROW, H. SCULLION and I. TARIQUE, eds. *Strategic talent management: Contemporary issues in international context.* Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-25.

SPARROW, P., SCULLION, H. and TARIQUE, I., 2014b. Multiple lenses on talent management: definitions and contours of the field. In: P. SPARROW, H. SCULLION and I. TARIQUE, eds. *Strategic talent management: Contemporary issues in international context.* Cambridge University Press. pp. 36 – 70.

SPARROW, P., SCULLION, H. and TARIQUE, I., 2014c. Strategic talent management: future directions. In: P. SPARROW, H. SCULLION and I. TARIQUE, eds. *Strategic talent management: Contemporary issues in international context.* Cambridge University Press. pp. 278 – 302.

STACEY, R.D., 2011. *Strategic management and organisational dynamics: The challenge of complexity.* 6 edn. Pearson education.

STAHL, G.K., CHUA, C.H., CALIGIURI, P., CERDIN, J.E. and TANIGUCHI, M., 2007. *International assignments as a career development tool: Factors affecting turnover intentions among executive talent.* Insead Faculty and research working paper.

STAHL, G., BJÖRKMAN, I., FARNDALE, E., MORRIS, S.S., PAAUWE, J., STILES, P., TREVOR, J. and WRIGHT, P., 2012. Six principles of effective global talent management. *Sloan management review,* **53**(2), pp. 25-42.

STEAD, G.B. and BAKKER, T.M., 2010. Discourse analysis in career counseling and development. *The Career Development Quarterly,* **59**(1), pp. 72-86.

STERNBERG, R.J., 2000. *Practical intelligence in everyday life.* Cambridge University Press.

STURGES, J., CONWAY, N., GUEST, D. and LIEFOOGHE, A., 2005. Managing the career deal: The psychological contract as a framework for understanding career management, organizational commitment and work behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **26**(7), pp. 821-838.

STURGES, J., CONWAY, N. and LIEFOOGHE, A., 2010. Organizational support, individual attributes, and the practice of career self-management behavior. *Group & Organization Management,* **35**(1), pp. 108-141.

STURGES, J., GUEST, D., CONWAY, N. and DAVEY, K.M., 2002. A longitudinal study of the relationship between career management and organizational commitment among graduates in the first ten years at work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* **23**(6), pp. 731-748.

STURGES, J., GUEST, D. and MAC DAVEY, K., 2000. Who's in charge? Graduates' attitudes to and experiences of career management and their relationship with organizational commitment. *European journal of work and organizational psychology,* **9**(3), pp. 351-370.

SUPER, D.E., 1990. A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In: BROWN, D. and BROOKS, L. eds. *Career choice and development, applying contemporary theories to practice.* Jossey-Bass, pp 197 – 261.

SWAILES, S., 2013. The ethics of talent management. *Business Ethics: A European Review,* **22**(1), pp. 32-46.

TARIQUE, I. and SCHULER, R., 2014. Typology of talent management strategies. *Strategic talent management: Contemporary issues in international context, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,*

THUNNISSEN, M., BOSELIE, P. and FRUYTIER, B., 2013a. A review of talent management: 'infancy or adolescence?'. *The international journal of human resource management,* **24**(9), pp. 1744-1761.

THUNNISSEN, M., BOSELIE, P. and FRUYTIER, B., 2013b. Talent management and the relevance of context: Towards a pluralistic approach. *Human Resource Management Review,* **23**(4), pp. 326-336.

TRUSS, C., 2001. Complexities and controversies in linking HRM with organizational outcomes. *Journal of Management Studies,* **38**(8), pp. 1121-1149.

TRUSS, C., GRATTON, L., HOPE-HAILEY, V., MCGOVERN, P. and STILES, P., 1997. Soft and hard models of human resource management: a reappraisal. *Journal of Management Studies,* **34**(1), pp. 53-73.

ULRICH, D. and BROCKBANK, W., 2005. *The HR value proposition.* Harvard Business Press.

VAIMAN, V. and HOLDEN, N., 2011. Talent management in Central and Eastern Europe: challenges and trends. In: SCULLION, H. and COLLINGS, D., eds. *Global Talent Management, Routledge, London,* pp. 178 – 193.

VAIMAN, V., SCULLION, H. and COLLINGS, D., 2012. Talent management decision making. *Management Decision,* **50**(5), pp. 925-941.

VAIMAN, V. and COLLINGS, D.G., 2013. Talent management: advancing the field *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **24**(9), pp. 1737 - 1743.

VAN BUREN, H.J., 2003. Boundaryless careers and employability obligations. *Business Ethics Quarterly,* **13**(02), pp. 131-149.

VARDI, Y. and WEITZ, E., 2004. *Misbehavior in organizations: Theory, research, and management.* Psychology Press.

VOS, A.D. and DRIES, N., 2013. Applying a talent management lens to career management: the role of human capital composition and continuity. *International journal of human resource management,* **24**(9), pp. 1816-1831.

WENGRAF, T., 2001. *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods.* Sage.

WISEMAN, R., 2004. *The Luck Factor: the scientific study of the lucky mind.* New York: Random House.

WRIGHT, P. AND NISHII, L, 2013. Strategic HRM and organizational behaviour: integrating multiple levels of Analysis. In: PAAUWE, J., GUEST AND WRIGHT, P. (EDS), ed., *HRM and Performance. Achievements and Challenges.* Chichester: Wiley, pp. 97-110.

YARNALL, J., 2007. *Strategic career management.* Routledge.

YARNALL, J., 1998. Line managers as career developers: rhetoric or reality? *Personnel Review,* **27**(5), pp. 378-395.

YIN, R.K., 2009. How to do better case studies. *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods,* **2**, pp. 254-282.

YOUNG, R.A., VALACH, L. and COLLIN, A., 2002. A contextualist explanation of career. *Career choice and development,* **4**, pp. 206-252.

