Talent management functions: a qualitative research on container shipping industry

Ramazan Ozkan Yıldız, Sedat Bastug, Soner Esmer

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Ramazan Ozkan Yıldız* and Sedat Bastug

Barbaros Hayrettin Naval Architecture and Maritime Faculty,
Iskenderun Technical University,
Iskenderun, Hatay, Turkey
Email: rozkan.yildiz@iste.edu.tr
Email: sedat.bastug@iste.edu.tr
*Corresponding author

Soner Esmer

Barbaros Hayrettin Naval Architecture and Maritime Faculty,
Iskenderun Technical University,
Iskenderun, Hatay, Turkey
and
Maritime Faculty,
Dokuz Eylul University,
Buca, Izmir, Turkey
Email: soner.esmer@iste.edu.tr

Abstract: The extremely competitive and goal-driven structure of container shipping has led firms to acknowledge the need for qualified and competent employees to accomplish business objectives. Accordingly, talent management (TM) is a critical factor to achieve these objectives and effectively execute corporate strategy. Therefore, this study primarily aims to contribute to the development of the TM field by examining TM-oriented subjects concerning the primary actors of Turkey's container shipping industry (container shipping lines and ocean freight forwarders). First, a systematic literature review was conducted to identify existing TM practices and obtain data for the identification and conceptualisation of talent management functions. Second, a combined method of in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis was used to investigate the most common talent management practices under TM functions in Turkey's container shipping industry and highlight the differences with the current literature.

Keywords: talent management; resource-based view; RBV; systematic literature review; SLR; content analysis; container shipping.

Biographical notes: Ramazan Ozkan Yıldız currently works as a research assistant at Iskenderun Technical University. He is a PhD candidate at Iskenderun Technical University, Department of Maritime Transport Engineering. He holds a BSc in Maritime Business Administration from the Dokuz Eylul University and also an MSc in the same field from the same university. He has presented several papers in international conferences and his works have been published in peer reviewed journals. His main research areas are; talent management, human resources management, organisational behaviour, logistics management, container shipping industry and port management.

Sedat Bastug is an Assistant Professor Doctor in Barbaros Hayrettin Naval Architecture and Maritime Faculty, Iskenderun Technical University, Iskenderun, Turkey. He received his PhD in Maritime Business Administration from Dokuz Eylul University. He has presented several papers in international conferences and his works have been published in peer reviewed journals and international books. His main research areas are supply chain management, ship chartering, marketing, industrial buying and ship management. He has an editorial membership in the *Journal of Shipping and Trade*.

Soner Esmer is a Professor Doctor in Dokuz Eylul University, Maritime Faculty and he is the Dean of Barbaros Hayrettin Naval Architecture and Maritime Faculty, Iskenderun Technical University, Iskenderun, Turkey. He received his PhD in Maritime Business Administration from Dokuz Eylul University. He has presented several papers in international conferences and his works have been published in peer reviewed journals and international books. His main research areas are; port management, logistics management, supply chain management, marketing, and container shipping. He has an editorial membership in various scientific journals.

1 Introduction

Talent management is a novel and developing research area [Cooke et al., (2014), p.226; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, (2016), p.32; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, (2019), p.176]. Although the number of empirical talent management (TM) studies has grown (particularly conceptual studies), many authors still mention the inadequacy of experimental studies [Cappelli and Keller, (2014), p.306; Anlesinya et al., (2019b), pp.302–303; Jooss et al., (2019), p.2; Li et al., (2019), p.1088].

The current TM literature considers specific practices in an intertwined and complex manner. According to Sparrow and Makram (2015, p.259), widely identified and conceptualised TM functions are needed for a better understanding and implementation of TM. Despite some attempts to address this issue, these studies have not gone beyond declaring a few statements and naming them as TM functions. Therefore, to develop TM as a fully recognised field, a broad identification and conceptualisation of TM functions are essential, together with a detailed classification of TM practices.

Most TM studies concentrate on the service sector, especially the tourism and hospitality industry. Another expanding service sector industry is shipping [Bratton and

Watson, (2018), p.58; Stopford, (2009), p.12; Lun et al., (2011), p.3; Balci et al., (2018), p.32, p.15; Pantouvakis and Karakasnaki, (2018a), p.161]. TM is considered an important driver facilitating the achievement of business objectives in shipping and enabling effective execution of corporate strategies [Progoulaki and Theotokas, (2016), p.868; Pantouvakis and Karasnaki, (2018b), p.649].

Within the shipping industry, TM can be studied more clearly in relation to container shipping as it includes many multinational companies (MNCs) and has the most intense institutionalisation [Haralambides, (2019), p.50]. Moreover, because this sector is particularly dynamic and competitive, companies must recruit and retain high-potential, competent, high-value, and high-performing personnel [Zheng, (2009), p.483; Pantouvakis and Karasnaki, (2019), p.277]. According to Pantouvakis and Karakasnaki (2018a), it is essential to identify the primary components of TM within the container shipping industry because it requires superior human skills and capabilities.

Given this context, the present study focused on the container shipping industry as the research area, with container shipping lines with ocean freight forwarders as the specific unit of analysis. As the primary actors, container shipping lines and ocean freight forwarders form the backbone of the industry [Heaver, (2002), p.213; Balci et al., (2018), p.26; 2019]. Ocean freight forwarders, which sometimes act as shippers, suppliers, and agencies, have also started to act as shipping lines via long-term contractual agreements [Fremont, (2009), p.541]. In response, several researchers in the container shipping industry have focused on ocean freight forwarders together with container shipping lines (Heaver, 2002; Fremont, 2009; Balci et al., 2018, 2019).

Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to identify and conceptualise TM functions by following the basic philosophies of management science and determine how the container shipping industry implement TM practices under the obtained functions. To achieve these goals, the study addressed the following research questions:

Research question 1   What are the most common practices within TM functions according to the literature and container shipping industry? Are there any differences between the literature and the container shipping industry?

Research question 2   How do companies operating in Turkey's container shipping industry implement talent management practices from the perspective of TM functions?

2   Conceptual background

2.1   The war for talent and the resource-based view (RBV)

The striking phrase 'war for talent' was coined by the McKinsey research team in 1998 [Chambers et al., (1998), p.44; Axelrod et al., (2001), p.9], when the notion of TM appeared in the managerial sphere [Frank and Taylor, (2004), p.33; Bethke-Langenegger et al., (2011), p.525; Chabault et al., (2012), p.328; Vaiman et al., (2012), p.925; Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li, (2016), p.264; Ahammad et al., (2018), p.5; Lai and Ishizaka, (2020), p.637]. Given the high awareness regarding the scarcity of talent and the fierce competition for it, it has become more important than ever to manage talent efficiently [Axelrod et al., (2001), p.10]. This situation is a consequence of increased

business competition and globalisation [Chabault et al., (2012), p.328; Cooke et al., (2014), p.227]. In addition, an ageing workforce and tightening labour markets [Collings et al., (2011), p.455] have induced a significant war for talent because companies preserve their positions under highly competitive market conditions [De Vos and Dries, (2013), p.1820]. In short, the phrase refers to the shortage of talented employees while the universal remedy for this scarcity is TM [Gelens et al., (2013), p.342; Latukha, (2015), p.1051; McDonnell et al., (2017), p.89; Bonneton et al., (2019), p.1; Kock and Burke, (2008), p.461; Jones et al., (2012), pp.401–402]. The McKinsey researchers proclaimed that talent is worth fighting for because it is a rare, valuable, and non-substitutable asset. Furthermore, creating competitive advantage and improved corporate performance, is a key success factor for companies. This argument is deeply rooted in a RBV of the firm [Barney, 1991; Chambers et al., (1998), p.45; Axelrod et al., (2001), p.11; Collings and Mellahi, (2009), p.304; Dries, (2013), p.273; Meyers et al., (2020), p.580].

RBV scholars claim that valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable human capital in firms is one of the main facilitators of sustainable competitive advantage [Barney, (1991), p.102; Wright et al., (2001), p.703; Barney et al., (2011), p.1301] refers to the uniqueness of the company's human capital, its collection of talented employees with inimitable capabilities. Valuable refers to the potential contribution of these elite employees to the organisation's performance and core competence [De Vos and Dries, (2013), p.1818; Cappelli and Keller, (2014), p.308; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., (2015), p.270; Lai and Ishizaka, (2020), p.639].

However, according to Barney and Clark (2007, p.130), talented employees alone are not enough for companies to sustain competitive advantage; rather, the effective management of this unique resource is critical, which emphasises the importance of TM [Lewis and Heckman, (2006), pp.145–146; Gelens et al., (2013), p.342; Luna-Arocas and Morley, (2015), p.33; Latukha, (2018), p.72; Li et al., (2018), p.500; Crane and Hartwell, (2019), p.83]. Collings and Mellahi (2009, p.304) define TM as a combination of practices that enable a company to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. These include identifying key positions, developing and maintaining a talent pool to fill these positions, and creating a distinctive HR architecture to facilitate this talent pool.

Companies use unique, rare, and differentiated TM practices for planning, identifying, attracting, acquiring, developing, deploying, and retaining talent. These constitute the substructure of an inimitable and well-organised TM system [McDonnell et al., (2011), p.177; Jones et al., (2012), p.413; Valverde et al., (2013): 1834; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, (2016); p.44; Tafti et al., (2017), p.15; Latukha, (2018), pp.83–84]. TM requires a differentiated approach to the management of labour and to the dynamic and highly competitive business environment. Such distinctive practices improve firm performance and provide sustainable competitive advantage [Iles et al., (2010), p.135; Bethke-Langenegger et al., (2011), p.527; Gelens et al., (2013), p.342; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, (2016), p.44; Ahammad et al., (2018), p.5; Bonneton et al., (2019), p.4; Harsch and Festing, (2020), p.43].

