

## THE EFFECT OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ON EMPLOYEES ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

Daniel GAJDA<sup>1\*</sup>, Przemysław ZBIEROWSKI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Human Resources Management, University of Economics in Katowice;  
daniel.gajda@ue.katowice.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-6074-6854

<sup>2</sup> Department of Human Resources Management, University of Economics in Katowice;  
przemyslaw.zbierowski@ue.katowice.pl, ORCID: 000-0001-6144-1940

\* Correspondence author

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to explore employees' reactions to talent management (TM), given the controversy around this issue. Specifically, the study presented here aims to determine the impact of TM practices perceived by the talent pool members on their work engagement and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The study also investigates the role of perceived distributive and procedural justice as an psychological processes that are involved in shaping the employees' reactions.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The authors surveyed 730 participants of talent pools from 33 large companies, each of which has its own well-developed TM program. A series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed to test the hypotheses.

**Findings:** The study shows that TM practices perceived by employees in talent pools have a positive direct and indirect (via perceived distributive justice) effects on their work engagement and OCB. The results also reveal that perception of procedural justice moderates the impact of perceived distributive justice on talent pool members' engagement and OCB.

**Originality/value:** Although TM has received considerable attention in the practitioner and academic literature, very little is known about its long-term consequences, especially on performance-related attitudes and behaviors of employees. This seems to be an important omission as their reactions should influence how effective TM programs are. Present study is one of very few studies to investigate the effects of TM practices at the individual level, thus delivering added value to the study domain.

**Keywords:** talent management, work engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational justice.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary economic realities, characterised by intense market competition, high dynamics of changes in the organizations' environment and declining demand due to the recent lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to a significant increase in risk and uncertainty in managing the organization. These tendencies have contributed to the weakening of bonds between employees and employers who, facing difficult market conditions, are unable to provide their staff with stable, long-term employment. This elicits employees' dissatisfaction with their work, lower engagement and willingness to change the job (Rožman et al., 2021). In response to the economic challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, organization's decision-makers implements TM programs to mitigate the loss of talented employees and meet the organization's current and future competency needs (Seopa et al., 2015; Mwila, Turay, 2018).

Presently, TM is perceived by academics and practitioners as one of the priorities in management of an organization (Khoreva et al., 2017; Anlesinya et al., 2019). This is primarily due to the growing competition among companies for a limited resources of talented employees, which is called in the literature 'the war for talent' (Joss et al., 2023). Despite the ongoing discussion on TM over the past few decades, this issue has still not reached theoretical maturity and requires further development. Specifically, there is a shortage of satisfactory empirical evidence confirming that companies' efforts in the field of TM have a positive impact on employees' attitudes and behavior. Some studies (e.g., Björkman et al., 2013; Gelens et al., 2014) confirm that such a relationship exists, while others report that TM causes negative reactions of employees, such as a feeling of stress and insecurity (Dries, Pepermans, 2008) or identity struggles at work (Tansley, Tietze, 2013). Owing to the existing research gap, managers lack scientific grounds to make decisions about talented individuals.

Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to determine the impact of TM practices on the work engagement and OCB of talented employees, that is attitudes and behavior that have been associated with organizational outcomes in previous research. The study expands the knowledge of employees' reactions to TM and, consequently, provides an enhanced insight into the results of this process at the individual level, given the controversy around this issue. To better understand how TM affects employees' reactions, we also explored the underlying mechanism that link TM practices to work engagement and OCB. In addition, the manuscript advances current research on determinants of employees' attitudes and behavior. The research was carried out within the research project no. 2017/27/B/HS4/02172 and 2018/31/N/HS4/03936, funded by the National Science Centre, Poland.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1. Talent management

TM is actually a multilevel construct consisting of distinct, hierarchically ordered components, that is, principles, policies, programs and practices (De Boeck et al., 2017). Existing literature operationalize these components at different, interdependent levels of abstraction. Ordered from more to less abstract, principles, policies and programs are all considered as global components designed by organizational leaders and human resources (HR) managers. In contrast, TM practices represent less abstract component that depend on how well TM programs are implemented by lower level managers (De Boeck et al., 2017). As the practices are situated at the lowest level of abstraction, in this paper TM is operationalized as a set of human resources management (HRM) practices focused on remarkably talented people in the organization, which includes networking, internal project teams, special tasks to stimulate learning, in-house development programs, cross-disciplinary project working, instructor-led off the job training, formal career plans, coaching, mentoring, assessment centers, graduate development programs, succession plans, high-flier schemes, university courses, training in international operations, short-term international systems, international project teams, internal and external secondments, and job rotation (Tatoglu et al., 2016).

