

Effective Talent Management Practices to Enhance Succession Planning in the Technology Sector

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of talent management practices on succession planning in the technology sector. Sixteen articles were selected using preselected criteria through a literature search in PsycINFO and Business Source Ultimate. Three interviews as well were conducted for exploratory reasons. The paper includes three sub-questions and findings on (1) succession planning definitions within talent management, (2) talent management practices that contribute to succession planning and its outcomes in the literature, (3) current talent management practices that contribute to succession planning in the technology and what is there yet to learn. These sub-questions are analyzed in terms of inclusive and exclusive talent management. Findings showed that talent management as identifying and developing talent, encouraging transparency, and involving management, can ensure a sustainable leadership pipeline, reduce turnover intentions and increase organizational benefits. Additionally, the practices contribute to the development of employees. Analysis of the data showed similar practices that were found in the literature and in practice. Both theoretical and practical implications, limitations of this paper and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Keywords: succession planning, talent management, inclusive talent management, exclusive talent management, technology sector

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Introduction

In today's highly competitive job market, growing global talent scarcity is leaving significant conflict between the skills available and those in demand. This makes it crucial for organizations to attract, motivate, and hold on to talents to ensure their long-term success (Ustundag & Cevikcan, 2018). This is essential, especially in sectors like technology, which constantly must innovate and adapt and where technical talent is a crucial asset (Kim et al., 2014).

With over 200,000 employees of the baby boomer generation leaving the labor force each month, critical gaps in institutional knowledge are left in companies. To address these gaps, it is crucial to forecast organizational needs and use staff training, leadership development, and succession planning (Gordon & Overbey, 2018). Succession planning plays a vital role in identifying and developing the talent within a company to fill any gaps in the organization's future (Jinda & Shaikh, 2021) and ensure long-term success (Gordon & Overbey, 2018).

Companies can use leadership development and performance management practices to identify, develop, and retain key employees (McDonnell et al., 2010). In this thesis, effective talent management practices will be examined as they are an essential part of succession planning and, therefore, ensure the development of potential executive leaders from further down the pipeline to fill future succession roles (Church, 2014). A succession plan can allow employees to advance their skills and careers while incentivizing them to remain with the company (Hildebrand, 2016). Moreover, it helps organizations reduce hiring costs, encourages employees to aim for leadership roles (Grooves, 2007), and gives the company a competitive advantage over competitors (Gordon & Overbey, 2018).

The approach underlying this thesis includes different methods that can be used for managing talent, such as dividing the employees into two groups - inclusive and exclusive talent

groups. An inclusive approach in an organization implies that the employer sees all employees as valuable talents and distributes their assets equally (Dries, 2013). On the other hand, an exclusive approach considers only specific talents as valuable and dedicates most of their assets to these individuals, who are believed to bring the most benefits to the company (Dries, 2013). However, the effectiveness and contribution of these talent management practices to succession planning are not yet much studied. This is due to talent management practices depending on the organization's goals, values, and the current resources they offer; in other words, what could work for one company may not necessarily be effective for another company (Dries, 2013). Therefore, understanding the impact of inclusive and exclusive talent management practices on succession planning becomes essential to develop the practices that fit the organization's needs.

Hence, the aim of this thesis is to examine effective talent management practices and raise awareness about the significance of succession planning in organizations that must adapt and innovate continuously, specifically where technical talent is a crucial asset. This will be analyzed taking along the inclusive and exclusive approach of talent management. Therefore, the following research question is proposed: "*What are the most effective talent management practices to enhance succession planning in the technology sector?*". By exploring this question, this study aims to determine the essential practices that could help enhance succession planning. Lastly, the purpose is to provide a valuable understanding of how organizations can nurture their technical talents to ensure their sustainability and ability to adapt in a constantly evolving industry.

This paper adds to evidence-based management literature and provides insights into the impact of talent management practices and the debate of inclusive and exclusive approaches to succession planning. An organization's context is essential because it influences the effectiveness of implemented human resource practices (Johns, 2006), and succession planning has yet to be

extensively researched, especially in the technology sector. Therefore, this thesis will solely focus on the technology sector and provide practical insights into which talent management practices are most effective in enhancing succession planning.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis section reviews the fundamental concepts necessary to demonstrate effective talent management practices for improving succession planning. First, the main variables are explained, including talent management and succession planning practice, and how they are presented in the relevant literature. Then, the succession outcomes resulting from effective talent management practices are described. The debate between inclusive and exclusive talent management is examined. Lastly, the importance of addressing the technology sector regarding talent management and succession planning is discussed.

