Recapitulating Talent Development: 'Talent Sharing' as an answer to the demands of a dynamic environment

INTRODUCTION

Today, the fast changing challenges of the modern economy, arising from new technologies, global competition, changing customer and market demands, force organizations to innovate at a tremendous pace (Bhalla et al., 2017; Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Tseng & Lin, 2011). In order to confront these challenges recent research has indicated the importance of internal and external networks which allow for fast and flexible learning, knowledge sharing, accessing new markets and incorporating novel tacit knowledge sourced within and beyond organizational boundaries (Crane & Hartwell, 2019; Ferraris et al., 2019; Schäfer & Festing, 2019; van den Broek et al., 2018). In this context the organization`s talents are considered as a lynchpin because their in-demand experiences and knowledge foster network building and maintaining which allow them to contribute to value creation out of these social ties, namely social capital (Crane & Hartwell, 2019; Levin & Cross, 2004). TM scholars have recently begun to acknowledge this social value of talents leading to an initial inclusion of a relational lens in the literature (Collings, 2014; Crane & Hartwell, 2019; Gittell et al., 2021; Reiche, 2012; van den Broek et al., 2018). However, so far, this relational lens has not been prominently integrated into Talent Management (TM) research (Crane & Hartwell, 2019). On the contrary, TM has been continuously criticized for its static focus on human capital associated with long-term talent development (TD) programs, failing to pay tribute to the demands for greater interorganizational connectedness and coordination in a dynamic environment and contributing to persistent talent and skill shortages that prevent organizations to fill their key positions and impede innovation and organizational growth (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Claus, 2019; Collings et al., 2019; Crane & Hartwell, 2019; Harsch & Festing, 2020; van den Broek et al., 2018).

Therefore, today organizations are increasingly urged to reconsider and redesign the ways in which they manage their talents (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Claus, 2019; Harsch & Festing, 2020; Mercer, 2016). As part of such a redesigned TM system the practice of 'Talent Sharing' has recently emerged. This experience-based approach to TD has the potential to shape key employees with the help of interorganizational talent transfers between co-operation partners or competitors for a fixed time period and thus allows for an external perspective, interorganizational learning and knowledge exchange across organizational boundaries. As such, this approach reflects not only the human capital-centered perspective on talents and TM but acknowledges as well the – so far largely neglected – significance of networks and the relational value of talents, i.e. the social capital (Collings, 2014; Crane & Hartwell, 2019). Researchers argue that this particular view on talents will be of special importance for two reasons: First, in the future TM challenges are expected to be too risky and too costly for many single organizations leading to the need to solve them in organizational networks, for example in the form of joint talent pools (van den Broek et al., 2018). Second, the dynamic environment requires many organizations to build up a considerable amount of valuable information and knowledge, which for example are embedded in social networks, to lower the uncertainty it accompanies (Ferraris et al., 2019; Unger et al., 2011).

To date, however, research on Talent Development in general and on 'Talent Sharing' is relatively scarce (Collings, 2014; Garavan et al., 2012). This represents a significant research gap, especially in the new world of work, where talents are confronted with fast changing demands that urge them to update their skill base quickly by moving within and beyond

organizational boundaries (DeRue et al., 2012; Ferraris et al., 2019; Zwick, 2002). Furthermore, most of the current studies in the TM arena neglect the role of social capital and instead center solely on talent`s human capital. However, recent research calls for an integration of the social capital perspective into theory and practice of Talent Management as social ties play a crucial role for "[…] maximizing the benefits from a firm`s human capital […]" (Collings, 2014, p. 256; Crane & Hartwell, 2019). Taking these research deficits into account we look at the processes underlying the development of human and social capital. The goal of our study is to empirically explore how strategic Talent Sharing, as a specific TD initiative, contributes to individual and organizational learning and which learning facilitating factors can be identified. We are interested in the current design of Talent Sharing practices in organizations and would like to find out which adaptations are required in order to shape talents and organizations to meeting the demands of the modern business environment. Thus, we look at the dynamic TM capabilities (Harsch & Festing, 2020) that underlie Talent Sharing and shape talent. Therefore, we focus on the characteristics of talents, home and host organizations supporting Talent Sharing, and study the specific outcomes that are achieved on talent and organizational level. Since knowledge and measures are very limited in this research field this study follows an explorative approach.

Our study contributes to this important research field in three ways: First, meeting the descriptive goal of our study, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper that focuses in detail on TS and describes how companies design TS and what they consider as success factors and outcomes. Second, addressing our explanatory goal and paying tribute to the claim by Garavan and colleagues (2012) to further research how talents could be developed we suggest a framework that explains the design of Talent Sharing, and further facilitating factors on the organizational and individual level. The arguments underlying this framework are supported by our empirical findings and theoretical insights gleaned from Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984), organizational learning theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978), absorptive capacity theory (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) as well as Social Capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002), and Human Capital theory (Becker, 1964). Thereby, in line with the requests by Crane and Hartwell (2019) our study adopts a relatively new theoretical lens in the discussion on TM and fosters the much needed integration of the human capital and social capital lens in TM in the new world of work. Third, concerning our normative goal, we build on the empirical results of our study and our framework and contribute by providing recommendations for designing TS in organizations in order to generate competitive advantage (Harsch & Festing, 2020). This is especially important as the cost-intensive TD initiatives need to be thoroughly designed reflecting talent`s and organizational (development) needs alike thereby creating value for both parties (Garavan et al., 2012; Wang-Cowham, 2011).

This paper is organized as follows. After this introductory section, we provide a literature review covering the concepts of TM and talents as well as TD and experience-based development approaches, which are at the heart of Talen Sharing. Afterwards we describe the methodology of the exploratory approach chosen in this study, and then present and discuss the findings thereof. Finally, we conclude by providing a brief summary, outlining the studies contributions and limitations, as well as the theoretical and practical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Talent Management & Talents

Talent Management (TM), which is considered as one of the key strategic priorities in Human Resource Management (HRM) (Scullion & Collings, 2011), can have considerable individual und organizational performance implications if it is aligned to the environmental

context as well as corporate strategy (Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Harsch & Festing, 2020). It includes all organizational processes and practices which focus on attracting, identifying, developing, retaining, and deploying talented employees (Collings et al., 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Stahl et al., 2012) and build dynamic TM capabilities that shape talents (Harsch & Festing, 2020). According to TM scholars, talents – in contrast to other employee groups — are regarded as strategic resources contributing to an over-average degree to organizational value and competitive advantage and implying the need to manage them in a different way via TM activities (Collings et al., 2019; Festing & Schäfer, 2014; Sparrow & Makram, 2015).