2.2 *TM practices and functions*

The term 'practice' is defined as the way of doing things (working) in a particular business [Oxford University, (2002), p.581]. The focus of 'practice' is the events and
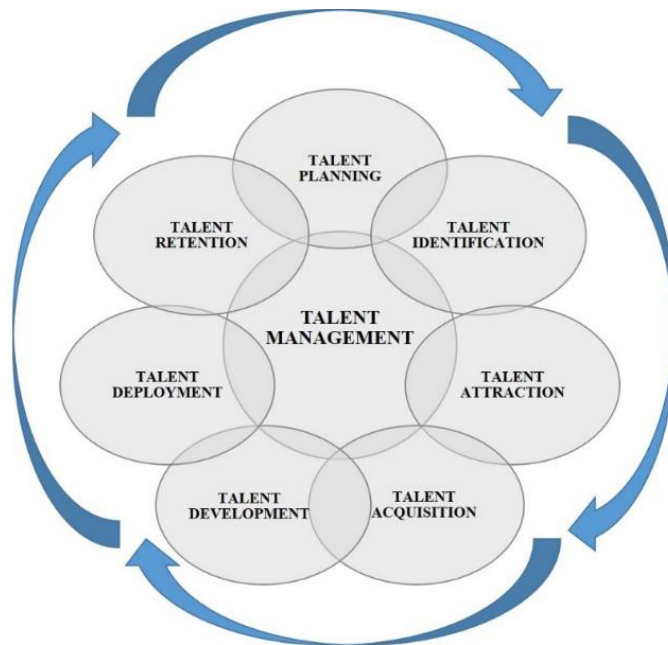
activities in an organisation [Paroutis and Pettigrew, (2007), p.101; Whittington, (2007), p.1576]. Thus, TM practices can be defined as talent-oriented working methods (ways of performing activities) developed under specific organisational and cultural dynamics to facilitate a company's TM system. Through the aim of improving the effectiveness of TM practices and ensuring their appreciation and adoption by the entire workforce, TM practices should transmit the correct message to employees while employees should perceive these messages as intended [Al Ariss et al., (2014), p.176; Crowley-Henry et al., (2019), p.9]. To achieve sustainable competitive advantage, TM practices must be unique, valuable, and difficult for competitors to imitate [Collings et al., (2011), p.459; Cooke et al., (2014), p.225; Ambrosius, (2018), p.64]. Thus, a well-established TM system differentially combines and utilises TM practices to outperform competitors [Collings and Mellahi, (2009), p.304; Mensah, (2015), p.549]. Bethke-Langenegger et al. (2011, p.535) argue that corporate strategy-focused TM practices significantly increase company profit.

The current TM literature does not yet adequately define and conceptualise TM. Henri Fayol, a French coal mine director, wrote a book in 1916 called 'Administration Industrielle et Generale', which was published in English in 1949. Fayol (1949) described five particular management functions that he claimed applied to all businesses: *planning*, *organising*, *commanding*, *coordinating*, and *controlling*. These significant functions operate together to achieve business objectives.

Further research into business management revealed that guiding people by motivation worked much better than telling them what to do (e.g., command and coordinate). Consequently, the term 'leading' started to be used in place of Fayol's five functions, which were replaced by four basic management functions (*planning*, *organising*, *leading* and *controlling*) [Parker and Ritson, (2005), pp.176–177; Conkwright, (2015), pp.15–16]. Koontz and O'Donnell (1955, p.34) criticised the list of management activities as overcrowded and complex. They claimed that a scientific approach was needed to produce a unanimous classification to avoid confusion. They, therefore, suggested five management functions (*planning*, *organising*, *staffing*, *leading*, and *controlling*), which could encompass all management practices [Koontz and Weihrich, (2012), p.3]. Similarly, Flippo (1976, p.4; 1980, p.5) described two distinct sets of human resource management functions:

a   managerial functions (*planning*, *organising*, *directing/leading* and *controlling*)

b   operative functions (*procurement*, *development*, *compensation*, *integration*, *maintenance* and *separation*).

Sparrow and Makram (2015, p.259) argued that a better understanding and implementation of TM required that its functions should be widely identified and conceptualised. To the best of our knowledge, only a few studies have attempted to identify these functions. Khilji et al. (2015, p.242) identified the core functions of TM as talent planning, talent acquisition, talent development, and talent retention. Ewerlin and Süß (2016) identified four basic TM functions or phases in the literature: talent identification and attraction, deployment, development, and retention [Ewerlin and Süß, (2016), p.144]. Similarly, Pandita and Ray (2018, p.186) named five TM stages: talent planning, acquisition, development, deployment, and retention. Golubovskaya et al. (2019, p.4118) described talent development as an important TM function.

Figure 1 TM process (system) (see online version for colours)

Table 1 Explanations of seven core TM functions

Functions	Explanations	Sources
Talent planning	TM system starts with detailed and effective talent planning, structured according to the corporate strategy. Talent planning is a comprehensive function that creates and structures plans to identify, attract, acquire, develop, deploy, retain current and potential talents to maintain the demand and supply balance.	Kock and Burke (2008, p.463), Pilbeam and Corbrige (2010, pp.102–103)
Talent identification	Talent identification enables companies to find high-potential employees to strengthen talent capacity and inclusion in organisational talent programs.	Jones et al. (2012, p.410), Bolander et al. (2017, p.1532), Jooss et al. (2019, p.19), Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss (2018, p.75)
Talent attraction	Talent attraction contains specific unique practices (employee value proposition, employer branding, etc.) to impress and acquire potential talent from the external labour market by portraying an image of being a great place to work. The driving force of talent attraction is to offer an employee friendly, valuing, and cherishing culture.	Chung and D'Annunzio-Green (2018, p.112), Pandita and Ray (2018, p.189), King and Vaiman (2019, p.204), Harsch and Festing (2020, p.50)

Table 1   Explanations of seven core TM functions (continued)

Functions	Explanations	Sources
Talent acquisition	Talent acquisition involves processes to identify key positions, and develop and maintain a talent pool of high-potential, high-performing recruits to fill these roles.	Garrow and Hirsh (2008, p.399), Kock and Burke (2008, p.463), Collings and Mellahi (2009, p.304), Cooke et al. (2014, p.226)
Talent development	Talent development focuses on designing, selecting, and using development practices for the whole workforce aligned with organisational talent management processes to ensure that the company has competent and adequate talent to meet strategic objectives.	Garavan et al. (2012, p.6), Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li (2016, p.286), Rezaei and Beyerlein (2018, p.76)
Talent deployment	Talent deployment focuses on allocating and relocating talent to key positions through extensive succession planning and a differentiated HR architecture. The main concerns of talent deployment are anticipating critical positions within a company, possible career moves of incumbents, and pipelines of available talent to fill these roles.	Lewis and Heckman (2006, p.151)
Talent retention	Talent retention is an effort by a company to keep high-potential and high-performing, talented employees to meet business objectives by preventing voluntary talent turnover. Talent retention should focus on employee motivation, integration of employees into the company's culture, a clear and fair performance management system, and efforts to increase employee loyalty and commitment.	Frank et al. (2004, p.13), Hatum (2010, p.97), Latukha (2016, p.24), Bolander et al. (2017, p.1526), Ambrosius (2018, p.54), Bonneton et al. (2019, p.5).

Based on the evaluated information, supported by empirical findings and the systematic literature review (SLR), the present study revealed seven core TM functions previously mentioned in the literature (see Appendix 1), although these are not broadly conceptualised or labelled as TM functions. These seven primary functions (*talent planning*, *talent identification*, *talent attraction*, *talent acquisition*, *talent development*, *talent deployment*, *talent retention*) together constitute the TM system. They operate interactively as a cycle (see Figure 1) in the creation, execution, and realisation of business objectives (e.g., sustainable competitive advantage and improved business performance) through the practices that they involve [Kock and Burke, (2008), p.463; Khilji et al., (2015), p.242; Pandita and Ray, (2018), p.186]. The present study classified and segmented the practices identified from the SLR process under these seven functions (see Appendix 1). Table 1 presents definitions and explanations of the seven core TM functions.

2.3   Talent management in shipping

Human capital is a valuable, critical, and rare asset in the shipping industry, especially in container shipping (Parola and Satta, 2012; Notteboom et al., 2019). Recruiting high-quality, capable, competent, and rare human capital is essential for shipping

companies to achieve their business goals as perfectionism is a necessity in customer-oriented service delivery [Ng et al., (2009), p.257; Pantouvakis and Karasnaki, (2019), p.277]. From a RBV, Progoulaki and Theotokas (2010) claim that the unique and authentic management of human capital is a prerequisite for achieving sustained competitive advantage in the shipping industry. TM involves the exclusive and specific management of valuable and rare human capital [Iles et al., (2010), p.135; Bethke-Langenegger et al., (2011), p.527]. In short, TM is a prominent essential factor for shipping companies to achieve their business goals and gain a sustainable competitive advantage [Pantouvakis and Karasnaki, (2018b), p.649].

According to Groysberg and Abbott (2012), leading companies in the container shipping industry identify and entitle talent management as a strategic priority. A simple web search demonstrates that the TM know-how of these companies is rewarded globally. For example, due to its TM system, the MAERSK line was named 'Best Organisation for Talent Development in the World', a prestigious award given by the Association of Talent Development (ATD) in both 2015 and 2016. Similarly, the Top Employers Institute named DHL, another leading firm in the container shipping industry, 'Top Employer Europe' in 2020 for its talent acquisition programmes. Thus, actors in the container shipping industry are highly active in TM and contribute directly to the development of TM as a field of application. These actors attach great importance to practices related to identifying, attracting, acquiring, developing, deploying, and retaining talented employees to succeed in the volatile and competitive business environment [Pantouvakis and Karakasnaki, (2018a), p.161; (2018b), p.649; (2019), p.277].

Through their empirical analysis, Yildiz and Esmer (2021) defined TM specific to the container shipping industry as identifying high-potential and talented candidates along with critical positions within the company, placing these potential talents in positions of great importance for the company after the necessary personal and professional development processes have been completed, and retaining high-performing and competent talents through various rewarding and recognition practices. Yildiz and Esmer (2021) argue that firms within the container shipping industry accept that TM should be implemented across the workforce and that development practices are the most critical function of this system. Other important TM functions are ensuring that critical positions are filled systematically by competent, talented employees who are the 'right person for the right job'.