Talent management and succession planning practice

Talent management (TM) effectively manages employees' skills and abilities (Groves, 2007), and it involves identifying, attracting, developing, and retaining talented individuals to ensure company's continued growth and success (Church, 2014). Within this framework, talent management includes measuring competencies, offering customized processes and tools for employee development, and managing employees who no longer meet the organization's needs (Cannon & McGee, 2011). This requires creating a strategy that meets the current and future demands of the business plan. Succession planning can be conceived as a specific talent management approach that helps to identify and train high-potential employees for future leadership roles, providing opportunities for growth and development (Zhang et al., 2023). Even though talent management and succession planning concepts overlap in the studies, it is essential

to distinguish their different goals and outcomes to use them effectively in organizations. Talent management is necessary for an organization's growth since it enhances employees' skills and abilities by identifying and developing the company's talent. Therefore, succession planning adds to this practice and ensures that the company has ensured leadership pipeline.

Succession planning outcomes

Employing effective talent management practices impacts the success of succession planning outcomes (Bano et al., 2022). As mentioned above, succession planning (SP) is a crucial process in organizations that aims to identify and grow future leaders to take over essential positions when current leaders retire, resign, or cannot continue (Atwood, 2020). This proactive approach ensures a smooth leadership transition, guaranteeing organizational stability and continuity. Ultimately, this ensures that the organization continues to achieve its strategic objectives (Harrell, 2016) while retaining the knowledge and expertise (McQuade et al., 2007). Furthermore, approach ensures a smooth transition of responsibilities, and enhances engagement, satisfaction, and retention rates while fostering a positive work culture (Zhang et al., 2023). Typical indicators of successful succession planning used in research include the timespan of key positions filled by talents, their promotions, and retention rates (Ghazali et al., 2022). The significance of effective talent management practices on succession planning outcomes is highlighted by Bano et al. (2022), as well as specific strategic choices, including the organization's decision to choose various talent management practices that lean towards more of an inclusive or exclusive approach.

Inclusive vs. exclusive talent management approach

Different approaches can be used to ensure that these succession planning outcomes are achieved. In recent talent management theory, approaches can be either inclusive or exclusive. This distinction has to do with the conceptualization of talent. According to Williams-Lee (2008), individuals who consistently exhibit remarkable abilities and accomplishments are known as talents. This implies that talent refers to people with a distinct skill with the potential for further growth (Armstrong, 2006; Blass, 2007; Boxall & Purcell, 2008).

Additionally, the most common approach to talent management is an exclusive way of looking at company talent (Aljbour et al., 2021). In contrast, other researchers view talent as something that all people have and that they can develop (Meyers et al., 2013). Table 1 summarizes the key differences between exclusive and inclusive talent and talent management conceptualizations.

Depending on the culture and priorities of the organizations, succession planning can lean towards inclusive or exclusive talent management strategies. A more inclusive approach to succession planning highlights and encourages a more positive work environment that includes openness, trust, and overall employee well-being (Warren, 2006). In this approach, succession planning would focus on identifying and developing talent across all levels of the organization, ensuring that opportunities for growth and advancement are accessible to everyone; however, this approach is beneficial especially for small-sized organizations that have a greater tendency towards inclusivity (Aljbour et al., 2021).

On the other hand, the exclusive approach of looking at succession planning prioritizes maximizing returns on investment through identifying and developing high-potential star employees (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). Organizations that use this approach identify a few

individuals who demonstrate exceptional achievements and motivation and use their resources to help them flourish. This approach is more associated with large-sized organizations characterized by a culture of competitiveness and driven by performance (Aljbour et al., 2021).

Therefore, to understand which talent management approach, inclusive or exclusive, used in the literature when it comes to succession planning, sub-question 1 was raised:

Sub-question 1: How is succession planning defined within TM, and does it lean more towards an inclusive or exclusive talent approach?

In addition, to examine which TM practices are most effective, sub-question 2 is raised:

Sub-question 2: Which talent management practices, inclusive or exclusive, are the most effective in achieving succession planning outcomes?

Table 1.