Despite its strategic relevance, within research there is still no consensus on what is understood by the term 'talent' (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Tansley, 2011). The major debates centre on the object approach vs. subject approach and the developable vs. stable approach (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). While the subject approach focuses on entire individuals very often regarded as *high potentials* or *high performers* the object approach considers talents to be single individual attributes that create value for the organization (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). However, both approaches heavily rely on the human capital perspective (Crane & Hartwell, 2019; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), which is reflected in exemplary definitions of talents as "employees who are exceptional in their skills and abilities" (Silzer & Dowell, 2010, p. 13) (subject approach) or "a complex amalgam of employees' skills, knowledge, cognitive ability and potential" (Tansley, 2011, p. 271) (object approach). This is also supported by Dries and colleagues (2014) who found that HR practitioners worldwide link the term talent to knowledge, skills, ability, and potential. Recent studies claim to move away from the perspective focusing solely on human capital as in the modern world of work coined by increasing demands of interconnectedness and coordination "[…] competing on employees' knowledge, skills, and expertise is no longer sufficient for competitive advantage" (Gittell et al., 2021). Instead organizations are required to also invest in talents` social ties which are a source of information, influence, solidarity, and power that enables talents and organizations to build, share, transfer, exploit and/or leverage hitherto inaccessible resources including for example human capital, goodwill and customer bases (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Oddou et al., 2009; Reiche, 2012; Somaya & Williamson, 2011). In this context, larger networks provide employees or organizations with access to a greater quantity and a greater variety of resources which can create value for the organization, namely social capital (Hernández-Carrión et al., 2019). The favourable outcomes of social capital are well documented within existing literature. As such, social capital contributes to relative individual and organizational success in various fields: It increases individual career success, manager compensation, interorganizational learning, innovation, creativity, organizational commitment, effectiveness of cross-functional teams, richness of applicant pools, access to new markets, and entrepreneurship and reduces employee turnover and organisational liquidation (for summaries see Adler & Kwon, 2002 & Reiche, 2007; Reiche, 2012). These positive effects underline the significance of social capital – in addition to human capital - as one key element of talents navigating in a dynamic environment. Therefore, researchers more recently started to advocate integrating both human and social capital into the TM discussion (Crane & Hartwell, 2019). In line with these arguments our study takes an object-approach to TM, regarding talents as a combination of human and social capital that can be cultivated by Talent Development activities.

Talent Development & experience-based development approaches

Although research in the field of Talent Development (TD) is scarce, it has been shown to positively influence organizational and individual outcomes (Bethke-Langenegger et al.,

2011). That's why it is considered as a key element of TM (Garavan et al., 2012). TD has been defined as "the planning, selection and implementation of development strategies for the entire talent pool to ensure that the organisation has both the current and future supply of talent to meet strategic objectives and that development activities are aligned with organisational talent management processes" (Garavan et al., 2012, p. 6). In order to ensure a sufficient supply of talents it is crucial that TD programs target required talents within the right individuals in an adequate way and at the right point in time (Wang-Cowham, 2011). There are different approaches how talents are developed (Caligiuri & Dragoni, 2019; Dries & Pepermans, 2007; Garavan et al., 2012; Stahl et al., 2007; Wang-Cowham, 2011). One of them are *experience-based learning initiatives* including for instance job rotation, (international) assignments and secondments which expose talents to novel challenges, ideas, organizational practices, networks, cultures and markets, that are outside their regular work setting and which confront them with uncertain — sometimes complex— conditions leading to greater social and human capital among these talents (Collings, 2014; DeRue et al., 2012; Garavan et al., 2012; Korotov, 2007; Oddou et al., 2009). For instance, several studies indicate that expatriate managers dispose of a greater stock of social ties than their counterparts who stayed at home (Mäkelä, 2007; Richardson & McKenna, 2014; Schlepphorst et al., 2020). In a similar vein, Mäkelä and Brewster (2009) found that expatriate/repatriate interaction contexts relate to a higher degree of shared cognitive ground and interpersonal trust, which in turn fosters knowledge sharing. However, not only long-term expatriate assignments contribute to the development of social capital but also short-term assignments albeit to a smaller extent (Bozkurt & Mohr, 2011). Expatriates who dispose of rich and diverse social ties are not only able to acquire valuable information themselves but they also serve as boundary spanners who transfer this knowledge to their home organization (Oddou et al., 2009; Reiche, 2012). Furthermore, empirical studies also found a positive correlation between job rotation and network development and knowledge acquisition (Campion et al., 1994).

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine in how far Talent Sharing can contribute to the development of human and social capital among talents, and to improve our understanding concerning the design of the program, we follow an explorative, qualitative approach which can make considerable contributions for theory development in this novel research field (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). This interpretative, inductive approach, allows us to learn from talents participating in Talent Sharing and experts responsible for Talent Sharing in different home and host organizations. Especially with regard to the context-dependency of TM (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020) this method is adequate in order to gain deep insights from various participants and experts in various organizations in the field. Our study focuses on organizations in Germany, hence covering one country context, in order to prevent biases due to cultural specificities.

In total until today we have conducted 15 interviews until September, 15th, 2021; another 5 interviews are planned and partly already scheduled. The anonymity of the participants and their organizations was ensured, and the interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview manual covering the following topics:

- Specificities of home and host organizations: External environment, challenges and opportunities
- About Talent Sharing: General frame of program including duration, number of participating talents, name and specificities of host/home organization, description of talent`s work in host organization, objectives, implications in terms of human, social capital and attitudes of talents, success factors of the program including design, characteristics of talents, of home and host organizations

The duration of the interviews was between 35 and 80 minutes. Due to pandemic crisis the interviews were exclusively conducted by video calls using Zoom in between June and September 2021. They were carried out in German, and for the purpose of presenting the findings in this study direct quotes have been translated into English. The interviews were videotaped, then transcribed and finally independently analyzed by two researchers with qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA). The generated data serve as the core data base, however they were enriched by additional documents such as internal documents or publicly accessible information all of which serve the purpose of data triangulation (Flick, 2007). Specifically, we pursued the rigorously structured approach to explorative TM research by Muratbekova-Touron et al. (2018) and applied the 3-step enhanced grounded theory approach (Gioia et al., 2013) to systematically analyze the collected data. This approach is composed of three steps: Initially, the two researchers engaged in open-coding and based on that decided on the first-order concepts. Subsequently, the researchers synthesized the emerging concepts into second-order themes, considering also the findings of the literature study. The respective data structure will be displayed in the section "Findings & Discussion" of this paper.