### 2.2. Work engagement

Work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2006, p. 702). *Vigor* is characterized by high level of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and being persistent even in the face of difficulties. *Dedication* reflects a strong involvement in one’s work and feeling of significance, enthusiasm, pride, inspiration, and challenge. Finally, *absorption* refers to being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work (Robijn et al., 2020). Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities, and they see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their jobs (Zhang et al., 2019).

### 2.3. OCB

OCB’s are work-related activities performed by employee that are discretionary, so do not directly or explicitly recognized by scope of job description (do not belong to the formal duties of employees) but foster the effective and efficient functioning of the organization (Jehanzeb, 2021). Podsakoff et al. (1990) organized different types of OCB’s into five categories or dimensions: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue.

*Altruism* involves voluntarily helping others with organizationally relevant tasks or work-related problems. *Conscientiousness* entails behaviors that go well beyond the minimum role requirements of the organization in terms of attendance, obeying rules and regulations, taking breaks, and so forth. *Sportsmanship* is a willingness to tolerate the inevitable inconveniences of work without complaining, and maintaining a positive attitude even when things do not go our way. *Courtesy* refers to a person's behavior aimed at preventing work-related problems with others from occurring. Finally, *civic virtue* represents interest in, or commitment to the organization as a whole by active participation in, and involvement in the life of company, and looking out for its best interests.

#### **2.4. TM, organizational justice and their consequences**

In line with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees negotiate exchanges with the organization in which actions of one party evoke reciprocation by the other. Therefore, they adjust their behavior depending how they think the organization perceived them in terms of value and potential. Applied to TM, such a social exchange would imply that, when the employer invests in the employment relationship by, for example, providing an access to a wide range of development opportunities or offering fast-track promotion, employees are then feel obligated to reciprocate these investments with beneficial attitudes and behavior (Khoreva, Maarten, 2016). Meeting obligations helps employees maintain the positive self-image of those who repay debts and avoid the social stigma associated with the reciprocity norm's violation (Caillier, 2017). In consequence, employees perceiving high support are more likely to show higher engagement to do the things that the organization values and prioritizes to compensate advantageous treatment they receive from the employer (Swales, Blackburn, 2015). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that:

*Hypothesis 1: TM practices perceived by employees in talent pools are positively related to their work engagement.*

*Hypothesis 2: TM practices perceived by employees in talent pools are positively related to their OCB.*

Implementation of a TM program requires a careful differentiation of the workforce in terms of performance and potential prescribing diversification of HRM systems within organization on the basis of the returns the performance of different employee groups generate (Kwon, Jang, 2022). This differentiation refers to the investment of disproportionate resources where one expects disproportionate returns, in those specific people that help create strategic success (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015). The underlying rationale of the differentiation is that it is believed that organizations suffer unnecessary high costs when they invest equally in all employees (Collings, 2017). Therefore, organizational decision-makers should target their HRM practices specifically at those employees they are least willing to lose, i.e. those who are of high value to the organization, and most difficult to replace (Dries et al., 2014). As a consequence the scarce resources of an organisation ought to be invested first and foremost

in attracting, developing and retaining of talented people, as they generate higher performance and higher returns, than non-talented. Differentiation creates inequalities in the distribution of resources, which affects the employees' perception of distributive justice, that is, perceived fairness of the allocation of resources within the organization (Al-Douri, 2020). Employees who are considered as talented experience greater distributive justice when given greater resources. In the light of preceding considerations, it is proposed that:

*Hypothesis 3: TM practices perceived by employees in talent pools are positively related to their perception of distributive justice.*

