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Developing Talent or Maintaining Control?

Talent Management and Sensemaking in a Public Organization

By

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Abstract

Title: Developing Talent or Maintaining Control?

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Purpose: This study aims to understand how employees and managers make sense of talent management, and with a particular focus on the relationship between organizational structures, managerial practices and employee responsibility for career development.

Methodology: This is a qualitative study following abductive and interpretive research tradition. The data collection consists of 14 semi-structured interviews, where two were pilot interviews and two follow-up interviews with respondents from the organization AeroNord.

Theoretical framing: The sensemaking framework by Weick et al. (2005) as well as the definition of sensegiving by Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) is the primarily theoretical framework of this study. This is also supplemented with the garbage can model by Cohen et al. (1972) as well as previous literature within the field of talent management.

Contributions: The study contributes to talent management literature by framing talent management as a mechanism of managerial power and organisational control rather than a purely strategic development system. We also contribute to the literature of symbolic management (Berg, 1986) and add that it can be used in the sense of symbolic *talent* management.

Key words: Talent Management, Career Development, Succession Planning, Sensemaking, Sensegiving, Operational Context, Organizational Structures, Gatekeeping, Expectation Trap

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To our readers, we hope you enjoy reading this thesis as much as we have enjoyed writing it.

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Table of Contents

	5
1. Introduction	7
1.1 The Evolving Nature of Talent Management	7
1.2 Problematization	9
1.3 Purpose	11
1.4 Research Question	11
1.5 Thesis Outline	11
2. Literature review	13
2.1 Talent Management as a Strategic System	13
2.2 Talent as Socially Constructed	15
2.3 Theoretical Framework	17
2.3.1 Sensemaking and Sensegiving	17
2.3.2 Garbage Can Model	19
2.4 Structural Constraints on Talent	19
2.5 Talent Management at The Individual Level	21
2.5.1 Effects of Recognition	22
2.6 Symbolic Management	24
2.7 Positioning of Study	25
3. Methodology	26
3.1 Research Approach	26
3.2 Data Collection	27
3.2.1 Sampling Method	28
3.2.2 Sampling Rationale: Managers and Employees	29

3.3 Data Analysis	31
3.3.1 Sort	31
3.3.2 Reduce	32
3.3.3 Argue	32
3.4 Credibility and Transferability	33
3.5 Use of Generative AI	34
3.6 Ethical Considerations	35
4. Analysis	36
4.1 Organizational Structure	36
4.1.1 Organizational Gatekeeping	40
4.2 Individual vs Organizational Responsibility	42
4.2.1 Individual Differences	44
4.3 Symbolic Talent Management	47
4.4 Expectation Trap	49
4.4.1 Talent Recognition and The Escalating Expectations	52
4.5 Short-term vs Long-term Tension	54
4.6 Chapter Conclusion	56
5. Discussion	57
5.1 Core Findings of The Empirical Data	57
5.2 From Strategic to Symbolic Talent Management	58
5.3 Talent Management as Organizational Power	60
5.3.1 Sensegiving, Sensemaking and Managerial Power	60
5.3.2 Negative Sensemaking	63
5.4 Conditions Shaping Managerial Control	64
5.4.1 Contextual Constraints	64
5.4.2 Resource Constraints	66
5.4.3 Bias and Managerial Self-interests	67

5.5 Understanding Perceptions of Talent Management Narratives	69
5.5.1 Self-perception	69
5.5.2 Managerial Relationships	70
5.5.3 Previous Experiences	71
6. Conclusion	72
6.1 Answer to Research Question	72
6.2 Theoretical Contributions	74
6.3 Limitations	76
6.4 Future Research	77
7. References	78
8. Appendix	83
Appendix A - Interview Guide For Pilot Interviews	83
Appendix B - Interview Guide Revised After Pilot Interviews	85
Appendix C - Interview Guide For Managers	88
Appendix D - Interview Guide With Former Trainees	91

1. Introduction

In this section, we begin by introducing the subject of talent management and outlining the current state of research within the field. We further problematize the topic by presenting the research object and explaining the intended contribution of the study. Lastly, the purpose, research question, and thesis outline are presented.

1.1 The Evolving Nature of Talent Management

What is talent? Is it a characteristic, a capability, or a person? Is talent transferable and universal, or is it dependent on a specific context, place and moment in time? When envisioning a talent, it is easy to picture a superhuman, an individual capable of mastering any task presented to them. However, talent rarely exists in isolation, and is so much more than just finding the right person and expecting them to deliver. It is about continuously working with talent management.

“[...] talent management is partly about becoming, as far as possible, self-sufficient in skilled employees and leaders, identifying development opportunities, and making use of the potential of those we already have within the company.” - RI

The term “talent” gained recognition through introduction by McKinsey Group in 1990, anticipating a “war for talent” driven by shortages of individuals with leadership potential. This war was distinguished by stealing talent from its competitors, while simultaneously getting better at retaining their own employees (Cappelli, 2008, p. 76). Since then, the term has been widely adopted, though scholars note that it remains conceptually fluid and open to multiple interpretations (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 146). Rather than relying on one clear definition, most researchers have conducted their own (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016, p. 32; Lewis & Heckman, 2006, p. 140). Some scholars present talent management as a strategic and objective way of identifying and developing employees (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 304), while others suggest that it is shaped by organizational values and subjective assessments (Lever & Swailes, 2023, pp. 75-76).

Despite these differing definitions, existing research emphasizes the strategic aspects and the long-term benefits of working systematically with talent management practices (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 311; Di Prima et al., 2024, p. 3114; Lewis & Heckman, 2006, p. 145). Instead of solely focusing on recruitment, organizations increasingly emphasize employee development, engagement and retention through talent management practices (Cappelli & Keller, 2014, p. 306).

However, when discussing the topic of talent management, it's important to acknowledge that it might not be a one-fit all solution. In industries where operations depend on highly specialized competence, retaining employees becomes critical not only for organizational performance, but for operational continuity itself. Simultaneously, organizations must encourage employees to grow, develop and pursue new opportunities. Otherwise, there is a risk that valuable expertise and knowledge will leave the organization. This tension becomes particularly visible in organizations operating within critical infrastructure, where competence shortages and organizational uncertainty may coexist with demands for uninterrupted operations. Talent management might not be as straightforward as it initially seems in these types of contexts, and remains a challenging field in practice as organizations increasingly struggle both to attract talent, and also to retain and develop employees in a labour market characterized by changing career expectations, increased mobility and continuous organizational change, which directly affects the organization's future survival (Di Prima et al., 2024, p. 3112)

The tension of retaining specialized knowledge becomes extended when another aspect of the evolving nature of talent management is reflected in a broader shift from organizational responsibility toward increased individual responsibility for career trajectories (Di Prima et al., 2024, p. 3110). As talent management becomes less structured and more dependent on individual initiative, employees are increasingly expected to manage their own careers, development and employability (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 8), while we would argue that organizations simultaneously retain control over opportunities, recognition and career pathways. This creates a contradiction between individual responsibility and organizational dependency, where employees are encouraged to take ownership of their careers while their possibilities for advancement at the same time remain constrained by organizational structure, contexts or even managerial control.

Moreover, talent identification may also affect the self-perception of employees and how they perceive their future in the organization. Being labeled a “talent” or “high-potential” may shape motivation, identity construction, expectations as well as the relationship with the organization (Ehrnrooth et al., 2018, p. 449). At the same time, symbolic initiatives or unclear career pathways can create a sense of frustration, uncertainty and injustice (Cappelli & Keller, 2014, p. 316), which is the risk for employees operating in contexts that do not allow them to develop to become “talents”. This is what we further will investigate in the context of AeroNord.

To understand these contradicting perspectives from both a managerial and employee perspective, this study draws upon the concepts of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005), and sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi's, 1991), focusing on how managers and employees interpret, communicate and create meanings surrounding talent, development and career opportunities within a public organizational context.

1.2 Problematization

Previous research within the field has largely focused on talent management within private-sector organizations, while public and state-owned organizations remain relatively underexplored (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016, p. 32). This creates an interesting foundation for research as public and state-owned organizations often operate under different structural conditions than private firms, including bureaucratic processes, operational continuity, political influence and more limited hierarchical career opportunities (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016, p. 49). While private-sector talent management often is driven by competition, profitability and performance optimization, public organizations must as well be profitable, balance operational efficiency and stability in critical areas, while simultaneously meeting other regulatory demands (Collings, 2014, p. 305). Public organizations operating within critical infrastructure face tensions with competing demands and interests from different stakeholders. These organizational conditions may translate into contextual constraints, which may influence how well implemented talent management may be within an organization.

Therefore, this study focuses on a state-owned organization, with large-scale operations throughout the whole of Sweden, AeroNord. AeroNord is active within the transport industry

and a crucial member of Sweden's infrastructure. Their operations can be described as the ones connecting Sweden both domestically and internationally. The transport industry is defined by a fast-paced and rapidly changing environment, which affects the operations at AeroNord and leads to them having to be agile and respond with continuous change.

This makes AeroNord a particularly interesting object to study, as the organization operates in a highly dynamic environment, while simultaneously depending on long-term operational stability and employee retention. However, this study will argue that there is a lack of understanding of how a long-term, strategic perspective of talent management is applied in these types of contextual constraints. This study will draw further upon this perspective, since these constraints may also influence in what way talent management is integrated into the organization. Even though talent management is about developing employees and giving them opportunities to make career movements, it could potentially function as a procedure through which organizations regulate employee expectations to maintain operational continuity. This study therefore approaches talent management as a socially constructed process rather than a neutral organizational practice. Particular attention is directed toward if talent management may function as a mechanism of organizational control and managerial power within a public organization characterized by external uncertainty and operational continuity demand.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of how talent is managed within a public organization and specifically in a highly operational context. It explores how talent management processes are shaped in the context of the research object of AeroNord, and how operational conditions influence the way talent management is practiced and interpreted. The study further examines how talent management may function both as a developmental practice, and as a mechanism through which employee expectations and organizational stability are managed, and how this in extent can be used as a tool for organizational control and managerial power through the process of sensemaking and sensegiving.

1.4 Research Question

In order to reach our purpose of this study we have conducted following research question;

How do employees and managers make sense of talent management in a highly operational organization?

This research question aims to examine talent management practices within an organization such as AeroNord. With highly operational organization we are referring to organizations that operate in a volatile environment, that is affected to a high extent by changes within the external environment, and that must respond to multiple demands and regulations from various external stakeholders. The focus of the research question is on how employees and managers make sense of talent management. The reasoning behind this is to enable the use of the sensemaking and sensegiving framework, which provides an understanding of how talent management is interpreted and constructed by organizational actors, since talent management may be understood and interpreted differently. Furthermore, the framework is used to research how these talent management initiatives shape attitudes and behaviour.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis builds on the following logic.

Introduction: The introductory chapter begins by outlining the current positioning of talent management and the present state of the academic literature on the subject. The research object of this study, AeroNord, is further introduced. We explain the industry in which they operate in and their crucial role within Swedish infrastructure. This is followed by the purpose of the study, and what this study aims to discover, as well as the research questions.

Literature review: The literature review chapter gives a general overview of the existing literature on talent management, including both foundational and newer studies on the subject. This section is structured with the idea of starting broad to give an overview of the idea of talent management as a strategic system, and systematically narrow it down into more specific themes that we have identified during the research process. The literature review further presents the theoretical framework of sensemaking and sensegiving used for this study, and results in us showing our positioning of study.

Methodology: This section is focused on the methodology of this study. We describe how the process of data collection and data analysis was outlined. This section also includes how generative AI has been used throughout writing the thesis as well as ethical considerations. Lastly, the credibility and transferability of this study is discussed.

Analysis: The analysis chapter consists of our findings from the semistructured interviews. Following a thematization, we include quotes as well as analytical reports on how we interpret our empirical result.

Discussion: In the discussion, we connect previous literature in the field to the empirical findings, as well as applying the theoretical framework. This follows an abductive process where we move back and forth from existing theory and our own findings and interpretations.

Conclusion: In the conclusion, the answers to our research questions are presented. This section further describes our empirical contribution to the field of talent management as well as suggestions for future research. In addition, it explains the methodological limitations that we have identified during the research process. Lastly, the thesis empties out in a section regarding future research within the field of talent management. Reference list and appendix is included at the end of the thesis.

2. Literature review

This chapter presents the theoretical background underlying the study. It outlines previous research on talent management. A broad perspective of talent management's strategic role is firstly presented, before moving into more specific bodies of literature and the theoretical framework that has been used in this study. Lastly, we will present our position of study.

2.1 Talent Management as a Strategic System

Talent management has increasingly become a central component of strategic human resource management. To achieve organizational success Jensen (2005) emphasizes HR as an important strategic actor. This is in the sense that HR needs to be integrated in both cost-cutting activities as well as growth-oriented strategies. By viewing HR as a strategic partner instead of an

administrative role, it could lead to valuable competitive advantages for companies (Jensen, 2005, pp. 46-51). Jensen (2005) outlines six strategic HR practices that distinguish successful companies, one of these being talent management. Talent management (TM) is at large conceptualised as a strategic organizational system aimed at creating competitive advantage. At heart, it is a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and therefore structuring a plan to meet it (Cappelli, 2008, p. 74). Talent management further exists to support the organization in meeting their overall goal, which often is associated with revenue (Cappelli, 2008, p. 77). Therefore, a successful talent system with resources put into employee development, may also improve return on investments, as per Cappelli (2008, p. 78) has a strong correlation.

A dominant perspective defines talent management in terms of identifying strategically important positions and developing the right competence that is capable of filling them. For example, Collings and Mellahi (2009, p. 304) emphasize the systematic identification of key roles that contribute to organizational performance and competitive advantage, together with development of “high-potential” and “high-performing” employees to fill key roles and ensure their continued commitment to the organization. Collings (2014, p. 303) later argues that talent management ranges from a focus on succession planning to the management of star performers. Similarly, broader definitions describe talent management as a coordinated set of practices involving attraction, development, engagement, retention and deployment of individuals of particular value to an organization (Beardwell & Thompson 2017, p. 147). Accordingly, talent is conceptualized as a resource to be developed and optimised in a strategic way, closely aligning talent management with performance outcomes and long-term competitiveness (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 305).

This strategic perspective is further strengthened by the integration of human resource management into overall business strategy. As mentioned previously, HR is increasingly framed as a strategic pillar responsible for enabling development, efficiency and growth (Collings, 2014; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Jensen, 2005). Practices such as competency-based career development with systematic assessment and gap analysis further illustrate this logic (Guinn, 2000, p. 391). By comparing existing skills with desired competencies, firms can identify development needs and design targeted interventions in order to align their workforce

competences (Guinn, 2000, p. 392). This perspective of HR as a strategic actor is relevant to the present study, as it highlights the importance of integrating HR practices into organizational strategy in order to support growth and overall performance. It also provides a basis for understanding the consequences when such integration is limited or absent. These fundamental studies that have been made on talent management, is of further importance for our study since it provides us with a comprehensive understanding of the history of the phenomenon and creates understanding of how it has developed throughout the years of research.

The strategic emphasis that this body of literature provides, presents talent management as a linear and objective process, where organizations can identify and develop their employees in a controlled and predictable way, in order to meet their exact needs. Lewis and Heckman (2006, p. 149) challenge this perspective by stating how talent management practices lack concrete guidance for allocating limited organizational resources. Their alternative view, draws on a resource-based logic, suggesting that talent should be used as a source of competitive advantage when it is valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate (Lewis & Heckman, 2006, p. 151). While this perspective strengthens the link between talent and competitive advantage, it also shows a tendency towards a short-term perspective, where organizations focus on immediate performance instead of graduate and sustained development. In contrast, Collings (2014, p. 305) emphasizes that talent management could be understood as a long-term investment in human capital. Therefore, in order to plan long-term, there is a significant need to start by identifying crucial positions first, and second crucial employees (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 307). Our study bulbs on the tension between short- and long-term talent management practices to explore how competing organizational priorities shape the implementation and outcomes of talent management.