FINDINGS

Talent Sharing – Relevance and objectives

Our data reveals that Talent Sharing is especially conducted by organizations operating in rather complex and competitive markets characterized by high demands for cost efficiency, customer orientation, differentiation and new market requirements such as digitalization. The interviewed talents and experts identify several goals of Talent Sharing that help organizations to deal with the complex challenges of this environment. Among them one of the main objectives is to avoid inward-thinking by enabling talents to change their perspective and break through rigid ways of thinking in a rather hands-on –instead of theoretical way– with other practitioners.

As two talents stated:

> It was really about just recognizing, looking, learning, how do they do certain things? What do they do differently? What do they do better? More efficiently? What tools do they have? What technology do they have? That was actually the core of the whole thing. […] So we had the practitioners together […] [and we said to each other]: Wow, we have newly introduced that. That really helped us. Do you already have that? (Interviewee 1)

> [Talent Sharing was applied] as a new instrument to simply bring new perspectives into the company, to interrupt the daily work routine and to break up existing thinking […].That was the main driver. (Interviewee 2)

Furthermore, Talent Sharing was also applied in order to inspire key players for change and establish them as multipliers within the company in order to spread the vision of top management to a broader employee base.

> I think it was simply a case of wanting to open up new horizons for the employees, because the knowledge was [...] already available by […] our head of sales. He knows exactly what's going on [in the host company] […]. I think it was important for him to put it on more shoulders and on more feet, because he was always alone with the knowledge when he reported on something [in the

headquarter] […]. And when he now has his people from sales behind him, and they then also say: Man! We need that. Man, we have experienced this. That's super great. I think that was important to him, simply to open up this horizon for us and perhaps also […] to have even more multipliers, to have even more confidants (Interviewee 3).

Additionally, in the face of the demand-supply gap of talents and greater talent mobility between organizations Talent Sharing might be one way to build interorganizational talent pools to source sought-after knowledge and skills within the company. From the talent's point of view, this can also satisfy the search for meaning at work, as their knowledge can be applied in several places - with several employers.

As argued by one expert:

> […] if you're looking in the direction of AI [Artificial Intelligence] […] or something like that, we're also seeing that you have to build up a lot of expert knowledge in order to answer particular questions. And there is simply not yet this expertise in every organization, and many then buy it in through consultancies, of course. But does that have to be the only solution? Maybe there is another way to share knowledge besides expensive consulting firms, and Talent Sharing would be a great answer (Interviewee 3).

Another goal of Talent Sharing, especially for host organizations was to improve their relationship with the home organization of the talent in a way that would create greater goodwill and thus access to new customer projects.
These insights provided by the interviewees are also largely reflected in existing research on talent mobility, e.g. with respect to human capital and customer access as well as goodwill (Harvey et al., 2002; Reiche, 2012; Somaya & Williamson, 2011).

Talent Sharing - Success factors

We further consulted the interviewees on the role of success factors that help to further develop and strengthen the human and social capital of talents and their home organization. In this vein, the data shows that several success factors at the individual and organizational level need to be taken into account. Concerning the individual level these include motivation, ability and mindset and on the organizational success factors are summarized in the dimensions of significance attached by managers / leader, capabilities, organizational culture and climate, motivation and HRM or TM practices. The data structures present a summary of these success factors, displayed in Figure 1 and 2.

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Individual level: The results of our analysis reveal that several talent characteristics are regarded to be conducive to human and social capital development on individual and organizational level such as willingness to network and proactivity in networking, willingness to externalize knowledge, capacity for reflection, communication skills, analytical competencies, technical expertise, absorptive capacity, networking skills, openness to the new and curiosity and sociability.

Organizational level: According to our data Talent Sharing requires managers and leaders to attach importance to this Talent Development approach, which is manifested in our data by the support of top management, sharing of experiences and learnings to direct supervisors, directors and top management.

In terms of capabilities, talent`s home organization needs to dispose of absorptive capacity to evaluate, harmonize and apply the knowledge internalized by the individual during the Talent Sharing initiative to generate value.

Different aspects concerning the organizational culture and climate in host and home organizations are conducive to Talent Sharing. For instance, talents and Talent Sharing experts regarded characteristics such as honesty and a focus on knowledge-sharing, professionalism and rigor in structures and processes of the host organization to be essential. While the home organizations, disposes of open-mindedness and curiosity and needs to accept "unproductive" working time dedicated to Talent Sharing.

Additionally, motivational factors such as the willingness to try new things, the willingness to listen to and apply talent`s experiences and learning of the home organization as well as willingness to reserve time capacity for the talent and the interest to get in contact with new people on the part of the host organization.

Several HRM and/or TM practices supporting Talent Sharing are provided by the host and home organization. Regarding the initiation and matching phase, the links between talents and host organizations were mostly established via a platform specifically designed for Talent Sharing or via personal contacts between the organizations or the talent and the host company. Finding host organizations by oneself without any social ties in advance was unsuccessful in many instances as host organizations were hesitant due to the great organizational effort it entails.

As one talent reported:

> I have tried to find a [host] company independently in which I would have liked to get this insight. I have therefore written to various companies, but was somewhat difficult to win them for it. [...] So I think if you already have an interface to certain companies […] then I can acquire the company myself. I call and talk to the people in HR and explain the situation. And then I would imagine it might have worked out a little bit better. I tried it through LinkedIn. [...] And from what I understood, I guess the issue was very, very new. I think very few companies say, no, we're not going to do that, no way. It's more like, okay, when it comes to actually setting up the whole thing, there is at least a little organizational effort behind it. Then it fails. (Interviewee 5)

Regarding the fit between talent and host organization, a balance between similarity and diversity is considered as positive by the interviewees so that sufficient knowledge can be shared and transferred while at the same time there is sufficient common ground to understand, evaluate, internalize and transfer it to the home organization. Some participants outlined that the platform could have made a greater contribution by providing more profile data to evaluate the fit between the two parties. As outlined by two talents:

> I think a key factor in successful Talent Sharing is matching: Placing the right person in the right organization [and] in the right environment, in order to really have the maximum effect. [...] So, it has to fit [...] not only in terms of personality, but also simply in terms of the environment. [...] [But] it is also

important that the difference is big enough. So, that you're confronted with enough diversity. (Interviewee 2)

I believe that in order for the companies and participants, to really benefit from the talents who do this, it has to be a very good match. So [with one talent who came to us], there were so few links between what this person normally does and what we do so that it was totally interesting for this person to see how [our company] […] works. But I don't think he has taken away anything relevant for his company, and we couldn't get anything relevant from him either. (Interviewee 4)

As part of the preparation, many talents and host organizations regarded it to be important to get to know each other in telephone conversations or face-to-face meetings in order to clarify mutual expectations and wishes ex ante. Employees of some host organizations were explicitly encouraged by their employer to approach talents with an open mind so that informal exchanges and relationship building could take place.