ZHANG, L., LIU, J., LOI, R., LAU, V.P. and NGO, H., 2010. Social capital and career outcomes: a study of Chinese employees. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* **21**(8), pp. 1323-1336.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Phase 1: Participant profile summary

Senior HR Professionals	
Name	**Organisation Description and approximate employee numbers**
Bridget	FMCG, UK based, 100 employees
Charlie	FMCG, food and agriculture group, global, over 100 000 employees
Gareth	Banking and financial services, Asia, 1 500 employees
Hermione	Manufacturing, global, 7 000 employees
Hilary	Technology and engineering, UK and Asia, 250 employees
Ian	NHS Trust, multi-site, 10 000 employees
Jessica	FMCG, UK 1 500 employees
Jim	Design and manufacture of leisure product, global, 2 000 employees
Julia	Local Government shared service centre, UK, 13 000 employees
Julie	Financial services consulting, global, 40 000 employees
Lisa	Banking and financial services, Europe, 10 000 employees
Marcus	Building and construction, UK, 650 employees
Nicky	NHS Foundation Trust, 3 500 employees
Peter	Financial services, global, over 50 000 employees
Richard	Professional services, global, 8 000 employees
Rod	Educational institution, UK, 1 500 employees
Ruth	Utility company, UK, Europe and America, 30 000 employees
Simon	FMCG, global, 35 000 employees
Sindy	Manufacturing, UK and Europe, 2 000 employees
Steve	Banking and financial services, global, over 100 000 employees
Steph	Financial services, UK, 400 employees
Sue	NHS Trust, multi-site, 10 000 employees
Suzanne	Financial services, UK and Europe, 3 500 employees

OD Consultants	
Hugo, Marie, Steve	OD, leadership and change consultants and coaches
Aaron, Gillian	HR consultants and coaches
Caroline, John	Career and outplacement consultants and coaches

Appendix 2 Phase 1: Information provided to participants

Improving Workplace Career Conversations

Phase 1 – HR and OD Perspectives

Main researcher: Maggi Evans, Loughborough University, School of Business and Economics, maggi@mosaic-consulting.co.uk 07850 903508

Supervisor: Professor John Arnold, BE.2.81, Sir Richard Morris Building, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU J.Arnold@lboro.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?

Workplace career conversations are considered an important part of organisational talent management processes and individual career management development. At their best they provide an opportunity for open sharing about motivations and aspirations, a chance to align, to create shared career goals and a joint commitment to future actions. However, whilst this may be the opportunity, research evidence suggests that this aim is not always achieved and any gap in goals, expectations and approach to these conversations is likely to have a negative impact on the organisation and the individual.

Phase 1 of the research involves a series of discussions with 25-30 senior HR and OD professionals. These discussions will explore thoughts, views and experiences of career conversations as part of the talent management agenda within their organisation and more generally.

Phase 2 of the research will be change projects within MT case study organisations, working in collaboration with stakeholders to find practical ways to improve career conversations.

The research aims to contribute to understanding of workplace career conversations – furthering understanding in the academic community and helping to improve the way career conversations are conducted within organisations – benefitting the individual and the organisation.

Who is doing this research and why?

The research is being conducted by Maggi Evans, a Chartered Occupational Psychologist with over 17 years experience as an OD consultant. This study forms the basis for Maggi's PhD thesis and is part of a Student research project supported by Loughborough University.

The research is sponsored and funded by Mosaic Consulting and is being supervised by Professor John Arnold from Loughborough University.

What will I be asked to do?

Your involvement in Phase 1 will consist of a meeting with Maggi Evans on the topic of career conversations (approximately 1 hour, face to face or by telephone). During this discussion Maggi will write notes and then send you a summary so you can confirm that your views, thoughts and experiences have been appropriately captured. Themes from across the discussions will then be identified and a report produced.

All participants in phase 1 will receive a copy of this report. It is hoped that the report will provide a useful source of information on career conversations in other organisations, potentially acting as a catalyst for new approaches.

If you have any questions about the research or your involvement, please contact Maggi.

Once I take part, can I change my mind?

Yes! After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have we will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form. However if at any time, before, during or after the meeting you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact the main investigator. You can withdraw at any time, and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

- Participants and their employing organisations will not be named in the research report or any subsequent publications unless they specifically wish to be named.
- Pseudonyms will be used to refer to individual HR/OD professionals and a brief description of the employing organisation will be agreed with each participant.
- Information collected during the meetings will be kept securely but may be viewed by the participants themselves. Information will be kept for up to 10 years.
- All participants will be sent a copy of the final report and informed of any subsequent publications based on phase 1 of the research

What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?

If you are not happy with how the research was conducted, please contact Professor John Arnold or Ms Jackie Green, the Secretary for the University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee:

Ms J Green, Research Office, Hazlerigg Building, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3TU. Tel: 01509 222423. Email: J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk

The University also has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm.

Appendix 3: Informed consent form

Improving Workplace Career Conversations

Phase 1 – HR and OD Perspectives

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.	Yes ☐	No ☐
I agree to participate in this study.	Yes ☐	No ☐

Your name _____

Your signature _____

Signature of investigator _____

Date _____

8.5.15

By 26.1

- In what ways are these aspects of approaches similar/different

~~Anna~~	Linda	
~~Jo~~	Bridget	• Ind + Org level (i.e. looking @ systemic + H/J + ? academic ref).
~~Barbara~~	Marcus	
~~Annie~~	~~Nicky~~	
Simon	John Od Hugood	11/2
Julie		
Gareth	Jill	(13)

Jill met a 26.1

(had own way but key ideas was Jim (ILM top))

? What was similar/different about Marcus + Anna

? What was different about Julie Simon

? What were Annie, Bridget, Linda, + Jo, Gareth finding difficult (Choices)

? What are the perceived goals/challenges/drivers

? What questions/ideas emerge from all this (& to be checked at/explored this ref to other date

22

'deep Thirty' 8.5.15

Academic papers ✱ check at Mannix book

- Owen - clearly sympathy the journey.
- Check AR ready - emergent methodology.
- Stage learning org? (structure for colgov)

Pts ⇒ M'gr / Ind - what seemed to help/hinder?
- any different views?

? Anything similar i terms of
- sector
- size
- geography

v. clear ed. a/c; 1 item

Org
cultural alignment; strat imp 'drivers'
1 item, part of what do

Particular interest how saved drft?
- Jim
- Anna
- Marcus

not practical

getting the conv. & there yet seemed to ⇒ for less concern re other things

Marcus different - Sh-term; v. clear top level strategic imperative.

⇒ a direct to explore
= what ways similar + different.

23

18.10.15

Just starting some analysis of data. Will start with the first case study + follow a similar process to Phase 1. Have a go @ representing a a mindmap + also capture 'flow' with a table/grid of data.

Can use this coding cycle to refine some labels...

Currently have 10 lots of field notes (3 from case study 2, the rest from the first one).

7 from GW.

What have I learnt?

a) Record the number of specific concepts
- instructor
- purpose
- outcome
- process.