As equity theory (Adams, 1963) contends, the perceptions of organizational justice shape employees' attitudes and behavior. In line with this reasoning, the few studies have tested the impact of perceived distributive justice on work engagement and OCB. For example, Rangriz (2012), Jafari and Bidarian (2012), and Rahman and Karim (2022) have proved that employees who perceive that the distribution of resources in organization as fair showed a higher level of work engagement and when employees have a good perception of distributive justice, they have a greater tendency toward involving and participating in showing OCB. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

*Hypothesis 4: The talent pool members' perception of distributive justice is positively related to their work engagement.*

*Hypothesis 5: The talent pool members' perception of distributive justice is positively related to their OCB.*

#### *The mediating effect of perceived distributive justice*

Employees who are included in the organization's talent pool get a stronger recognition of their potential as they receive a higher status than others (Gelens, 2014). They also obtain access to wide range of development activities, additional incentives and fast promotion opportunities that are perceived as symptoms of preferential treatment (Lee, 2018). When talent pool members see the opportunities for promotion and growth offered to them, they consider the distribution of resources in the organisation as fair. The perceptions of justice they experience induce a willingness to reciprocate the investments made by the employer, which may lead to greater work engagement and OCB's (Godkin, 2014; Hurrell 2016). In line with this reasoning, we assume that TM practices affect distributive justice perceived by talented employees, which, in turn, enhances their work engagement and OCB. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

*Hypothesis 6: The perception of distributive justice mediates the relationship between TM practices perceived by employees in talent pools and their work engagement.*

## **2.5. The moderating effect of perceived procedural justice**

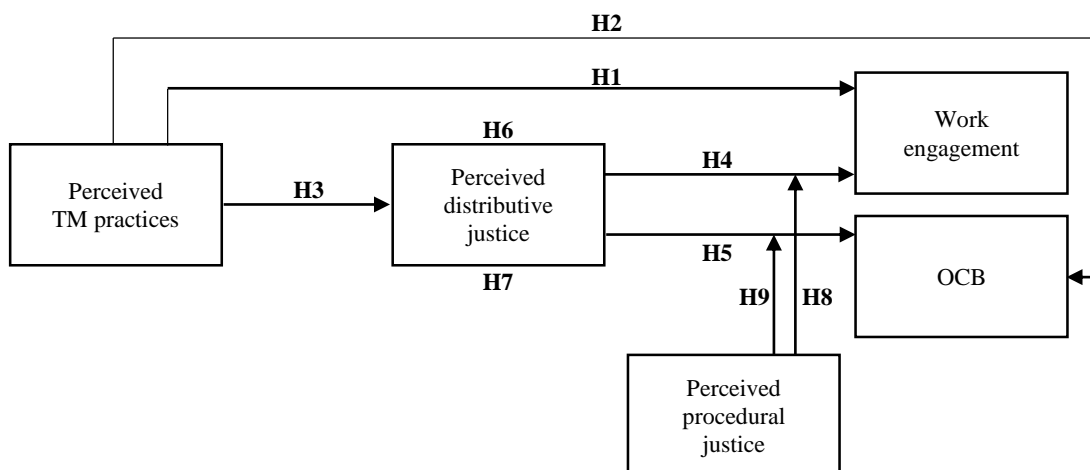
The TM process are often quite intransparent, with crucial information being withheld from employees, since companies are unwilling to disclose the status of talent pool members for the fear of their associates' reactions (e.g. jealousy, discouragement) and stigmatization of talented

employees as Primus (Dries, 2013). A lack of transparency in TM may negatively affect employee's perception of procedural justice, that is, perceived fairness of the process, rules and procedures by which resources are allocated within the organisation (Al-Douri, 2020). If the employees perceives the information they receive about TM to be incomplete, out of date or lacking in detail, they will feel unfairly treated. This could lead to negative reactions aimed at restoring the balance in the relationship with the employer (Ghosh et al. 2014), such as lowering of work engagement and discretionary effort, particularly extra-role or citizenship behavior (Agarwal, 2014; He, 2014; Daniel, 2016; Lyu, 2016). Given the above, the following hypotheses were proposed:

*Hypothesis 8: The perception of procedural justice moderates the relationship between distributive justice perceived by talent pool members and their work engagement in such a way that the relationship is stronger when employees in talent pools perceive the rules and procedures of resource allocation in an organisation as fairer.*

*Hypothesis 9: The perception of procedural justice moderates the relationship between distributive justice perceived by talent pool members and their OCB in such a way that the relationship is stronger when employees in talent pools perceive the rules and procedures of resource allocation in an organisation as fairer.*

In summary, we assumed that TM practices perceived by the talent pool members directly and indirectly (via perception of distributive justice) affect their work engagement and OCB. It is also expected that talent pool members' perception of procedural justice enhances the effect of perceived distributive justice on their work engagement and OCB. Based on the literature review an integrated conceptual framework for empirical investigations is proposed, where the relationships between the examined constructs are reflected (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework and hypotheses.

Source: own work.

### 3. Methods

We surveyed 730 participants of TM programs (*so-called* talents) from 33 companies, each of which has its own well-developed TM program. At least 20 correctly and completely completed questionnaires were obtained in each of the examined organization. The survey allowed a significant number of replies to be obtained at a low cost, did not induce an immediate reply and gave the respondents a feeling of autonomy.

#### 3.1. Data collection and sample characteristics

The data were collected by means of an on-line questionnaire sent to 500 organisations on the 2020 list of the largest companies in terms of revenues operating in Poland (*so-called 500 List*), which is published annually by the economic and legal journal *Rzeczpospolita*. The rationale for conducting study on a sample of large companies is that the core research subject, that is TM, occurs mainly in this type of organisations. Small and medium-sized enterprises, due to the low level of formalization of HRM function (Singh, Vohra, 2009; Wickramasinghe, 2022), rarely decide to implement the TM programs. A similar assumption has been made by Ingram (2016) and Chodorek (2016). Purposive sampling was used, as in most studies on TM (*e.g.* Dries, Pepermans, 2007; Dries et al., 2012; Björkman et al., 2013; Gelens et al., 2015; Seopa et al., 2015; Swales, Blackburn, 2016). Conducting the research on a random sample was not possible owing to the lack of a register of companies that managing talents in an deliberate and organised manner. As we were collecting data during the pandemic (from October 2020 to January 2021) and our target groups of respondents were hard to reach, we recruited participants through distributing questionnaires via contact persons in the HR departments. In each company, he or she reached out to employees identified as talent, explaining the aims of the study and the importance of their participation.

In total, 45.6% of surveyed employees were male and 54.4% were female. The average age of respondents was 29.76 ( $SD = 3.41$ ) ranging from 23 to 37 years, with an average of 4.06 years of job tenure ( $SD = 2.19$ ) and 5.59 years of organizational tenure ( $SD = 2.60$ ). Their average work experience was 5.93 years ( $SD = 2.95$ ). In terms of education, 69.4% of them had obtained a Bachelor's or Master's degree, and 30.6% held a secondary school diploma. 93.4% of talent pool members in our sample were full-time employees. They represented a wide range of industries such as: finance services, insurance, consulting, IT, telecommunications, retail, foodservice, and others.

#### 3.2. Variables and measures

Following Tatoglu et al. (2016) we measured **TM practices** through a total of twenty TM practices identified by Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2011) which serves as a reference to operationalizing TM in empirical studies. Participants of TM programs

were asked whether or not they perceived their employer as offering to them the opportunity to make use of particular TM practices. Responses were given on a five-point Likert-type scale in which 1 corresponds to “never used” and 5 to “used very extensively”. Among the practices included in scale were *i.a.* job rotation, cross disciplinary project working, training in international operations, external secondments, and high flier schemes. The scale had good reliability (Cronbach alpha 0.89).

The level of **work engagement** was measured using the shortened version of *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9)* developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006). The UWES-9 is rooted in Schaufeli *et al.*'s (2002) conceptualization of work engagement that has evolved from formative Kahn's (1990) concept. It allows to measure three dimensions of engagement: vigor, dedication and absorption. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they feel a certain way at work. They reported on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). Sample items for each of three dimensions are: “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”, “My job inspires me”, “I am immersed in my work”. The scale had good reliability (Cronbach Alpha 0.89).