Concerning the design of the program interviewees indicate that Talent Sharing itself was well structured by host organizations. On the first day some talents have received an onboarding session similar to new employees to familiarize them with the new work environment, to explain the different elements of the program and also provide them with necessary hardware. Many talents report on the importance of a timetable containing predefined appointments to get in contact with employees and/or to get insights into work-related topics. On the other side it was considered important that the entire stay was not completely structured, but that there was also sufficient free time for informal exchange during lunch, dinner, at the coffee machine or during free time activities for knowledge sharing and relationship building. Two talents summarize this as follows:

If possible, one should provide the person with a kind of timetable. So that was really great at Company Y and also with the Company Z. I knew practically every day where I had to go, who wanted to talk to me, it was all arranged, that was great. […] And someone who makes sure […] that there is really a lot of exchange, so that it is really also very actively ensured that private lunches then take place, or that you are just taken along to appointments or so, or that people also take time for a conversation. (Interviewee 4)

There were also topics that were not related to work. As I have already said, there was also a bit of a cultural component, a bit of free time, where there was also room for the group to network, to get to know each other, to work together on this presentation and to have a bit of fun. (Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, during the stay many talents report that they had short, informal conversations, so called check-ins concerning their experiences and/or the status of their assigned tasks. Furthermore, at the end feedback discussions played a major in summarizing and reflecting on their experiences within the host organization. Most of the talents had a direct sparring partner or mentor at the host organization. In this regard one participant mentioned the role of the quality of this mentor:

The branches themselves were, I think, selected in such a way that we were assigned to, yes, good employees, to strong personalities, […] who could show others things. These were all long-term employees, where we were assigned to,

who also already had a history in the company. And they were not chosen at random. (Interviewee 1)

This talent also outlined the importance of mutual exchange in that the sparring partner of the host organization was also sent to the talent`s home organization.

> Then, of course, following this exchange, we also had an exchange at our headquarters. We then had a project, of course, to make a presentation in the group, from the entire program, we compiled things, we also received questions, […], that we had to answer, but also freedom to bring our own, yes, incentives or suggestions, […] to provide our company something. […] So there was already a clear visible interest that this [Talent Sharing] was not just entertainment, but that there […] should result a return on investment for the company. (Interviewee 1)

Immersing oneself in a different environmental context and work climate was also considered important to the success of Talent Sharing. As such, on talent states:

> [It] was also a special location in that it wasn't really the company's office at all, but a house [...] that was intentionally used for workshops. It was brand new and I could actually sleep in it, so it also had a few bedrooms. And I was then actually completely in this house the whole week. It was actually like a small innovation house, it was super, super nice, so also with its own kitchen, with garden. It was like a short vacation actually. Therefore, the complete framework [...] was absolutely perfect. (Interviewee 8)

Barriers to effective Talent Sharing & proposed solutions

Many talents noted that their home organizations provided rather a small degree of guidance and steering of the Talent Sharing program which was perceived as major obstacle to successful Talent Sharing, in particular the lack of clear learning objectives, preparation, and assistance during the program and in the aftermath were mentioned. Many of the talents would have wished a greater contribution of their home organizations in the form of reflection sessions, organized best practice and experience exchange in management and leadership circles as well as formal trainings to systemize and substantiate their knowledge. In this regard, one talent mentions the idea of Talent Sharing as one element of a more holistic approach to Talent Development and career development guided by clear goals and enriched by formal trainings. The talent describes this as follows:

> The design is exactly one of the points that I would criticize the most. [...] I like it when it's structured, when it's clear where the beginning is, where the end is, where the goal is, and what the left and right borders are. It was all very, very open. I think that if you're unlucky and it's not structured [by the host company], you can just waste a week. Well, I mean, then you have a week - the company paid for it, so it doesn't really matter to you. But somehow it's not the motivation with which you would participate here. […] A [formal] training program is pure theory that you get compressed in a week, with almost no practical content. [...] And this Talent Sharing is basically only practice and almost no theory, except for what someone tells you. [...]. What would be cool is [...] a combination of both. […] And I think that's why it's also quite good [...] if you know what the talent can learn in terms of practice when he/she does this [Talent] Sharing, embedded in a learning path that he/she has. (Interviewee 11)

Another talent points out that the problem of the respective organization was not the general mindset but rather the unwillingness to absorb the external knowledge brought by Talent Sharing into the organization. This is summarized as follows:

> So, basically, I would say Company X is open and curious to such inputs. However, it is very likely that this person [the talent] will end up as a lonely voice in the wilderness. (Interviewee 2)

In contrast other companies were willing but were not able to fully integrate the external knowledge because of standardized process specifications from headquarters as well as other work-related specifics, such as the tying up of personnel capacities by shift work, which prevented for example joint team meetings.

One aspect that was also regarded critically by some talents was the duration of five to ten working days which was felt to be too short to fully immerse oneself in the topics, to take away more than just an impulse or impression or to develop strong relations to members of the host organizations. This applies especially for those talents who worked in very dissimilar contexts as compared to their actual position or in organizations with fixed monthly cycles such as consulting. Besides this, data protection was also one of the reasons that prevented active collaboration in some cases.

In order to further intensify and expand ongoing exchange and interorganizational learning interviewed talents and experts suggest measures such as repeated participation, participation of more talents and employees in Talent Sharing and the establishment of firm-internal alumni networks. As explained by on talent:

> And the […] point is not to do it with just one person, but with several people on a regular basis. I think if there's ever a leadership team that says, "Oh, you're doing your shadowing now? I did mine last year. And the other person says: Yes, I had mine the year before last. I think that's important. And I think that when this kind of extra-organizational learning becomes normal, it works really well. (Interviewee 2)

Talent Sharing in the majority of cases had limited or no benefit for talent`s careers which according to existing literature could prevent talents from being motivated to exploit their network ties developed during Talent Sharing in favor of the organization.