Although across both short-and long term perspectives, it could be seen how talent management is primarily understood in terms of formal systems and organizational performance outcomes, with limited attention to how talent is constructed and how talent management actually is used in an highly organizational context, which our study aims to uncover.

2.2 Talent as Socially Constructed

The concept of “talent” remains ambiguous within the literature, with no universally agreed definition. Talent may be understood either as a set of individual characteristics, such as ability, commitment, and performance, or as a category of people identified within the organization (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013, p. 291).

Cappelli and Keller (2014, p. 307) further mentions the differences between inclusive and exclusive approaches on talent management, where the exclusive approach is dominant within the existing literature on the subject. Inclusive approaches suggest that talent management should be adapted to fit all workers. Exclusive approaches on the other hand, suggest that only a subset of employees or certain jobs is seen as valuable. It could therefore be seen how talent identification is not just an evaluation, but rather a selection and exclusion. As Kwon and Jang (2022, p. 113) argue, when talent management processes appear biased, the perceptions of organizational justice can be undermined. This risk becomes particularly significant when individual characteristics that are unrelated to employees’ actual performance still influence the evaluation process. Further, this could lead to limited visibility where some employees seem to be overlooked due to the bias that appears in the managers decision process (Kwon & Jang, 2022, p. 103). These dynamics may lead to disengagement, cynicism and turnover (Kwon & Jang, 2022, p. 95).

Lever and Swailes (2023, pp. 75-76) further contribute to the conversation of how the identification of talent is shaped by organizational power structures and social dynamics. Employees who align with dominant organizational norms and expectations are more likely to be recognized as “talent”, suggesting that talent identification involves navigating implicit rules and expectations (Lever & Swailes, 2023, p. 64). Similarly, research shows that factors such as similarity bias influence who is identified as talent, as individuals who are more visible or resemble decision-makers are more likely to be selected (Mäkelä et al., 2010, p. 135; Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 163). In this sense, the “similar-to-me” effect could harm organizational trust and justice (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 163; Zahed & Satteri Ardabili, 2017, p. 260). This effect may appear when employers have a tendency to favor and select employees who

resemble them in either geographical, demographic, cultural and behavioral attributes (Mäkelä et al., 2010, p. 138). The result of this is connected to job dissatisfaction and mistrust against managers, while managers that consistently challenge the similar-to-me effect tend to avoid conflicts and instead establish group-thinking (Zahed & Satteri Ardabili, 2017, p. 255). Thus, from this perspective, management works to identify talent, but actively shapes and regulates who is allowed access to development opportunities and career progression (Lever & Swailes, 2023, pp. 73-74) which this study will further challenge as more of a subjective outlook. One prominent concept is the success syndrome, whereby individuals labeled as talent receive early career sponsorship, privileged access to developmental resources, and increased visibility, which can accelerate their advancement and performance outcomes (McCall, 1998, cited in Dries, 2013, p. 281). However, this creates an ambiguity since it is difficult to determine if their success is due to actual ability or the extra support they received (McCall, 1998, cited in Dries, 2013).

To conclude, the perspective of talent as socially constructed is particularly relevant for the present study, as it challenges the perspective of talent management as a systematic and objective process, and the biased nature opens up for the possibility of organizations using talent management as a mechanism for driving an organizational or managerial agenda, or even control. In other words, management decides who is recognized as talent, in order to feed their own personal interest. To further understand the socially constructed perspective of talent management, the theoretical framework used for this study will consist of the sensemaking framework (Weick et al., 2005) and sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi's, 1991). This is used to explain how employees and managers make sense of talent management practices.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Sensemaking and Sensegiving

In this study, we draw upon Weick et al. (2005) definition of sensemaking which states that circumstances are turned into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard to action. This perspective becomes relevant for the present study, as we are interested in understanding how employees interpret and make sense of talent management practices within AeroNord, and how these interpretations may influence both managers and

employees expectations and actions. Sensemaking is driven by trying to understand an event and bringing meaning into existence, which provides stability for a person to act into the future (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410). It is also of importance to understand that sensemaking is an ongoing cycle as well as retrospective, which means that it could change any time.

Closely related to sensemaking is the concept of sensegiving, which will also be used in this study to understand how organizational actors attempt to shape and influence employees' interpretations of talent management and career development. We therefore draw upon Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991, p. 442) definition of sensegiving as the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality. In the context of this study, this becomes particularly relevant for understanding how managerial actors communicate narratives surrounding talent, development, potential, and career progression in ways that shape employees' expectations and interpretations of their future within the organization. The framework of sensegiving does also give a foundational theory for understanding how talent management practices could be used as a power tool for managers to drive their own agenda.

The concept of sensegiving is further developed by Kraft et al. (2018) where they explain the crucial aspect of communication and actions being in accordance, in order for the sensegiving attempts to be successful. They explain two types of strategies leaders use to provide sense. Discursive strategies focus on communicative practices, such as conducting dialogues, while symbolic strategies could be actions that may give sense to employees instead of actually aiming towards what they are communicated to do (Kraft et al., 2018, p. 79). If the sensegiving process fails, employees may experience negative sensemaking. This could lead to several damaging consequences for an organization (Kraft et al., 2018). It could give rise to employees questioning certain projects or processes credibility and if there is a hidden agenda, as well as impatience and frustration that further could stall progress. If employees are unsatisfied with their role or the outcome of a project or situation, they may take on a purely negative personal evaluation of the situation, which further can prevent the organization from learning or gaining confidence for future challenges. If the sensegiving is inconsistent and managers actions do not match their words, employees may begin to doubt their leaders which further could damage the organizational climate (Kraft et al., 2018, p. 80). The consequences of negative sensemaking will

be used to illustrate when managers may use talent management as a tool of power and how this could harm the organization long-term.

However, if sensegiving processes are successful, it generates positive sensemaking that could lead to several advantages in an organization. Positive sensemaking allows for the organization to take advantage of significant opportunities or cope with environmental threats (Kraft et al., 2018). It also provides a symbolic foundation that informs, motivates and directs organizational effort. In a reorganization, effective sensemaking paired with sensegiving, can provide reassurance that the process is controlled and managed rather than ambiguity that often is connected with strategic change. Further, this can also gain confidence for the organization's future change capability (Kraft et al., 2018, p. 80). Even though this study isn't necessarily focused on a change process, the concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving to provide the feeling of a controlled process, provided by Kraft et al. (2018), remain relevant to capture how talent management initiatives can be used to provide a sense of control over career process characterized by ambiguity within a high volatile context.

The concept of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) and sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442) used within the field of talent management is limited. However, according to Glaister et al. (2018, p. 730) sensemaking is used in the context of talent management for managers to rationalize their approaches and justify their allocation of resources, in response to external pressures. Even though this study is based on a different cultural context, their findings are still particularly relevant for our study since our research object AeroNord, operates in a highly evolving environment and therefore is affected by external pressures to a high extent.

2.3.2 Garbage Can Model

Another theoretical framework that is used throughout the study as a complement to the sensemaking framework (Weick et al., 2005) is the garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972). The model emphasizes that decision-making processes are ambiguous, which concerns AeroNord due to their contextual constraints. A decision could be seen as a response to increased pressures from the external or internal environment. Where this response symbolizes a solution to a problem but instead the underlying issues remain unresolved. Organized anarchies (Cohen et al.,

1972) is a term that describes organizations which are characterized by ambiguity, unclear goal-setting and fluid participation. In these organizations the decision-making models are not linear or structured, instead decisions are made in the moment and highly dependent on organizational circumstances. The garbage can metaphor stems from decisions and solutions, connected to situations when the opportunity arises rather than during long-term strategic planning. This is relevant for the following study since it helps create an understanding of responsibility when the organizational structure still remains unclear. Further this model is also used to explain where talent management decisions may stem from.

2.4 Structural Constraints on Talent

The insights provided by scholars in regards to talent being socially constructed becomes of further interest when understanding how organizational structure itself has an important role in determining who becomes and remains recognised as a “talent” within organizations.

Organizational structures also emphasize that human capital should be considered the most important resource in line with the resource-based view (Cappelli & Keller, 2014, p. 308). This view could be argued as crucial in order to achieve successful talent management. Yet, Thunnissen (2016, p. 69) showed that talent management is not as easy to implement as the literature predicts. While talent management has been conceptualized as a systematic process of recognizing high-performing individuals (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 304), other scholars instead emphasise its subjective and people-based nature rather than purely competency-based assessments (Dries, 2013, p. 279).

Furthermore, Tyskbo (2021, p. 2161) demonstrates that the meaning of a talent depends on two different logics. Under a business logic, talent is associated with leadership potential, mobility, and commercial capability. In contrast, the engineering logic conceptualises talent as exceptional specialists or “superstars,” prioritising technical expertise and in-depth knowledge. Tyskbo (2021, p. 2162) therefore argues that the same individual may not be considered talented in every situation depending on which logic dominates. This reasoning suggests that talent is not simply discovered but defined. However, Tyskbo (2021, p. 2171) asserts that this categorisation has structural implications, by referring to “the glass ceiling” metaphor, in the case where managers prioritize the business case with attributes such as leadership potential. This kind of prioritisation

may lead to technical specialists encountering limited upward development despite expertise, and being hit by “the glass ceiling”. This perspective illustrates the ambiguous framing of talent management, since organizational definitions can shape career possibilities. This argument shows how organizational structures could affect the talent management processes, but it also fits well with the suggestion that talent management may be socially constructed.

However, whether talent is viewed as objectively identified or socially constructed, the ability to attain and sustain talent status remains highly dependent on organizational structures that regulate access to development opportunities. This could arguably become partially important in knowledge intensive industries, where human capital is increasingly viewed as a primary source of competitive advantage (Nelson & Duxbury, 2021). Within these contexts, the design of the organizational structure could either facilitate or constrain employee development. The literature highlights how rigid, traditional organizational forms are misaligned with contemporary workforce expectations, such as regarding clarity in possible career pathways and flexibility in work agreements (Nelson & Duxbury, 2021, p. 168-170). It's important to note however, that the context the Nelson and Duxbury (2021) study is based upon is an accounting firm and therefore the type of context differs from AeroNord. We would still argue that the study is applicable since they both are knowledge-intensive companies, and that the main point of rigid organizational structures struggling to support modern career expectations are of importance even in the context of AeroNord. The main takeaway from the source is that organizational structures in itself become the reason that some employees gain visibility and others become more restricted. The understanding of *how* organizational structure affects talent recognition in combination with understanding *who* and *what* creates talent recognition is of importance to this study.

The importance of clearly defined career pathways is further reinforced in earlier foundational work such as Walker (1974). Walker (1974, p. 66) argues that while career planning is an individual process, it requires systematic organizational support. He conceptualises organizations as internal labour markets, where employees should be able to envision long-term progression without needing to leave the firm. From this perspective, organizational structure must facilitate alignment between individual aspirations and organizational needs through transparent processes in recruitment, job assignment, performance evaluation, and advancement. Walker (1974, p. 67)

further emphasizes the need to replace informal and “mysterious” management practices with structured human resource planning systems. This becomes particularly relevant to this study, when connected to the possible notion of talent management being socially constructed, suggesting that access to advancement and visibility often are contingent upon others rather than a clearly communicated process (Dries, 2013, p. 281).

2.5 Talent Management at The Individual Level

While there is a discussion in the literature regarding how organizations both construct and constrain talent (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013; Nelson & Duxbury, 2021), another shift can simultaneously be observed in the literature. The traditional “war for talent” approach, primarily focused on attracting high-performing employees for organizational advantage, has increasingly shifted towards employee engagement and retention (Di Prima et al., 2024). Organizations increasingly seek to retain valuable employees by providing stimulating and meaningful work experiences, which has contributed to moving the focus of talent management from the organizational level to the individual level (Di Prima et al., 2024, p. 3110). It could be seen how organizations tend to design their talent management initiatives firsthand on the individual level and then later moving on to organizational level, such as talent retention (Di Prima et al., 2024, p. 3111). This suggests that talent management no longer is only concerned with organizational performance outcomes, but also with how individual employees experience the talent initiatives. This is particularly relevant for the present study, as it provides a lens for analysing how talent management practices are experienced at the individual level within the organization, rather than only as formal strategies.

At the same time, this shift reflects a potential broader redistribution of responsibility between organizations and employees. Although organizations continue to shape opportunities through structures and talent management systems, employees are increasingly expected to manage and direct their own careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 6; Sirén et al., 2021, p. 1369). Sirén et al., (2021, p. 1380) argue that the more employees manage their careers in a self-directed manner, the more they perceive opportunities for both internal and external development. This suggests that talent management moves towards assumptions that employees who navigate their own career are more likely to succeed. However, Sirén et al. (2021, p. 1384) also emphasizes the

importance of clear advancement opportunities to keep these individuals engaged. This process is also highly driven by personal values to create meaning of what defines a successful career.

However, this creates an important tension for our study within the literature. While employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their own development, previous bodies of literature (Nelson & Duxbury, 2021, p. 168-170) have suggested that organizational structure may constrain talent development. Adding on to the discussion of talent being socially constructed, the employees ability to actually drive their development is highly dependent on organizational context, visibility and recognition in the company. Thus, a contradicting relationship between individual responsibility versus organizational limitations can be seen, which are of importance to this study. When individual responsibilities are transferred to employees without providing the right support, it could be seen as a way for managers to justify their actions and control the narrative regarding career progression.

2.5.1 Effects of Recognition

It could be suggested that the categorisation of talent does not only recognise performance, but also shapes access to future opportunities. When organizations treat talent as a category of people rather than a set of competencies, identified talents are frequently fast-tracked into strategically important positions (Dries, 2013, p. 279). In this sense, talent identification is not a neutral process and functions as a mechanism of organizational differentiation where selected individuals gain increased status, visibilities and developmental opportunities compared to non-selected employees. However, organizations tend to struggle to identify talents or “high-potentials” due to performance in a current role being a poor predictor of success in a more complex future role (Cappelli & Keller, 2014, p. 308).

While much of the literature focuses on identifying talent, less attention has been given to how individuals experience being included in or excluded from talent pools (Lever & Swailes, 2023, p. 63). This highlights a gap in the literature, as the lived experiences of employees within talent management systems remain underexplored. However, what we do know is that being identified as “talent” also has important implications for employee behavior and motivation (Collings, 2014, p. 311). Being identified as “talent” or “high potential” comes with high expectations

(Tyskbo & Wikhamn, 2022, p. 692). Employees identified as talents develop a stronger psychological contract with the organization due to the identification, and therefore also become more sensitive whether the organization fulfills its promises or not (Ehrnrooth et al., 2018, p. 449). If an organization fails to live up to the expectations created among employees, it may lead to employee turnover, also called talent emptiness defined by Tyskbo and Wikhamn (2022, p. 692).

From this perspective, formally identifying talents may increase performance and commitment (Cappelli & Keller, 2014, p. 316), but it may also suggest that employees could view talent labeling as a starting point towards a successful career, where they can expect special consideration. Meanwhile, employers see this as an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities and therefore attract attention from higher up within the organization. This indicates a misalignment between how talent management is perceived from different perspectives (Dries & De Gieter, 2014, p. 151). Something that could help manage this is transparent talent communication, which is likely to have profound implications on creating a strong psychological contract. However, this is not without risk. Most employers choose to avoid transparent talent communication (Dries & De Gieter, 2014, p. 137) since it may create a situation where organizational justice is at stake. Due to these circumstances, one conclusion that can be drawn is that talents may not be aware of their current talent status.