3   Methodology

In order to find answers to the research questions, which are the starting point of the study, the content analysis method, which is one of the most renown and mainstream qualitative research methods, was used. The data obtained by SLR and structured interview methods were subjected to qualitative content analysis, the research processes of two separate methods were given under the methodology, and the findings were presented under the findings section.

Content analysis refers to the objective and systematic analysis of various kinds of data. The main goal is to identify the notions and relations that allow the data to be interpreted and explained [Roberts, (1989), p.148; (2015), p.769; Krippendorf, (2004), p.88]. The first step in qualitative content analysis is usually the transcription of interview

recordings. The raw data from the one-to-one interviews are analysed and condensed at each step. Categories and themes are then organised to include all the meanings obtained, including explicit content and implicit meanings [Mayring, 2014; Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, (2017), pp.93–94].

MAXQDA allows a more systematic method of content analysis than manual methods (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2019). In traditional content analysis, the research team creates the coding scheme and trains the coders before analysing the content. Researchers have developed various algorithms and software to reduce the subjective interpretations of coders [Krippendorff, (2004), p.13]. Thanks to such software, a frequency table can be created so that content analysis can be applied to similar documents multiple times [Krippendorff, (2004), p.39]. In the present study, two expert coders who had participated in similar studies and were trained in coding were appointed to increase reliability. The Cohen Kappa coefficient scores to compare their codings were higher than 0.65, which indicates that the codings were consistent and reliable [McHugh, (2012), p.279]. The Kappa coefficient can vary between 0 and 1, with 1 representing complete agreement – although this can also be seen as suspicious. A value between 0 and 1 indicates partial agreement [Kuckartz and Radiker, (2019), p.281]. In short, the coders achieved a satisfactory level of agreement has been reached and the study's coding process was reliable.

3.1   The research framework

This study used two different but connected qualitative research methods (see Figure 2) to address the research questions and achieve the study's main purpose. First, a SLR was used to identify the most common talent management practices in the current literature and the basic TM functions covering these practices. Second, a combined method of in-depth structured interviews and qualitative content analysis was used to identify prevalent TM practices in Turkey's container shipping industry and determine whether the TM functions identified from the current literature were applied or not.

Material evaluation in qualitative research involves preparing and organising the obtained data, coding, theming by combining and condensing codes, and presenting the data as a discussion supported by visuals [Creswell, (2007), p.148]. A two-stage process development approach was used to create an analytical category pattern. In the first stage, the basic framework of main categories and sub-categories was established based on the existing literature. For data condensation, the iteration cycle method was used to code the categories belonging to the criteria. The seven TM functions identified by the authors were determined as the analytic categories that comprise TM practices as sub-categories. In particular, the most studied TM practices were identified. Those making little or no contribution to the theory were excluded from the analysis. Through this process, all sub-categories within the main categories were compared with each other. Data condensation was completed by collecting similar sub-categories under one main category. The TM practices for which the iteration process was completed at the conclusion stage were defined as sub-categories (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

Figure 2 Research process (see online version for colours)
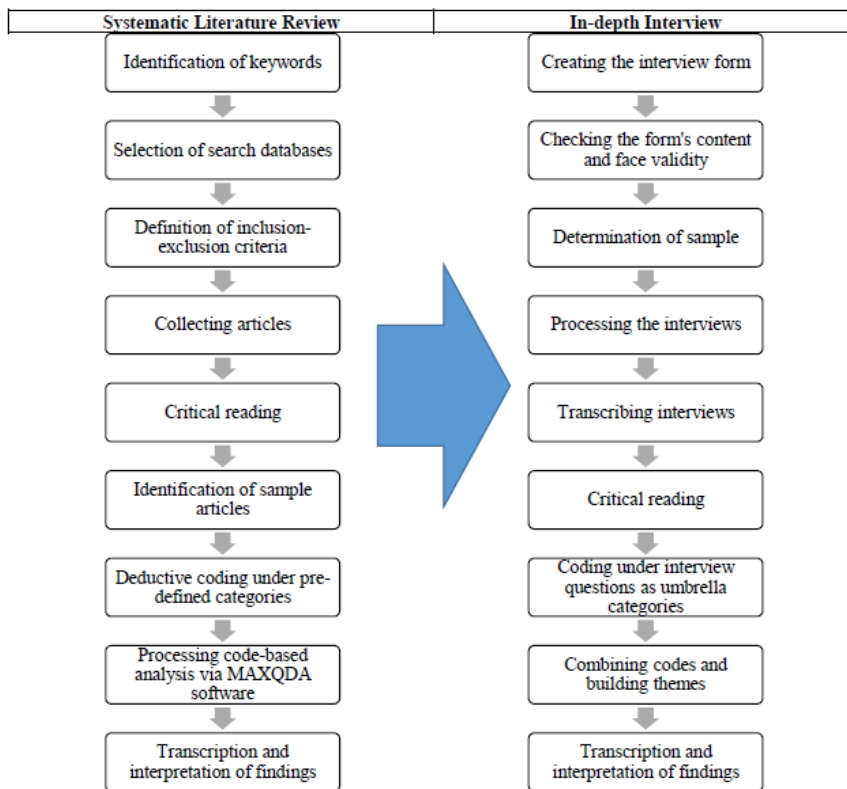
3.2 Systematic literature review

3.2.1 Research approach

This study used a SLR method to critically analyse current TM literature to identify existing TM practices and functions [Anlesinya et al., (2019a), p.149; (2019b), p.441; (2019c), p.300; Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li, (2016), p.265]. The SLR addressed the following research questions:

Research question 1   What are the most common TM practices in the current literature?

Research question 2   Which functions exist involving these practices?

SLR is a rigorous, transparent, reliable, and replicable method [Seuring and Gold, (2012), p.545] for identifying, analysing, interpreting, and rendering the current structure of available research [Tranfield et al., (2003), p.212]. SLR can be applied to a specific research question, topic, or phenomenon of interest determined by researchers, scholars, and practitioners [Kitchenham, (2004), p.1; Kitchenam and Charters, (2007), p.3; Brereton et al., (2007), p.572; Fink, (2014), p.3; Okoli and Schabram, 2010]. Tranfield et al. (2003, p.207) claim that SLR is a reliable and valid method for management and business research. Supporting this, Tarique and Schuler (2010, p.124) applied SLR for

their TM study of business management. This approach was adopted for the present study based on its appropriacy.

3.2.2   Data collection

SLR data collection uses a deductive search approach with predefined keywords. According to Neuman (2014, p.136), a keyword search is appropriate for online searching because keywords reflect the primary components of topics and titles, whether in the titles, abstracts, or keywords sections of scholarly articles. Neuman (2014, p.136) warn that using very narrowly defined keywords may eliminate relevant articles whereas very broad keywords will include too many irrelevant articles. Between six and eight keywords are generally appropriate while the breadth of the keywords depends on the specific study.

Accordingly, the following word combinations were identified as the keywords for the search: 'talent planning', 'talent identification', 'talent attraction', 'talent acquisition', 'talent deployment', 'talent development', 'talent retention', 'attracting talent', 'finding talent', 'identifying talent', 'employing talent', 'developing talent', 'deploying talent', 'retaining talent', 'talent management practices', and 'talent management'. To ensure that the articles to be analysed were of a sufficient standard, the search focused on leading international peer-reviewed journals with proven academic competence and prestige [Singh et al., (2007), p.327; Okoli and Schabram, (2010), p.22; Tarique and Schuler, (2010), p.124]. Therefore, the following seven renowned academic research databases were used: *Emerald Insight*, *Inderscience*, *Sage Online*, *ScienceDirect*, *Springer*, *Taylor & Francis Online*, and *Wiley Online Library* [Anlesinya et al., (2019a), p.150; (2019b), p.441; Kravariti and Johnston, (2020), p.124].

Each article was evaluated using inclusion and exclusion criteria in the three-stage process described by Neuman (2014, p.138). First, article titles and keywords were read, then the abstracts, and finally the whole text line-by-line to determine the sample. An additional step before the final stage was to examine the references of each article. By evaluating the titles, potentially relevant articles were identified. Then, using the inclusion/exclusion criteria, the abstracts were critically read. This helped to identify more relevant articles and improved the search [Neuman, (2014), p.139; Anlesinya et al., (2019b), p.301]. After concluding this additional stage, 123 articles were selected for full-text reading. The main of this phase was to identify the articles that addressed the research question, which concerned examples of TM practices. To prevent errors, the whole stage was performed separately by an independent analyst who is an expert in qualitative analysis and trained by the authors in the TM concept. Ultimately, the analysts agreed on 62 articles to retain for further analysis.

3.2.3   Descriptive information

Frequency distributions were calculated to characterise the 62 articles comprising the study sample. These are often used in such studies due to their suitability for SLR [Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, (2016), pp.35–37; Anlesinya et al., (2019a), p.151; (2019b), pp.301–303; (2019c), pp.443–444]. This technique enables researchers to present a descriptive framework of the sample articles [Seuring and Gold, (2012), pp.547–548]. The present study focused on publication trends (yearly distribution and the

linear trend of detected articles), publication outlets (distribution by databases and journals), and contextual and methodological assessments.

No relevant articles were detected before 2006. The 62 articles were published between 2006 and September 2020 covering 15 years. Figure 3 shows the yearly distribution of research into TM practices.

Figure 3   Yearly distribution of articles (see online version for colours)
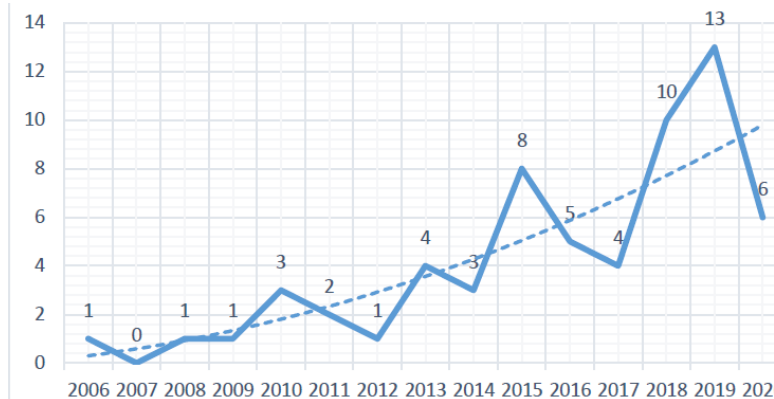
As Figure 3 shows, there was an upward linear trend over the period. There was little interest in the topic for the first half of the period, with only nine English-language articles published in renowned international peer-reviewed journals between 2006 and 2012. This contrasts sharply with a peak in 2019 of 13 articles. This significant increase is probably due to the publication of special issues dedicated to TM. Finally, in the first nine months of 2020, only six articles were detected. This may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting negative psychological atmosphere.