Will be worth capturing the data on a spreadsheet so it's easier to sort by different types of concepts. Look the specifics. Then also do thematic on the more general comments.

26.10.15.

Just been coding some of the specific concepts. Have put the GW ones into a spreadsheet. - Fairly easy & be really useful to have the data presented this way.

However, am having to make some decisions about what concepts to include. So far it has been:
- Have all
- Specific concept with outcome if/d.
- One named person/specific event

Flaws in this approach are:
- am post rationalising the coding without asking the person
- Some key/important concepts are omitted / not fall into.

Learning?
- Will focus more specifically on checking this into a more structured way with next set of data collect (TBD in a couple of weeks).

Appendix 5: Phase 1 - Probing within the interview

Area of exploration	Sample of how this was explored and probed in the interview
Process	• What's your approach to talent management (TM)? • What are the key elements of this? • How well do you think each bit is working? • What alternative approaches have you considered? • Are there any informal bits to your approach?
Purpose	• Taking a step back, what is TM trying to achieve for your organization? • Who 'owns' or 'drives' this? • What is the relationship between TM and individual careers?
Impact	• How do you review the impact? • What would senior directors see as impact? • What would line managers or individuals see as the impact?
Individual needs	• Within TM, how do you understand individual aspirations? • How well does this work?
Roles	• What do you see as the TM and career role of the organization? • What about individuals?
Career conversations	• What sorts of career conversations are part of the formal process? • What other types of career conversations seem to take place? • What's your view on ideal career conversations? • How well do they seem to work in your organization?
Context	• How does your approach link to the organization's culture and goals? • What seems to make the difference between areas of the business where this works well and areas where it doesn't?

Phase 1: Exploring and probing within the interviews.

Appendix 6: Phase 1 – application of the embryonic data display in the interviews

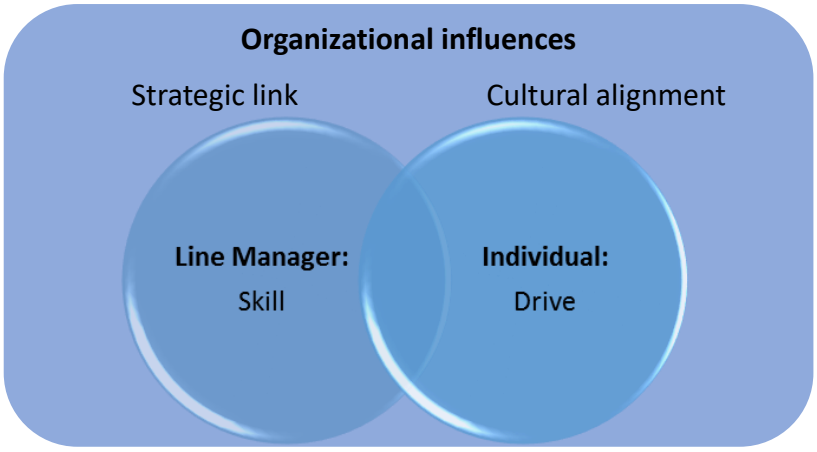


Figure 5. Embryonic data display diagram

Area of exploration	Sample of how this was explored in the interview
Testing out embryonic data display diagram	Testing out the embryonic framework in a very tentative way. For example, 'it seems as if there could be…', 'from what I've heard there seem to be influences at a number of levels. How does that match your thoughts …'
Exploring elements of the diagram in more detail	For example, exploring the line manager commitment in more detail, 'You've mentioned the importance of line managers being committed to these conversations if they are to work well. What do you see as influencing their level of commitment?'
Transparency	Building understanding of what openness and transparency might mean for the different stakeholders, for example, 'if I'm someone who's keen to progress, what do I need to do to 'get on round here' and how clear will this be to me?'

Table 3. Testing out the embryonic data display diagram

Appendix 7: Phase 1 - First cycle coding

Step	Labels
First cycle coding	• What is talent management? • Roles in talent management and career development • Contribution of career conversations • What is working • What are the challenges

Appendix 8: Phase 1 and Phase 2 – Topics discounted for further analysis

	Topic	Rationale for discounting/not pursuing
PHASE ONE	Background of HR participant	It was recognized that the professional, gender and cultural background of the participants could have been an influence on their views. This was not further investigated as biographical data to support such analysis had not been collected.
	Influence of industry sector	There seemed to be a difference in professional identity which emerged in some of the sectors – particularly health and engineering. This was captured within the contextual map but not fully explored as the intended focus of the study was on organizational context rather than wider contextual influences.
	Influence of national culture	National culture was raised as an influence by all participants with international roles or working in multi-cultural environments. As with industry sector, this was captured within the contextual map but not fully explored as the intended focus of the study was on organizational context rather than wider contextual influences.
PHASE MT	Focus on line manager as a stakeholder	Some data to illustrate points and provide an additional perspective, but not as much depth of data on line manager as a stakeholder as anticipated (the focus on career narrative tended to keep things on the individual's experience as receiver)
	Role of providing support to peers	Whilst recognizing the importance of the 'development network' the 'givers' role with peers was not specifically explored unless raised by the participant
	Career discourse being used by individuals	Could return to this and analyse in more detail, but did not directly relate to the research questions for this study
	Detailed analysis of the behaviours used in career conversations	Although this had been a focus of previous research (e.g. Kidd *et al.*, 2003), this was not spontaneously mentioned by participants. Therefore the data on this were not extensive
	Timing of specific conversations	This could be an interesting line of future analysis to understand any antecedents relevant to positive career conversations (e.g. other events, thoughts or experiences)
	Happenstance	The ways in which people described finding the right person to talk with. This could be an interesting follow-up area, based on development neMTrks
	Participant view of Talent management	Few individuals consciously had direct experience talent management. It was therefore only included if it formed a natural part of a participant's career narrative.
	Gender differences	Some previous research has indicated that women may engage more in coaching and development than their male counterparts. However, this was not a focus for the present study. Did not look at gender differences (Ye *et al.*, 2016)
	Influence of individual career capital	Work by Iellatchitch *et al.* (2003) identifies the potential impact of social capital and cultural capital on career. This was referenced in the analysis, but was not fully explored during data collection.

Appendix 9: Phase 2 – Information provided to employing organizations

Improving Workplace Career Conversations

Phase 2 – Line manager and individual perspectives

(Employing organisations)

Main researcher: Maggi Evans, Loughborough University, School of Business and Economics, maggi@mosaic-consulting.co.uk 07850 903508

Supervisor: Professor John Arnold, BE.2.81, Sir Richard Morris Building, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU J.Arnold@lboro.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?