To measure **OCB**, the scale of Podsakoff *et al.*'s (1990) was adopted. It measures five dimensions of citizenship behavior identified by Organ (1988): altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue. We asked talent pool members to report the degree to which the items described their own behaviors. Minor modifications were done to fit the tool to the current study. All items were rated by a seven-point Likert scale where 1 is for “strongly disagree” and 7 is for “strongly agree”. The sample items are: “I willingly help others who have work related problems”, “I obey company rules and regulations even when no one is watching”, “I consume a lot of time complaining about trivial matters”. The scale had good reliability (Cronbach Alpha 0.91).

The perception of **distributive and procedural justice** was measured with the use of justice scale designed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993). This tool evaluate separate but related constituents from the three-component model of organizational justice proposed by Greenberg (1990). We ask participants to rate their agreement with the listed items. The answers were scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale, where 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 7 means “strongly agree”. The example items include: “I think that my level of pa is fair”, “Overall, the rewards I receive here are quite fair”, “My general manager clarifies decisions and provides additional information when requested by employees”. The scale had good reliability (Cronbach Alpha 0.96).

Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), we test the convergent and discriminant validity of our measures. The average variance extracted (AVE) from our independent and dependent variables is close or over 0.5, supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity is also supported because the AVEs are higher than the squared correlations among these constructs.



## 4. Results

The data obtained from the survey were subjected to statistical analyses. We started our analyses by calculating descriptive statistics and coefficients between the variables. The results of descriptive and correlations analyses are presented in Table 1.

Correlation coefficients showed strong relationships between perceived TM practices, the perception of distributive and procedural justice, work engagement and OCB. Almost all of the analysed inter-correlations among focal variables proved to be statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.01$  and are positive.

Significant correlation coefficients raise a question about the possibility of multicollinearity. We have controlled for this threat by analyzing the variance inflation factor (VIF). A VIF greater than 5 would indicate overly high collinearity, and, consequently, a potential collinearity problem. The VIF value for employee's experience was greater than 5, so we excluded this variable from the regression models. Apart from this, the highest reported value (around 2.9) was observed for perceived procedural justice. This value is, however, within the acceptable range.

The values of correlation coefficients may be artificially overestimated due to the existence of apparent correlations and distortions in the research process (e.g. *common method bias*). Therefore, to test out hypotheses we carried out a series of hierarchical regression analyses. In each analysis, several control variables were included in the model to control for potential bias.

**Table 1.***Descriptive statistics and correlations of variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. TM practices	2.76	0.61											
2. Work engagement	3.88	0.90	0.250***										
3. OCB	4.99	0.77	0.107**	0.537***									
4. Distributive justice	4.78	1.13	0.198***	0.564***	0.633***								
5. Procedural justice	4.69	1.17	0.265***	0.522***	0.632***	0.797***							
6. Gender	0.54	0.50	-0.005	0.104**	0.110**	0.037	0.045						
7. Age	29.76	3.41	0.04	-0.008	-0.053	-0.061*	-0.030	-0.044					
8. Education level	5.15	0.86	-0.129***	-0.067*	-0.055	-0.007	-0.070	-0.044	0.215***				
9. Job tenure	4.06	2.19	0.081*	0.030	-0.088*	-0.098**	-0.081*	0.004	0.536***	0.076*			
10. Organizational tenure	5.59	2.60	0.073*	0.003	-0.147***	-0.143***	-0.165***	0.036	0.500***	0.087*	0.722***		
11. Work experience	5.93	2.95	0.081*	0.006	-0.124***	-0.123**	-0.136***	0.016	0.617***	0.091*	0.703***	0.910***	
12. Work status	0.93	0.25	0.058	0.078*	0.076*	0.026	0.005	0.157***	0.134***	0.053	0.048	0.109**	0.079*

**Notes:** *M* - mean; *SD* - standard deviation; 1–11 - inter-correlations for variables; gender was measured by a dummy variable coded as 0 = male and 1 = female; age, tenure and experience were self-reported in years; education was measured categorically ranging from 1 = primary school to 6 = Master's degree; work status was measured by a dummy variable coded as 0 = part time and 1 = full time; significance: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: own study.