Overview of Inclusive vs Exclusive way of looking at talents

Inclusive TM	Exclusive TM
‘Inclusive Talent’	‘High Performers/ High Potentials’
Everyone deserves an equal opportunity to showcase their talents. Inclusivity means ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in programs that help them identify and utilize their abilities (Swales et al., 2014)	High performers and high potentials are crucial assets for any organization to achieve its strategic goals. These employees can be effectively managed to improve the organization's value creation. (Kabwe et al., 2019)
‘Workforce at all levels’	‘Exclusive talent/ Top Talent/ Differential Treatment of employees’

Every worker in a company, from entry-level staff to executives, encompasses individuals with varying career stages, diverse backgrounds, distinct skills, and unique experiences (Valverde et al., 2013).

To keep valuable employees, organizations use a talent differentiation strategy. This involves identifying top talents and providing them with customized developmental opportunities. These opportunities include coaching sessions, MBA courses, succession planning initiatives, and developmental programs (Kabwe et al., 2019; Sonnenberg et al., 2014).

‘Key Positions’

Identifying critical positions helps find talented employees who can contribute significantly towards achieving the company's strategic goals. Cultivating these employees can ensure that the right people are in the right positions to succeed. (Kabwe et al., 2019; Tatoglu et al., 2016).

Context: Technology sector

Talent management practices and succession planning effectiveness are not universal; it depends on the organizational context (Johns, 2006). Studies that have been done on the topic of talent management and succession planning include the banking and healthcare sectors (Ali & Mehreen, 2019; Groves K., 2007). Therefore, the lack of research in the technology sector encourages to explore and understand which talent management practices are reported on in the technology sector, what is known about their effectiveness for succession planning outcomes, and how this sector and context is different from other sectors and their talent management practices.

Managing technical employees, such as engineers and scientists, requires a unique approach. This is due to the high risk and high levels of uncertainty of current labor markets (Whysall et al., 2018), ongoing innovations within the industry (Kim et al., 2014), and the fact that technical talents are short in supply and high in demand that gives organizations competitive advantage (Kim et al., 2014). In summary, the effectiveness of talent management practices and succession planning differ throughout the different organizational contexts.

Therefore, to understand current talent management practices used and points of improvement in the process of succession planning in the technology sector, sub-question 3 is raised:

Sub-question 3: Which talent management, inclusive or exclusive, is reported on in the technology sector, and what is yet to be learned?

Next, the methods for the sub-questions are presented.

Method

Study Design

This thesis aims to assess effective talent management practices in the technology sector to enhance succession planning. This was done by analyzing literature reviews and interviewing experts from a large multinational high-tech company. Literature reviews enable one to form a broad view of the specific topic and identify which areas lack the knowledge or expertise (Snyders, 2019). Therefore, a systematic review was chosen as the research methodology which is the most authoritative evidence. It synthesizes existing knowledge on a specific subject and identifies areas where knowledge gaps exist (Caldwell & Bennett, 2020). In turn, helped answer sub-questions 1 and 2. Moreover, interviews were conducted to provide an in-depth investigation of participants'

perspectives on their workplace experiences and organizational environments (Dunwoodie et al., 2022). Interviews helped to understand current talent management practices used in the technology sector to enhance succession and what is yet to be learned in the processes, therefore answer sub-question 3.

Literature Review

Search Strategy

A literature review was conducted using the PsycInfo and Business Source Ultimate databases to answer the research question. The search strategy used a combination of relevant keywords, as presented in Table 2. These keywords were combined using the Boolean operators “OR” and “AND” to retrieve relevant articles. Specifically, the search terms “succession planning” OR “talent pipeline” OR “leadership pipeline” AND “talent management” were used.

Table 2.

Keywords used in the search

Independent variables	Dependent variable
Talent Management	Succession Planning
	Talent Pipeline
	Leadership pipeline