Workplace career conversations are considered an important part of organisational talent management processes and individual career management development. At their best they provide an opportunity for open sharing about motivations and aspirations, a chance to align, to create shared career goals and a joint commitment to future actions. However, whilst this may be the opportunity, research evidence suggests that this aim is not always achieved and any gap in goals, expectations and approach to these conversations may have a negative impact on the organisation and the individual.

Phase 1 of the research involved a series of discussions with 30 senior HR and OD professionals. These discussions explored thoughts, views and experiences of career conversations as part of the talent management agenda within their organisation and more generally.

Phase 2 of the research will be a series of discussions with a selection of line managers and individuals who experience career conversations within their workplace. Their experiences, thoughts and opinions will be explored, building understanding of how these groups view career conversations.

The research aims to contribute to understanding of workplace career conversations – furthering understanding in the academic community and helping to improve the way career conversations are conducted within organisations – benefitting the individual and the organisation.

Who is doing this research and why?

The research is being conducted by Maggi Evans, a Chartered Occupational Psychologist with over 17 years experience as an OD consultant. This study forms the basis for Maggi's PhD thesis and is part of a research project supported by Loughborough University.

The research is sponsored and funded by Mosaic Consulting and is being supervised by Professor John Arnold from Loughborough University.

What will I be asked to do?

Your involvement in Phase 2 will be as an employing organisation. This will consist of inviting a selection of managers and individuals to meet with Maggi Evans to discuss their experiences of career conversations. A participant information sheet and draft email will be available to help you with this. Maggi will meet with those who are happy to take part and have a non-attributable discussion. The conversation will last approximately 1 hour, and be primarily face to face (although some may be by telephone). During this discussion Maggi will write notes and then send the participant a summary for them to check and edit as appropriate. Themes from across the discussions with line managers and individuals involved in phase 2 will then be analysed and a report produced.

All participants in phase 2 will receive a copy of this report and a copy will also be sent to you as the employing organisation. It is hoped that the report will provide a useful source of information on career conversations and how they are perceived by line managers and individuals, potentially acting as a catalyst for new approaches.

If you have any questions about the research or your involvement, please contact Maggi.

Once I take part, can I change my mind?

Yes! After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have we will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form. However if at any time, before, during or after the meeting you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact the main investigator. You can withdraw at any time, and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing. Line managers and individuals will also be asked to complete an Informed Consent Form and given the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

- Participants and their employing organisations will not be named in the research report or any subsequent publications unless they specifically wish to be named.
- Pseudonyms will be used to refer to line managers and individuals.
- Information collected during the meetings will be kept securely but may be viewed by the participants themselves. Information will be kept for up to 10 years.
- All participants will be sent a copy of the participant report.

What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?

If you are not happy with how the research was conducted, please contact Professor John Arnold or Ms Jackie Green, the Secretary for the University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee:

Ms J Green, Research Office, Hazlerigg Building, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3TU. Tel: 01509 222423. Email: J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk

The University also has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm.

Appendix 10: Phase 2 – Sample information provided to participants

Improving Workplace Career Conversations

Phase 2 – Line manager and individual perspectives

(Line managers and individuals)

Main researcher: Maggi Evans, Loughborough University, School of Business and Economics, maggi@mosaic-consulting.co.uk 07850 903508

Supervisor: Professor John Arnold, BE.2.81, Sir Richard Morris Building, Loughborough University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU J.Arnold@lboro.ac.uk

What is the purpose of the study?

Workplace conversations about careers are considered an important part of organisational talent management processes and individual career management development. At their best they provide an opportunity for open sharing about motivations and aspirations, a chance to align, to create shared career goals and a joint commitment to future actions. However, whilst this may be the opportunity, research evidence suggests that this aim is not always achieved and any gap in goals, expectations and approach to these conversations may have a negative impact on the organisation and the individual.

Phase 1 of the research involved a series of discussions with 30 senior managers with a professional interest in this field. These discussions explored thoughts, views and experiences of career conversations as part of the talent management agenda within their organisation and more generally.

Phase 2 of the research will be a series of discussions with a selection of line managers and individuals who experience conversations about careers in the workplace. Their experiences, thoughts and opinions will be explored, building understanding of how these groups view career conversations.

The research aims to contribute to understanding of workplace career conversations – furthering understanding in the academic community and helping to improve the way career conversations are conducted within organisations – benefitting the individual and the organisation.

Who is doing this research and why?

The research is being conducted by Maggi Evans, a Chartered Occupational Psychologist with over 17 years experience as an OD consultant. This study forms the basis for Maggi's PhD thesis and is part of a research project supported by Loughborough University.

The research is sponsored and funded by Mosaic Consulting and is being supervised by Professor John Arnold from Loughborough University.

What will I be asked to do?

Your involvement in Phase 2 will consist of a meeting with Maggi Evans to discuss your experiences of career conversations (approximately 1 hour, face to face or by telephone). During this discussion Maggi will write notes and then send you a summary. Themes from across the discussions will then be identified and a report produced. Your input will not be attributable to you.

All participants in phase 2 will receive a copy of this report and a copy will also be sent to the employing organisations. It is hoped that the report will provide a useful source of information on career conversations and how they are perceived by line managers and individuals, potentially acting as a catalyst for new approaches.

To help xxx to benefit directly from this research a short summary of themes emerging within xxx will also be produced. This will highlight strengths and opportunities raised by at least half of the people seen. This will be non-attributable and a copy of this will be sent to you and also to yyy.

If you have any questions about the research or your involvement, please contact Maggi.

Once I take part, can I change my mind?

Yes! After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have we will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form. However, if at any time, before, during or after the meeting you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact the main investigator. You can withdraw at any time, and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

- Participants and their employing organisations will not be named in the research report or any subsequent publications unless they specifically wish to be named.
- Pseudonyms will be used to refer to individuals.
- Information collected during the meetings will be kept securely but may be viewed by the participants themselves. Information will be kept for up to 10 years.
- All participants will be sent a copy of the participant report

What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?

If you are not happy with how the research was conducted, please contact Professor John Arnold or Ms Jackie Green, the Secretary for the University's Ethics Approvals (Human Participants) Sub-Committee:

Ms J Green, Research Office, Hazlerigg Building, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3TU. Tel: 01509 222423. Email: J.A.Green@lboro.ac.uk

The University also has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm.