A comparison of the databases shows that ScienceDirect was the leading source of TM articles, followed by Emerald Insight. Overall, the 62 articles were published in 29 different journals. As with previous reviews of TM [e.g., Tarique and Schuler, (2010), p.125; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., (2015), p.267; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen, (2016), p.35; McDonnell et al., (2017), p.91; Anlesinya et al., (2019a), p.151; (2019b), p.302], four journals were the main outlets for the 62 TM articles: *Journal of World Business*, *Human Resources Management Review*, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* and *Thunderbird International Business Review*.

Of the 29 academic journals, 18 are indexed under SSCI, 10 under ESCI, and one under SCOPUS. Consequently, 46 articles in this study were indexed under SSCI, 15 under ESCI, and one article under SCOPUS. More specifically, the leading journals were indexed under SSCI (e.g., *Journal of World Business* – 2019 Impact Factor: 5.194; *Human Resource Management Review* – 2019 Impact Factor: 4.922; and *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* – 2019 Impact Factor: 3.040, etc.). These high-impact journals are stronger contributors to the field. Unsurprisingly, most of the journals belong to *Human Resource Management and Business Management*. Interestingly, however, a number of sampled articles came from journals within tourism management.

Table 2 summarises the methodological approaches of the sampled articles. Over half were empirical while the rest were conceptual/theoretical. Quantitative and qualitative

methods were equally represented in the empirical articles, with only one article using mixed methods. A majority of the quantitative studies used questionnaires to collect data while in-depth interviews were the most preferred data collection tool for the qualitative studies.

Table 2   Methodological assessment

Methodological issues	Frequency
Type of paper	
Empirical	35
Conceptual/theoretical	27
Total	*62*
Research approach	
Qualitative	17
Quantitative	17
Mixed	1
Total	*35*

Most of the authors were based in European institutions followed by authors from Asian institutions. Accordingly, most research concentrated on European companies followed by Asian companies. Most articles primarily examined MNCs. Only one study investigated Turkish MNCs from various industries. A large proportion of the empirical articles focused on the service sector, particularly tourism and hospitality.

3.3   Combined in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis

3.3.1   Research approach

This study used a combination of in-depth structured interviews and qualitative content analysis to systematically identify and deeply analyse the most common TM practices and the functions covering these practices within Turkey's container shipping industry. The following research questions guided the application of this combined method:

Research question 3   What are the most common talent management practices in Turkey's container shipping industry?

Research question 4   Which TM functions cover these practices?

The research process was conducted in accordance with the phenomenological research design. The phenomenology method aims to reveal the distinctive personal views of expert individuals about their experiences, the situations they have witnessed, and their observations during their professional life from the viewpoint of the researcher [Bloor and Wood, (2006), p.128]. Interviews can be used to analyse and commentate on phenomena that occur and form around the interviewee in accordance with the phenomenological research design [Sığrı, (2018), p.186].

Through interviews, researchers can verbally examine the ideas, feelings, perceptions, and realities of individuals regarding a specific subject. The ultimate goal of the interview method is to obtain quality data about the research topic [Sığrı, (2018), p.237]. Structured interviews are conducted in a standardised manner by asking all participants

pre-determined open-ended questions in the same order. The strengths of structured interviews are that they allow producing valid data and enable the responses of the participants to be compared [Van Niekerk and Savin-Baden, (2010), p.33; Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013].

Validity in the interview method is ensured by conducting pilot interviews with subject experts. Several steps should be followed to determine the framework of the research, create the data collection tool, create the interview guide, and ask questions to the participants. After conducting and transcribing the interviews, the data is subjected to qualitative content analysis.

Table 3 Descriptive information regarding interview participants

Profile of the respondents		Quantity
Age	20–30 years	8
	31–40 years	16
	41 years and over	7
Occupation	HR specialist	11
	HR Chief	1
	HR Manager	15
	HR Assistant Manager	2
	HR Business Partner	2
Years of experience within the industry	1–5 years	11
	6–10 years	9
	11–15 years	3
	16–20 years	4
	21 years and over	4
Education	Bachelor's degree	19
	Master's degree	12
Gender	Male	14
	Female	17
Profile of the selected companies		Quantity
Company type	Overseas-based multinational company	12
	Turkish multinational company	12
	Turkish large-scale company	3
	Joint venture (Turkish-foreign)	2
	Company origin container shipping line	11
	Freight forwarder	18

3.3.2 Data collection and expert respondents profiles

The data were obtained through online, structured interviews, the data collection tool was organised around the questions obtained from the current TM literature. To address reliability concerns, five academicians from several institutions critically analysed the interview form (one professor and one associate professor from Dokuz Eylul University,

one professor from the University of Piraeus, one assistant professor from Istanbul University, and one associate professor from Yasar University). They confirmed whether the questions were appropriate and extensive enough to collect the targeted data. To test the validity of the tool, two container shipping HR executives were interviewed using the form. The interviews were repeated after a week to see if the answers were similar. Gathering identical responses guarantees that the data collection form has the requisite validity.

Purposeful (purposive) sampling is frequently used in qualitative research to identify and select samples with extensive knowledge of the relevant phenomenon to use limited resources efficiently. In purposive sampling, in addition to expertise, competence, and knowledge, eligibility and volunteering to take part are also important criteria [Palinkas et al., (2015), p.534]. For our study, 13 HR officials from 11 different container shipping lines and 18 HR executives from 18 different ocean freight forwarders were specified as the research sample via purposeful sampling considering their activeness in the industry, and expertise and command of the field. That is, the final sample included 31 experts from 29 different companies in the container shipping industry. The 11 container shipping lines are listed in the top 20 of Alphaliner Top 100 list while eight of the freight forwarders are members of the Top Ocean Freight Forwarders NVOCC 2020 list and the other ten have well-established HR departments and actively operate TM systems.

The data were obtained between March and September 2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research was mostly conducted remotely, with only five face-to-face interviews at the beginning of March. The other 26 interviews were conducted online. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Most interviews could not be recorded due to the privacy concerns of the participants and their organisations. Therefore, their opinions were recorded word for word transmitted in writing by the interviewer. Table 3 shows the profile of the respondents and information related to the selected companies.

4   Findings

4.1   SLR findings

The most frequently studied TM categories were determined by analysing the content of the 62 articles comprising the sample. Themes and clusters in the content analysis are the main categories and sub-categories found through the SLR. The articles were converted into digital texts for analysis with MAXQDA software. Compatible with the research questions, the relationships between categories are examined using coding matrices. In particular, matrix queries are used to define the main categories and dimensions of concepts, and to make multiple comparisons between cases and concepts [Miles et al., (2014), p.111; Saldana and Omasta, (2018), p.330]. Coding matrices can query data like frequency, duration, coding references, row and column percentages, and coding rate. In this study, coding references and frequencies were used to compare coding differences between categories. Coding references show a collection of keywords for information gathered from data sources, such as interviews, focus groups, web pages, social media postings, articles, or surveys. Special words and characters can be used as operators in coding matrices (Bastug et al., 2020). The most frequently mentioned talent management practices in the literature were determined by employing coding frequencies. In addition,

relationship maps and relationship matrices of codes reflecting talent management practices were created using MAXQDA qualitative content analysis software. Finally, significant connections among TM practices were determined within the scope of the current literature.

Figure 4 Code frequencies by main categories (TM functions) (see online version for colours)

Figure 5 Code cloud of TM practices (see online version for colours)

Figure 4 shows the content analysis of TM practices. Talent retention practices were the most studied topic between 2006 and 2020, followed by talent development and talent acquisition practices. Considering all seven TM functions, the most frequently mentioned of the 81 TM practices were *talent pool*, *succession planning*, *coaching, mentoring and buddying programs*, *employer branding*, *transparent and rapid appraisal and feedback systems* (see Figure 5). As a talent acquisition practice, *talent pool* refers to the database that helps companies track talented job candidates. Talent pools reflect the insights

gained from searching for and recording talent generally instead of searching and hiring specifically to fill vacant positions [Hatum, (2010), p.44].

Talent pools enable companies to readily supply talent for a specific position by eliminating all the processes before the acquisition [Hatum, (2010), p.70]. Another consistently highlighted practice in the current literature is *succession planning*. This is directly related to the substitution of key positions in a firm by identifying potential successors [Garrow and Hirsh, (2008), p.399; Jooss et al., (2019), p.2]. This practice enables companies to fill strategic vacancies with existing talent within the organisation [Hartmann et al., (2010), p.174; Harsch and Festing, (2019), p.268].

The most strongly emphasised talent development practice was *coaching*, *mentoring*, and *buddying programs*. Coaching and mentoring is a kind of developmental relationship between a talent with advanced experience and knowledge and a talent with less experience and knowledge [Ambrosius, (2018), p.57]. The more knowledgeable and experienced talent has a promotive function of supervising and encouraging response and learning in less experienced and knowledgeable talent to encourage the latter's career and individual development [Roberts, (2000), p.162; Naim and Lenka, (2018), p.439; Younas and Bari, (2020), p.1331]. Buddying refers to appointing an experienced talent as the primary contact person for a beginner while they settle into the company. Buddying helps new talents to orient themselves more quickly and develop necessary capabilities regarding business practices [Goh and Okumus, (2020), p.4].