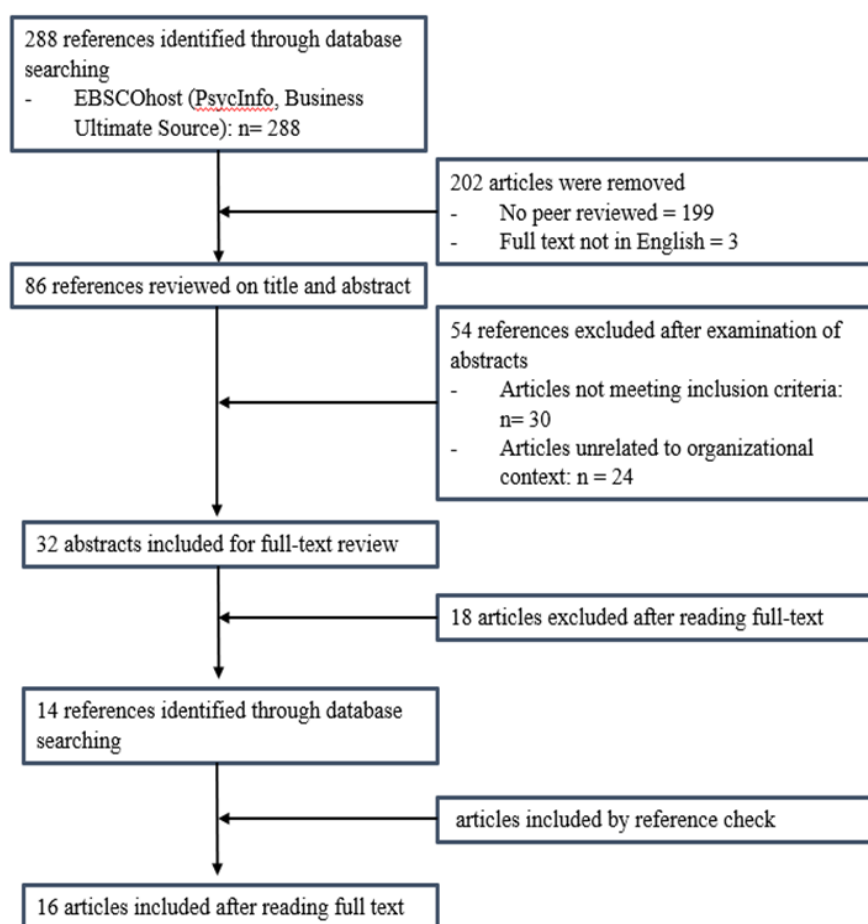
Procedure

Using above-mentioned keywords and their combination in PsycINFO and Business Source Ultimate, 288 articles were found. However, specific criteria were applied to filter out the further search. Figure 1 shows a complete overview of the literature selection criteria. First of all, only peer-reviewed articles were selected (n=199 excluded). Later, only articles published in English were selected (n=3 excluded). After the mentioned criteria were filtered out, 86 articles

were left, and their titles and abstracts were reviewed for further analysis of eligibility for the research question. Some articles did not meet the inclusion criteria and were not related to organizational context (n=54 excluded), for example, articles about succession planning referring to family-owned businesses. This left 32 articles to review by reading them thoroughly, and eventually, 14 were chosen after reading them thoroughly (n=18 excluded) due to, for example, succession planning being referred as replacement planning. Therefore, the content of those articles could not answer the research question of the paper.

Figure 1.

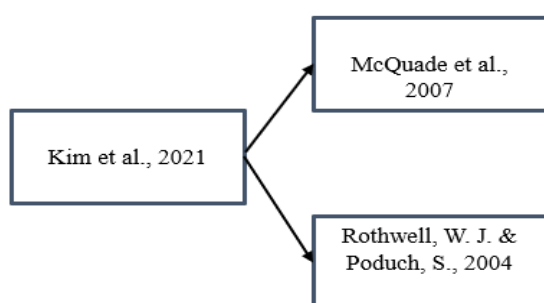
Scheme search and selection result



The snowballing technique, a method of convenience sampling, was used. The specific article by Kim et al. (2021) was analyzed more in-depth because it focused on technical talent and its development. This means that references of this particular article were checked to find relevant articles. Figure 2 shows an overview of articles found using this technique.

Figure 2.

Articles found using the snowballing technique



To sum up, 16 articles were found and presented in Table 2, and therefore, they will be analyzed for this paper.

Data analysis

In order to answer sub-question 1 and 2, the 16 articles found by the searching strategy mentioned above, were read thoroughly and analyzed. Firstly, the key findings were presented together with the studies design, population and sample size (see Appendix B). Later on, in Table 3, studies were analyzed in terms of the link between talent management practices and succession planning and whether it leans towards more of an inclusive or exclusive approach, as well as presented used practices and the definitions of the main variables.

Interviews

Research Design

Three interviews were selected as an additional and exploratory method due to the lack of literature regarding succession planning in the technology sector (Brink & Wood, 1989). Moreover, social science commonly uses interviews to explore personal views on various social

phenomena like emotions, prejudices, and opinions. These are the insights that quantitative methods may miss (Dunwoodie et al., 2022). Therefore, the aim of these interviews was to answer sub-question 3.