2.6 Symbolic Management

Berg (1986) provides a foundational argument that organizations increasingly rely on symbolic resources, such as narratives, values, rituals, and images, to strategically manage human resources. The emphasis of symbolic resources relies on the fact that their value does not lie in the existence of actual resources, the power rather lies in their meanings and the behaviours they lead to (Berg, 1986, p. 559). This marks a shift from managing individuals as separate units to managing collectives through shared interpretations of reality. At the core of this perspective is the idea that organizations actively “frame” internal reality through symbolic means. According to Berg (1986, p. 566), symbolic management integrates corporate identity, strategic profile, and external image into a united whole that guides the employee action. This suggests that talent

management is not only about developing skills, but about shaping how employees understand their role within a broader organizational narrative.

While Berg (1986, p. 567) assumes that symbolic framing can guide action, Khoreva and Vaiman (2015, p. 201) challenge this assumption by demonstrating a disconnect between intention and behaviour. Thus, employees may symbolically align with organizational messages, expressing willingness to participate in development, but this does not necessarily translate into action. This creates a direct tension with Berg's (1986) argument. If symbolic resources are meant to enhance collective action, then the intent-action gap identified by Khoreva and Vaiman (2015, p. 213) suggests that symbolic alignment is at best partial. Employees do not simply internalise organizational meaning, instead, they evaluate it based on perceived effectiveness and personal benefit. In this sense, symbolic management can create cognitive alignment without behavioural commitment. The symbolic message must be accompanied by trustworthy outcomes, otherwise it remains rhetorical.

A similar tension between meaning and reality appears in Doherty et al. (1997), but at the level of organizational communication rather than individual participation. Their study shows how organizations strategically reshape the language of careers, shifting from promises of long-term progression to narratives of "employability" and personal responsibility. This shift can be interpreted through Berg's (1986) framework as a reconfiguration of symbolic resources. Language here becomes a tool to redefine how employees interpret their relationship with the organization.

Taken together it could be seen how organizations produce symbolic narratives (Berg, 1986) and employees interpret and evaluate these narratives (Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015, pp. 212-213). The behavior depends on whether the narratives are perceived as credible and beneficial and not just communicated. One example of this type of situation, according to Cappelli (2008, p. 77) is succession planning that sometimes leads to more negative outcomes rather than positive. When a vacancy occurs, it may become clear that the person who is next in line for the position does not fit anymore and this may instead drive the organization towards external recruitment. Which leads to the perception that succession planning may be one aspect within talent management

that works in a symbolic manner. This outcome may sometimes hurt the employees more than having no succession plan at all. The candidates may feel betrayed, since the organization fails to live up to their promises. As well as the investments made regarding these candidates are wasted. In order to avoid this happening, the succession plan must be updated every year, which Cappelli (2008, p. 77) argues is a waste of time and energy since it does not work long-term.

The perspective of symbolic management is crucial for this study since we aim to understand how talent management practices are perceived and interpreted within the organization of AeroNord. Therefore, symbolic initiatives and the effects of those, is one important aspect to gain comprehensive knowledge about in order to be able to answer this study's research question. The aspect of how symbolic initiatives affect attitudes and behaviour for instance, plays a part in how employees make sense of talent management. As well as from the managers perspective, it is valuable to comprehend what symbolic initiatives stem from and why they may be implemented.

2.7 Positioning of Study

To conclude, the use of talent management appears to not be a question of a systematic objective process. This thesis instead takes a standpoint in the perspective of talent management as socially constructed, influenced by managerial biases, individual perspectives and operational pressures. While previous literature has studied the socially constructed nature of talent management, as well as the effects of talent identification and labeling, we still perceive a gap in understanding how these socially constructed and potentially biased processes may be used as a managerial power tool to shape employee perceptions, regulate career opportunities, and drive organizational agendas in response to both internal and external demands which this study aims to nuance.

3. Methodology

This section describes how the empirical data collection was carried out. It outlines the research approach, the design of the semi-structured interviews, and the sampling methods used to collect the empirical material. Furthermore, the section presents the data analysis process and discusses considerations related to credibility and transferability. Lastly, it explains how generative AI was

used throughout the research process and highlights the ethical considerations taken into account.

3.1 Research Approach

To answer the research question of this study, a qualitative approach was applied since it allows for an in-depth analysis of a real phenomenon, which was suitable for the purpose of the study (Bell et al., 2022). The study follows an abductive logic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 239), originating from the literature on talent management, the sensemaking framework, while analysing the dynamic context of a public mid-size organization.

The chosen organization of this study has been given the pseudonym of AeroNord. AeroNord is a Swedish mid-sized, state-owned company operating within the transport industry, with approximately 2000 employees and operations across multiple locations in Sweden. We came in contact with this organization out of convenience. However, we quickly found the environment they work in as specifically interesting. AeroNord operates in a highly regulated environment characterized by fast-paced work conditions and high operational dependency. During our process of analysing existing literature within the field of talent management, we also saw a potential research gap, where these kinds of organizations were not equally represented, something that also was noted by Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016, p. 48). Considering this contextual perspective in combination with ownership and size, this study aims to contribute to the talent management literature by examining a type of organization that has received limited attention in previous research.

The study followed Kvale and Brinkmann's table "seven stages in an interview study" (2014, pp. 144-145). We first started out by formulating a purpose and potential research questions. After this step we went into the planning phase and prepared interview guides, and also planned on how to accommodate the ethical concerns of a qualitative study (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014, pp. 97-114). When the interviews had been carried out, a transcription process followed. In the analyzing process, we followed Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) strategy of sorting, reducing and arguing. The results were analyzed through credibility and transferability. Lastly, the results were written down in this study and shared with AeroNord.

This study adopts an interpretive research tradition (Prasad, 2018, pp. 13-16), focusing on how individuals construct meaning around their experiences of talent management, attitudes, behaviour, and career development. Rather than aiming to identify objective truths, the study seeks to understand how these concepts are perceived and interpreted by employees and managers within their organizational context. The study also aims to show that talent management is socially constructed through acts of interpretation.

3.2 Data Collection

The empirical data was collected through fourteen semi-structured interviews, meaning that part of the interview was predetermined by an interview guide (Bell et al., 2022, p. 213) (see appendix A-D). The collection of interviews consisted of two pilot interviews, two follow-up interviews and ten initial interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gather insight into how both managers and employees experience talent management within a public organization, which we will elaborate more on in 3.2.2 *Sampling Rationale*. The questions focused on the respondents personal career, talent management in general and how the respondent views talent management at AeroNord. To encourage participants to elaborate on their answers and develop their reasoning, follow-up questions were asked in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. The respondents were also encouraged to raise aspects they themselves considered relevant and were allowed to deviate from the prepared questions. This approach provided valuable insights into their own interpretations, which aligns with the purpose of a qualitative study. Furthermore, the guide was adapted depending on who the respondent was and also depending on if we needed to add or rephrase questions.

In order to test whether the chosen method of data collection was appropriate, the two pilot interviews were conducted in accordance with instructions from Bell et al. (2022, p. 263). These pilot interviews were at the same time, used to assess the interview guide and to explore whether the questions generated the type of responses needed to be able to answer the thesis research question: *How do employees and managers make sense of talent management in a highly operational organization?* Throughout the interviews, the questions that seemed to be

misunderstood or difficult to answer were revised. As the interview process proceeded, some questions that didn't bring any useful information were eventually removed.

The respondents were contacted via e-mail, where we briefly introduced the subject of the study and suggested time for the interview. Nine interviews were held during a three-day period at the AeroNord headquarters. The rest of the interviews took place online, on either Zoom or Teams Microsoft. All interviews were conducted with both authors present, where one primarily led the conversation and asked the questions, and the other one focused on more administrative aspects and asked follow-up questions. Each interview lasted around 35-90 minutes, depending on how detailed the questions and answers were. Since the interviews took place at a Swedish organization with Swedish employees, the interviews were done in Swedish. However, they were later on translated to English during the analysing stage. In order to make the data analysis process easier, we recorded the audio of every interview. We later transcribed the interviews using the artificial intelligence transcription software Klang AI. The transcriptions were subsequently checked against the original audio files whenever it was needed.

3.2.1 Sampling Method

In our study, a non-probability sampling method was applied, combining convenience sampling and snowball sampling when gathering respondents to our semi-structured interviews.

Convenience sampling (Bell et al., 2022, p. 200) was used to select respondents based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. We therefore started out by doing pilot interviews with our two contacts at AeroNord, since it was convenient and easy access within the time frame. This was complemented by snowball sampling (Bell et al., 2022, pp. 394-395), where initial respondents helped identify and recruit additional participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. Snowball sampling facilitated access to further respondents with relevant insights within AeroNord.

These two sampling approaches were appropriate as the study aims to gain in-depth understanding of how talent management works in the example of a realistic mid-size public organization. The combination of convenience and snowball sampling enabled access to relevant respondents with direct experience of talent management practices within AeroNord.

The chosen sampling strategy offers several advantages, particularly in terms of accessibility, efficiency and the ability to recruit respondents (Bell et al., 2022, pp. 200, 394) with relevant experience of talent management. However, the use of convenience and snowball sampling also introduces limitations, including a risk of selection bias and limited representativeness. As respondents are recruited based on accessibility and social networks, the sample may become relatively homogeneous, potentially excluding alternative perspectives. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to a broader population (Bell et al., 2022, pp. 200, 395), but instead aim to provide in-depth insights into the studied context.

3.2.2 Sampling Rationale: Managers and Employees

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of AeroNords work with talent management, we made sure to mix respondents with both employees and managers, as well as respondents from different parts of the organization. Departments that participated in this study are for example, communication, HR, projects and corporate affairs. The different departments also have some differences regarding how they work within talent management. This made it important for us to interview throughout the whole organization to gain as big of a picture as possible and comprehend how the differences affect the employees. By interviewing managers we got a clear insight of how talent management works within the organization and what the main goal with the practices was. Therefore by interviewing employees we saw these practices from their perspective and how these practices shaped their attitudes, behaviour and career development opportunities. Additionally, we interviewed employees that started out as trainees and later on gained a permanent role at AeroNord. This gave us the opportunity to compare managerial intentions with employees' reactions, therefore indicating that this study is multi-perspective, something that has been limited within the talent management research field (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016, p. 49). We too recognized the importance of mixing respondents from different parts of the organization, since there are differences of how talent management is practiced between different departments. The following table shows the mix of employees and managers as well which interviews were either pilot or follow-up interviews.

Pseudonym	Position
Respondent 1 (Pilot interview)	Manager
Respondent 2 (Pilot interview)	Manager
Respondent 3	Employee
Respondent 4	Employee
Respondent 5	Employee
Respondent 6	Employee
Respondent 7	Manager
Respondent 8	Manager
Respondent 9	Manager
Respondent 10	Manager
Respondent 11	Manager
Respondent 12 (Follow-up interview)	Manager
Respondent 13 (Follow-up interview)	Manager
Respondent 14	Employee

Table 1: List of respondents

3.3 Data Analysis

For this study, we adopted an abductive approach to analyze the material (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 239), allowing for an open interpretation of the empirical data while still grounding the analysis in a theoretical framework. Rather than applying theory deductively or generating theory purely inductively, we moved between data and theory throughout the research process. This approach enabled us to both guide our discussion and deepen our understanding of the phenomena emerging from the data. At the same time, the openness of the analysis allowed us to identify patterns and insights that were not anticipated by existing theory. An abductive approach thus facilitates interpreting empirical findings through the lens of established theory without

overlooking nuances that may fall outside its scope (Bell et al., 2022, p. 25). The abductive approach was also particularly useful as it enabled us to remain open to unexpected findings.

3.3.1 Sort

We conducted the first two pilot interviews and carried out a preliminary analysis based on them. From these initial insights, we realized that the research question needed to be refined to better fit the organizational context. We then collected a substantial amount of empirical data during a short period of time, with most interviews conducted over three days. Between interviews, we reviewed the material, engaged in brief discussions, and completed transcriptions, which allowed for ongoing, smaller-scale analyses. This process of reviewing and discussing the material allowed us to gradually refine our analytical focus and become more sensitive to emerging patterns. Before moving onto the analyzing process we started with sorting the material, to create a guideline on where the study was going and potential arguments to be made (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 69). We proceeded with the initial coding that was relatively open and exploratory, by reading through all interviews and highlighting segments we found most relevant under the categories of strong quotes, identity, motivation, and career development. These initial categories were used to structure the material, they primarily served as analytical entry points rather than fixed explanatory frameworks. Each category was assigned a specific color. The selected quotes were then organized into a spreadsheet to provide a clear overview. This process made the material more manageable and helped address the “chaos problem” (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 234). As the analysis process went on, we identified more categories and sorted the material according to these. Later in the data collection process, we conducted two additional interviews, along with two follow-up interviews, following the same procedure which allowed us to further validate emerging patterns and clarify ambiguities identified in earlier interviews.

3.3.2 Reduce

Moving on in the analysis process, we dealt with what Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018, p. 107) refers to as the problem of representation. It is not possible to present all of the data collected in this study; therefore, the material needed to be reduced in order to be managed and analyzed effectively. We, as analysts, have the responsibility to go through all of the empirical data, and

carefully select out the parts that may stimulate our analytical involvement (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 108). Therefore we used the categorical reduction described by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018, pp. 109-115). As mentioned in the sorting process, we did sort the data into categories, however, these categories were not used to answer the research question. Only to sort up the material and make it easier to comprehend. The structure that we followed was that we went through each interview and picked out excerpts that matched each category and inserted them into a spreadsheet. This approach was particularly suitable for our study, as the aim was not to quantify patterns but to capture how respondents articulate and make sense of their experiences. Through this process, themes were not predefined, but gradually constructed by grouping together recurring patterns, contradictions and tensions in the empirical material.

3.3.3 Argue

The final stage of the analysis involved transforming empirical findings into analytical arguments. However, the process of sorting and reducing can also be seen including continuous argumentation at the same time. We still had an excessive amount of data and therefore needed to make a final decision on what to include and what to exclude (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p. 143). This required moving beyond description and actively interpreting the data in relation to theoretical concepts, either by confirming an already existing theory or building a new theory (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, pp. 144-145). In line with the abductive approach, this stage involved a continuous dialogue between theory and data, where empirical findings were both explained through existing theory and used to challenge or nuance it (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 239). As researchers, we played an active role in constructing these arguments, making selective interpretations of the data while remaining aware of the potential influence of our own preconceptions (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, pp. 10-13).

3.4 Credibility and Transferability

In order to decide the quality of this study and its generated result, we will argue for the studies credibility as well as transferability. Credibility (Bell et al., 2022, p. 369) determines how trustworthy and reasonable the interpretations that have been made are based on the empirical material. The credibility was strengthened through the multi-perspective design of the study, as both managers and employees were interviewed. This enabled comparisons between managerial

intentions and employees' lived experiences and how they make sense of talent management practices. Reflexive research was conducted where we continuously challenged our interpretations in order to minimize the risk of potential bias affecting the result of the study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, pp. 10-13). Another aspect that strengthens the credibility is our thorough presentation of how the data collecting was outlined. In this section of the thesis (chapter 3) we have provided a step-by-step report on which steps were taken and what was taken into consideration. In the following analysis section (chapter 4) we have also provided direct quotes from the respondents of this study, this also strengthens credibility since the reader will be able to do their own interpretation and decide how reasonable our assumptions are.