Firstly, we checked whether the TM practices had a direct impact on work engagement, OCB and perception of distributive justice. The results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 2. The first of the estimated models shows that TM practices are a significant predictor of work engagement of talented employees ( $b = 0.357$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This supports hypothesis 1. Another model confirmed that TM practices constitute a significant predictor of talent pool members' OCB ( $b = 0.139$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). These results support hypothesis 2. We also found that TM practices significantly affects the perception of distributive justice ( $b = 0.396$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is considered to be confirmed.

The second round of regression analyses evaluated the impact of perceived distributive justice on work engagement and OCB of employees included into TM programs. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

The estimated models indicate that perceived distributive justice is a significant predictor of the work engagement and OCB of employees identified as talents ( $b = 0.452$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $b = 0.423$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , respectively). Thus, hypotheses 4 and 5 are confirmed.

Subsequently, the possible mediating effect of distributive justice was examined (hypotheses 6 and 7). In doing so, we conducted another series of regression analyses following the three-step procedure of Baron and Kenny (1986). In this procedure a variable is assumed to play the role of a mediator when three conditions are met: (1) the independent variable is related to the dependent variable; (2) the independent variable is related to the mediator; and (3) the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable disappears (full mediation), or the strengths of the relationship is reduced (partial mediation), when the mediator is added to the model.

Firstly, we tested the mediating effect of distributive justice on the relationship between TM practices and work engagement of employees identified as talents. The estimated model showed that: (1) TM practices are a significant predictor of work engagement ( $b = 0.357$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ); (2) TM practices significantly predict distributive justice ( $b = 0.396$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ); and (3) the strength of the relationship between TM practices and work engagement is reduced when distributive justice is added to the model ( $b = 0.186$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The results obtained mean that perceived distributive justice partially mediates the relationship between TM practices and work engagement. The significance of the mediation effect was checked using the Sobel test, which proved that this effect is statistically significant ( $Z = 5.564$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This supports hypothesis 6.

**Table 2.**

*Results of regression analysis: TM practices as a predictor of work engagement, OCB and distributive justice*

	Work engagement	Work engagement	OCB	OCB	Distributive justice	Distributive justice
TM practices		0.357***		0.139**		0.396***
		(0.053)		(0.046)		(0.068)
Gender (female)	0.164*	0.174**	0.162**	0.165**	0.087	0.097
	(0.067)	(0.065)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.085)	(0.083)
Age	-0.004	-0.005	0.007	0.006	0.003	0.002
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Education level	-0.068+	-0.031	-0.042	-0.028	0.005	0.046
	(0.039)	(0.038)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.050)	(0.049)
Job tenure	0.030	0.024	0.014	0.011	0.006	-0.000
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.029)	(0.028)
Organizational tenure	-0.017	-0.019	-0.059***	-0.060***	-0.071**	-0.074**
	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.024)	(0.023)
Work status (full time)	0.255+	0.202	0.245*	0.224+	0.165	0.106
	(0.136)	(0.133)	(0.117)	(0.116)	(0.172)	(0.169)
Constant	3.984***	2.923***	4.967***	4.553***	4.828***	3.650***
	(0.351)	(0.376)	(0.300)	(0.329)	(0.443)	(0.478)
Observations	730	730	730	730	730	730
<i>F</i>	2.65*	8.86***	5.55**	6.09***	2.95**	7.55***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.022	0.079	0.044	0.056	0.024	0.068

**Notes:** Standard errors in parentheses; significance: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.1$ .

Source: own study.