Sample

Interviews were conducted with experts (n=3) of one large high-technology company that is one of the most valuable companies worldwide and uses succession planning and talent management as part of their daily activities in the business. More specifically, interviews were done with one of the department managers (DM), who currently has a succession plan in place, the Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP), who works with the department manager, and the Group Lead (GL), who is part of the succession plan of the department manager. The interviews aimed to understand what practices are currently being used, what are their view on the effectiveness and point of improvement of talent management practices on succession planning in the technology sector.

Procedure and instruments

Before conducting interviews, participants received an e-mail with an invitation explaining the aim of the research, the reason for participant selection, and why their knowledge is significant. Participation in the research was voluntary, and confidentiality was ensured. The department manager and human resource business partner were asked questions different from those of the group lead. This was due to the sensitivity of the topic and being unsure about the transparency and knowledge of the succession planning process for the employee.

Data analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Firstly, the practices of TM mentioned are listed, then the distinction between inclusive and exclusive practices is made.

Lastly, the outcomes of succession planning due to talent management practices are listed, as well as the things the company was struggling with and wished to improve. This is also summarized in Table 4. Appendix C shows the complete overview, including the citations from the interviews.

Results

This section of the paper presents the research findings, starting with the findings of the systematic literature and following the outcome of the interviews.

Systematic literature review

Descriptives

To start with, Appendix B shows an overview of the descriptives of the articles in order to understand the quality of the papers. Basic properties like population, sample size, design, and the main findings of the articles chosen in this data set. It was found that most research has been done in India, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Taiwan, which leaves the research gap focused more on European countries. The population of studies varied from commercial banking employees and pharmaceutical and healthcare organizations to engineering-led organizations (Ali & Mehreen, 2019; Whysall et al., 2018; Groves K., 2007). In addition, the research studies were designed using survey methods, semi-structured interviews, and mixed-method research or literature reviews.

Next, the findings for the sub-questions are presented.

Definition of SP as inclusive or exclusive TM

This section presents the results for sub-questions 1. Table 3 includes the definitions used in the selected data set from the literature.

The first sub-question: *How is succession planning defined within TM, and does it lean more towards an inclusive or exclusive talent approach?* was analyzed. To answer this question,

the definitions of succession and talent management provided in the articles were inspected and compared to the criteria provided in Table 1.

Of the 16 articles, ten provided definitions of SP and two of TM. Seven articles made explicit reference to an exclusive approach using words like: “talent “(Groves, K., 2007), “key leadership” (Jindal & Shaikh, 2021), and “pool of high potentials” (Hor et al., 2010). The other three definitions are potentially more inclusive and use words like: “...preparing individuals or employee groups” (Ali & Mehreen, 2019) and “employees in a particular organization” (Pandey & Sharma, 2014). The rest is not determined since no definition of succession planning was provided.

To validate whether the potentially inclusive definitions were also interpreted as such in the research, it was checked how it was operationalized in the text. It appears that the articles with more inclusive definitions include talent development practices, performance appraisal or identifying key positions as the core practices. However, the practices do not seem to differ from the exclusive approach, therefore we cannot draw the conclusions.

Hence, definitions are sometimes quite broad and potentially inclusive, but the interpretation shown from the practices mentioned in the text demonstrates a narrower interpretation, leading to the conclusion that all selected articles interpret succession planning as an exclusive talent management strategy. Lastly, not all articles presented definitions; in most cases, either a talent management definition or succession planning was presented, which could be a hindering factor in understanding the whole overview.

Table 3.

Summary of the articles analyzing the link between talent management practices and succession planning

Author & year	TM definition	Succession Planning definition	Inclusive/ Exclusive TM looking at the definition of SP	TM Practices that contributed to SP	Succession planning outcomes	Effect Size
Ali & Mehreen, 2019	n/a	a “systemic, long-term process of determining goals, needs, and roles within an organization and preparing individuals or employee groups for responsibilities relative to work needed within an organization”	Inclusive	Offering employee development activities Performance appraisal Involvement of top management	Reduced employee turnover intentions Ensured future leadership Accelerated employees performance Provides job security Provides career growth Encourages promotions	0.12 for career attitude 0.23 for job security = small
Whysall et al., 2018	n/a	n/a	n/a	Employers themselves need to take a lead identifying new approaches to close critical skills gaps Involvement of middle and line managers in talent development processes	Enable organizations to competitively perform due to ongoing changes in technology Maximized organizational resources	n/a
Pandey & Sharma, 2014	n/a	“ a systematic way to ensure that employees in a particular organization are competent enough to develop and then replace strategic roles in organization hierarchy”.	Inclusive	Identifying employees aspirations develop development plans exercise manpower planning	Internally filled vacancies High potentials retained in the pool and promoted Covered positions by succession plan process Organizational growth	n/a
Bhatnagar, 2008	n/a	n/a	n/a	High potential development – job rotation, mentoring/coaching, formal external training Robust performance management system supported by top management Identifying key talent pools	Employee engagement that leads to high retention rates	
Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009	n/a	n/a	n/a	Identification of talent on organizations competency framework Plot on a talent matrix	Important position filled with internal candidates Succession plans having two or more “ready now” candidates	n/a