Outcomes of Talent Sharing

The results of our interviews reveal that Talent Sharing in most instances had an effect on human and social capital as well as on attitudes among talents. However, our data indicates that organizations where more Talent Sharing-specific facilitating factors are present show more favorable outcomes on the individual and organizational level. Depending on the characteristics of the host organization talents were able to acquire and deepen human capital including technical, methodological and soft skills. For instance, talents working in a similar organization and position as compared to their home organization were able to gain job-relevant technical or leadership skills. Others were able to take advantage of a dissimilar start-up context as compared to their rather rigid organization in that they learnt methodological skills including for instance design thinking approaches or agile sprints. Furthermore, the program has raised the awareness for critical questioning of the status quo and the need for perspective change. However, only a small number of talents states that the human capital gained through Talent Sharing has been persistently incorporated into their

work within the home organization and that the knowledge has been absorbed at the organizational level.

Concerning social capital on the long-run talents developed no to rather weak ties to employees of the host organizations which –if at all – are primarily maintained via social media such as LinkedIn on an irregular basis. However, most of these relationships are considered to be reactivatable by talents to transfer relevant resources. When Talent Sharing was conducted with a group of peers from the same organization, talents often developed and hold strong and trustworthy relationships to some persons of this group, depending on profile fit and frequency of interaction at the home organization. One talent states that the intensity is so strong that regular, informal exchanges about private matters, business results, and best practices take place. Furthermore, attitudes of talents have been affected by Talent Sharing. Many talents perceive the program as an organizational signal of appreciation towards their person leading to greater motivation and commitment. Nevertheless, in some instances Talent Sharing also contributed to turnover intention as talents became more aware that there are other exciting fields of work, that there are places with better working conditions or that their current job does not match their interest. As summarized by two talents:

> And shortly after Talent Sharing, I started actively looking for a job because I really wanted to change. I wanted to experience something different. And I also really wanted to put on a different pair of glasses. [...] And Talent Sharing actually encouraged me to really get out of my own comfort situation and try it out. [...] And yes, I am now actually at a company that works much more like the company I got to know back then [during Talent Sharing]. (Interviewee 8)

> Effectively - and I think this is also very important - it has focused my mind even more on what I don't want to do. And that [was] to stay […] in the environment at that time. My change this year is also motivated by this. (Interviewee 2)

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DISCUSSION

The results of our interviews reveal that Talent Sharing had some positive effects on individual human capital, social capital and attitudes as well as on organizational human capital. Theory- and evidence-based insights on Talent Sharing and in related fields indicate that such approaches to Talent Development have great potential to considerably shape talents by equipping them with valuable and complex knowledge, skills and networks that can be leveraged by their organization (Carpenter et al., 2001; Reiche, 2012), making them a strategic key resource for achieving organizational competitive advantage (Carpenter et al., 2001). Our findings, however, re-confirm previous research in that this talent shaping process does not occur automatically but that various facilitators on the individual- and organizational level influence the relationship between investment in talents/employees and human and social capital development (Felício et al., 2014; Oddou et al., 2009; Reiche, 2012; Unger et al., 2011). Against the backdrop of our empirical results and further theoretical considerations gleaned from ELT (Kolb, 1984), social capital theory (Adler & Kwon, 2002), human capital theory (Becker, 1964) organizational learning theory (Argyris, 1977) and absorptive capacity theory (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) we discuss how different facilitators contribute to successful outcomes of Talent Sharing.

– Insert Figure 4 over here –

Transforming the Talent Sharing experience into individual human and social capital – the individual learning path

Drawing on ELT (Kolb, 1984) and our empirical findings we suggest that Talent Sharing is one element within a greater learning process which requires complementation with further elements serving the purpose of reflection, conceptualization and experimentation leading to a "holistic integrative perspective on learning" (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). As such, our results demonstrate the importance of trainings, reviews, mutual talent exchanges between host and home organization and the formation of alumni networks (for reflection and conceptualization) as well as free time within talent`s regular working time to try out things gained from the Talent Sharing experience (active experimentation) in the aftermath to convert the concrete experience, in the form of Talent Sharing into an individual-level learning result, i.e. human capital.

Insights of social capital theory indicate which type of and how much human capital can be translated depending on the quality of social ties between the involved partners. Here, trust plays a major role: While weak relationships help accessing novel information (Hansen, 1999), trusting ones facilitate the transfer of tacit, strategic and also a greater amount of knowledge (Chen et al., 2014; Reiche, 2012). Trust, however, is dependent on several factors including for example the frequency of partner`s interactions, the length of the respective relationship (Cherry, 2015) as well as common goals (Chen et al., 2014). In most instances our findings reveal that relationships between Talent Sharing partners did not exist before the program, that the program duration was relatively short, and that both parties were rather dissimilar all of which leads to the absence of the aforementioned trust builders and hence inhibits effective knowledge sharing (Chen et al., 2014). Detailing with the power of social networks, Talent Sharing initiatives hold high potential if they are conducted with business partners with which strong ties already exist, such as partners interacting in a strategic alliance, joint ventures or cooperative, which was evident for one case of our sample. Another, alternative is to regard Talent Sharing as a starting point to establish strong interorganizational bonds which require maintenance by regular renewal and reconfirmation in the aftermath (Adler & Kwon, 2002), for example in the form of repeated Talent Sharing, participation of the talent in events of the host company, mutual talent exchange and regular contact via social media platform which has also been suggested by interviewed talents. Furthermore, research in the human capital field indicates that knowledge is not only easier to acquire and transfer but also yields greater performance effects if it is related to the particular tasks of the employee (Becker, 1964; Unger et al., 2011). In the entrepreneurial context, for instance, researchers found that human capital characterized by high task relatedness of entrepreneurs led to greater knowledge about key stakeholders such as suppliers and clients as well as products all of which helps entrepreneurs to identify and exploit novel opportunities (Gimeno et al., 1997; Unger et al., 2011). Additionally, taking the perspective of absorptive capacity into account (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) task-related novel knowledge can be absorbed more easily than non-task related one. For the specific context of interorganizational learning, in the form of Talent Sharing, our findings show that in most instances the host organizations were not systematically selected based on task relevance and similarity of human capital as organizational information were not fully available in advance making task-related matching more difficult. However, those cases which were characterized by greater task-relatedness for instance in the form of relevant process- and content-specificity of human capital showed greater human capital-specific outcomes on individual

and organizational level. In our sample this was especially achieved by careful selection of assignment location and mentor or sparring partner.