Appendix 11: Phase 2 – Individual and line manager perspectives, initial discussion prompts

Individuals

Introduction	• Context • Informed consent • Pseudonym
Narrative	• Summary of career over the past (10) years • What events have had a significant positive effect on you and your career? • What conversations can you recall that you have had that have been helpful? (with who, when, what covered, what was it about them that was helpful?) • What conversations can you recall that have not been helpful? • What conversations do you wish you had had?
General	• Thinking about your career and your current organisation, what do you think is your responsibility? And your manager's responsibility? And what do you think the organisation is responsible for? • In an ideal world how would this change? • Overall, how much overlap do you feel there is between what you want from your career and what your organisation wants from you?

Specific	• Transparency
	  ○ How does your organisation know what you want? (and why do they want to know?)
	  ○ How open are you with your organisation and how open are they with you? (why?)
	  ○ How clear are you on 'how to get on round here'? (why do you think it is it like this?)
	  ○ Do you know if you (or others) are identified as 'High Potential' or 'Talent'
	• Freedom
	  ○ How much freedom do you feel to be yourself and to develop your career as you want? (why)
	• Line manager
	  ○ What things enable a line manager to help you with your career? (commitment, skills, access to resources)
	• You
	  ○ What things help you to develop your own career? (drive, engagement, self-awareness)
	  ○ To what extent do you help others with their careers?
	• Organisation
	  ○ What organisational things help people generally to develop their careers? (strategic importance, culture, transparency, structural opportunities)

Line managers

Introduction	• Context • Informed consent • Pseudonym
Narrative	• Summary of career management roles over the past (5) years • What has been your best experience of helping a team member with their career? (who, when, how, result, reflections) • What has been your most frustrating experience of supporting a team member with their career? • What conversations do you wish you had had?
General	• Thinking about your your current organisation, what do you think is your responsibility for developing the careers of your team members? And what do your team members have responsibility for? And what do you think the organisation is responsible for? • How do you feel about your role (comfortable/uncomfortable with) • How does the organisation support you in your role? • In an ideal world how would this change (the roles and the support)? • Overall, how much overlap do you feel there is between what team members want from their career and what your organisation wants from them?

Specific	• Tensions
	  ○ How do you balance the needs of the individual, yourself and the organisation?
	• Transparency
	  ○ How does your organisation know what team members want?
	  ○ How open is the organisation with team members?
	  ○ How clear are people on 'how to get on round here'?
	  ○ Are people clear if they (or others) are identified as 'High Potential' or 'Talent'
	• Line manager
	  ○ What things enable you to help your team with their careers? (commitment, skills, access to resources)
	• You
	  ○ What things help a team member to develop their own career? (drive, engagement, self-awareness)
	  ○ What has helped you to develop your own career?
	  ○ To what extent have you benefitted from career conversations?
	• Organisation
	  ○ What organisational things help people generally to develop their careers? (strategic importance, culture, transparency, structural opportunities)

Appendix 12: Phase 2 – Summary notes from first case study showing application of initial coding

Context

- International multi-site
- Loose on process generally
- Pride selves on high trust and empowering environment
- Conversations seen as part of how business is done (e.g. big projects – not a big governance and reporting structure, but 'we have lots of conversations and a 5 minute report. The conversations are the currency')
- Long serving (in sample it was 30 years, 22 years, 2 x 21 years, 18, 16, 14, 11, 7) – and those with less service had mostly joined straight from Uni)
- Common view that 'the business wants you to get on', want to promote internally (partly as external recruits don't always land well)
- A lot of cross-busienss moves to very new areas even if no experience, 'no one blocks moves to keep you in a silo – there's a willingness to put people in post without a proven track record in the field', 'there have been big benefits in working across functions', move from sales to HR; a Uni intern given a trade sales region and colleagues not told only an intern
- Business has process and ethos to recruit on attitude and innate and then train the specific skill
- Regular business re-structures
- Consistent view and description of the business from all (and aligned with HR)
- Strong focus on personal development – e.g. quarterly off-site for all managers (flown in)
- Now advertise all roles – and therefore no time on succession planning
- Manager led business – HR available for advice but very much the manager's decision re people
- Now seen as transparent and fair (although one person challenged it saying it preferenced people who were good at interviews and writing an application – these skills may not be what is needed in some roles)
- Opportunity to talk to others 'everyone is approachable and you can confide in them'

Historical

- A lot of 'taps on shoulder', e.g. one person 30 years, at least 9 roles in a range of functions and didn't apply for any jobs except for the very first one!
- No real interviews, just a 'we'd like you to…'
- Little asking of what they wanted 'apart from that [asking if preferred US or UK role] they never asked me
- 'In the past I've experienced others getting role which I'd have like to apply for (that weren't openly advertised) – or there have been interviews and it's been a near pointless recruitment process – it has left me feeling demoralised and deflated, it's not honest' (NC)
-

Perceived roles

Individual:

- The individual is the driver – they need to be the spark for moving career forward (all) 'the drive to take responsibility for where you want to go'
- The individual (now) needs to actively apply for roles (all)

- Be honest with self and others re strengths and weaknesses – have self-awareness (5)
- Self-directed growth in existing role, 'CP 'people who are switched into personal development typically have more conversations with people, attend more programmes and workshops, apply for more roles and learn more about the business and what would suit them'
- Desire to want to add value to the organisation
- 'reach out, create opportunities and showcase the right behaviours' (DE)
- Individual challenges:
    - 'I don't want to raise my options for the future in case that's taken as not being happy in my current role'

Line manager:

- Have open conversations and give feedback – open dialogue, so you're 'part of the sounding board if they're thinking of moving on'
- Provide opportunities to grow and develop – including offering personal help and support and also using network to access support and don't feel threatened if other opportunities develop 'you need to be genuinely delighted for them and help them', NP 'when people grow and get reward for their effort, it's a lovely lovely feeling'
- Challenge them to get the best results – 'here's a thought', 'why do you want to do this?'
- Listen and be open to their needs, 'listen to what they want, not what you want for them'
- Develop self awareness in others, 'sometimes others see something in you and it acts as a stimulus, even if you're already happy'
- Identify who you think is talent and potential
- Set clear goals
- Separate out performance today from development for the future
- Expect people to move on – expect them to stay for 18 months, 'round here it's normally seen as positive when people move on'
- SG has a structure which he uses for himself and tries to encourage them to reflect in the same way – motivated to try to develop talent for the wider business
- SCr – aware that could let people make more mistakes
- RG – encourage people to think about the longer term
- Line manager challenges in performing role:
    - Spans of control make it difficult for some (153 reports!) – but makes it easier to take hit if someone good moves
    - As managers we tend to focus on performance not development
    -