The most often mentioned talent attraction practice was *employer branding*. Vaiman et al. (2012, p.930) emphasise the role of employer branding in talent attraction. This involves taking all necessary steps to publicise the company's reputation as a decent and attractive employer [Backhaus and Tikoo, (2004), p.502; Meyers and van Woerkom, (2014), p.195; King and Vaiman, (2019), p.203].

The most constantly expressed talent retention practice was *transparent and rapid appraisal and feedback systems*. Talented employees feel recognised and more engaged with their company if there is a fair and clear appraisal of their performance and immediate and constructive feedback regarding this appraisal. This in turn reduces their intention to leave [Naim and Lenka, (2018), p.433; Pandita and Ray, (2018), p.189].

The most frequent talent identification practice was *talent review*, which involves identifying employees with competency and developmental potential for the company [Burbach and Royle, (2010), p.424]. This facilitates the creation of talent pools and succession planning [Bolander et al., (2017), p.1526; Jooss et al., (2019), p.12].

The most frequently referred talent planning practice was *work-related social media usage*. Social media usage is rapidly becoming significant in both the business world individuals' daily life [Bitiktas and Tuna, (2020), p.1].

One of the most important methods for any research project is to analyse the connections and relationships between the analytical categories and sub-criteria. MAXQDA qualitative content analysis software enables researchers to examine relationships between pairs of codes, and search for intersections and code proximity [Kuckartz and Rädiker, (2019), pp.160–162].

Figures 6 and 7 together show the most significant relationships among the obtained TM practices. The code relations matrix (Figure 6) shows a meaningful relationship between *talent pool*, *succession planning*, and *talent review*. Talent review facilitates the development of a company's talent pool and succession planning by identifying potential employees [Burbach and Royle, (2010), p.424; Bolander et al., (2017), p.1526; Jooss et al., (2019), p.12].

A significant relationship was also detected between *work-related social media usage* and *employer branding*. The current literature asserts that work-related social media usage is a facilitative tool for employer branding [Walford-Wright and Scott-Jackson, (2018), p.226; Nayak et al., (2018), p.27]. Work-related social media usage was also related to knowledge sharing and management. That is, social media can catalyse knowledge sharing and management through talent development [Naim and Lenka, (2018), p.433].

Figure 6 Code relations matrix by most significant relationships (see online version for colours)

Figure 7 Code map of the most closely interrelated TM practices (see online version for colours)
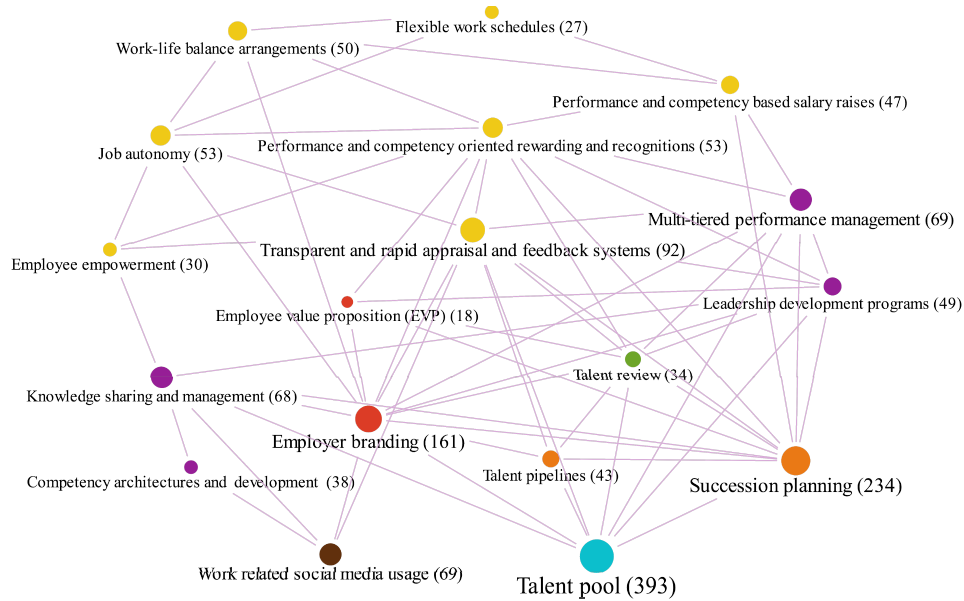
The matrix shows a connection between *flexible work schedules* and *work-life balance arrangements*. Previous studies have also found that flexible work schedules support a better work-life balance [Li et al., (2019), p.1098; Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, (2019), p.3872].

Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li (2016, p.277) verify another meaningful relationship from the present study by claiming that *multi-tiered performance management serves two main goals: performance and competency oriented rewarding and recognition and identification of training needs*.

The final relationship identified by the analysis is between *leadership development programs* and *succession planning*. Groves (2007, p.240) confirms this by asserting that integrating succession planning and leadership development programs is the best way of identifying, developing, and deploying talents with leadership potential.

4.2   In-depth interview findings

An inductive approach was adopted for the general analysis process and coding. This allowed the personal views and tendencies of the participants to be transferred to the results independently of the opinions of the researcher. The coding process was based on the coding paradigm proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990). This begins with open coding before combining the axis codes. Themes are then created by selective coding. During the coding process, the texts are read repeatedly to create first-stage codes. These codes, revealed by using the interview questions as umbrella categories, are then grouped under themes regarding their relations with each other. These resulting themes should next be explained both by using language that readers can easily understand and through visual analysis. Finally, the findings are interpreted to gain a clear understanding of the findings from the analysis. Table 4 provides an example of the code and category building followed in the present study.

Table 4   Coding and categorisation example of the data analysis process

Question: What kind of procedures and practices are followed in your company to develop talent?				
Theme	*Category*	*Code*	*Raw data*	*Researcher's interpretation*
TM practices	Talent development	Specialised training and learning programs	"We try to increase the experience and perspective of talented employees through coaching and mentoring practices to enable them to reflect their competencies and abilities to the work."	Participant states that coaching and mentoring practices are effective in talent development

The first step in reporting the findings is presenting the main themes, followed by descriptions of the theme-based categories and then the visual interpretation of the findings. The relationships among the codes were explained and their overall meanings were determined by interpreting cause-effect relations among the findings.

The theme of TM practises was examined under seven categories: *talent planning*, *talent identification*, *talent attraction*, *talent acquisition*, *talent development*, *talent deployment*, and *talent retention* (see Figure 8). The most frequently mentioned category in the interviews was *talent development*.

The talent development category had three different codes: specialised training and learning programs, coaching/mentoring, and job rotation. Participants highlighted the

importance of specialised training and learning programs (see Figure 9), emphasising that these practices play an important role in talent development. They also stated that these practices combined various distinct programs and activities like in-house training programs and cooperation with contractual institutions on subjects such as foreign language education (see Table 5).

Figure 8 TM practices under TM functions (code frequencies) (see online version for colours)
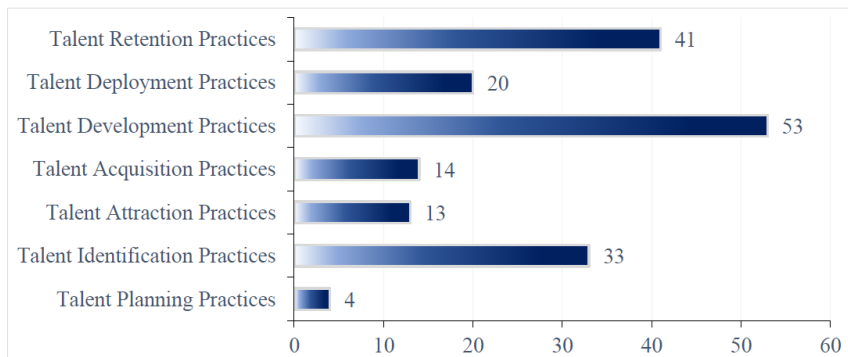

Table 5 Selected participant statements regarding talent development practices

Participant	Statement
Part. 16	"We organise in-house training sessions structured according to our employees' competencies and the talent requirements of the company. Besides, we encourage and facilitate the participation of our talented employees in conferences and seminars related to their fields and specialities."
Part. 26	"Continuous in-house training programs and external learning programs that are structured according to the needs of the employees and company, together are our primary talent development methods. With the training provided in accordance with the company objectives, existing talents are developed, and career paths are routed."

Another frequently mentioned category within talent management practices was talent retention, which was defined by five different codes: *intrinsic/extrinsic rewards*, *value alignment and employee commitment efforts*, *employee suggestions and feedback schemes*, *team spirit*, *team building and socialising activities*, and *flexible work schedules*. Participants frequently emphasised the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in talent retention (see Table 6).

Table 6 Selected participant statements regarding talent retention practices

Participant	Statement
Part. 10	"We support our talented employees with reward systems such as salary increases and promotions to reduce and eliminate their turnover intentions."
Part. 11	"With our reward system, we show that we value and recognise the work of talented employees. High performing employees are honoured every four quarters with the name 'employee of the quarter'. When people are encouraged and appreciated, they work much more efficiently and happily. Accordingly, they feel engaged in their jobs and their commitment to the company increases."

One of the three most frequently repeated categories within talent management practices was talent identification, which was specified by three codes: *extensive trainee/internship programs*, *talent reviews*, and a *combined method of assessment centre/360-degree feedback/personality measures*. According to the participants, potential talents can be identified through extensive trainee/internship programs (see Table 7).

Table 7   Selected participant statements regarding talent identification practices

Participant	Statement
Part. 23	"We have extensive internship and trainee programs. In this way, we have the chance to observe the talents of students who study maritime transport and logistics while turning their theoretical knowledge into practice. And we continue to work part-time or full-time with candidates who have had a successful internship period."
Part. 30	"First of all, we try to start the talent identification period by recruiting interns from career days. We continue the process by evaluating the potential and performance of candidates through practices such as internal training and development programs and job rotation with the help of multi-trait assessment methods."

Another important category within talent management practices was talent deployment, specified by two codes: talent *pipelines and succession planning* and *talent relocation*. The participants asserted that, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, succession planning has become more important. Thanks to talent pipelines and succession planning, vacancies due to illness or similar issues can be easily filled with sufficient and competent reserves thereby preventing the disruption of the company's operations (see Table 8).