Transferability (Bell et al., 2022) was supported since we argue that the results could contribute with understanding to similar organizational contexts. We give a thick description of our research object AeroNord, in accordance with what Bell et al. (2022, p. 369) suggests. This gives the reader the opportunity to for themselves decide the transferability and whether it could be transferred to other social contexts. Other organizations who might benefit from this study's result are other public or state-owned organizations, if they operate within the infrastructure as well as if they operate in a highly volatile environment. However, as the study is based on one organization within a Swedish context, the findings should not be viewed as statistically generalizable, but rather as analytical transferable to comparable contexts.

3.5 Use of Generative AI

In this study, AI tools have been used for the purpose of supporting the research process. Three tools have been used - Klang AI, Notebook LM and Open AI. However, even though Klang AI is not a generative AI system, it has been used during the transcribing process, where we insert the recorded files into the service for transcribing. Considering the fact that the interviews were between 35-90 minutes long, it made the process more efficient and enabled us to work with the material in more efficient ways. However, we reviewed the transcriptions with a critical eye, and sometimes went back to the files to listen to the exact formulation when we suspected an incorrect formulation in the transcriptions. This was especially done when we choose the quotes from the respondents to present in our analysis, to ensure an accurate description.

In order to summarize the notes that we have written down when reading peer-reviewed articles and our own notes from courses throughout the masters programme, we used NotebookLM to simplify the process. The prompt that was used was simply “*summarize*” or asking a question which we wanted to get a comprehensive answer to from all the gathered notes. However, this process was only used in the beginning of a writing session, to gather our thoughts and make bullet points for what we wanted to include in the specific section. When we started writing the final draft, we read the articles thoroughly and fact-checked with every source mentioned, to make sure that we had gathered the right conclusion and provided correct references.

Lastly we have used Open AI (Chat GPT), however, this was only used for initial brainstorming and also regularly for language refinements. For example prompts such as “*how should we structure our literature review?*”. But of course also straightforward prompts such as “*rephrase this sentence to correct grammatical errors*”, “*can you give me more academic phrasing for...*” and “*another word for...*”. To show how we have used Chat GPT more specifically, we have provided the links to our conversation in the reference list. No sources have been entered into Chat GPT, as well as any of the other generative AI tools that have been used throughout this thesis project.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

To address the interpretative nature of qualitative research, we adopted a reflexive research inspired by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2018, pp. 10-13). This involves acknowledging that data is not neutral, but co-constructed through the interaction between researchers and participants. We therefore remain aware of the external factors that may influence the interpretation of the gathered data, but also be aware that our own pre-understandings, experiences and theoretical perspectives may have colored the way we analyzed our findings. If we were to miss the steps, it could lead to that valuable data getting disregarded if it doesn't align with our own bias (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018, pp. 139-140). Rather than attempting to eliminate bias, the aim was to critically reflect on how interpretations were formed and to remain open to alternative understandings. Since we are two writers in this study, we had the opportunity to challenge each other's views and therefore question our own personal statements. This was an ongoing process and eventually led to parts of the thesis, as well as research questions being re-worked several

times. Which also demonstrates that we were willing to adapt to changes that emerged throughout the course of writing.

We have taken steps to comply with the ethical considerations required in accordance with Kvale and Brinkmann (2014, pp. 97-114). As mentioned before, this study has followed the “seven stages in an interview study” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, pp 144-145) and therefore the ethical considerations as well. In line with ethical guidelines, informed consent (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, pp. 107-108) was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. All participation was entirely voluntary, and no incentives were provided. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, how the data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. Before recording the interviews, the respondents gave their consent. No sensitive personal data was collected, and care was taken to ensure that participants were not exposed to any discomfort during the interviews. We as the researchers were also mindful of the potential power imbalance in the interview situation and aimed to create an open and respectful dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, pp. 51-53). As well as, confidentiality and anonymity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 109) was ensured throughout the study by anonymizing all of the respondents and removing identifiable information.

The collected data was handled securely and was only accessible to the researchers, and the supervisor on one occasion. Quotes from the respondents have been anonymized with the terms of “R1”, “R2” and so on (see table 1 in 3.2.2 *Sampling Rationale*).

4. Analysis

The following chapter presents an analysis of the empirical findings. Selected interview excerpts are interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework and organized into thematic sections to facilitate a structured analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of the analysis.

4.1 Organizational Structure

AeroNord operates in a highly complex and sensitive context, and therefore needs to be equipped to handle a fast-paced environment. Being a state-owned company that manages the majority of

Sweden's airports, AeroNord has a central role in connecting Sweden domestically and internationally, while simultaneously balancing various obligations in different areas. In order to adapt and fulfill the obligations that they face, it could be seen how they operate at a continuous state of change. These changes are largely driven by external pressures from the transport industry, including regulatory frameworks, sustainability and political decision-making. This positions AeroNord within what can be understood as a highly operational environment, where adaptability is not optional, but necessary for operational continuity. As one of the respondents states, small details could have a significant impact on the organization that leads to quick responses and adaptations;

“Everything that happens on the planet affects us. It only takes a bit of weather for it to impact our operations. And the global situation, pandemics, you name it. At the same time, we are expected to keep doing the same thing all the time. But that also means we have to adapt a lot.” -

R11

However, this constant state of change introduces a fundamental tension between the organizational context and the long-term logic arguably required for sustainable talent management. This tension becomes particularly visible in relation to talent management as a long-term strategic process. While talent management is theoretically grounded in development and future-oriented investment in employees, the empirical findings suggest that frequent organizational changes might disrupt this logic. It could be seen how there is no foundation at AeroNord for implementing and establishing structure, consistency and coherence for talent management practices. Rather this strategy could be seen as somewhat turbulent, as mentioned by R5;

“[...] I think we adjust and change this far too much or too often. This is a long-term strategy, a very long-term strategy. [...] you should be very cautious about changing long-term strategies.” -

R5

The highly volatile organizational environment makes it hard to predict the future. Therefore it is also challenging to predict when a reorganization will hit and how this will affect the employees position.

“No, there is no clarity. That’s what you’ve unfortunately learned, that, you know, who knows what will happen? There could be a reorganization, an unexpected week that makes you redundant.” - R7

Although at AeroNord, the findings suggest an emphasis on expertise knowledge. Being a company that has a dominant position in this specific area in the infrastructure sector, there is generally speaking very specific knowledge that is centered on the company and its operations. This creates a tension between employee development and operational continuity. Since much of the expertise is highly organization-specific and difficult to replace, retaining employees within their existing roles becomes strategically important for maintaining stability and daily operations, which is further mentioned by R10 in the following quote. Therefore it becomes challenging when talent management is expected to encourage development and growth, while the organization needs to prioritize stability, predictability and long-term retention.

"We don't have the affordance to have people running around and wanting to make a career. That our individuals should remain in the same role, same position. Today, tomorrow, in five years and think that 'it's damn fun to come to work.'" - R10

A manager further explains this tension where it is hard to balance the demand for development by the employees while maintaining focus on keeping the daily operations uninterrupted at the same time.

“I think this question is very difficult, and it’s hard to work with it in our organization. On the one hand, we want to be a company people are drawn to because they want to grow and do new things. But at the same time, we also need people to stay where they are and feel satisfied being there year after year.” - R11

Rhetorically however, development is possible for everyone, even cross-functional such as moving from an operational role to a more strategic one.

“It is also very positive if we can bring in operational employees into our administrative functions, but just as much the other way around.” - R1

These contradictory messages could be interpreted as reflecting an organizational willingness to engage with talent management practices by promoting advancement and development opportunities, while simultaneously struggling to provide clear and realistic pathways for career progression due to the context being too uncertain for facilitating an environment where it sufficiently can be implemented. Organizational change is both frequent and unpredictable, creating challenges for long-term investment in internal career progression, which puts pressure on management in providing talent opportunities when the future of the organization is uncertain. In such an environment, management may therefore be hesitant to invest significant time and resources in employee development, particularly when operational demands leave little room for mistakes. In this sense, the willingness to engage becomes merely rhetoric, since the findings instead suggest that managers primarily focus on meeting the organizational demands.

“So this idea that we need to get every visitor to spend money - that’s ultimately what we need to achieve.” - R10

This could imply that managers may focus on driving their own interests with the help of talent management practices, as in the previous statement aims for increased revenue. This could be done in order to navigate the pressure that they perceive in their role. As a result, limited predictability and constrained resources make it difficult to establish consistent and sustainable development pathways. When organizational change disrupts these conditions, talent processes risk slowing down or becoming reactive rather than strategic. As R1 highlights, the organization must always ensure readiness for critical roles, particularly in order to maintain core operations such as airport functionality. This showcases a tension between short-term operational demands and the stability required for sustained employee development.

“But as those responsible in the organization for these processes, we have to ensure that we always have people ready to step into positions. We have many critical roles, and if we don’t have them, we can’t keep the airports open,.” - R1

In light of the organizational context, there appears to be pressure on management to ensure that operations run as efficiently as possible. The ambition for achieving this in a fast-paced environment may lead management acting in their own interests, as they tend to rely on approaches and employees that are familiar and consistent. With constant “fire fighting” due to the continuous changes, the perspective on TM becomes short-term in the sense that those who are available, visible, and suitable at that exact moment are the ones being hand-picked, while individuals who may be an even better fit in the long run, given the right development, are overlooked. In the long-term, there is a risk that these individuals may leave the company and eventually take their expertise with them, which could further disrupt operations. We will continue this argument later in the analysis.

4.1.1 Organizational Gatekeeping

The suggested short-term perspective on talent management, where managers may act in their own or the organization’s immediate interests regarding talent management, can further be connected to how employees’ ability to recognition and career development remains shaped by organizational structures and managerial involvement. Another important dynamic that therefore emerges from the empirical data is the role of visibility and organizational gatekeeping in the talent identification process. While AeroNord formally evaluates employees based on performance and potential, the respondents describe how the assessment of potential is highly dependent on managerial recognition and perception.

“[...] potential assessment is extremely subjective. It depends entirely on the individual leader's opinion. [...] We have far too little neutral data; it often becomes a case of "I like Kalle, so I think he has potential," while someone else might be overlooked.” - R2

The potential assessment that is described to be ‘extremely subjective’ and with ‘far too little neutral data’ indicates that the identification of talent in the organization could be seen as a

gatekeeping process, where the managers act as filters determining which employees gain visibility and recognition. In this sense, managers are responsible for evaluating performance, but too hold significant influence over which employees competence that becomes recognised as valuable within the organization. However, managers are not obligated to engage in employee development, it is up to every individual manager whether this lies in their interests.

“Development is the employee’s own responsibility. As a manager, I do not have a formal responsibility to directly develop my staff. However, it is in my interest to do so.” - R2

This may create a scenario where an employee who is highly valued by a manager achieves opportunities, while another, despite comparable qualities or better performance, doesn't get recognised.

“If you have a manager who is really good at saying, ‘Okay, you want to develop in this area, I’ll make it happen,’ then things start moving. Whereas if you have a more passive manager, nothing might happen at all. They don’t highlight you in the same way or help drive things forward.” -

R6

Furthermore, there is a lack of a clear structure for managers on how to act in this area. Therefore the outcome may not be in line with organizational justice and highly individual dependent.

“Of course, if you have a good dialogue with your manager, or a good relationship, and your manager knows you well, then your manager can naturally also see that you may need to develop in a certain area and suggest that on their own. [...] there may not be any real structure or strategy for this.” - R8

This raises further questions about the norms surrounding the subjective talent identification, and could be seen as a form of organizational power where career mobility and advancement become dependent on managerial perception and support rather than solely on objective performance criteria. Instead, it could transform into a case of whether an employee is strategically valuable for their manager. Particularly in a fast-paced and operationally demanding environment such as

AeroNord, there may be incentives for managers to prioritize employees who can immediately support current operational needs, rather than investing in long-term employee development. As a result, employees who are already trusted, visible, and accessible may receive increased opportunities, while others with comparable or stronger potential risk remain overlooked.

When assessments depend solely on a leader's opinion, there is a risk that similar profiles are repeatedly identified for development, as managers may favor individuals similar to themselves. A potential outcome of this is an organization that lacks diverse perspectives and personalities, and that highly competent employees remain unnoticed. While employees that feel comfortable in the spotlight will receive more recognition.

“I think about those who are extroverted and who automatically take the stage. They still end up getting [...] a little longer in the spotlight in some way, because you notice them. You pay attention to them”. - R1

The empirical data also reveal information that employee performance and potential is not widely shared across the organization. Performance scores are primarily known within the individual team, meaning that other managers may have limited insight into employees outside their immediate department. As a result, potential candidates for new roles or projects may remain invisible to managers, if they are not the ones that have an immediate relationship with the decision-maker in question.

4.2 Individual vs Organizational Responsibility

At AeroNord, the employee is responsible for their own development. Something that indicates a shift from management responsibility onto the individual employee.

“But then a lot of the responsibility, I think, lies with the individual to raise their own development needs.” - R7

However, the organization believes that everyone has talent. But the responsibility to develop this talent is placed on the individual. In theory, every employee has the opportunity to do so.

“Because at some point, you have to take control of yourself. So we very much believe that everyone has talent, but you are the one who drives your own development best.” -

R10

At the same time, this individualization of responsibility may also function as a form of organizational control, where responsibility is shifted onto employees while the organization retains control over the structural conditions that enable or constrain such progression. Managers provide employees with tools, guidance and encouragement needed for career advancement, however it is up to the individual to make something out of it, as R10 argues;

“That is your career development. You drive it, not me. I give you tools, keys, ideas, and inspiration. But you are the one who has to drive it.” - R10

The shift toward individual responsibility can therefore be interpreted as developmental philosophy, as well as a managerial strategy that aligns employee expectations with organizational interests.

As mentioned previously in the analysis, the organizational context at AeroNord is highly dependent on the external environment as well as complex to grasp. This complexity is clear for the employees as well, when a reorganization occurs it is beneficial to have a long-term outlook on how this will affect the individual's career. As R8 mentions, this team of employees have previously passed through a reorganization, but the consequences of this still remain unresolved.

“So, for example, let's say that I have just carried out a minor reorganization within my team, where five people have been given new roles. And even though I believe that what I have done involves relatively small changes - just adjusting a few things here and there - I currently have a situation where some members of the team feel somewhat stressed and concerned about it.” -

R8

However, in a highly volatile industry shaped by external events such as weather conditions, geopolitical developments and economic uncertainty, long-term organizational planning becomes difficult. This creates a paradox where employees are expected to take long-term responsibility for their own career development within an organizational context itself that struggles to provide long-term predictability. Responsibility for career progression is thereby individualized, despite employees having limited influence over the structural conditions that shape available opportunities. Therefore, the expectation of individual responsibility for career pathways in this type of organizational structure could be seen as impossible to achieve.