**Table 3.**

*Results of regression analysis: distributive justice as a predictor of work engagement and OCB*

	Work engagement	Work engagement	Work engagement	OCB	OCB	OCB
TM practices		0.186***			-0.030	
		(0.046)			(0.037)	
Distributive justice	0.452***	0.430***	0.177*	0.423***	0.426***	-0.287***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.081)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.060)
Procedural justice			-0.025			-0.409***
			(0.092)			(0.068)
Distributive justice × procedural justice			0.036*			0.127***
			(0.017)			(0.013)
Gender (female)	0.125*	0.132*	0.114*	0.125**	0.124**	0.103*
	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.041)
Age	-0.005	-0.006	-0.010	0.005	0.005	-0.004
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Education level	-0.070*	-0.051	-0.054+	-0.044+	-0.047+	-0.018
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.024)
Job tenure	0.027	0.024	0.024	0.011	0.011	0.007
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Organizational tenure	0.015	0.013	0.024	-0.029*	-0.028*	-0.015
	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.011)
Work status (full time)	0.180	0.156	0.183	0.175+	0.179+	0.161+
	(0.112)	(0.111)	(0.111)	(0.091)	(0.091)	(0.082)
Constant	1.804***	1.353***	2.410***	2.924***	2.996***	5.337***
	(0.311)	(0.327)	(0.463)	(0.252)	(0.268)	(0.344)

Cont. table 3.

Observations	730	730	730	730	730	730
<i>F</i>	53.05***	49.53***	44.57***	74.15***	64.92***	88.69***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.340	0.355	0.358	0.418	0.419	0.526

**Notes:** *Standard errors* in parentheses; significance: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , +  $p < 0.1$

Source: own study.

Similar analysis was performed with OCB as the dependent variable. In this case, we found that: (1) TM practices are a significant predictor of OCB ( $b = 0.139$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ); (2) TM practices significantly predict distributive justice ( $b = 0.396$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ); and (3) the relationship between TM practices and OCB disappears when distributive justice is added to the model ( $b = -0.030$ , *n.s.*). Therefore, perceived distributive justice satisfied the requirements of being a full mediator between perceived TM practices and talent pool members OCB. The Sobel test confirmed the significance of the indirect effect ( $Z = 5.615$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, the hypothesis 7 was also supported.

Finally, we examined the possible moderating effect of perceived procedural justice (hypotheses 8 and 9). At first, distributive and procedural justice and the two-way interaction between them as independent variables, as well as work engagement as a dependent variable, were added into the model (*see* Table 3). Subsequently, the analysis was repeated with OCB instead of engagement as the dependent variable. The estimated models show that the interaction between perceived distributive and procedural justice has a statistically significant impact on work engagement ( $b = 0.036$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and OCB ( $b = 0.127$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This means that the perception of procedural justice moderates the relationships between predictor and criterion variables. The results obtained confirm hypotheses 8 and 9.

## 5. Discussion

From the perspective of justice theory, the results obtained indicate that participants of TM programs believed that their potential and contributions to the organization are valued. Employees in talent pools gain not only a unique status, but also greater development opportunities, additional incentives and the possibilities of fast promotion. When talent pool members see the opportunities for promotion and grow offered to them, they consider the distribution of resources in the organisation as fair. Thus, it might be that they attitudes and behavior are not only affected by talent status itself but also by the resources that follow. This, in turn, triggers their work engagement and OCB.

Our findings seems to correspond to previous research. For example, Björkman et al. (2013) suggest that talent pool membership is taken as a signal that the organization values employees' contribution and that talent pool members feel that the company has fulfilled a part of the psychological contract by investing in their careers. On the other hand, Marescaux et al. (2013)

has reported that employees who experienced a less favorable treatment than others had a lower affective commitment compared with those who experienced an equal or a more favorable treatment.

The theoretical contributions described above give rise to certain implications for business practice. Organisational leaders must bear in mind the repercussions associated with implementing TM initiatives. By including employees to talent pools, a “Matthew effect” is brought about, by which privileged groups are allocated the lion share of development opportunities, causing them to land in a better position relative to others in the organization. A possible danger is that the unequal treatment might cause perception of injustice and consequently negative employee reactions. As only minority of workforce (usually from 1% to 5%) can be included into organization’s talent pool, it is clear that the risk of frustrating a large part of excluded staff is quite high. It is important that organizations should not neglect non-members of talent pools as they could represent a future source of potential. This is not to say that all employees should be offered a TM program of some sort, but organizations could be guided by a set of fair procedures in relation to workforce development (Swales, 2013). The process of nominating and selecting employees for development programs need to be objective and transparent with all employees getting a fair chance. Explaining the reasons and giving the objective criteria for identifying someone as a talent could not only trigger high engagement among talent pool members, but could also increase justice perceptions among non-talents. Giving such clarification reduces the odds of employees creating their own alternative story of their non-identification as a talent (Shaw et al., 2003).