Table 8   Selected participant statements regarding talent deployment practices

Participant	Statement
Part 1	"Thanks to having a good succession plan, during the pandemic period we have been able to quickly relocate our employees that we previously assigned and subjected to necessary development processes to roles that were vacated due to illness and similar essential reasons."
Part. 13	"We witness that many companies have difficulties in backing up under pandemic conditions. Having a succession plan constantly fed by a wide range of talent pipelines saved us from this situation."

Table 9   Selected participant statements regarding talent acquisition practices

Participant	Statement
Part. 2	"The talented and high-potential candidates that we identified through internship programs are incorporated into our talent pool and we try to bring them to our company by offering over-market working and wage conditions."
Part. 6	"In constant contact with relevant educational institutions, we identify candidates with high potential and include them in the talent pool that we have developed. We try to keep our pool up to date with internal and external reference-based feedback systems."

Talent acquisition was defined by two codes: *talent pool* and *onsite recruitment*. Participants explained the importance of talent pools, stating that high-potential

individuals are included in talent pools so that they can be employed quickly when needed (see Table 9).

Talent attraction was specified by two codes: *visits and attendance to career fairs and career days*, and *employee value proposition/employer branding*. Participants talked extensively about the value of career days, which they frequently attend to promote their companies (see Table 10).

Table 10   Selected participant statements regarding to talent attraction practices

Participant	Statement
Part. 16	"We attach great importance to attendance in career days. Thanks to participation in career days, we have the opportunity to introduce our company to high potential candidates and to attract them."
Part. 18	"Through the visits to career days and fairs, we can reach candidates with high talent potential and impress them by promoting our company. We include talented candidates who contact us as a result of these visits to our internship programs."

Figure 9   TM practices in the Turkish container shipping industry (see online version for colours)
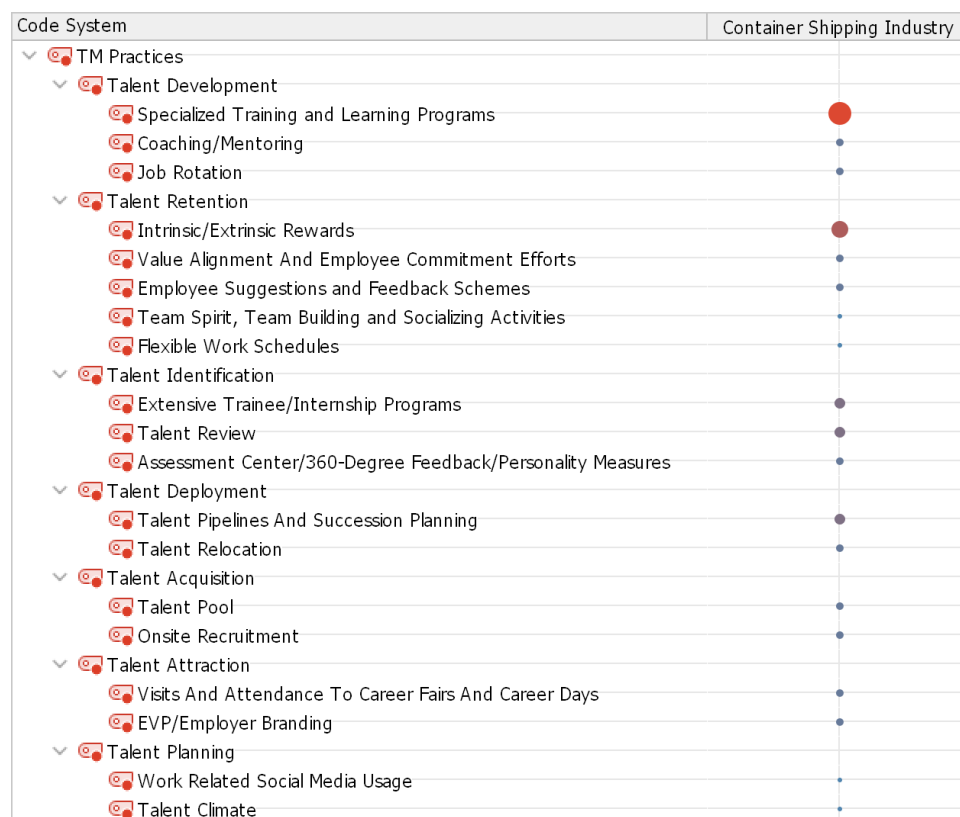
The last category mentioned under the theme of talent management practices was talent planning, which was specified by two codes: *work-related social media usage* and *talent climate*. According to the participants, social media is present in all areas of life, so it

must be integrated into business life. The use of social media, which occupies a great place in the lives of employees and individuals, facilitates talent planning if it is integrated into all functions of talent management (see Table 11).

Table 11   Selected participant statements regarding talent planning practices

Participant	Statement
Part. 14	"As a manager, I think work-related social media usage is a practice that allows the company to plan and coordinate all processes within the talent management system. I think it is of great importance that company members are connected and in constant communication on social media in matters such as employer branding, talent reviews, knowledge sharing, organisational identity and value alignment."
Part. 28	"Branding and work related social media usage are very important. Talent only comes where it can shine."

Figure 9 shows that the participants working in the container shipping industry have the strongest opinions regarding *specialised training and learning programs* and *intrinsic/extrinsic rewards*. Figure 10 shows that while the participants mentioned specialised training and learning programs, they also referred to other practices such as job rotation and coaching mentoring. While giving their opinion on intrinsic/extrinsic rewards, which is a talent retention practice, they also frequently gave opinions about employee suggestions and feedback schemes. Finally, they often mentioned extensive trainee/internship programs and talent reviews, which are facilitators of talent pools.

Figure 10   Code map of TM practices (see online version for colours)
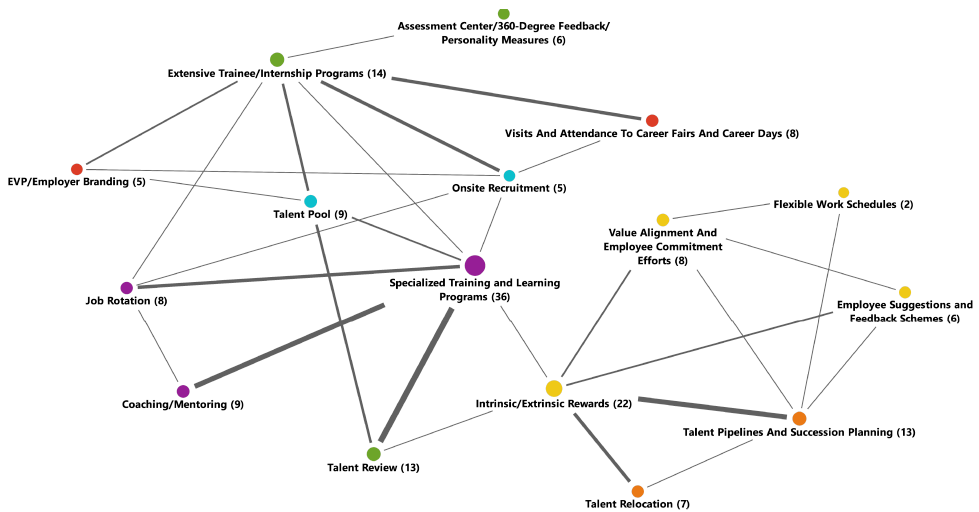
5   Discussion

This study produced several significant findings. First, it provided a detailed and systematic segmentation and classification of TM practices under seven core TM functions. Second, it showed how Turkish shipping companies implement TM practices under these functions. Third, it showed that the rankings of TM practices in the literature

differ from practices in Turkey's container shipping industry. For example, interviewees paid more attention to *talent development* practices than *talent retention* practices whereas the latter is frequently studied in the literature.

Regarding the in-depth interviews, the talent development function was indicated by three different practices: *specialised training and learning programs*, *coaching/mentoring*, and *job rotation*. MSC, for example, has a specialised training and learning program called the talent development centre. This centre continuously evaluates the training and educational needs of current talents and provides individualised learning programs to enhance their performance and potential. Turkish companies within the container shipping industry trust in their talents' skills and competencies while assigning more knowledgeable and experienced talents as buddies to newcomers. For example, MAERSK globally implements a *student assistant* program for all talents to speed up their orientation and develop necessary capabilities regarding best business practices. MSC runs an adaptation and job rotation program called *MyRoute*, which allows new talents to experience different positions every three months. This allows them to adapt to the whole process and develop necessary competencies about the current workflow.

Talent retention stands out as an extremely prominent function in both the literature and among industry actors. Within the talent retention practices, *transparent and rapid appraisal and feedback systems* was most emphasised in the literature. The fair and clear appraisal of their performance and immediate and constructive feedback regarding this appraisal makes talented employees feel more recognised and engage with their company, thereby reducing their intention to leave [Naim and Lenka, (2018), p.433; Pandita and Ray, (2018), p.189]. In contrast, the container shipping industry interviewees paid more attention to *intrinsic/extrinsic rewards* as a talent retention practice. Throughout the industry, there is a belief that this is the best way of showing talented employees that their potential and performance are recognised, appreciated, and valued. The participants stated that rewards motivate talents to work much more effectively and happily, which in increases their work engagement and commitment to the company.

A significant difference regarding TM practices between the current literature and Turkey's container shipping industry is that the participant companies dwell on talent identification practices in contrast to the literature. The interviews showed that these companies specify the talent identification function by three different practices: *extensive trainee/internship programs*, *talent reviews*, and a combined method of *assessment centre/360-degree feedback/personality measures*. The first of these enables the company to find employees with required competencies and developmental potential [Burbach and Royle, (2010), p.424].

According to the container shipping industry participants, talent acquisition comes after talent identification. A talent pool is a database where HR officials record all potential talent candidates for the company. This includes not only job applicants but also potential candidates suggested by experienced talents and internal candidates, such as those on internships. Some container shipping lines, such as Maersk and CMA CGM, gather candidates for hire through electronic talent pools. These pools also inform candidates about what the shipping company offers, the key responsibilities of the candidate, and who the shipping company is looking for. Talent pools enable companies to readily supply talent for a specific position by eliminating all the processes before the recruitment of the talent. *Succession planning* under the function of talent deployment was the most studied practice, which is directly related to the substitution of the key

positions [Garrow and Hirsh, (2008), p.399; Jooss et al., (2019), p.2]. Participants noted that, during the pandemic, they could quickly relocate employees that they previously assigned and subjected to necessary development processes to roles that were open due to illness or other reasons due to well-established succession planning.