				Individual development plan On the job trainings project and stretch assignment opportunities to valued and top talents Mentoring with a more senior leader	Same employees as “ready now” candidates on more than two succession plans Retained high potential managers	
Groves K., 2007	n/a	“Succession planning is a process every company needs to have to make sure they know where the gaps are, they know what talent they have in place and how to develop them in the upcoming years until the position is ready”	Exclusive	Develop mentoring relationships Identify and codify leadership talent Talent developmental activities Enhance high-potential visibility as well as senior management involved in development programs	Effectively built leadership pipeline	n/a
Jindal & Shaikh, 2021	“Talent management plays a key role in creating, developing, and sustaining a competitive advantage for any pharmaceutical company”	“Succession planning firstly is viewed as strategy to work on the damage that may happen because of the loss of key leadership”	Exclusive	Talent identification, Talent development Talent retention	Talent retention Employee engagement Employee loyalty	0.401 for talent identification on SP, 0.253 for talent development = small
Kim et al., 2014	“Talent management focuses on developing talent that is strategically important for an organization’s future.”	n/a	n/a	Craft an employment brand that appeals to technical workers Use competency models to guide and assess technical workers performance On the job training Offer development and advancement opportunities Ensure senior leader support	Building and sustaining a strong talent pipeline Attracting, retaining and transferring the knowledge of technical workers whose skills are critical due to ongoing innovation	n/a
Church & Seaton, 2022	n/a	n/a	Exclusive	Identifying high potential talent at multiple career stages – formal assessment of learning agility Developing a longer-term pipeline of future leaders	Enhanced quality of talent management processes in organizations by assessing learning agility Determining future leadership potential	n/a
Ghazali et al., 2021	n/a	“Succession planning is a process that not only ensures the stability and tenure of key personnel but is also perhaps best defined as any effort to ensure the continued effective performance of an	Exclusive	Identifying critical positions Identifying competencies Involving senior management in succession planning	In time tilled executive leadership positions – quality leadership Talent turnover	n/a

Barnett & Davis, 2008		organization, division, department, or workgroup by providing for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people over time” “a structured process involving the identification and preparation of a potential successor to assume a new role,” implying the need for a reliable, repeatable process	Inclusive	Identifying key, critical positions Coaching, mentoring	Leadership continuity Reducing turnover Increasing retention	n/a
Bano et al., 2022	n/a	“intended to help the organizations in managing and retaining their talent pipeline and focusing on the competence development”	Exclusive	Involvement of top management Individual development plans for all employees Leadership development programs	Organizational sustainability and business continuity	n/a
Hor et al., 2010	n/a	“is classified as the deliberate and systematic efforts to project leadership requirements, to identify a pool of high potential candidates, and to develop leadership competencies in those candidates through intentional learning experiences and selections of leaders from a pool of potential leaders”	Exclusive	Leadership development program	Ability to develop identified potentials	n/a
McQuade et al., 2007	n/a	n/a	n/a	Coaching Mentoring In house development programs	Reduced negative effect of lost company knowledge	n/a
Rothwell & Poduch, 2004		"any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department or work group by making provision for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people over time.	Exclusive	Identify the individuals with most valuable knowledge On the job training Mentor programs	Sustained and preserved institutional knowledge	

Zhang et al., 2023	n/a	“a critical process within organizations that focuses on identifying and developing future leaders to fill key positions when current leaders retire, resign, or are otherwise unable to continue in their roles”	Exclusive	Talent identification Talent development: coaching, mentoring Retention programs	Improved financial performance Enhanced organizational commitment	n/a
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Succession planning effectiveness

In this section, results for sub-question 2 are presented. Table 3 summarizes the talent management practices and succession planning outcomes used in the selected data set from the literature. These findings of the systematic literature are visualized in Figure 3.