In addition to fostering talents, supervisors can also trigger feelings of organizational support by listening to what employees have to say, expressing recognition for their ideas and efforts, involving them in decision-making processes, offering more autonomy or improving working conditions (Rhoades, Eisenberger, 2002). Furthermore, the HR strategy should consider how employees outside TM programs are benefitting, for example, through better performance in relation to the limited resources that are being diverted to them. In this way, companies can stimulate perception of organizational support among all employees while still making disproportionate investments in human resources.

To sum up, it is important to consider the potential long-term implications of TM programs, and to counterbalance the focus on talents with creative “talent solutions” (Beechler, Woodward, 2009) that capitalize on diversity, and involve broader approaches to TM.

Our study contributes to the recent debates on TM in three ways. First, it expands the knowledge of employees’ reactions to TM and, in consequence, verifies the assumption about the positive impact of TM on employees’ attitudes and behavior. Earlier publications (e.g., De Boeck et al., 2017) indicate that managers take this essential assumption for granted, even though research results in this area are not unequivocal. Second, it also identifies perceptions of organizational justice as an psychological mechanism that helps to explain the relationship between TM practices perceived by the talent pool members and their work and

engagement and OCB. The next contribution is to more general literature on organizational behavior, more specifically, to the studies on work engagement and OCB. Present study advances the knowledge on determinants of employees' attitudes and behavior. Our findings are also valuable for organizational decision-makers who are investing more and more funds into TM initiatives without confidence whether these are successful in achieving the expected results.

## **6. Limitations and directions for future research**

Like other studies, ours has some limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, all the data for this study were gathered from a single source at a single point in time, raising concerns about common method bias. Future research would benefit from assessing attitudes and behavior before employees are included to TM program and afterwards. Any differences in their motivation or commitment could then be weight against the difference found among employees not included into talent pool. The involvement of non-talents in the study will allow to recognize and compare their outcomes.

Second, our study had a cross-sectional design. There is thus a possibility for reverse causality such that individuals who are seen to exhibit outcomes examined in the study are more likely than others to be included in talent pools. Longitudinal research is needed to examine the nature of causality within relationship analyzed in the study.

Third, although all examined organizations had well-developed TM program, there are a number of potential sources of exogenous variation that may influence employee reactions, including different business strategies, company policies, and specific nature of organization's TM. For instance, it is worth to explore whether employees response differently when 80% of available resources are invested in 5% of the workforce, compared to a situation when 50% of resources are invested in 25% of most talented staff. It was beyond the scope of present study to investigate such organizational factors, but this would be an interesting direction of future research.

In addition, further studies could focus on attitudes and behavior of employees that are nested in various sectors or cultures to investigate whether or not there are contextual limitations to the generalizability of the results. It would be also interesting, although very challenging, to conduct comparative studies at an international level.

## 7. Conclusions

The high level of interest in TM among academics and practitioners suggest that it has something to offer yet our understanding of the effects of TM on employees is light. Our paper aimed to fill the gap in existing literature by answering the question: What is the role of TM in relation to work-related attitudes and behavior of employees who are members of talent pools? We contribute to this gap by applying justice theory for HRM to develop and empirically test a number of hypotheses concerning employees' reactions to TM practices. The study reveals that TM seems to be successful in enhancing work engagement and discretionary effort of talent pool members via perception of distributive justice, and the impact of this perception on employees' engagement and OCB was stronger, when talented employees perceive the rules and procedures of resource allocation in an organization as fairer. Therefore, by pursuing the TM program employers may reasonable expect that there would be work-related attitudes and behavior, which in turn are critical to the achievement of organizational outcomes. Current study adds to the small body of research on employees' reactions to TM and, in consequence, it broadens the knowledge about the results of practices in this area at the individual level, responding to urgent calls in the literature for more research on implications of being identified as a talent (Björkman et al., 2013).

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