The interviews revealed that other talent management practices provided great benefits to companies during the pandemic. *Flexible work schedules* enabled them to quickly adapt as they already had procedures like working from home and alternate working. With the help of a talent pool, companies could also easily and quickly fill vacancies because of illnesses with external talents that had already been identified.

This finding coincides with those of previous studies within the SLR. In the literature, talent attraction practices are moderately studied and represented by *employer branding* among the frequently studied terms. The findings of the in-depth interviews demonstrated that companies in Turkey's container shipping industry (e.g., Arkas and Turkon) pay attention to visiting and participating in career days at maritime schools and universities. According to the interviewees, these visits contribute to their employer brand and promotes their company's reputation as a decent and preferred employer. This makes it easier to attract high-potential candidates for their talent pools. Similarly, Vaiman et al. (2012, p.930) noted the key role of employer branding in talent attraction.

Unfortunately, the least mentioned TM function by both the respondents and from the SLR is talent planning. Among the talent planning practices, *work-related social media usage* was the most frequently mentioned practice. The significance of social media usage is expanding rapidly in the business world as in individuals' daily life (Bitiktas and Tuna, 2020). Walford-Wright and Scott-Jackson (2018, p.226) claim that social media is an important tool in talent attraction. Similarly, Nayak et al. (2018, p.27) state that work-related social media usage is not only essential in talent attraction but also increasingly used for talent identification, talent acquisition, and talent retention. Naim and Lenka (2018, p.433) highlight the importance of social media in talent development by catalysing knowledge sharing and tightening the connections between their employees.

In parallel, the container shipping industry representatives evaluated social media usage as a practice that allows them to plan and coordinate all processes within the talent management system. The participants asserted that company members must be connected and in constant communication on social media in matters such as employer branding, knowledge sharing, organisational identity, and value alignment. Another frequently mentioned talent planning practice was talent climate. The participants stated that talented candidates are attracted to companies that value their ideas, skills, and that the main purpose is to encourage continuous improvement so that they can more easily demonstrate their potential in these environments. They frequently mentioned the importance of creating a climate that makes employees feel this directly by prioritising development and a value-centred mentality in the formation of the general talent management system.

6   Conclusions

This study responded to the limited amount of empirical studies of TM issues by empirically examining TM practices under TM functions in Turkey's container shipping industry. Several TM important researchers have claimed that TM research is dominated

by Anglo-Saxon societies, which requires a solid contribution by other countries and cultures to fully analyse and understand distinctive perspectives and practices within TM [Vaiman et al., (2012), p.926; Pandita and Ray, (2018), p.188; Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, (2019), p.3861; Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo, (2019), p.177; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., (2020), p.460]. In addition, TM researchers assert that it is essential to investigate TM practices in different industries and emerging economies to develop them as a recognised domain [Farndale et al., (2010), p.161; Latukha, (2015), p.1056; (2018), p.73; Latukha and Selivanovskikh, (2016), p.169; Thunnissen, (2016), p.69; Khoreva and Kostanek, (2019), p.412]. Thus, our study makes an important contribution by responding to these needs. TM-oriented subjects have not been widely researched, either in shipping contexts or in Turkey. Indeed, this study is the first to examine TM practices in the container shipping industry.

Our findings show that industry-leading companies identify TM as a strategic priority. This study aimed to investigate the details of this priority and create a resource to guide companies that have recently entered the industry or wish to strengthen their current standing using data from actors within the industry. The in-depth examination of TM practices within the context of the Turkish container shipping industry demonstrated that *specialised training and learning programs*, *intrinsic/extrinsic rewards*, *succession planning*, and *talent pools* are the most highlighted practices within this industry.

Talent development is of great importance for both main actors (container shipping lines and ocean freight forwarders) (Groysberg and Abbott, 2012; Yildiz and Esmer, 2021). Some leading companies have even been rewarded internationally for their talent development programs. However, in the container shipping lines that dominate the sector, their focus has gradually turned to external talents and talent acquisition through *talent pool* practices (Groysberg and Abbot, 2012; Yildiz and Esmer, 2021). Meanwhile, in line with Yildiz and Esmer (2021), ocean freight forwarders still focus on in-house talent while succession planning is considered a more valuable practice than talent pool for filling critical positions.

This particular finding, suggests that follower companies should determine the focus of their talent management system: whether it should be internal or external talents. Indeed, the starting point for the work was a conversation with industry representatives who mentioned that retaining talent had recently become very difficult and sometimes they felt helpless regarding this issue. The study revealed the reality of this challenge in that talent retention is a real concern in Turkey's container shipping industry. This study offers a solution by revealing the most common talent retention practices in both the literature and the container shipping industry by highlighting the choices of leading industry representatives and revealing the distinctions between the current literature and industry.

One of the primary limitations of the study was the difficulty of conducting face-to-face interviews due to the pandemic conditions. These conditions placed a heavy burden on HR, such as part-time work arrangements and private insurance applications. This made it hard to contact and approach the targeted executives and significantly reduced their willingness to take part in the research. Therefore, data collection took longer. Another limitation is that the TM functions and the classification and segmentation of TM practices were only tested by qualitative methods. Future studies can therefore evaluate these concepts using quantitative approaches, such as multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) methods and surveys.

This study is a pioneer in examining the TM function in more depth. Therefore, it has created a resource that can greatly help in determining starting points and road maps. With the help of this study, well-established criteria for TM functions and practices have been revealed and presented. These can be used by future studies operating on MCDM methodology. Finally, this work provides a valuable guide and benchmark tool for studies examining TM components in the shipping industry specifically.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

Table A1   TM practices categorised on the basis of TM functions and hierarchy of SLR codes

Ranking	TM functions	Category codes	Authors	Ranking	Practices	Criteria codes
6	Talent planning	TP	Kock and Burke (2008), Burbach and Royle (2010), Pilbeam and Corbridge (2010), Sparrow and Makram (2015), Pandita and Ray (2018)	1	Work-related social media usage	TP10
				2	Top management and leadership support	TP5
				3	TM-oriented workforce planning	TP11
				4	Talent mind-set	TP1
				5	TM oriented workforce differentiation	TP7
				6	TM oriented diversity management	TP8
				7	Retirement planning	TP12
				8	Enterprise-wide talent data systems	TP6
				9	Talent planning and organisation tool	TP9
				9	Talent analytics	TP3
				9	Talent gap analysis	TP4
				10	Talent climate	TP2
7	Talent identification	TI	Kock and Burke (2008), Farndale et al. (2010), McDonnell et al. (2011), Jones et al. (2012), Björkman et al. (2013), Skuza et al. (2013), Festing and Schäfer (2014), Meyers and van Woerkom, (2014), Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015, 2020), Latukha (2015), Mensah (2015), Morley et al. (2015), Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016), Bolander et al. (2017), McDonnell et al. (2017), Tlaiss et al. (2017), Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss (2018), Li et al. (2018), Bonneton et al. (2019), Jooss et al. (2019), Khoreva and Kostanek (2019), Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2019), Pantouvakis and Karakasnaki (2019), Lai and Ishizaka (2020), Meyers et al. (2020)	1	Talent review	TI1
				2	Extensive trainee/internship programs	TI9
				3	Assessment centre	TI3
				4	Personality measures	TI6
				4	360-degree feedback	TI5
				5	University links	TI7
				6	Competency mapping	TI8
				6	Career websites	TI4
				7	Talent assessment	TI2

Table A1 TM practices categorised on the basis of TM functions and hierarchy of SLR codes (continued)

Ranking	TM functions	Category codes	Authors	Ranking	Practices	Criteria codes
5	Talent Attraction	TA	Lewis and Heckman (2006), Iles et al. (2010), Festing et al. (2013), Festing and Schäfer (2014), Meyers and van Woerkom (2014), Schiemann (2014), Sidani and Al Ariss (2014), Ewerlin and Süß (2016), Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016), Latukha and Selivanovskikh (2016), Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li (2016), McDonnell et al. (2017), Chung and D'Annunzio-Green (2018), Pandita and Ray (2018), Anlesinya et al. (2019c), Crowley-Henry et al. (2019), King and Vaiman (2019), Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2020), Harsch and Festing (2020), Kravariti and Johnston (2020), Younas and Bari (2020)	1	Employer branding	TA2
				2	Career path alternatives	TA13
				3	Career orientation	TA5
				4	Employee value proposition (EVP)	TA1
				5	Over-market wages	TA8
				6	Employer of choice image	TA3
				7	Visits to career fairs, career days and recruitment expos	TA6
				8	HR marketing	TA12
				8	Transparent pay structures	TA9
				8	Start-up funds	TA10
				8	Career development opportunities	TA7
				9	Employee referral programs	TA14
				10	Career entrepreneurship	TA4
				10	Job attractiveness	TA11
3	Talent acquisition	TAC	Kock and Burke (2008), Burbach and Royle (2010), Schuler et al. (2011), Cooke et al. (2014), Schiemann (2014), Khilji et al. (2015), Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li (2016), Tafti et al. (2017), Ahammad et al. (2018), Nayak et al. (2018), Pandita and Ray (2018), Anlesinya et al. (2019b)	1	Talent pool	TAC6
				2	Employee-brand fit	TAC3
				3	Talent profiles	TAC5
				4	Critical job identification	TAC2
				5	Headhunting	TAC4
				6	E-recruiting	TAC1
				7	Onsite recruitment	TAC7

Table A1   TM practices categorised on the basis of TM functions and hierarchy of SLR codes (continued)