Organisation:

- Not much structured help – ¼ly reviews are performance based
- Create an environment for honest conversations
- Consistency so people know how to apply
- Provide access to personal development
- 'The nature of these conversations is all different – tailored to the individual and what they need. You can't force the moment or the time'
- Challenges:
    - 'the formal reviews don't tend to be of much benefit – any issues should be raised earlier'
    - 'the challenge is how to create enough formality about career progression, succession planning and performance management, but not too much – if there's

too much then it becomes just about the admin, but if there's not enough then it varies too much and becomes woolly'

What's helped people develop their careers (reflections on their own experiences)

- A lot on the role of personal development (through the Academy) – see some notes above. RG providing help with personal development keeps people open minded – if you focus on career it may be more narrow
- Descriptions of line managers who have helped – 'pivotal'
- 'If it hadn't been for the conversation with them I may not have applied for it [global management role], the conversation helped me to clarify my goals and what I was looking for'
- Personal willingness to take a risk and try new things, 'it gave me lots of scars, but also lots of experience across disciplines and a real developmental experience'
- Some development experiences also cited as big influence, about the coaching feedback 'it really rang true and has been key for my personal development. It's over 20 years ago now, but I can still hear it and see it – I carry it with me in my self-awareness since then'
- Peers used by many to bounce ideas
- Wider network used to hear of opportunities 'it wasn't visible as a vacancy' – seen to depend a bit on who you know
- Not many at JW had a clear plan Scr 'my main driver is opportunity' DE 'looking for stimulus, for challenge and enjoyment, wanting to feel that I've learnt something everyday and that I've managed to do something I thought I couldn't'
-

Examples

- AJ – career catalyst was manager plus a developmental experience ('CEO's office'), no conversation about the future – he doesn't know
- GrP – manager as career catalyst, plus developmental experience 'corporate communicator' – doesn't want to raise future aspirations
- ZK – support from the academy, not had conversations about the future
- RG – career catalyst, not line manager
- SCr – HRD was key (would have left without conversation with her which then helped open up new opportunity). Had some conversations as part of succession planning about what could see himself doing, but not recent
- NC – mentor (within business), no conversations re future 'who knows what opportunity may present next and what they may ask of me'
- DE - academy and coach and manager
- CP- HR