The second sub-question: *Which talent management practices, inclusive or exclusive, are the most effective in achieving succession planning outcomes?* was analyzed. Firstly, three talent management practices are presented that were mentioned, following three most mentioned outcomes of succession planning. Lastly, the effectiveness of talent management on succession planning is discussed.

Talent management practices are used for succession planning. The three mentioned talent management practices are talent development, talent identification and senior leadership involvement. Below are descriptions from the literature, which can be found in Table 3.

Talent development practices. Talent development practices were mentioned in 13 of 16 articles. This is broadly defined as fostering and increasing organizational talent knowledge and skills within their work domain (Kim et al., 2014). Example practices from the articles falling under talent development included mentoring and coaching (Bhatnagar et al., 2008; Barnett & Davis, 2008; McQuade et al., 2007), as well as individual development plans (Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009; Pandey & Sharma, 2014; Bano et al., 2022), on the job training, stretch assignments, project-based learning opportunities, formal external training (Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009; Bhatnagar, 2008; Groves K., 2007) and leadership development programs (Bano et al., 2022; Hor et al., 2010).

Identification of talent. Second most mentioned practice was talent identification, mentioned in 12 of 16 articles. It refers to identifying high potentials who contribute greatly to succession planning (Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009; Bhatnagar et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2023). Identifying talent's competencies and aspirations and the organization's key and critical positions is a crucial step for organizational sustainability (Ghazali et al., 2021; Barnett & Davis, 2008; Pandey & Sharma, 2014). Various methods could be used in this process, such as evaluating individuals about an organization's competency framework and positioning them on a talent matrix for assessing their performance and potential (Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009). A formal evaluation of learning agility is also recommended (Church & Seaton, 2022).

Involvement of senior leadership. The third most mentioned practice was senior leadership involvement, mentioned in nine of 16 articles. Succession planning can only be effective when higher management, including line and department managers, supports the process and understands its importance for an organization, as it strengthens the sense of accountability (Bano et al., 2022; Groves, 2007; Bhatnagar, 2008; Whysall et al., 2018).

The three most mentioned practices each lean toward the exclusive approach. Some studies explicitly mentioned that the practices are solely used to develop and retain talents further and do not focus on developing employees into talents (Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009; Ghazali et al., 2022). Using keywords like "talent pools" and "critical talent" (Bhatnagar, 2008) also indicated the exclusive approach of practices. However, it is not known from the articles if the practices differ between all levels of employees.

Succession planning outcomes as a result of effective TM practices. Three most mentioned outcomes were secured leadership pipeline, reduced turnover intentions and increased retention

rates and organizational benefits. Below these are described from the literature and can be found in Table 3.

Reduced turnover intentions and increased retention rates. Reduced turnover intention and increased retention rates were mentioned in eight of 16 articles as outcomes of succession planning. It refers to organizations aim to keep their talents and decrease their intentions to leave (Jindal & Shaikh, 2021; Ali & Mehreen, 2019; Pandey & Sharma, 2014; Bhatnagar, 2008; Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009; Jindal & Shaikh, 2021; Kim et al., 2014; Ghazali et al., 2021; Barnett & Davis, 2008).

Secured leadership pipeline. Ensured and secured leadership pipeline as a result of effective talent management practices of succession planning was mentioned in seven of 16 articles. It refers to succession planning ensuring a healthy and sustainable leadership pipeline (Kim et al., 2014), by preventing the gaps in leadership that could impact the organization (Bano et al. 2022; Zhang et al., 2023; Barnett & Davis, 2008; Kim et al., 2014; Pandey & Sharma, 2014).

Organizational benefits. Apart from the below mentioned outcomes of succession planning, outcomes such as organizations financial performance (Zhang et al., 2023), its sustainability (Bano et al.,2022) and growth (Pandey & Sharma, 2014) were mentioned.