This approach is also highly dependent on the existence of clear and structured career pathways. Without clearly communicated pathways, employees may struggle to understand what forms of development are valued, what opportunities are realistically attainable, or how progression is expected to occur. The empirical findings indicate that such structures are not consistently in place, this uncertainty may reduce employees willingness to invest in proactive career behaviors. This creates a situation where responsibility is assigned without sufficient guidance, which may discourage employees from engaging in proactive career development. While employees are expected to act as agents of their own development, their ability to do so is constrained by not only organizational structures, but also limited roles and lack of mandate, noted by R6;

“Because sometimes it’s actually difficult to push these things on your own. Even though you, as an employee, also have to contribute, it’s hard to manage these kinds of issues by yourself. You can’t create a role for yourself when you don’t have the mandate to do so.” - R6

The lack of structured career pathways is also emphasized by R8;

“No, my impression is that there may not be very structured, or very clearly structured, career paths. [...]. But I don’t really experience it as very clear that, as an employee, you know which steps are possible to take within the organization and what is expected in order to take those steps.” - R8

4.2.1 Individual Differences

In AeroNord, we have been shown examples of employees happy with their career progression. However, the empirical material also includes accounts of employees leaving the organization as a result of experiencing insufficient managerial support and feeling overlooked in their development. When this is mixed with the heavy weight put on individual responsibility of one's career pathway, it creates an inequality in the workforce, that R14 indicates:

“I know that they probably felt stuck in a role afterward that was not particularly good, because there was no clear plan for what we were supposed to do next. So it became a situation where we were placed in different positions, and depending on how well the match turned out, the work tasks became either fairly dull or very stimulating and rewarding. So it was probably largely connected to the fact that there was no very clear plan for what we were supposed to do afterward.” - R14

R14 continues to emphasize on the inequality that may appear:

“Perhaps not in such a structured way; rather, it is about being in the right place with the right manager. And that may not always be entirely fair to everyone else who might also want such an opportunity. It becomes very dependent on the individual, which may not be ideal either.” - R14

Opportunities for development therefore appear unevenly distributed and highly dependent on informal relationships, visibility and managerial recognition rather than transparent organizational structures. This inequality is further noticeable within the workforce as well, with individual differences making the progression accessible for some employees while some misses out. Some may feel comfortable by taking a risk and asking the manager for a bigger challenge, while others might have to be challenged by someone else in order to take the next step. R14 is one respondent that had the courage to ask for developmental opportunities;

“But it was more that I was the one saying, ‘Now that I’ve seen this project, could I be involved in that instead of doing this?’ And that I was the one who had to raise my hand during meetings and say, ‘I can do this.’” - R14

This could further lead to, that the people receiving opportunities are the ones that are also seen and heard the most, while the people that might actually have the best competence are left in the dark.

“It is very individual, because I know a colleague of mine who is very dissatisfied with her situation, as she has been stuck working as a project manager and wants to move into a more advanced role, but she has remained at the same level without progressing further. There is, of course, a certain frustration when you want to move upward but still remain standing still.” - R4

While the responsibility lies on the individual, AeroNord have also developed supportive tools to be used in the context of employee development. For example, there is the career coach tool that was created with the intention of the employee and the affected manager to work towards the employees career aspirations. As well as the employee having the power of deciding for how long and if, they wanted to proceed the developmental process. However, this tool also appears to contain certain challenges. It is not commonly integrated into everyday organizational practice, and several respondents emphasized that they were unaware of anyone actively using it. Rather than facilitating easy access to opportunities, the organization introduces a degree of difficulty in order to ensure that only highly motivated employees engage with it. The organization thereby transfers part of the burden of career development onto the employee, while simultaneously limiting the number of employees who actively pursue development opportunities. In this sense, the emphasis on individual responsibility is not only ideological but also embedded in the design of organizational tools. R10 further highlights the limitation of development opportunities, suggesting that access is not only shaped by individual initiative but also by organizational capacity constraints.

“That is exactly how our career coaching tool is built. The system is deliberately quite slow and rigid, because it is meant to be challenging. We have so many people who say things like: ‘Okay, develop me then.’ But no, we can support you, but you are the one who has to take responsibility for the drive.” - R10

While this reflects the intended purpose of the tool, the following statement by R10, suggests that it may also function as a mechanism of organizational control and managerial power, when consciously made challenging to work with, deliberately discouraging employees from pursuing the process further.

“So then we poured a lot of syrup into it. Things start moving a bit slowly, and it becomes a bit like, ‘I can’t be bothered, now I have to look inward and reflect on what I actually want.’ And that’s when people start encountering resistance. And then it’s like, ‘Well, maybe that’s a good thing - perhaps career development is not what you should be focusing on right now. Maybe there is something else you need to reflect on instead.’” - R10

The managerial perspective at AeroNord is “*we want people to stay in the same place*” is emphasized several times throughout the interviews, this reflects the operational demands of AeroNord, where continuity and predictability are central to maintaining daily operations. At the same time, this creates a tension between the career coaching tool and the responsibility being shifted downwards. In this sense, talent management practices may not only function as mechanisms for employee development, but also as subtle forms of organizational control aimed at regulating employee mobility and aligning individual aspirations with operational needs. By emphasizing on the individual responsibility, the organization simultaneously limits its own formal responsibility for providing career opportunities or structured progression. Which indirectly suggests that the talent management practices are affected by the managerial power structures and moving towards their personal interests. As a result, talent management risks becoming symbolic, where the language of development and career growth is maintained without necessarily leading to advancement opportunities.

4.3 Symbolic Talent Management

As previously elaborated on, the empirical data points toward a gap between formalized talent management practices and their lived experience within the organization. While HR articulates a more structured and strategic approach to talent management, employees outside HR perceive it as somewhat diffuse, inconsistent, or even unknown. The findings further support the notion of management using them in a way that favours their interests. Not necessarily out of hostile

intent, but rather because of a short-term focus towards managing the operations due to limited resources and time. This supports the interpretation of talent management as symbolic rather than embedded in everyday practice. A first indication of this symbolic nature is the disconnect between formal tools and employee awareness. HR emphasizes structured initiatives such as career coaching and succession planning, yet these are not reflected in employee narratives. Instead, development is described informally through manager-led conversations, where it could be experienced as just another item on the agenda to go through.

“Then we have these evaluation-conversations [...], and they generally work quite well. But even there, I think it’s pretty dependent on the manager. How much do you actually work with career development in those meetings? And how much is more just ticking a box, making sure it’s done?” - R6

This suggests that talent management is not standardized but dependent on individual managers, which undermines the idea of talent management as an organizational system and instead positions it as uneven and person-dependent. Thus, a risk can be seen when the implications of this is that development opportunities, feedback, and career progression vary significantly depending on leadership style, suggesting once again that responsibility of development shifts from the system to individuals. This perspective is further strengthened with HR initiatives, where a particularly revealing example is the career-coaching tool, which appears intentionally under-promoted and restricted in use, as mentioned previously in the analysis. Rather than being designed for broad developmental support, it is framed as something to be accessed only upon request. This selective visibility of initiatives further reinforces the interpretation of talent management as symbolic rather than operational. Although multiple tools formally exist, employees consistently refer only to evaluation-conversations when discussing development, suggesting that other initiatives remain inaccessible in practice.

“I think that today, we haven’t promoted it [the career-coach tool]. So today it’s probably mainly if someone asks for it. I haven’t heard of a single person who has used it.” - R2

The material also suggests that it is even sometimes implicitly discouraged due to resource constraints. As R10 notes, widespread use would overwhelm managerial capacity.

“How much do we actually want to make this visible? If it’s just like, ‘oh, here we have a digital career coach’, and then you’re sitting there as a [...] manager with 23 employees and everyone signs up, you won’t have time for anything else.” - R10

This suggests that the system is not used in a scalable or inclusive way, but rather to manage demand. In this sense, talent management practices appear less concerned with enabling development and more with regulating it. The career coaching tool, instead of functioning as an accessible resource, becomes a symbolic artifact, present in policy but absent in practice. Regardless of the intent behind it, it could be seen as a way of managerial power. By controlling how visible and accessible developmental initiatives become, managers simultaneously influence which employees are able to act on organizational narratives surrounding growth and career progression. The issue therefore lies not only in whether developmental tools exist, but in who is made aware of them, encouraged to use them, and practically able to access them. It becomes a way of saying that the managers hold the power to empower you, but also have the power to remove it.

4.4 Expectation Trap

The issue of not having talent management practices structurally integrated into the organization, is that it could result in ambitious, high-performing employees not achieving the growth and support expected when they joined the company. This could potentially depend on factors such as a self-perception of being labeled “talent” or a “high-potential”, or entering a role with certain promise or expectations. This highlights the paradoxical nature of identifying talent, where the talent may begin to form the perception of always being “high-potential” and being high achieving.

"So this is life-threatening with high performers, you take a self-image that you believe, that you are God's gift to companies. No. Because it's a short glitch. Why am I successful here and now? You have to be quite humble and ask yourself that question." - R10

While talent management is intended to motivate and retain high-potential employees, the findings suggest that it simultaneously creates a set of expectations that the organization are unable, or in some cases maybe even unwilling to fulfill. While organizational rhetoric surrounding talent, potential, and development may encourage motivation and commitment, the material simultaneously reveals a reluctance to translate these expectations into concrete advancement opportunities. This creates what can be conceptualised as an expectation trap, where employees are encouraged to remain ambitious and future-oriented with a vague promise of development, while the organization maintains flexibility by avoiding explicit commitments regarding career progression. R11 explains that this stems from the organization's limited resources, which constrain its ability to provide development opportunities that align with employees' expectations.

"I think it is dangerous to go out and tell someone that they are a talent. Because then the expectations come as well. And I believe you can have an explicit talent program in a company that is large enough. I think it may be possible when you have the resources for it, and by that I mean both financially, economically, and in terms of support and care." - R11

Several respondents describe how the company's resources and operational context make it difficult to provide the opportunities implicitly associated with talent management rhetoric. This tension becomes particularly visible in relation to the organization's structural limitations. As one respondent explains, the tension is partly constrained by not wanting to set high expectations that the organization can't fulfill, which includes the risk of losing valuable employees;

"It can be dangerous to point someone out as a talent because it immediately creates high expectations. The person might think they should only do fun things or that they will be CEO in five years. If the organization is too small to provide those opportunities, disappointment follows." - R2

Here, the identification operates necessarily not just as a reflection of current performance, but as a signal of future trajectory. However, the risk occurs when the trajectory is not supported by

actual structural opportunities. In the context of AeroNord, the advancement is limited due to the sector they operate within and the small size of the company, this indicates that succession plans mostly never plan out, only in very rare cases when luck is on your side.

“AeroNord is far too small a company to really create opportunities for those we identify as talents in succession planning. Only a small number of them ever actually get such an opportunity, simply because we’re too small. Everything would have to align perfectly, the stars, the moon, everything, for it to happen.” - R2

High expectations are also not always equivalent to reality where the most important aspect is to be able to keep daily operations uninterrupted and this will continue to be the first priority.

“And then we start building all these expectations that people will have career opportunities, ‘now I’m going to become a senior manager here’ or whatever they imagine. But no. This company has to operate and land airplanes tomorrow as well. Next week, in a month, in five years.” - R10

This reveals a structural mismatch between the symbolic promise of talent systems and the material constraints of the organization, together with a highly dependent operational context where it is of importance to have specialists long-term in the same position. While talent is identified, the pathways to realize potential remain hindered, creating sort of a bottleneck where many are recognised but few can advance. The organization makes it known that they are aware of this tension and attempts to manage it by avoiding explicit commitments.

“[...] we try to recognize them without locking them into a specific position that might not become available for years, which could be demotivating to know that I could get this position here, but this person sitting there never quits.” - R1

This suggests an ambiguity from the managerial side, that in itself becomes strategically useful. By recognizing employees' potential without attaching concrete commitments to that recognition,

the organization is able to encourage motivation and engagement while preserving managerial flexibility.

The expectation trap is therefore not simply about inflated hopes that break due to unfulfilled promises. Rather, it's surrounded by a narrative presented around talent and development that may create a future-oriented psychological contract with the organization without explicitly attaching it to any guarantees of advancement. Employees' investment in themselves and in their current area of expertise is praised, while access to actual advancement opportunities remains limited, selective, and dependent on organizational circumstances. When you reach a certain position, there might not be any room left for advancement.

“But if you want to take the next steps [in your career], I think you’ll have to do that somewhere else, and that’s fine.” - R8

4.4.1 Talent Recognition and The Escalating Expectations

However, when managerial power operates indirectly through the regulation of expectations, visibility and perceived future opportunities, there is a risk that employees develop cynicism or reduced motivation if talent management processes are experienced as symbolic rather than meaningful.

This highlights the risk of the implied contract between recognition and opportunity, which AeroNord, according to the findings, argue that they are trying to avoid. Instead of clear progression, individuals risk being left navigating an uncertain space where they are acknowledged for their work but maybe lack clarity of what this acknowledgement means or could lead to. Is it simply a pat on the shoulder, an encouragement of “keep going as you are”, or is it more of a push of “I see your potential to advance into more responsibility / a new role”? If a manager promises too much, too soon, this may hurt the organization in the long-run.

“I was once promised a promotion by a boss who said she was leaving soon, but she stayed for another 11 years. Those broken promises lead to losing good people.” - R2

This suggests that AeroNord is caught between two problematic alternatives, making expectations and promises explicit and risking disappointment, or keeping them implicit and risking confusion and individuals feeling that they have to leave the company and seek their advancement elsewhere.

However, it's important to note that the expectation trap is not a one-way phenomenon. Our findings suggest that it as well is reciprocal. When labeling someone as a talent or using a strong encouraging rhetoric, there is a risk - or a chance, depending on point of view - that expectations escalate on both sides, creating a reinforcing loop.

"But then actually the expectations go both ways. So that if you yourself are named as a talent then you get the expectations up [...]. But it can also be if I as an employer name someone as a talent then I expect to get the same performance regardless of what role they have." - R10

This illustrates how the label of talent produces a sort of double pressure mechanism. It could be that employees internalize the label and construct a self-image as high performers, while the organization and managers assume consistent and transferable performance no matter the situation or context.

In terms of managers driving their own agenda through talent management practices, the dynamic where talent becomes less about actual capacity and more about maintaining a socially constructed expectation can be used by managers to ensure consistent and high performance. In a company where opportunities for advancement are limited, YOU are chosen, and now you are expected to deliver even more than the role itself perhaps demands. These socially constructed expectations could place individuals under significant pressure, which necessarily not open up opportunities but rather creates a sense of one continuously striving to meet expectations.

"[if you are labeled a talent] it is easy to feel that 'now I am identified as a talent and then a lot of things are expected of me'." - R11

This creates a paradox where the talent identity brings expectations on their own performance which is intensified by assumptions of the nature of talent itself. The interviews challenge the idea that talent is stable and transferable, instead emphasizing its contextual nature. An example is given by one respondent where a promising leader was delivering fantastic results, her managers took notice of her and promoted her to another position where she did not deliver at all.

"You took a leader out of the context she needed to perform and put her somewhere else [...]. Our expectation is that we think [...] it will be the same there." - R10

The statement illustrates a skepticism toward traditional promotion logics, where employees are rewarded for previous performance without sufficient consideration of whether their competencies align with the demands of future roles. These findings suggest that talent is dynamic and even sometimes accidental, and not identified and cultivated over time. Similarly, it suggests that performance is not an inherent trait that secure performance across the entire organization. A disconnect can therefore be seen when viewing talent identification the opposite, as something that can be generalized across roles. This challenges assumptions within talent management that “high performers” can be generalized across organizational contexts and roles. As a result, talent labeling and promotion decisions may increase the risk of misplacement and underperformance, which is reflected in R10's reference to the Peter Principle;

“The Peter Principle mathematically proves that we promote people beyond their level of competence [...]. In the end, this means that many management teams consist of complete idiots who have been promoted beyond their own ability.” - R10

Furthermore, potential itself is questioned in the empirical material. Rather than being a fixed attribute, it's described as fluid and time-bound.