Developing human capital - the organizational learning path

As outlined before our data reveals that Talent Sharing equips talents with new perspectives, ideas and knowledge which are a potential source of organizational learning. In a few instances, this leads not only to the adaptation and improvement of established routines and the manner things are done but also to the introduction of completely novel answers such as the introduction of new technologies. In line with organizational learning theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978), these represent outcomes of two different levels of the learning process, namely single-loop and double-loop learning. While the former is directed towards adaptation, improvement, correction and thus leads to incremental solutions the latter aims at taking an entirely new perspective on problems by reframing issues, formulating novel paradigms, modifying current values and goals finally leading to radical changes (Argyris & Schön, 1978; García-Morales et al., 2009; Wong, 2001). However, as reflected in our data the outcomes of Talent Sharing on organizational level are rather scarce. Some reasons for this which are emergent in our data are seen in the absence of leaders` commitment and supportiveness towards learning, a lack of an incentive system rewarding learning-oriented behavior as well as missing opportunities to communicate the Talent Sharing experience with peers which also re-confirms existing research in this field (Barette et al., 2012; Pham & Swierczek, 2006).

Furthermore, another key pre-requisite for organizational learning and the value creation thereof is regarded in the firm`s absorptive capacity involving "[…] an ability to recognize the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial end" (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990, p. 128; Zahra & George, 2002). Absorptive capacity is the connection between the internal, organizational capability for new product development and improvement and the opportunities and information available externally (Song, 2015). As such, Talent Sharing is a vehicle to get access to and transfer knowledge with the talent functioning as a boundary spanner in this regard (Reiche, 2012). In order to successfully transfer and capitalize on that knowledge at the organizational level our data, however, reveals that the talent`s motivation and efforts to externalize that knowledge are not sufficient but that organizational factors heavily influence this process. In line with existing research our analysis demonstrates that "the richness of transmission channels" and "corporate socialization programs" (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000, p. 477) play a crucial role. With regard to Talent Sharing, direct supervisors are regarded as key "transmission channel" as they dispose of the necessary networks and power to not only spread but also to apply the output of Talent Sharing in the form of knowledge throughout the organization and thus act as organizational multipliers to bring about change and improvement. Some of our cases, however, show that leaders very often remained in their routines or were not open to changes originating from the bottom which leads to the vanishing of knowledge at the organizational level in some instances. Therefore, our data also suggests the use of IT tools such as internal social media platforms and the establishment of alumni networks which allow for horizontal exchange between employees. Especially, the latter can contribute to familiarizing the employees with each other, creating common cognitive ground and hence develop a greater base for integration and leverage of external knowledge (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Our study demonstrates that Talent Sharing as a relatively new approach to interorganizational Talent Development builds a fruitful ground for individual and

organizational learning with the help of networks especially in a dynamic environment where external knowledge becomes increasingly important (Ferraris et al., 2019). The goal of this study was to identify how Talent Sharing contributes to individual and organizational learning and which learning facilitating factors support this. Hence, we descriptively show how Talent Sharing in organizations is designed, which success factors play a role and which outcomes are achieved. Based on these descriptive results our study was able to identify several shortcomings concerning the design and further facilitating factors which partly impeded favorable outcomes of Talents Sharing in the form of social and human capital. To overcome these restraining factors and following claims for further research on Talent Development mechanisms (Garavan et al., 2012) our study suggests an evidence- and theory-based framework which broadens our understanding on the favorable design of Talent Sharing, and further organizational- and individual-level facilitating factors in order to effectively shape talents and thus reaching competitive advantage (Harsch & Festing, 2020).

Limitations & Future Research

Beside these contributions our study also shows some limitations. First, the number of 20 targeted interviews will be rather small as compared to the number of talents who have already participated in Talent Sharing, which already amounts for example to 150 for only one single company included in our data. Nevertheless, as of now we are already seeing that data saturation (Flick, 2007) is being reached, which justifies this amount of interviews.
Furthermore, in our data one single company is over-represented which may lead to the fact that the results may not be fully transferable to other companies and industries. As our results show that Talent Sharing is especially driven by challenges originating from the dynamic environment, we suggest including further companies and industries that are exposed to a high degree of volatility and uncertainty stemming from the dynamic environment. Additionally, our study was conducted only in the German context. Therefore, we cannot assure that our findings also apply to dynamic environments in other countries. Taking also the context-dependency of Talent Management (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020) into account we hence advocate to further explore Talent Sharing in more countries.

Practical implications
In this section we will outline what TM practitioners, talents and organizations can learn from our study. One key take-away here are insights and best practices how to design Talent Sharing especially in the face of the high costs this program involves.

This part, however, requires further elaboration by the authors.