Ranking	TM functions	Category codes	Authors	Ranking	Practices	Criteria codes
2	Talent development	TD	Hartmann et al. (2010), Iles et al. (2010), Tarique and Schuler (2010), Preece et al. (2011), Garavan et al. (2012), Jones et al. (2012), Dries (2013), Skuza et al. (2013), Thunnissen et al. (2013), Al Ariss et al. (2014), Meyers and van Woerkom (2014), Sidani and Aal Ariss (2014), Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015), Khilji et al. (2015), Latukha (2015, 2018), Mensah (2015), Morley et al. (2015), Ewerlin and Süß (2016), Latukha and Selivanovskikh (2016), Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li (2016), Tatoglu et al. (2016), Thunnissen (2016), Bolander et al. (2017), McDonnell et al. (2017), Tafti et al. (2017), Tlaiss et al. (2017), Li et al. (2018), Rezaei and Beyerlein (2018), Muratbekova-Touron et al. (2017), Naim and Lenka (2014), Pandita and Ray (2018), Anlesinya et al. (2019a), Bonneton et al. (2019), Crane and Hartwell (2019), Golubovskaya et al. (2019), King and Vaiman (2019), Pantouvakis and Karakasnaki (2019), Harsch and Festing (2020), Younas and Bari (2020)	1	Coaching, mentoring and buddying programs	TD2
				2	Multi-tiered performance management	TD10
				3	Knowledge sharing and management	TD8
				4	Leadership development programs	TD4
				5	Job rotation and internal mobility	TD1
				6	Competency architectures and development	TD11
				7	Specialised training and learning programs	TD5
				8	Advanced education opportunities (MBA/PhD)	TD14
				9	Overseas training programs	TD9
				10	Project teams	TD16
				11	Job shadowing	TD3
				11	Professional career pathways	TD17
				12	In-house training and learning programs	TD7
				13	Peer learning	TD12
				14	Action learning sets	TD15
				15	Critical skills gap analysis	TD6
				16	Anytime-anywhere learning	TD13
4	Talent deployment	TDP	McDonnell et al. (2011), Vaiman et al. (2012), Valverde et al. (2013), Dries (2013), Mensah (2015), Ewerlin and Süß (2016), Thunnissen (2016), Thunnissen and Buttiens (2017), Chung and D'Annunzio-Green (2018), Latukha (2018), Pandita and Ray (2018), Jooss et al. (2019), Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2019), Harsch and Festing (2020)	1	Succession planning	TDP2
				2	Talent pipelines	TDP3
				3	Differentiated HR architecture	TDP4
				4	Talent relocation	TDP1
				5	Internal talent market places	TDP5
				6	Open job posting systems	TDP6

Table A1 TM practices categorised on the basis of TM functions and hierarchy of SLR codes (continued)

Ranking	TM functions	Category codes	Authors	Ranking	Practices	Criteria codes
1	Talent retention	TR	Burbach and Royle (2010), Tarique and Schuler (2010), Bethke-Langenegger et al. (2011), Preece et al. (2011), Schuler et al. (2011), Skuza et al. (2013), Cappelli and Keller (2014), Festing and Schäfer (2014), Meyers and van Woerkom (2014), Khilji et al. (2015), Latukha (2015), Mensah (2015), Latukha and Selivanovskikh (2016), Hedayati-Mehdiabadi and Li (2016), McDonnell et al. (2017), Li et al. (2018), Muratbekova-Touron et al. (2018), Naim and Lenka (2014), Pandita and Ray (2018), Anlesinya et al. (2019a, 2019b, 2019c), Bonneton et al. (2019), Crane and Hartwell (2019), Crowley-Henry et al. (2019), Li et al. (2019), Harsch and Festing (2020), Younas and Bari (2020)	1	Transparent and rapid appraisal and feedback systems	TR21
				2	Intrinsic/extrinsic rewards	TR2
				3	Job autonomy	TR19
				3	Performance and competency oriented rewarding and recognition systems	TR13
				4	Work-life balance arrangements	TR3
				5	Social, quality, and positive working environment	TR10
				6	Performance and competency based salary raises	TR15
				7	Employee empowerment	TR11
				8	Flexible work schedules	TR20
				9	On-boarding	TR1
				10	Interesting and challenging tasks	TR23
				11	Fast-track career development opportunities	TR17
				12	Performance and competency oriented remuneration packages	TR14
				13	Merit-based promotion opportunities	TR24
				13	Career advancement/development opportunities	TR5
				14	Individual development plans	TR6
				14	Employee stock-option	TR7
				15	Highly competitive compensation	TR4
				16	Team spirit and team building	TR18
				16	Relationship building and management systems	TR25
				17	Supportive work climate	TR26
				17	High-flyer programs	TR22
				18	Strong social security	TR16
				18	Company-sponsored social events	TR9
				19	Employee suggestions schemes	TR8
				20	Value alignment	TR12

Appendix 2

Table A2   TM practices categorised on the basis of TM functions and hierarchy of codes from interview findings

Ranking	TM functions	Category codes	Ranking	Practices	Criteria codes	Description
7	Talent planning	TP	1	Work-related social media usage	TP10	Work-related social media usage is a practice that allows the company to plan and coordinate all processes within the talent management system by benefitting from social media platforms.
			2	Talent climate	TP2	Talent climate is the strategic climate at the corporate level that can be developed by the application of a strong talent management system to create a common perception among employees that the company values talent and its contribution to the business objectives, in order to support talented employees and the development of their talent potential [King, (2017), p.301].
3	Talent identification	TI	1	Extensive trainee/internship programs	TI9	This allows companies to observe talented students while turning their theoretical knowledge into action. It also lets them continue working part-time or full-time with candidates who have had a successful internship period.
			2	Talent review	TI1	The talent review is a detailed analysis of each employee's ability and desire to perform, adapt, and develop regarding the work flow that allows the company to reach business objectives. Reviews are typically conducted by HR and involve detailed interviews with each employee and manager in the company, beginning with the most entry-level employees to the management team (Burbach and Royle, 2010; King and Vaiman, 2019).
			3	Assessment centre/360-degree feedback/personality measures	TI3/TI6/TI5	An assessment centre is a practice that takes candidates under standard conditions through a combination of group and individual exercises which simulates the conditions of a particular job. Observers judge the candidate's behaviour, which can serve as the basis for valuable estimates of the candidate's potential (Harsch and Festing, 2020). 360-degree feedback is a system of collecting anonymous feedback about an employee from parties with whom they have a business relationship (Chabault et al., 2012). Personality measures aim to describe aspects of an employee's personality that remain steady across work life, the employee's character pattern of behaviour, thoughts, and feelings (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015).
6	Talent attraction	TA	1	Visit and attendance to career fairs and career days	TA6	Visits to career days and fairs allow companies to reach candidates with high talent potential and let them impress these potential talents by promoting themselves.
			2	Employee value proposition (EVP)/employer branding	TA1/TA2	An EVP summarises what employees can expect to receive from the company in exchange for the work they perform. (Hatum, 2010). Employer branding is an ability of a company to differentiate and promote itself as a desired place to work for the candidates that they are interested in hiring (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).
5	Talent acquisition	TAC	1	Talent pool	TAC6	A talent pool is a database where potential candidates who want to work or can work in a company are stored. A talent pool is the sum of potential talents that are not currently considered for a role but can be recruited in a time of need (Kock and Burke, 2008).
			2	Onsite recruitment	TAC7	This is a practice in which a recruitment agency effectively becomes an integral part of the company and conducts all aspects of that company's recruitment processes (Singh and Sharma, 2015).

Table A2 TM practices categorised on the basis of TM functions and hierarchy of codes from interview findings (continued)

Ranking	TM functions	Category codes	Ranking	Practices	Criteria codes	Description
1	Talent Development	TD	1	Specialised training and learning programs	TD5	Via this practice companies continuously evaluate the training and education needs of current talents and provide individualised learning programs to enhance the performance and potential of their existing talents.
			2	Coaching/mentoring	TD2	Coaching is a form of development practice in which an experienced talent, by providing training and guidance, supports a potential talent to learn the workflow and adapt to the culture of the company (Cooke et al., 2014). Mentoring is a mutual and collaborative willpower relationship that usually occurs between a senior and a new talent for the purpose of adaptation, training and development (Roberts, 2000).
			3	Job rotation	TD1	Job rotation is the lateral movement of employees in different job roles that enrich their knowledge, skills, competencies, ability to work in different roles, and experience (Lewis and Heckman, 2006).
4	Talent Deployment	TDP	1	Talent pipelines and succession planning	TDP3/TDP2	A talent pipeline is the system which contains details such as potential external talents suitable to fill critical positions or existing talents of the company that are likely to be promoted (Burbach and Royle, 2010). Succession planning is the practice in which existing talents are appointed and developed to fill senior leadership and management positions, as well as other critical job positions (Bolander et al., 2017).
			2	Talent relocation	TDP1	Talent relocation refers to the practice of a company choosing to move an existing talent from one branch to another in a higher position or on more favourable terms, often by persuading them with certain benefits (Latukha, 2018).
2	Talent Retention	TR	1	Intrinsic/extrinsic rewards	TR2	An intrinsic reward is an intangible recognition, a sense of accomplishment, or conscious satisfaction given by the company to honour talented employees (Crowley-Henry et al., 2019). Extrinsic rewards are financial or tangible rewards, such as pay raises, bonuses, and benefits, usually given to talented employees regarding their performance or other achievements (Tlaiss et al., 2017).
			2	Value alignment and employee commitment efforts	TR12	Value alignment is a practice which consists of efforts about how a talent's personal values, personal vision/mission, and goals align with the desired values, mission/vision, and goals of the company (Cui et al., 2018).
			3	Employee suggestions and feedback schemes	TR8	Employee suggestions schemes can be described as a regular mechanism which promotes talents to contribute constructive ideas for improvement of the workflow (Cooke et al., 2014).
			4	Team spirit, team building and socialising activities	TR18	Team building is a practice used to improve social relationships among employees and often involves collaborative tasks. Team spirit is a practice aimed at developing the feelings of pride and loyalty that enable employees to want their teams to be good or the best (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2019)
			5	Flexible work schedules	TR20	Flexible schedules allow employees to take the initiative in their arrival and departure times or to choose the days they work (Tlaiss et a., 2017).