"Potential is perishable [...]. It says nothing about performance. It is here and now you have potential. In half a year it can be completely different... because you have landed into your new life relationship, life puzzle." - R3

The risk with not having sufficiently integrated talent management processes is that the power of choosing the next “talent” to a certain role, lies in the hands of the management. In this sense, the expectation trap also operates at the organizational level, where the desire to identify and develop talent may actually lead to decisions that undermine performance, even though it fulfills the expectations of those who have been labeled as “high-potentials” or “talents”. Taken together, the findings related to expectations due to talent labeling moves beyond just motivation and demotivation, satisfaction and disappointment. It suggests how the expectation trap is embedded in the organization, how a good intention of moving someone up to a higher position to meet the potential instead may disrupt their performance by moving them out of the context that made them successful.

4.5 Short-term vs Long-term Tension

Furthermore, through the interviews with the respondents working in HR, not a clear ownership can be seen regarding the talent management processes. It is rather fluctuating, initially formalised and established processes, but less involvement is seen in an ongoing development. The practices seem to be set and moved on from, as R10 states;

“I’ve somewhat left that behind. We’ve matured the process, so I no longer have responsibility for it. Today, it’s more that I work with leadership development. But why do I do that? It’s not really to develop leadership itself. It’s the strategy we use to become more business-oriented. So it’s essentially a cultural issue that we’re working on. We want to change the culture within the company. We need to become a bit more agile - more on our toes, and more commercially aware.” - R10

This statement also indicates the short-term orientation in how talent management is prioritized within the organization. This indicates a shift from hands-on talent management by those in charge, and the focus has rather shifted towards areas perceived of more strategic importance. As a result, this further strengthens the indication of talent management within AeroNord as symbolic rather than performative. Initiatives, such as the career coaching tool as previously mentioned, exist on paper but not necessarily continuously refined or actively driven.

Consequently, talent management remains present as a foundational system but attention is directed toward other areas such as profitability, as R5 notes;

“When you are employed in a large organization like AeroNord, we naturally have an enormous number of goals. We are expected to make a profit, but we are also expected to be best in class when it comes to environmental performance. At the same time, we are also supposed to be best in class regarding the work environment. And best in class, and best in class, and best in class.

There are an incredible number of objectives to optimize toward.” - R5

This prioritization of short-term operational demands over long-term developmental initiatives is particularly significant in a context such as AeroNord, where continuous operations are essential for maintaining critical infrastructure services. As one respondent highlights:

“But no. This company - we’re going to start and land airplanes tomorrow as well. Next week, in a month, in five years.” - R10

This illustrates the organization's strong emphasis on continuity and operational stability, where long-term developmental considerations must be balanced against the immediate need to maintain uninterrupted services and prioritize the customers, in this industry also known as passengers.

“After all, that is the goal of companies - to create strong value-generating development in order to enable efficient and professional handling of passengers.” - R5

This creates a paradox where development is formally encouraged but practically constrained. On the one hand, the organization emphasizes growth, mobility, and internal development. On the other hand, access to these opportunities is limited, informal, and dependent on individual initiative or managerial support. As a result, development becomes something employees must actively “opt into,” rather than something systematically facilitated.

This introduces a fundamental contradiction within talent management practices, while employee development exists on paper, organizational structures and resource constraints limit actual progression opportunities. Consequently, when the tools implemented are not actively integrated and used, talent management risks becoming symbolic, signaling commitment to employee development without fully enabling it. This not only undermines the effectiveness of talent management as a strategic function, but also emphasizes responsibility onto individuals, who must navigate a somewhat inconsistent system in order to access development opportunities. This further creates a risk where crucial knowledge disappears due to the feeling of being out of opportunities. As mentioned earlier in the analysis, this industry requires context specific knowledge, which makes it hard to find a quick replacement if something were to get lost. Furthermore, such loss risks interrupting the daily operations which in the long run is not only harmful to the organization but also the Swedish infrastructure.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

In the analysis, we discuss how AeroNord's organisational structures constrain the effectiveness of its talent management practices, alongside a strong emphasis on individual responsibility for career development. This results in limited and uneven application of talent management initiatives, where organizational structures and individual differences may help explain why some efforts fail. We further argue that talent management at AeroNord operates in a largely symbolic manner, which we suggest leads to an expectation trap affecting employees and ultimately organizational success. Finally, we suggest that these practices are more effective in a short-term span rather than a long-term time-frame.

5. Discussion

In this chapter we will discuss the empirical findings in combination with previous literature in the field of talent management as well as the theoretical framework of the study, containing the sensemaking framework and garbage can model. The discussion is sectioned into different themes. We start the discussion by giving a brief explanation of the core findings of the empirical data. Moving on, the focus shifts to findings that indicate a symbolic perspective of talent management. Furthermore we discuss the assumption that talent management could be seen as a

way of exercising managerial power. We deepen this discussion with a section researching the conditions that could shape managerial power within organizations. In this section we also put light on contextual and resource constraints as well as bias and managerial self-interests.

5.1 Core Findings of The Empirical Data

The core findings of this study is that talent management could be used in a sense that reflects managerial interests and therefore could work in a sense of organizational power. This is driven by various factors such as resource and time constraints, context effects, or simply self-interests due to bias such as the “similar-to-me” effect. We don't argue that talent management does not function as intended. Instead we argue that it actually functions but to drive the management's interest and agenda rather than for actual employee development.

The talent management therefore functions in a symbolic manner, where initiatives exist but strictly in the sense that they are used to sensegive to employees, that in turn sensemake the situation. In this sense talent management becomes a mechanism for shaping organizational narratives and regulating demand. This indicates that talent management practices work in a short-term span, the risk is that it doesn't function as well in the long run. However, this perspective we can only speculate about, since our study was done in a limited time-frame, we have not had the opportunity to research the far-reaching effects of existing talent management practices.

5.2 From Strategic to Symbolic Talent Management

Previous conceptualisation of talent management tends to describe it as a strategic system that can help organizations achieve competitive advantages, return on investment and a structured plan to meet human capital needs (Lewis & Heckman, 2006, p. 151; Cappelli, 2008, p. 74, 81). Within this perspective, talent management is framed as a long-term organizational investment built around succession planning, employee development, and the systematic identification of future organizational needs (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 304). However, our findings challenge the extent to which such strategic and future-oriented assumptions are possible to sustain within a highly operational and continuously changing organizational context. The empirical findings instead suggest that talent identification and development are influenced by subjective

managerial assessments, resource constraints, and operational priorities, as well as talent management practices not being fully implemented, or constructed in a way that facilitates growth.

This becomes particularly visible in relation to employee mobility and development. The findings indicate a strategic interest in keeping competent employees in the same positions in order to keep the operations going, partly due to factors such as specialised knowledge and partly due to factors such as resource and time constraints. This points talent management in a direction of a short-term focus, instead of talent management as a long-term strategy suggested by Collings and Mellahi (2009). A long-term strategy of talent management emphasises succession planning and planning for the organization's long-term survival. Through succession planning, the task of developing competence to fill the strategic positions, aligns with the perspective of talent management as a strategic process (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 304; Guinn, 2000, p. 392) which improves the organizational performance long-term. However, our empirical findings instead show how talent management processes formally exist, but suggest a gap between formal talent management systems and the lived reality of the employees, which challenges the strategic nature of talent management and indicates a short-term strategic perspective.

The short-term perspective also challenges Jensen's (2005, p. 46) conceptualisation of HR as a strategic partner, aimed at strengthening overall workforce performance in an organizational context. With the short-term focus, there is no room for aligning organizational capabilities with long-term objectives. The long-term strategic activities commonly associated with talent management, such as succession planning, retention and employee development (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 305), therefore risk becoming secondary priorities. Instead, HR gains a more administrative function in terms of talent management, by developing tools and guidelines so it exists if someone would ask for it, but not actively making sure it's integrated into the operations, such as the career coaching tool.

From this perspective, our findings align more closely with Berg's (1986) discussion of symbolic management, particularly in how organizations respond to employees' demands for career advancement and professional development within their field. Talent management initiatives

exist formally within the organization, such as the career coaching tool, succession planning discussions, and developmental rhetoric, yet these are simultaneously rarely used and intentionally difficult to engage with. One could therefore argue that when the tools only exist on demand, it's a way of framing the collective reality of the organization, by managing the perceived profile and image of the organization. We would however, like to further contribute to the argument around collective reality from the perspective that it can become operationally useful, through enabling controlling activities for managers in the organization.

From this perspective, short-term focus and symbolic talent management goes hand in hand. The symbolic initiatives may help organizations manage employee expectations, maintain motivation and signal developmental opportunities without fundamentally altering existing organizational structures. This becomes particularly important within operationally sensitive organizations, where continuity and stability are central organizational priorities. Symbolic initiatives may “buy time” for management by demonstrating that developmental opportunities formally exist, while simultaneously allowing management to prioritize activities towards immediate business needs.

5.3 Talent Management as Organizational Power

Talent management can in its nature be seen as a regulator when it comes to who is retained and developed as a talent. The process has, as previously framed, been described by many as a systematic process (Jensen, 2005; Collings, 2014; Collings & Mellahi, 2009), while we instead would argue that it's socially constructed. Our findings suggest that talent management regulates visibility, mobility, recognition, expectations, and access to development, which becomes interesting on the notion that talent management is not systematic and objective, rather subjective. Our findings then suggest that the regulatory characteristics of talent management facilitate a situation where power can be exercised in the name of “talent management”. This is framed through ambiguity, selective opportunities, and managerial control of development. We want to contribute to the current research on talent management, to describe how the process can be viewed as a process of sensegiving and sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi's, 1991).

From this perspective, the power within talent management does not only lie in formally identifying talent, but rather in shaping how employees interpret opportunities, progression, and their future within the organization. Sensemaking is an ongoing process that engages all members of the organization in one way or another (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409), meaning that managers and employees continuously attempt to interpret organizational signals surrounding development and career progression. At the same time, managers engage in sensegiving as a result of their own sensemaking, by actively shaping these interpretations through communication, symbolic initiatives, and organizational narratives (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). In this sense, managerial power is exercised not only through direct decisions regarding promotions or development, but through influencing how employees understand their possibilities, responsibilities, and future trajectories within the organization.

5.3.1 Sensegiving, Sensemaking and Managerial Power

The findings suggest that managers communicate messages with the intention of everyone being a “talent”, but that the employee has an individual responsibility for their own developing processes and the organizational responsibility is secondary, in accordance with Di Prima et al. (2024, p. 3111). This narrative influences the identity construction of the workforce and therefore has a positive impact on employees' sensemaking process (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416). While such an inclusive approach may appear developmental and motivational on the surface, the empirical findings simultaneously indicate that organizational resources, operational demands and limited career pathways restrict the organization's actual capacity to facilitate career progression. These symbolic initiatives can be labeled as acts of sensegiving (Weick et al., 2005, p. 416) as the management is taking a situation into existence and answers the question of what career development and opportunity are expected to mean within the organization.

However, these messages simultaneously exist within an organizational structure where opportunities remain limited, unclear, and highly dependent on managerial support. This becomes particularly interesting when connected to Kraft et al. (2018, p. 78), who argue that managerial communication and actions must be in accordance in order for successful sensegiving to occur. In our findings, a disconnect instead becomes visible between developmental rhetoric and actual organizational possibilities. One central finding of the empirical data is the emphasis

on individual responsibility. Employees are encouraged to take ownership of their careers in accordance with Sirén et al. (2021, p. 1380) that argues that this shift in responsibility will bring more opportunities towards the employees career development. However, we believe that there are more obstacles to this perspective than previously noted. The organization simultaneously constrains mobility through operational dependency, unclear pathways, and limited resource allocation towards development, which leads to the interpretation that taking individual responsibility is not as easy as it seems. In this sense, symbolic talent management may create an image of opportunity without actually enabling progression. The ambiguity itself therefore becomes operationally useful, since it allows organizations to maintain motivation and a future orientation among employees without attaching clear commitments to advancement, which builds the foundation of our theoretical contribution to the talent management literature.

This once again emphasizes that the purpose of such initiatives may not solely be developmental, but also managerial and symbolic. Symbolic talent management may also function as a mechanism through which management can legitimize existing organizational priorities and maintain operational stability without committing resources to actual career mobility or employee development. Through our interpretation, the symbolic talent management can therefore be seen as sensegiving, which adds to Kraft et al. (2018, p. 79) suggestion of a symbolic strategy. This consists of rhetoric that is implemented in order to make sense, rather than genuine actions in the line of the language being used. By sensegiving this image of existing development and opportunity, management is able to align employee expectations through affecting the employees sensemaking process, with organizational needs while simultaneously retaining control over actual progression possibilities. In this sense, power within talent management lies not only in deciding who gets opportunities, but also in controlling how employees interpret the absence of opportunities. Symbolic talent management becomes a way for management to maintain legitimacy and organizational stability under conditions where real career mobility cannot realistically be provided. These practices may function to normalize organizational constraints and encourage employees to adapt their aspirations to operational realities. This perspective differs from previous literature on the subject of talent management and therefore becomes part of our theoretical contribution.

The perspective of a rhetoric of career ownership in combination of selective development opportunities further aligns with what Glaister et al. (2018, p. 729) describe as a common occurrence among managers, they start by implementing inclusive approaches in the early stages of talent management, to avoid sensitivity among the employees. Meanwhile their later actions show that they use filtering and competitive assessments to narrow the talent pool. However, we would further argue that this gap between inclusive approaches such as “everyone is a talent” and the exclusive reality with unpromoted talent management practices, creates a space for managerial control. By framing development as universally accessible while simultaneously limiting actual opportunities, management retains influence over what career and progression are expected to mean within the organization. Thus, talent management becomes a mechanism for regulating employee expectations while preserving organizational flexibility, which stands out from previous literature.

This also suggests that organizations change how they communicate about careers, as well as it works as a managerial tool to redefine how employees interpret their career progression within the organization (Doherty et al., 1997, p. 178). Employees are encouraged to understand development as something dependent on initiative, flexibility, and self-responsibility, while the organization simultaneously retains control over the structural conditions necessary for progression to occur. In this sense, the process of sensegiving becomes closely connected to organizational power, since management shapes the collective understanding of what is considered realistic, attainable, and expected within the organizational context.

5.3.2 Negative Sensemaking

As Khoreva and Vaiman (2015, p. 201) argue, employee's responses to talent management practices are highly dependent on whether the narrative is seen as genuine and credible. This becomes particularly significant when connected to sensemaking, since employees continuously evaluate whether organizational narratives align with their lived experiences. If employees begin to perceive talent management as primarily symbolic rather than developmental, organizational commitment, motivation and retention may eventually weaken. This combined with the findings that the organizational structure does not allow for individual responsibility and avoidance of resource allocation towards employee development, suggests that the talent management

practices are functionally ineffective. Which in turn leads to negative sensemaking among the employees, when promises aren't fulfilled.

Negative sensemaking can lead to disadvantages such as questioning of intentions, impatience, frustration and negative personal evaluation among employees (Kraft et al., 2018, p. 80), that further may hurt the organization. Instead the importance of achieving successful sensegiving and sensemaking is emphasized in order to fulfill advantages such as providing reassurance in an organizational change and confidence for the organization's change capability. This is at risk when combining with symbolic talent management. However, Glaister et al. (2018, p. 720) argues that sensemaking can be used to bridge the gap between inclusive rhetoric and exclusive reality. Our findings instead suggest that when this gap becomes too large, sensegiving risks shifting from creating motivation and legitimacy to instead producing cynicism, uncertainty, and frustration among employees. In this sense, symbolic talent management may provide short-term organizational stability while simultaneously risking long-term employee disengagement and talent loss, which is another perspective of our theoretical contribution.

To summarize, our findings suggest that talent management at AeroNord functions less as a purely strategic and objective system for identifying talent, and more as a socially constructed and symbolic process through which organizational meaning, expectations, and mobility are regulated. In this sense, organizational power is not primarily exercised through explicit control, but through the ability to shape how employees interpret development opportunities, future progression, and their own role within the organization. Talent management therefore becomes not only about managing people, but also about managing organizational meaning.