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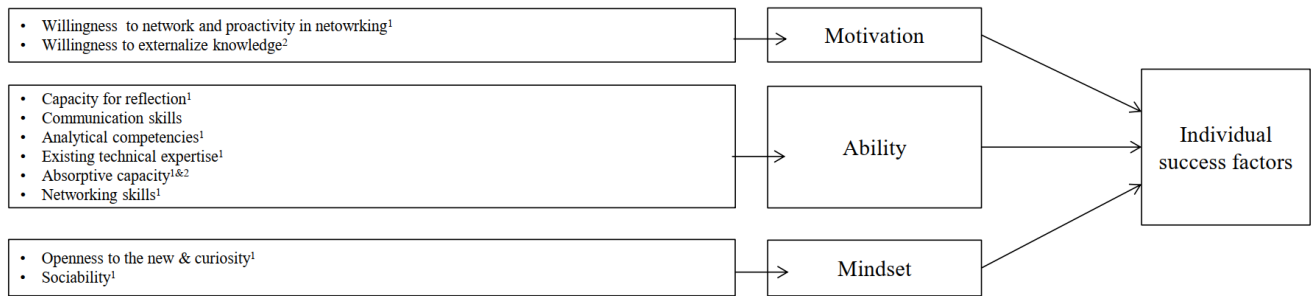
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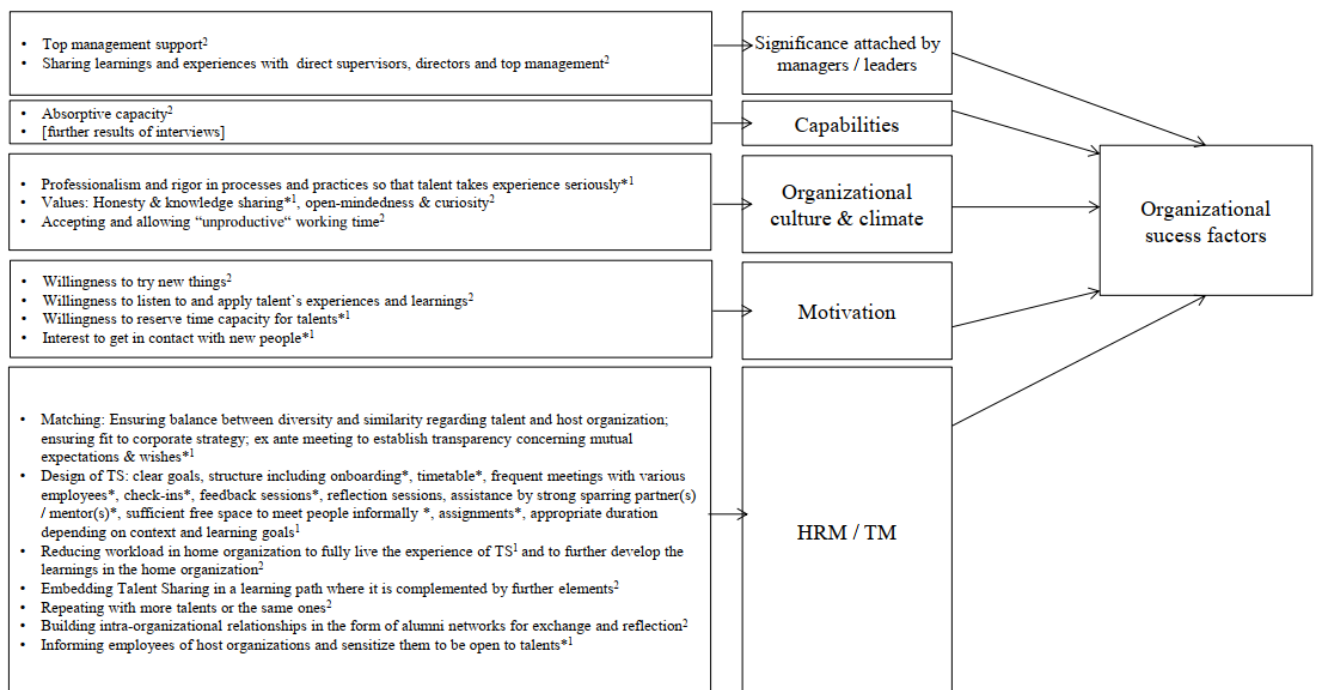
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Figure 1:
Data Sheet - Individual success factors

• Willingness to network and proactivity in netowrking[1] • Willingness to externalize knowledge[2]	Motivation
• Capacity for reflection[1] • Communication skills • Analytical competencies[1] • Existing technical expertise[1] • Absorptive capacity[1&2] • Networking skills[1]	Ability
• Openness to the new & curiosity[1] • Sociability[1]	Mindset

→ Individual success factors

Figure 2:
Data Sheet - Organizational success factors

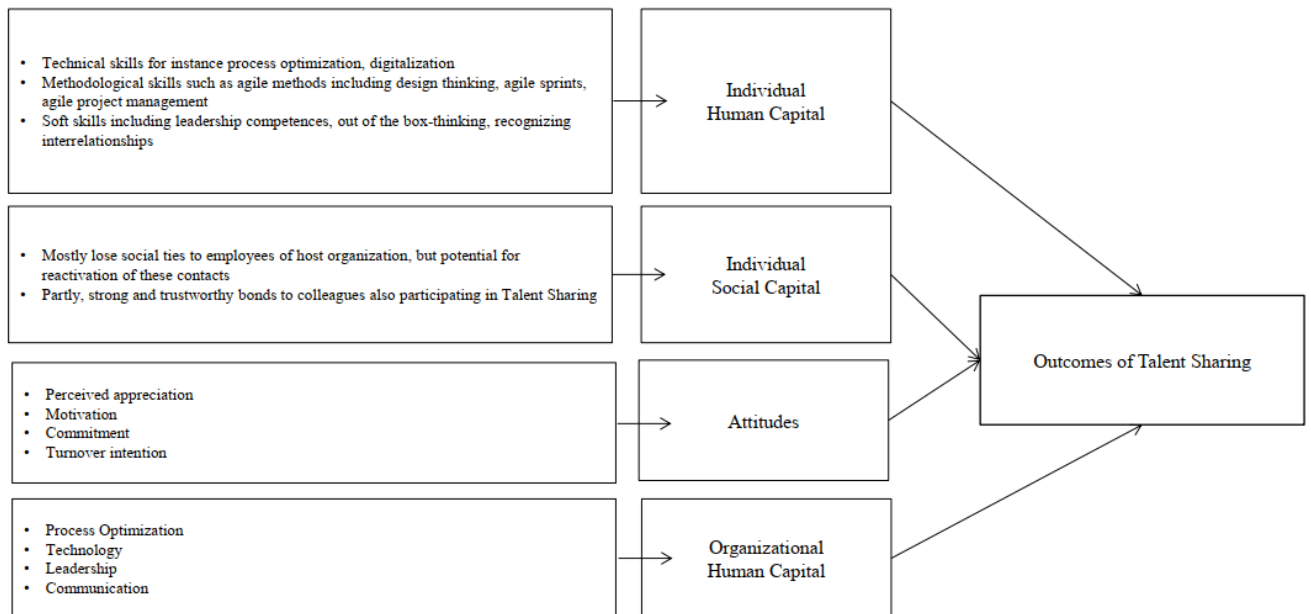|	
• Top management support[2] • Sharing learnings and experiences with direct supervisors, directors and top management[2]	Significance attached by managers / leaders
• Absorptive capacity[2] • [further results of interviews]	Capabilities
• Professionalism and rigor in processes and practices so that talent takes experience seriously*[1] • Values: Honesty & knowledge sharing*[1], open-mindedness & curiosity[2] • Accepting and allowing "unproductive" working time[2]	Organizational culture & climate
• Willingness to try new things[2] • Willingness to listen to and apply talent's experiences and learnings[2] • Willingness to reserve time capacity for talents*[1] • Interest to get in contact with new people*[1]	Motivation
• Matching: Ensuring balance between diversity and similarity regarding talent and host organization; ensuring fit to corporate strategy; ex ante meeting to establish transparency concerning mutual expectations & wishes*[1] • Design of TS: clear goals, structure including onboarding*, timetable*, frequent meetings with various employees*, check-ins*, feedback sessions*, reflection sessions, assistance by strong sparring partner(s) / mentor(s)*, sufficient free space to meet people informally *, assignments*, appropriate duration depending on context and learning goals[1] • Reducing workload in home organization to fully live the experience of TS[1] and to further develop the learnings in the home organization[2] • Embedding Talent Sharing in a learning path where it is complemented by further elements[2] • Repeating with more talents or the same ones[2] • Building intra-organizational relationships in the form of alumni networks for exchange and reflection[2] • Informing employees of host organizations and sensitize them to be open to talents*[1]	HRM / TM