Challenges

Alignment of views – individual, line manager, HR

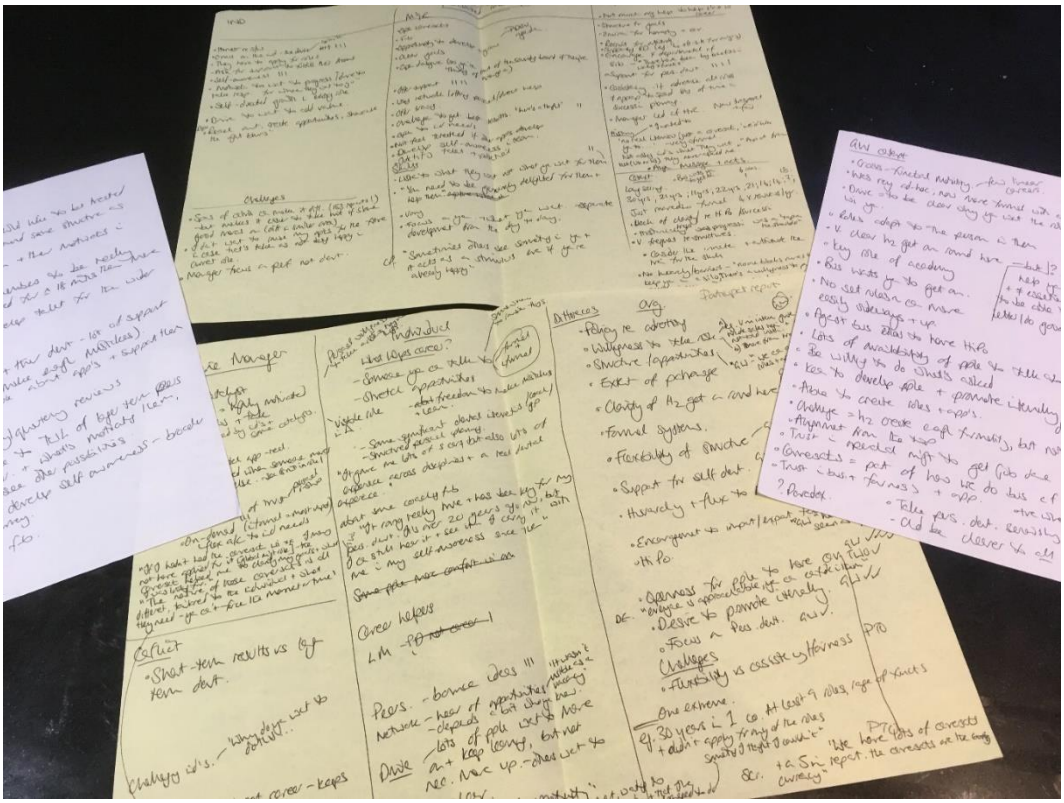
- Seem aligned – see notes

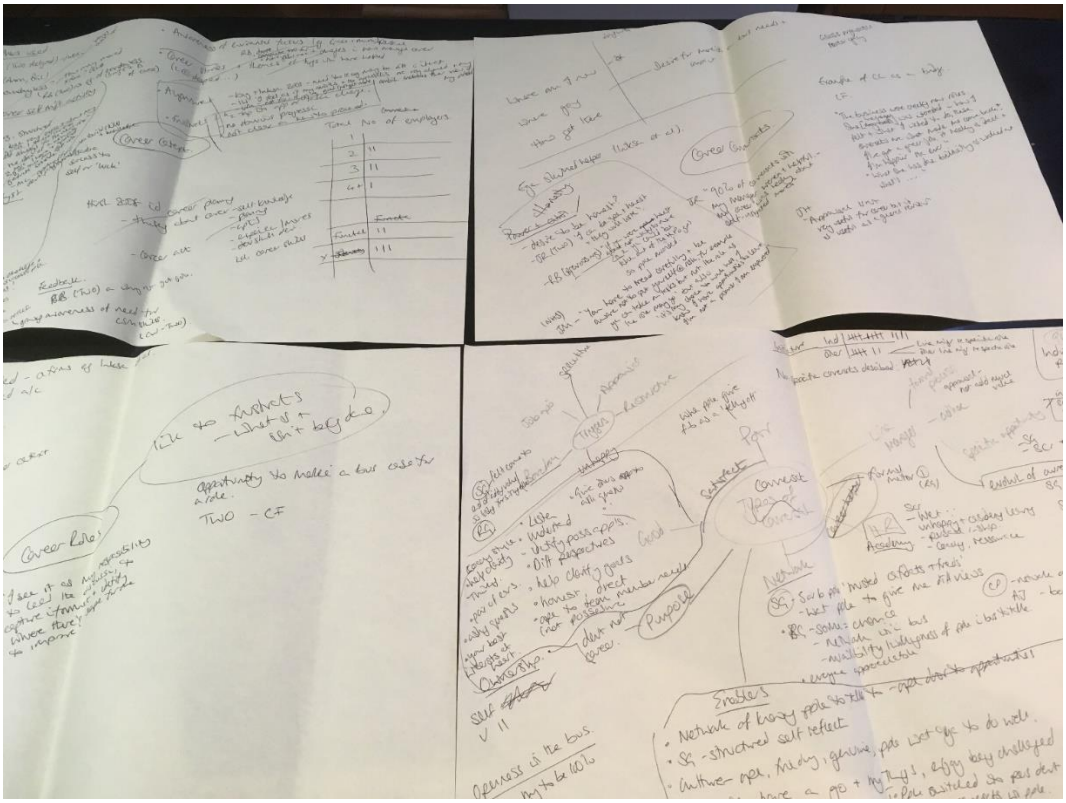
researcher reflections:

- Huge trust in the organisation that it has your best interests at heart – some aware of this e.g. 'my friends think I'm mad…', but people feel their trust is well founded – e.g. no conversation about salary

- Little conversation about the future – does this breed a helplessness and give the organisation greater power – despite their talk of empowerment?
- Could be clearer to all on how to get on round here
- How representative was the group that I saw?
- How 'self selective' is the culture?
- Willingness to take risk and link to strategic imperative
- How does this link to my framework?
    - Individual – drive – yes, slef awareness yes, engagement yes
    - Line manager – interest yes, skill yes, access to resources yes trust yes
    - Organisation – strategic imperative yes – particvularly willingness to take long term view, cultural alignment yes – link to risk taking, structural opportunities – less, transparency yes (now, but not before).
    - Wider – didn't really come up
    - Any counter information? – not yet, but may link to changing headings to be more specific about what helps – rather than at the moment it's more things to think about.

Appendix 13: Phase 2 - Sample mindmaps and summaries showing initial analysis of context, conversation and role from case study 1





Appendix 14: Phase 2 - Second iteration of data coding

Phase 2 Analysis themes for coding	
Organization code	
Business Context	
BC+	Business context (including process and culture) positive
BC-	Business context (including process and culture) negative
Personal History	
PHB	Personal History Background
PHC	Personal History Company Change
PHI	Personal History Internal change (promotion/role change)
Roles	
RI	Role Individual
RLM	Role Line manager
RO	Role Organization
Individual perspective	
IT	Individual Triggers (for change/conversation)
IN	Individual Network
IE	Individual Enablers
Line manager perspective	
LMG	LM Goals
LMP	LM Processes
LME	Line Manager Examples
Conversation	
CLM	Conversation with Line Manager
CN	Conversation with network
CHR	Conversation with HR
CO	Conversation with other
CB+	Conversation Behaviours positive
CB-	Conversation Behaviours negative

Appendix 15: Phase 2 – Screen shot of conversation analysis matrix and coding

Appendix 16: Phase 2 – log of coding parameters

1. **Is it a conversation?** To be included needed to clearly be a conversation.

   E.g. not counted, 'DL, strong influential bosses who believed in me and helped me developed' because they may have helped development by role modelling, not necessarily a conversation.
   KP – 'I was tehn headhunted' – not positioned as a conversation
   SMc (SB) gave more information on conversation 45 – that HR had facilitated things – but no mention of a direct conversation with her, so not included.
   Someone else might draw the line somewhere else
   Counted, JWS conversation 23 'worked with some inspitational people, great chats'
   Counted, JWS (21) she was not present but reported the conversation taking place on her behalf with an impact on her
   Counted (37) 'a lot of caoching' – implicit in coaching is that it is a conversation, lots of unknowns on this one – so filled in as ?
   Counted (43) 'in the annual appraisal' – implicit in this that there is a conversation
   Not counted AMcE (just after 50) – one of the most influential people I've worked with, developed a friendship – but not specific about any coaching or conversation element – could have been through role modelling,…

   Summary – it is a conversation when:
   - Clear triggerInformation on the other party (who they were
   -)Information on the outcome – how it was viewed at the time (some changed with hindsight, e.g. conversation 003, RB at MT)
   - May not have information on the behaviours or the instigator
   - Could include a one-off conversation or a series of themed conversations with a specific individual
   - This enables the inclusion of key conversations which were credited with shaping an individual's career, but may not have been fully explored in terms of the process, behaviours and relationships.

2. **Is it one conversation or more than 1?** When there was a series of conversations on the same theme with one person these were counted as one conversation (more like 'encounters' as Bosley et al) . Difficult when people clustered together e.g. AMcE (47) – had similar conversations/encounters with a number of senior stakeholders. Was important for her career, but not enough information to count more than once… so need to be carerful about saying 'this number of conversations were about this…'

3. **Is it formal or informal?** If clearly one or the other then coded, but sometimes not clear – e.g. conversation 48 – builliant leaders and developer, conversations about career –

4. **Is it about career? –** if it included self development or learning then yes – may have included current role and performance, but not for me to say (?). Boundary one (still not sure) 32 – giving feedback to boss on how like to be managed. Menrtioned in context of career, so not for me to say it isn't? however, JD, after conversation 53, had conversation with CEO, but all about the business and CEO, not JD

5. **Positive or negative outcome?** Mostly this was clear – if not clear, tehn put as neutral. E.g. 51 – a formal process realizing people's potential – agreed ratings…