5.4 Conditions Shaping Managerial Control

While the previous section discussed how talent management can function as a mechanism of organizational power through processes of sensegiving and sensemaking, the following section instead focuses on the conditions that appear to shape the need for such control. The symbolic and controlling aspects of talent management seems, according to the findings, to be highly dependent on the organizational environment in which they operate. Further, this section is in

agreement with Thunnissen (2016, p. 69) that talent management isn't as easy to implement as previously literature predicts.

5.4.1 Contextual Constraints

One central condition shaping managerial control is the organizational context itself. As previously touched upon, AeroNord operates in a context that is highly operational, and a continuously changing environment where the company is responsible for maintaining operations in order to meet critical infrastructure demands. Circling back to one of our central arguments surrounding the short-term focus not aligning with talent management long-term strategy, we could see how the structure at AeroNord constrain mobility and that operational continuity conflicts with developmental flexibility. This perspective can be connected to Nelson and Duxbury (2021) who argue that traditional organizational structures increasingly struggle to support contemporary expectations regarding for instance career development. We would especially argue that our study supports Nelson and Duxbury (2021) in the sense that operational continuity conflicts with developmental flexibility; their findings are applicable in this organizational context as well. That being said, we extend the argument that within operationally sensitive contexts, such as critical infrastructure organizations, retaining expertise may become more important than facilitating mobility. Employees who possess highly organization-specific competence therefore risk becoming structurally “locked” into their current positions because their knowledge is too valuable to lose operationally.

This perspective can be seen through the organizational logic provided by Tyskbo (2021, p. 2161). In a context that is highly operational and dependent on expertise knowledge, our findings suggest that the engineering logic is present and praised, but the “specialists” are wanted in their current position and therefore the engineering logic does not dominate when it comes to talent recognition for career progression. Instead, career advancement appears more closely connected to organizational flexibility, revenue, and efficiency, characteristics more aligned with Tyskbo’s (2021, p. 2162) business logic. Our findings therefore support Tyskbo’s (2021, p. 2171) “glass ceiling” argument, where highly competent specialists may experience restricted development opportunities despite being considered valuable to the organisation. This became particularly

visible in expressions of frustration, stagnation, and employees perceiving external mobility as the only realistic path for continued career progression.

On this note, the findings do challenge Walker (1974) conceptualization of organizations as internal labour markets, where employees should be able to envision their long-term progression without leaving the firm. AeroNord however, does lack the stable structure that is needed for this. Instead, developmental initiatives such as the somewhat hidden career coaching tool, limited succession planning and evaluation-conversations can instead be seen how talent management instead are these "mysterious management practices" that Walker (1974) advocates should be replaced with human resource planning systems.

From another perspective, the findings could be understood through the garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972), which suggests that organizational decision-making in ambiguous environments is often characterized by competing goals, unclear processes and shifting priorities. In the findings, talent management appears to involve and simultaneously encourage employee development, while there are requirements on stability and continuity. As a result, developmental initiatives could risk becoming inconsistent and fragmented rather than strategically coherent. The career coaching tool may be interpreted less as strategically integrated development systems and more as an organizational response to address pressures surrounding employee development and retention. The findings further indicate unclear responsibility structures surrounding career development, where employees are expected to take ownership of their progression despite limited support. This resembles "organized anarchies" described within the garbage can model (Cohen et al., 1972, p. 1), where decision-making processes become diffuse and responsibility is distributed ambiguous. The model further suggests that organizations operating under ambiguity may adopt solutions that create a sense of action, even when underlying structural constraints remain unresolved.

5.4.2 Resource Constraints

Another condition shaping managerial control concerns limitations in time, managerial capacity, and organizational resources. The findings suggest that developmental initiatives formally exist, but that there are limited organizational possibilities to fully integrate and operationalize them in

practice. This creates a situation where talent management becomes selectively enacted rather than systematically implemented.

To fully engage in talent management practices, resource optimization is required. The findings point toward talent management not being fully integrated in the organization, and being more of a superficial engagement. However, talent management should be treated as an investment, not just an entitlement (Cappelli, 2008, p. 78). Cappelli and Keller (2014, pp. 307-308) argues that organizations should invest scarce resources into employee development to receive the greatest return of investment. Compared to former literature on talent management, where the most important aspect was which position or job that was associated with an employee. Previous literature focuses more on the importance of investing resources into developing talents within the organization. We contribute to this perspective with our theoretical contributions. The empirical findings suggest that if an organization isn't prepared to invest into employee development, the talent management practices come to a halt.

Furthermore, the empirical data suggest that developmental initiatives formally exist, but that organizational structures create limited possibilities to fully integrate them in practice. This mirrors the findings of (Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015, p. 201), who highlight a clear distinction between intended development activities are the ones formulated by management, while the implemented activities are the ones actually experienced by employees. The superficial engagement is one example of this gap, where the speech of the organization does not match its action. Where formally initiatives are intended but they are restricted in use, suggesting an poorly implemented activity, which points to the symbolic representation of these kinds of activities (Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015, p. 213).

5.4.3 Bias and Managerial Self-interests

Another condition suggestingly shaping managerial control concerns bias, and managerial self-interest within talent management processes. The findings suggest that managers function as organizational “gatekeepers” who influence who becomes visible, recognized, and supported within the organization. Talent recognition therefore becomes highly dependent on proven

achievements, managerial perceptions and informal relationships, instead of long-term performance criteria (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013, p. 297).

The subjective characteristics can be connected to how Lever and Swailes (2023) frame talent identification as a product of organizational power structures and social dynamics. We support this perspective with our empirical findings regarding managers acting like “gatekeepers” in terms of determining who gets recognised as a talent and as a result, who becomes visible in the organization. We further agree that similarity also affects the degree of visibility (Mäkelä et al., 2010, p. 138). However, Lever and Swailes (2023, pp. 75-76) state that the ones recognised are those who align with dominant organizational norms and values. While we agree with this to an extent in relation to bias and “similar-to-me” effects when identifying talent (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 163; Mäkelä et al., 2010, p. 138; Zahed & Satteri Ardabili, 2017, p. 260), we add to this perspective, however we do think that this is relevant in a more “right here and know” context, for instance if a position would open up at the company.

In regards to the more continuous development over time, we would argue that the individuals who actually align with the organizational norms and values sometimes could be “locked” into their position due to the company wanting good, competent employees that do their job well. Thus, we would like to contribute to Lever and Swaile's theoretical perspective (2023) by arguing that organizational norms and values not only shape who becomes recognised as talent, but also who is allowed to act on that recognition. In that regard, it could be seen as very context dependent. In an operational context, employees who strongly align with organizational needs and demonstrate stable performance may paradoxically become constrained in their mobility, as their competence is considered too valuable to lose within their current role. Talent recognition does therefore not automatically translate into career progression.

This further challenges the perspective presented by Dries (2013), where unequal opportunities primarily are framed as a consequence of talent categorisation and fast-tracking of identified “high-potentials”. While our findings support the idea that talent management contributes to unequal access to opportunities, we would argue that the inequality does not only emerge from the talent label itself. Instead, it is continuously reproduced through managerial discretion,

subjective assessments, unclear developmental pathways, and uneven access to visibility within the organization. In this sense, the issue is not simply who gets labelled as talent, but rather who gets continuously supported, promoted, and made visible over time.

This discussion can further be connected to Kwon and Jang (2022, p. 113), who argue that perceived bias within talent management processes may undermine perceptions of organizational justice and lead to disengagement, cynicism, and turnover intentions. Our findings largely support this perspective, particularly in relation to employees expressing frustration regarding unclear career pathways, unequal access to opportunities, and dependency on managerial relationships. However, our findings also suggest that these perceptions are highly dependent on how employees make sense of the organizational signals surrounding development and opportunity. Some employees appeared comfortable navigating informal and ambiguous structures, particularly those who were proactive, visible, or had supportive managers. Others instead experienced uncertainty, stagnation, or frustration when they struggled to understand how progression actually occurred within the organization. This suggests that the consequences of subjective talent management processes are not experienced equally, but rather shaped by employees' ability to interpret and navigate informal organizational dynamics, which adds to our theoretical contribution.

5.5 Understanding Perceptions of Talent Management Narratives

While we now have discussed how talent management may function as a tool for organizational power through processes of sensegiving, our findings simultaneously suggests that the organizational signals surrounding talent management practices differ. Some individuals were more cynical, some positive, others clueless and some recognized the limitations but still did not seem very bothered. This shows how the sensemaking process (Weick, 2005) appears highly dependent on individual, relational and contextual factors, which we believe is an important aspect when discussing our empirical findings that points to symbolic talent management, since this suggests that the effects are not fixed, but shaped by how employees interpret and respond to organizational narratives.

5.5.1 Self-perception

Firstly, the difference that we noted between the respondents in our empirical findings was the individual differences among the employees. We would assert that one factor that could affect the sensemaking process of the talent management initiatives is sensemaking grounded in identity construction (Weick, 2005). If an employee has a certain idea of “who they are”, they might respond to the situation differently depending on how they perceive themselves.

For instance, on a speculative note, the rhetoric that “you are responsible for driving your own career” might lead one individual, who identifies as highly extroverted, confident, competent, and skilled at networking, to interpret the question “what does this mean for me?” as an exciting challenge. Another individual, perhaps equally competent but more introverted and somewhat insecure, might instead interpret the same question as an overwhelming challenge that they do not feel capable of handling. This can be reflected in something as simple as an everyday situation, such as a meeting. Through identity-based sensemaking of the situation (Weick, 2005, p. 416), one individual may be more willing to raise their hand depending on how they view themselves and their competence, while another may hesitate. If this becomes a recurring phenomenon, some individuals become visible while others do not. This further raises the question of organizational justice, as managers tend to avoid transparent talent communication in order to avoid making certain employees feel unfairly treated or overlooked (Dries & De Gieter, 2014, p. 137). We agree to some extent with this avoidance, but also believe that more transparent communication regarding the talent management practices within the organization would lead to more structured systems, and greater awareness of employees’ career development opportunities. However, the implementation of transparent talent communication is not unproblematic (Dries & De Gieter, 2014), when it risks leading to organizational injustice. Some extent of transparent communication would improve the sense of talent management practices, yet, how it should be implemented remains underexplored. This ambiguity was evident in the empirical findings and further follows into our theoretical contribution.

In a context where talent management practices are ambiguous and not systematically integrated, those who are more proactive arguably have a greater chance of being noticed, for instance through forming informal relationships that enable career advancement (McCall, 1998, cited in

Dries, 2013, p. 281). The more informal relationships individuals build, the more comfortable they may become navigating organizational politics, as these relationships can influence the extent to which they feel included within the organization and within the talent management process or not (Dries, 2013, p. 279).

5.5.2 Managerial Relationships

Secondly, we would argue that employees interpret talent management differently depending on the relationship with their manager. Since we previously have explained the sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi's, 1991, p. 442) role that managers do have, it gives reason to believe that managers have an influence on how employees perceive talent management initiatives. In the empirical findings, it was described how some managers actively engaged in promoting their employees, while others experienced the gatekeeping phenomenon. This is an example of when the manager, through word or action, sensegive to the employees, which will affect how the employee feels about the talent management practices, through the sensemaking process. Thus, in the process of sensegiving and sensemaking, the manager becomes the primary interpreter and translator of organizational development narratives. The differences between managerial relationships, also confirms the success syndrome (McCall, 1998, cited in Dries, 2013, p. 281) where some employees achieve greater opportunities due to their relationship with their manager.

The sensegiving process could both concern the more traditional development practices potentially associated with talent management, such as promotion or a clear development plan. But it could also be through motivation and a good dialogue, ultimately how well the manager is present in stimulating the employee in their current position that actually affects if the talent management initiatives are met with cynicism or not. On the other hand, the risk with the sensegiving practices provided is that there is a discrepancy in the rhetoric and action (Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015, p. 201). We would argue that this may not affect the sensemaking process in the short-term since it is possible to save the trust with smaller gestures and promises, but in the long-term there is a risk that promises are broken and that cynicism gradually occurs through enacted cues of sensemaking (Weick, 2005, p. 419), that further adds to our theoretical contributions. As suggested by our findings, this resonates with the “expectation trap”, where employees eventually leave the company due to broken promises.

5.5.3 Previous Experiences

Thirdly, we would argue that previous experiences affect whether symbolic initiatives are interpreted as credible or simply just empty rhetoric. This partly continues on the note of “broken promises” and the expectation trap that follows, as well as the risk of achieving talent emptiness (Tyskbo & Wikhamn, 2022, p. 692). The findings suggest that if an employee in the past has been through various talent management initiatives without achieving actual results, or has been promised a promotion that never happened, trust in the organisation may gradually weaken. As mentioned by one respondent that had personal experience, where “broken promises led to losing good people”. The findings further suggest that this risks being met with frustration, impatience, and questioning of managerial intentions.

This could be seen as a risk in itself, even if a talent management initiative eventually were to be successfully implemented, there is still a possibility that employees’ sensemaking of previous initiatives, from a retrospective sensemaking perspective (Weick et al., 2005), will shape how they approach new initiatives and organizational attempts at improvement. We would therefore argue that when the employees start to understand talent management practices as symbolic rather than developmental, there is a breach of the psychological contract (Ehrnrooth et al., 2018, p. 449), where expectations regarding development and progression are no longer perceived trustworthy, which could risk weaken motivation and organizational commitment.

In this sense, we would argue that symbolic talent management may become self-reinforcing over time. The more employees experience disconnect between rhetoric and reality, the more likely it is for future initiatives to be met with skepticism rather than motivation. The effect of sensegiving risks then gradually weaken, since the sensemaking will be affected by previous disappointments rather than the intended message itself.

6. Conclusion

In the following section, we will answer our research question with regard to the previous analysis and discussion of the empirical findings. We will also report on the contributions this study will bring to the theoretical field of talent management. Moreover, we discuss limitations of

this completed study. Lastly we suggest perspectives for future research within the academic field of talent management.

6.1 Answer to Research Question

For this thesis, the research question that has been aimed to be answered read;

How do employees and managers make sense of talent management in a highly operational organization?

This study explains how employees and managers within the context of AeroNord, interpret and make sense of the meaning of talent management in different ways. We suggest that this is shaped by the operational conditions and structural constraints of the organization. At AeroNord, talent management operates less as a systematic, developmental system and more as a symbolic mechanism, used by managers to sensegive to employees in order to regulate their expectations on career development. This creates space for managerial power, where organizational control is exercised. Managers have the opportunity to offer the possibilities of career progression. However, they are the ones in control and therefore can steer their employees in the direction that lies in their interests. In this sense it means keeping the employees in the same position, which is emphasized as of great importance for organizational survival. By offering symbolic talent management initiatives, it could therefore be interpreted as an activity to control the demand of their employees' wish for career development, but instead be perceived as managerial power. We propose that the reason for this is that highly operational organizations must continuously adapt to external challenges in order to maintain the daily operations uninterrupted. Due to a fast-paced environment, there is perceived to be limited time and resources to actually invest in the long-term perspective of talent management as suggested by existing literature, involving activities such as succession planning, retention and career development. Meanwhile, the employees still demand opportunities to develop. In this sense, managers control this demand without having to allocate valuable resources into talent management practices. Therefore, despite talent management being portrayed as of strategic importance in the existing literature, the findings suggest that this engagement is inconsistent as of now.