→ Organizational sucess factors

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[1] Effect on the relationship between individual outcomes and organizational outcomes
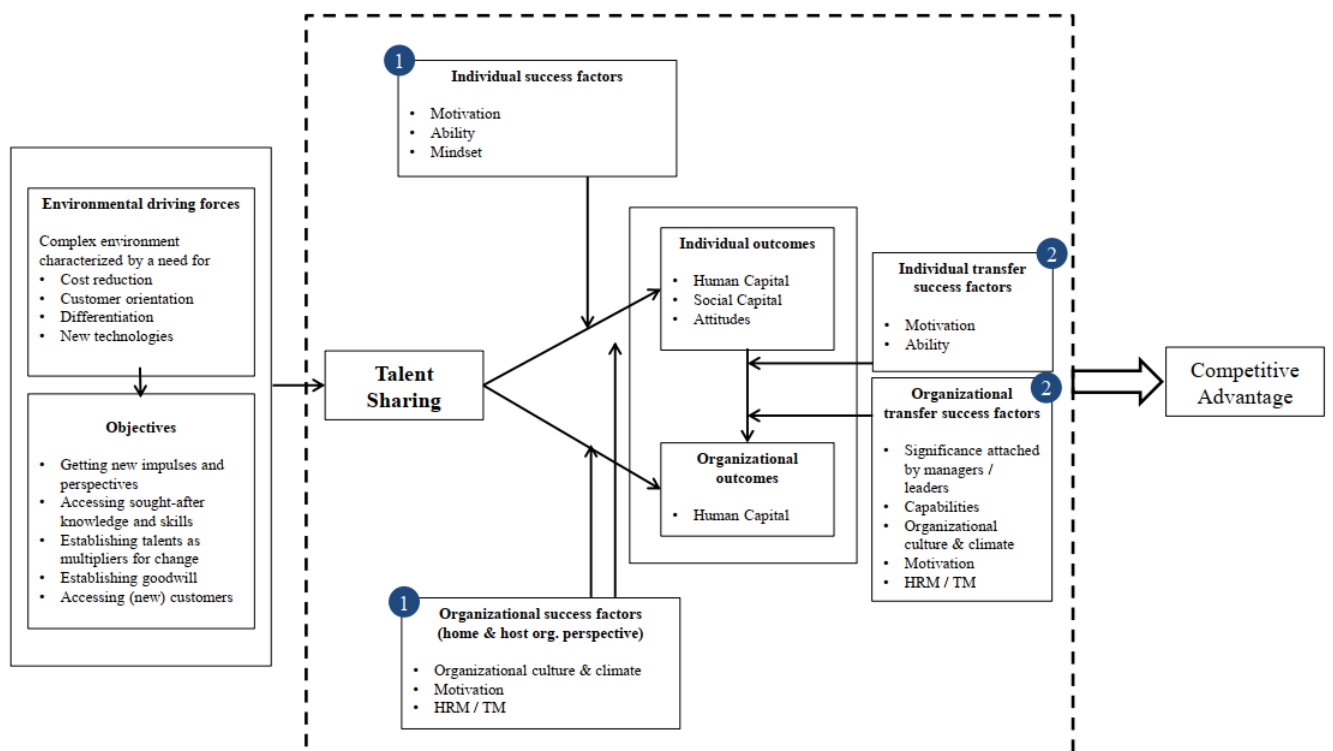[2] Effect on the relationship between Talent Sharing and individual outcomes
* Elements shaped by the host organization

Figure 3:
Data Sheet – Outcomes of Talent Sharing

- Technical skills for instance process optimization, digitalization
- Methodological skills such as agile methods including design thinking, agile sprints, agile project management
- Soft skills including leadership competences, out of the box-thinking, recognizing interrelationships

→ Individual Human Capital

- Mostly lose social ties to employees of host organization, but potential for reactivation of these contacts
- Partly, strong and trustworthy bonds to colleagues also participating in Talent Sharing

→ Individual Social Capital

- Perceived appreciation
- Motivation
- Commitment
- Turnover intention

→ Attitudes

- Process Optimization
- Technology
- Leadership
- Communication

→ Organizational Human Capital

Outcomes of Talent Sharing

Figure 4:
Evidence- and theory-based framework for explaining Talent Sharing design and further facilitating factors[3]

Environmental driving forces

Complex environment characterized by a need for
- Cost reduction
- Customer orientation
- Differentiation
- New technologies

Objectives
- Getting new impulses and perspectives
- Accessing sought-after knowledge and skills
- Establishing talents as multipliers for change
- Establishing goodwill
- Accessing (new) customers

Talent Sharing

1 Individual success factors
- Motivation
- Ability
- Mindset

Individual outcomes
- Human Capital
- Social Capital
- Attitudes

Organizational outcomes
- Human Capital

1 Organizational success factors (home & host org. perspective)
- Organizational culture & climate
- Motivation
- HRM / TM

2 Individual transfer success factors
- Motivation
- Ability

2 Organizational transfer success factors
- Significance attached by managers / leaders
- Capabilities
- Organizational culture & climate
- Motivation
- HRM / TM

Competitive Advantage

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[3] Numbers 1 & 2 indicate which specific success factor applies as indicated by Footnotes in Data Sheets 1 and 2