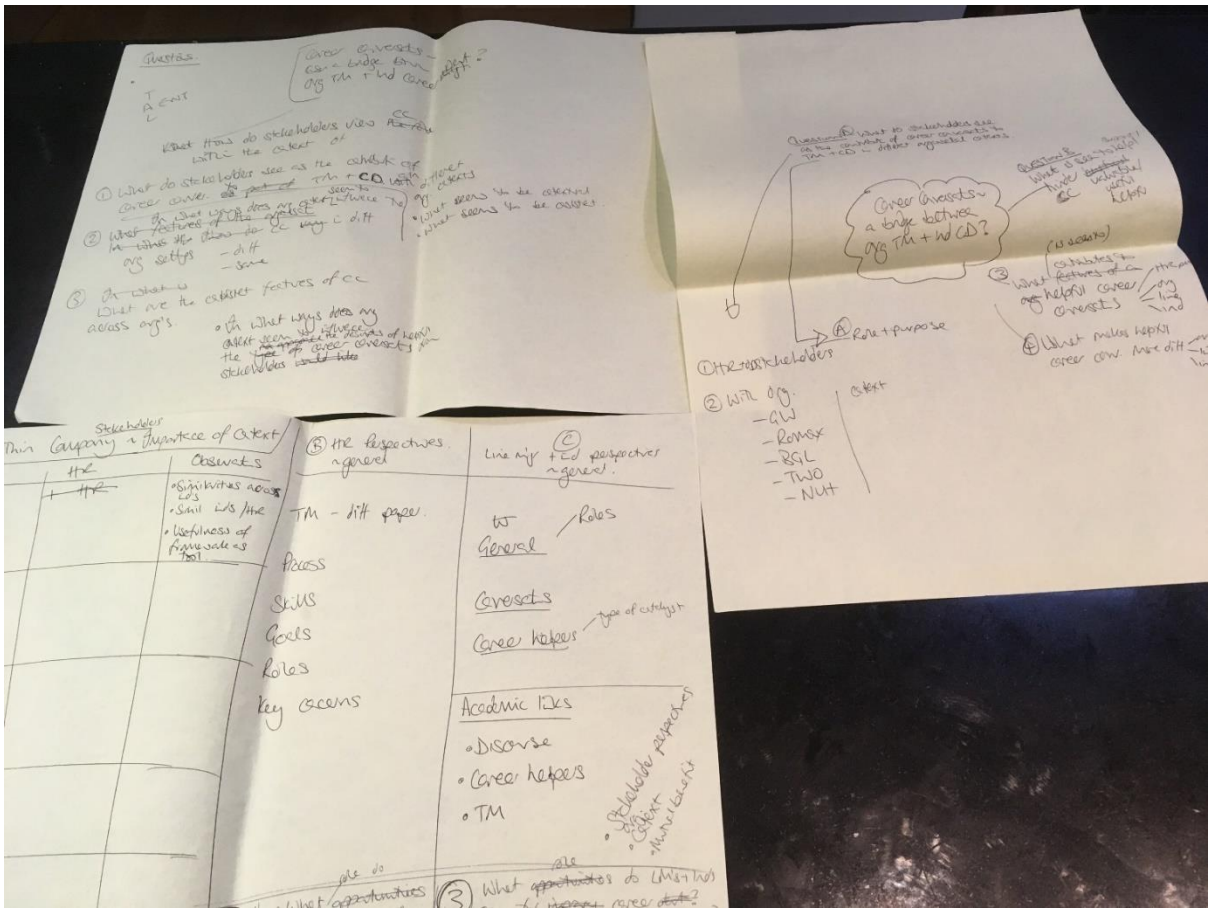
6. **Is it collaborative?** -spectrum, some very clearly collaborative, others on boundary. Needs to clearly reflect that ind needs were a key part of the conversation. E.g. conversation 30, yes, both parties had power and was mutual (new job) but another new job (conv 15 was not – not really interested in her needs

7. **What is the career impact?** Career self-knowledge – included increased self awareness (impacts on the way career is enacted) e.g. how well they see themselves doing tehir roel – as with Bosley et al, beyond occupation, to way interact with their employment (they use the word sequence). Career world view includes their perceptions of 'how to get on round here' – how to access opportunities etc.

8. **Some very difficult to categorize –** e.g. conversation 47 – outcome is positioning herself for future opportunities – it is a type of career action? But aslo impacted on career self-concept in having these conversations. Was coded as 3, because of mention that these conversations gave her access to 'broader projects'

9. **What is the career helper role?** Focused on their role within that conversation – often had dual roles (especially if part of ongoing conversations. But generally role in that conversation, e.g. conversation 35 (DL), with Matthew Donaldson – gave feedback re pushing boundaries (witness) and support re future direction (gatekeeper). In other, (conv 45) external assessment – were certainly a witness, could also be intermediary, but no mention of that aspect of role.

Appendix 17: Diagrams showing thoughts on structuring the findings



Appendix 18: Career management practices in the case study organisations

Career management practice (adapted from De Vos & Dries, 2013)	JW	HX	MT	SB	IH
Career planning workshops	No – but lots of wider personal development support	Yes – but only for graduate scheme (not mentioned by participants)	No	No	No
Formal mentoring	No	No	Not mentioned	Some	Yes – well established on clinical side, less on leadership
Succession planning	No - seen as counter to the culture of every role advertised (but did historically do this)	Yes – recently introduced	Yes – for those considered high potential and key performers	Yes – for key roles and high potential group	No
Coaching	Yes – on request	No	Some informal	Yes – if sponsored	Yes – ad hoc
Prescribed career paths	No – consciously encourage diverse moves	No	No	No	Yes, within some professions
Internal announcement of vacancies	Yes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Some – but also sometimes already decided who will be appointed	Some
Individual career counselling	No	Sometimes – if about to leave	Some ad-hoc	Some ad-hoc	No
Training outside current function	Yes – through job moves	No	No	No	Sometimes
Talent reviews	No	Yes – recently introduced	Yes	Yes, with the exec	Within some areas

Job rotation	Some planned moves – emerging from managers talking together	Some – but based on business needs rather than development	Some – but not formalised	No	Within some areas (e.g. medics rotate in and out of leadership roles and other hard to fill areas)
Development centres to assess potential	No	No	No	Some have been through an external assessment process with feedback	No
Self-assessment instruments	Yes, available through the learning function	No	No (although some available on development programmes)	No	Some available
Personal development planning	Yes, as part of review	Some, as part of appraisal	Yes – as part of review	Yes, as part of review	Yes, as part of review
Information on career development	No	No	No	No	Dependent on professional specialism
Formal career conversations between supervisor and employee	As part of quarterly review recently introduced	Some, as part of appraisal	Yes, as part of review	Yes, as part of review	Yes, as part of review