From the managerial perspective, managers make sense of talent management primarily through the lens of operational continuity and organizational stability. Despite a rhetoric of fostering development and growth, it is in a practical sense perceived to be an inconvenience for managers to actually take the measurements necessary to make the rhetoric a reality, since it risks jeopardizing the efficiency of operations short-term. Being highly dependent on expertise knowledge, there is instead an emphasis on keeping employees in the same position. By establishing talent management practices, a sense of being “done” is evoked, while still overlooking the fact that the practices remain challenging to engage with and therefore restricted in use. Rather than continuously integrating talent management practices through a long-term perspective, the processes instead remain largely symbolic within the organization. The symbolic talent management practices together with narratives such as “you are responsible for driving your own career” both work as a way for managers to justify their own focus, but primarily as a sensegiving process to control the narrative, and in extent, employee expectations of career development.

From the employee perspective, talent management makes sense through the tension between the rhetoric of development and the organizational reality they experience in practice. Thus, a result of the sensegiving provided from the management. Despite many employees seeming to enjoy their positions at AeroNord and having remained with the company for a long time, the talent management initiatives are among the employees perceived as vague, inconsistent, difficult to translate into actual career progression, and for some, even unknown. The findings suggest that employees try to interpret what the career progression and development mean for them in their future of the organization. Some employees do, however, seem more affected than others, due to the effects of three factors: self-perception, managerial relationships and previous experiences. This suggests that the sensemaking process differs among the employees, which further could lead to both negative and positive outcomes towards the organization. One negative aspect of this, is the expectation trap, where symbolic talent management initiatives may work in the sense that it creates high expectations for future career advancement within the organization. However, if these expectations aren't met, it could eventually be harmful for the organization, by creating a sense of frustration and uncertainty among employees. These consequences may appear when the organizational rhetoric doesn't align with the employees' lived experiences.

To conclude, managers make sense of talent management by providing symbolic initiatives that function as an act of sensemaking towards the employees. Meanwhile, they are still in control and exercising managerial power. Employees on the other hand, make sense of talent management as meaningful opportunities to develop and make career advancements. However, when initiatives remain symbolic, this sensemaking process may eventually be lost, since the efforts are not valuable career progressions in the long-run.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

In this section we will explain how theoretical contributions can be made from the studies result and conclusion. With theoretical contributions we aim to make additions to the field of talent management research.

From a theoretical perspective this study contributes to the literature of talent management with the insight of how talent management can be used as a tool for managerial power, as a mechanism for legitimacy of driving their own agenda. The study nuances existing talent management literature by challenging the conceptualisation of talent management as primarily strategic, and applied in a long-term perspective (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p. 304). Instead, our findings suggest that such strategic assumptions do not translate into all contexts. We do instead contribute with the perspective that talent management is influenced by subjective managerial assessments, resource constraints, and operational priorities that may result in a short-term perspective of talent management where employees with specialized knowledge may become restrained in their role and potentially leave the organization. The study does as well extend previous research on symbolic management (Berg, 1986) by arguing that it especially can function in a manner of symbolic *talent* management. These initiatives can function not merely as acts of sensegiving, but as a mechanism of managerial power and organizational control. Our findings suggest that symbolic talent management not only manages the expectations from employees of future career development, but actually becomes operationally useful, since it allows managers to maintain legitimacy, preserve organizational stability and actually regulate employee expectations without enabling actual career mobility. In this sense, talent management

initiatives formally exist but are unclear, difficult to access in practice and not promoted in the organization.

More specifically, the study contributes by extending and conceptualising talent management as organizational control and managerial power operating through processes of sensegiving and sensemaking (Goia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick et al., 2005). The findings suggest that managerial power is exercised not only through formal decisions, but through shaping how employees interpret opportunity and development within the organization. Further we extend the understanding for how talent management practices may appear universally accessible while simultaneously limiting actual opportunities due to both personal and contextual factors, and how management retains influence over what career progression and talent management are supposed to mean within the organizational context. In this sense, the manager does not only control the opportunities, but also the narrative surrounding talent management practices.

Previous research suggests that sensemaking may rationalize talent management approaches (Glaister et al., 2018, p. 720). We instead suggest that when the gap between actions and rhetoric become too large, for instance due to broken promises, sensemaking risks shifting from creating legitimacy and motivation to instead produce cynicism and frustration, which in turn could lead to disengagement and turnover. Therefore symbolic talent management could create short-term stability while simultaneously risking long-term negative sensemaking and talent loss. This adds onto the perspective how talent management could work as power from a short-term perspective with operational efficiency, but long term the consequences become even larger than actually taking the time to develop the employees in the first place. The source of Glaister et al. (2018) is also based on a different cultural context, by adding to this perspective we also contribute with insights of how sensegiving and symbolic talent management works in the cultural context of Swedish state-owned corporations.

6.3 Limitations

This study has several methodological limitations. First, the limited time frame created limitations on how many interviews that could be conducted. As well as the limitation of only engaging one organization into the study. In order to generate a generalizable result, a larger

sample selection would be necessary. Furthermore, the use of convenience and snowball sampling may have resulted in a relatively homogeneous sample, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives represented (Bell et al., 2022, pp. 200-395), even though this was something we tried to avoid. As access to respondents was partly facilitated through organizational contacts, there is also a risk of selection bias.

Second, the study relies on data conducted from semi-structured interviews, meaning that the findings reflect participants' subjective interpretations rather than objective accounts of organizational practices (Bell et al., 2022, p. 219). In addition, since the interviews were done in Swedish and later translated to English, certain nuances may have been lost in the translation process. Furthermore, the data was collected during a relatively short period of time, which means that the findings represent a snapshot of the organization rather than capturing changes over time. This is particularly relevant given the dynamic nature of talent management. To conduct a more accurate result, the study ideally should have been done during a longer time period, allowing for organizational changes to play out their role.

The qualitative and context-specific nature of the study limits its statistical generalizability (Bell et al., 2022, p. 336). Instead, the findings aim to contribute through analytical generalization by providing in-depth insights into how talent management is experienced within a public organizational context.

As mentioned in ethical considerations, we were aware of the risk of subjective interpretations throughout the analytical process and actively attempted to minimize this through continuous reflexive discussions and by challenging each other's interpretations. However, within a qualitative research, complete objectivity is difficult to achieve, as the analysis is inevitably shaped by our own theoretical understandings and interpretations. Therefore, it still remains a risk that certain themes or nuances may have been overlooked. While reflexivity was an ongoing process throughout the study, future research could strengthen this by adding additional researchers in the analytical process to further challenge interpretive bias, as well as supplement with longitudinal observations.

6.4 Future Research

For future research within the field of talent management, we suggest that these following points are worth considering. This study captures employees' experiences at a specific point in time. Future longitudinal research could examine how perceptions of talent management evolve over time in organizations that operate in a volatile environment. It would also be valuable to study one specific organization during a longer period of time to see if talent management functions better in a short-term perspective rather than long-term, as this remains underexplored in this study. The findings also indicate that talent management may function in a symbolic manner rather than practically. Future research could therefore further explore the relationship between talent management, managerial power and organizational control, both in private and public organizations and the symbolic effects this may have.

Future research could also explore whether similar tension between taking on individual responsibility in this type of organizational context exists in other private sector organizations. Comparative studies between public and private sector organizations may also contribute to a deeper understanding of how organizational context shapes talent management practices.

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OpenAI Prompts:

<https://chatgpt.com/share/69fc8f92-bcf0-8328-8a12-0ddaa76d0228>

<https://chatgpt.com/share/6a174681-2218-83eb-9d1a-3c1cd0e515a3>

<https://chatgpt.com/share/6a174ad8-e1e8-83eb-8ab2-6732b8810112>

8. Appendix

Appendix A - Interview Guide For Pilot Interviews

1. Introduction & Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Purpose: Build rapport, establish context, reduce interview anxiety.

- Can you briefly tell me about your current role and how long you have been working in the organization?
 - Probe: What are your main responsibilities?
- How would you describe your career path up to this point?
 - Probe: Were there any key turning points?

2. Identity and Self-Perception (10–12 minutes)

Purpose: Directly operationalize Social Identity Theory (self-concept, in-group/out-group).

- How do you think the organization sees you as an employee?
 - Probe: What signals give you that impression?
- How would you describe yourself as an employee in this organization?
- Do you feel your work identity here reflects who you really are in private?

3. Organizational Labels and Recognition (8–10 minutes)

Purpose: Identify whether and how the “talent” label exists for the participant.

- In your organization, are there any formal or informal labels used to describe employees with high potential or strong performance?
 - Probe: For example, “talent,” “high-potential,” “fast-track,” or similar?
- Have you ever been described using any of these labels?
 - Probe: How did you first become aware of this?
 - Probe: How clear was the meaning of the label to you?
- How would you describe the way recognition or potential is discussed in your organization?
 - Probe: Are these distinctions more formal or informal?

- The career coaching tool that you offer to your employees - is it available to everyone, or are only certain selected employees informed that it exists?

4. Motivation and Work Behavior (8–10 minutes)

Purpose: Explore motivational mechanisms (pressure, pride, engagement).

- What motivates you most in your current role?
 - Probe: Recognition, development opportunities, job security, autonomy?
 - Probe: Did you have different motivations earlier in your career?
- Do you feel that recognition or labels in the organization affect how motivated people are?
 - Probe: Yourself or others?
- Have you ever felt pressure - or a lack of encouragement - based on how you are categorized or perceived?
 - Probe: Can you describe a situation?

5. Career Trajectories and Opportunities (8–10 minutes)

Purpose: Examine how labels shape future orientation and access to opportunities.

- How do you see your future career in this organization?
 - Probe: What paths feel open or realistic to you?
- Do you think that certain labels, such as “talent,” influence access to promotions, projects, or training opportunities?
 - Probe: Have you experienced this directly or indirectly?
- Have organizational perceptions of you influenced your own career ambitions or decisions?
 - Probe: Staying, leaving, or changing direction?

6. Reflection and Evaluation (5–7 minutes)

Purpose: Encourage critical reflection and capture unintended consequences.

Appendix B - Interview Guide Revised After Pilot Interviews

1. Introduction & Warm-up

- Can you briefly tell us about your current role and how long you have worked in the organization?
 - Follow-up: What are your main responsibilities?
- How would you describe your career path up to today?
 - Follow-up: Have there been any important turning points?

2. Identity

- How would you describe yourself as an employee in this organization?
- Do you feel that your professional identity reflects who you truly are in your private life?

3. Motivation and Work Behavior

- What motivates you the most in your current role?
 - Follow-up: Recognition, development opportunities, job security, autonomy?
 - Follow-up: Did you have different motivations earlier in your career?
- Are there situations where you have lost motivation? If so, what kind of situations?
- Do you feel that recognition or labels within the organization affect how motivated you are?
 - Follow-up: Do you think it affects others as well?
- Have you ever felt pressure—or a lack of encouragement—based on how you are categorized or perceived?
 - Follow-up: Can you describe such a situation?

4. Organizational Practices

- Are there any formal or informal labels in your organization used to describe employees with high potential or strong performance?

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- Follow-up: For example, “talent,” “high potential,” or similar?
 - How do you perceive that Swedavia works with employee development and career opportunities?
 - Do you feel that there are clear career paths or steps within the organization?
 - Follow-up: How clear do you think they are for employees?
 - How are opportunities for development or the next career step communicated within the organization?
 - Follow-up: Is this done formally (e.g., in performance reviews or documents) or more informally in everyday work?

5. Career Paths and Opportunities

- How do you think a clear career ladder affects motivation to develop and advance within the company?
 - Follow-up: How do you think you or others would be affected if such a structure did not exist?
- Do you feel there is a need for a clearer career ladder?
- Are there clear criteria for determining which step an employee is at in the career ladder?
- Do you think certain labels, such as “talent,” influence opportunities for promotion, projects, or training?
- How do you view your future career in this organization?
 - Follow-up: Which paths feel open or realistic for you?

6. Reflection and Evaluation

- What do you think the organization’s goal is with TM practices / career development?

- Are there individuals who benefit or are disadvantaged in ways that were likely unintended?
- If you could redesign the talent system in your organization, what would you change?
 - Follow-up: What would make it more fair or meaningful?

7. Closing

- Do you have any questions for us?

Appendix C - Interview Guide For Managers

1. Introduction & Warm-up

- Can you briefly tell us about your current role and how long you have worked in the organization?
 - Follow-up: What are your main responsibilities?
- How would you describe your career path up to today?
 - Follow-up: Have there been any important turning points?
- Many of those we have interviewed have mentioned that you are currently undergoing a reorganization. Can you tell us more about this and what it entails?

2. AeroNords Work with TM (Talent Management)

- How does AeroNord work with employee development and career opportunities?
- Are there clear career paths within the organization?
- What paths are possible?
- How important is it to offer development opportunities to employees?
- Are there any formal or informal labels in your organization used to describe employees with high potential or strong performance?
 - Follow-up: For example, “talent,” “high potential,” or similar?
- In the project organization, there is a clear career ladder—would it be possible to have a similar model in other parts of the organization?
- Do you feel there is a need for a clearer career ladder among your employees?
- Is the opportunity to develop within the organization affected by whether the company is state-owned or privately owned?

3. Identity

- How do you think talent management practices affect employees' identity?
 - Follow-up: For example, identifying oneself as a "talent"
 - Follow-up: Do you think how one identifies affects how one performs?
- Can there be consequences of labeling someone as a "talent"? Positive or negative?
- Can identification and how one builds identity around performance-based recognition differ between generations?

4. Motivation and Work Behavior

- What do you think motivates employees the most at AeroNord?
 - Follow-up: Recognition, development opportunities, job security, autonomy?
 - Follow-up: Did you have different motivations earlier in your career?
- In what situations do you think employees lose motivation at work?
- Do you feel that positive feedback, development opportunities, or labels within the organization affect employees' motivation?
 - Follow-up: Do you think it affects others?

5. The Future

- Do you think many employees reflect on their future within AeroNord?
- What development opportunities exist for an employee at AeroNord? Education, promotion, etc.
- Is there a "ceiling" where an employee has reached maximum development?
 - Follow-up: If yes, what do you think the long-term consequences of this could be?

6. Reflection and Evaluation

- What is the organization's goal with TM practices / career development?
- Are there individuals who benefit or are disadvantaged in ways that were likely unintended?
- If you could redesign the talent system at AeroNord, what would you change?
 - Follow-up: What would make it more fair or meaningful?

7. Closing

- Do you have any questions for us?

Appendix D - Interview Guide With Former Trainees

1. Expectations vs reality

- What attracted you to the trainee program?
- What expectations did you have before starting?
- To what extent were those expectations met?

2. Development and learning

- How would you describe your development during the trainee program?
- What aspects contributed most to your learning?
- Did you feel challenged? In what way?

3. Responsibility

- To what extent did you feel responsible for driving your own development?
- What support did you receive from managers or the organization?
- Did you ever feel left on your own in your development?
 - Follow-up: what would have helped you more?

4. Structure

- How clear were the career paths after the trainee program?
- Did you know what steps were required to move forward?
- Did the program provide a clear direction for your future in the organization?

5. Transaction from trainee

- How was the transition from trainee to a permanent role?
- Did you feel that your role was clearly defined?
- Did you feel “placed” somewhere or did you shape your own role?

6. Leadership

- How important was your manager for your professional development?

- Can you give an example of when a manager supported (or didn't support) your development?

7. Motivation

- What motivates you most in your work today?
- How do you define "career"? (promotion vs learning vs variation)
- Do you see a long-term future in the organization? Why/why not?

8. Critical reflection

- What do you think the organization does well when it comes to career development?
- What could be improved?
- Do you think everyone has the same opportunities to develop in their career?