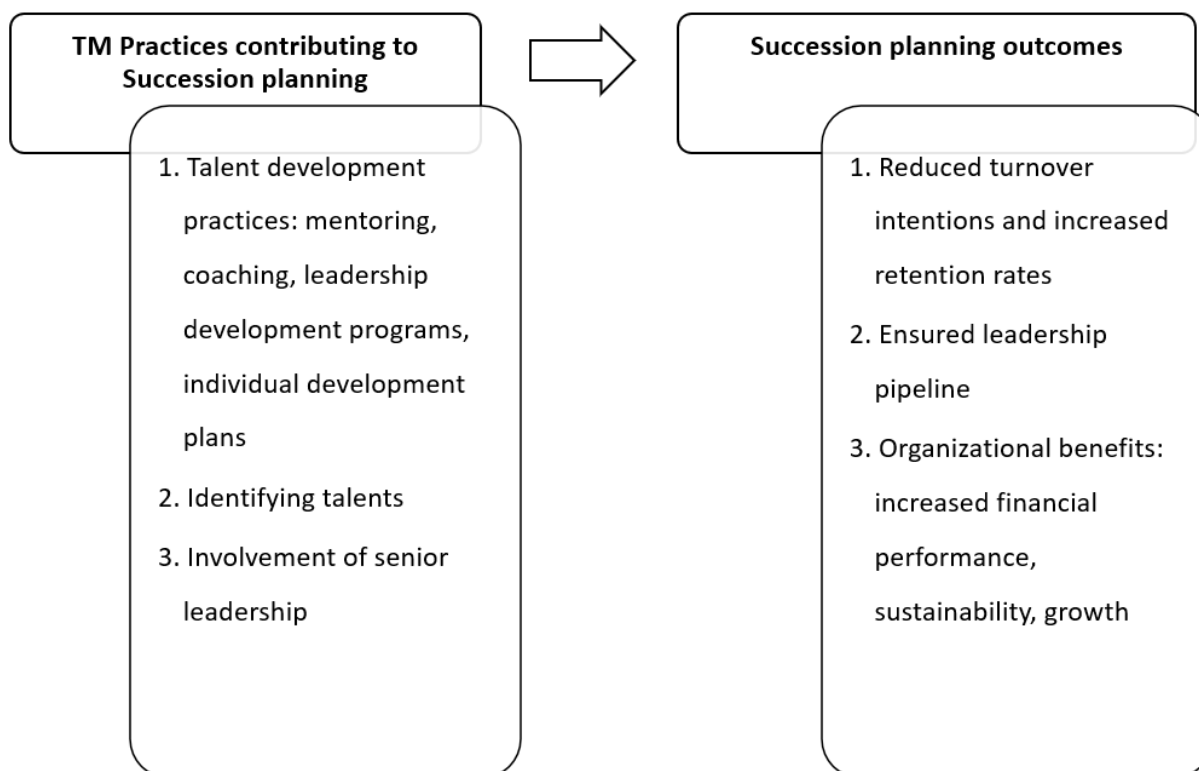
To determine the effectiveness of talent management practices, it is important to critically look at the effect sizes of the articles. However, only few studies from the data set in this thesis reported the effect sizes, due to articles being qualitative. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the evidence of talent management practices on succession planning outcomes.

Hence, only a few articles consisted of empirical evidence. The talent management practices that did come across the most often were identifying talent, which, by definition, is an exclusive approach, and talent development practices, including mentoring, coaching, individual

development programs, and involvement of senior leadership. These practices were found to ensure a secure leadership pipeline, reduced turnover intentions, and increased retention rates and organizational benefits like its growth, sustainability, and financial performance as a result of successful succession planning.

Figure 3.

Systematic literature findings talent management practices contributing to succession planning



Interviews: The current talent management practices used in the technology sector

This part reviews the findings of the three interviews conducted with experts from the technology sector and answers sub-question 3: *Which talent management practices, inclusive or exclusive, are reported on in the technology sector, and what is yet to be learned?*

First, talent management practices mentioned in the technology sector are presented, following the succession planning practices and outcomes. Lastly, their effectiveness is discussed in the technology sector. The main findings are summarized in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 4. Appendix C includes extensive summary of interviews including citations.

The primary practices that the experts named in the interviews were coaching and performance management in terms of developing and performing conversations. Moreover, talent assessment practices, more specifically talent review meetings, are when succession planning is presented. Cross-departmental collaboration was mentioned as well, in other words, getting support from colleagues to help the employees with their growth. All these practices are part of talent development practices. Finally, transparency of the process is indicated as a crucial step, yet something that needs to be improved.

Regarding the inclusive vs. exclusive approach, it was found that succession planning is an exclusive exercise of looking at talent management since it is only mandatory for job grades that indicate senior leadership and the key positions that are critical for an organization. Furthermore, the leadership programs mentioned have certain nomination programs, and limited seats are available. This means those programs are not available for everyone. Therefore, an exclusive talent management approach is chosen. However, it was found that the Develop & Perform (D&P) conversations are an ongoing conversations for all employees during which individual development plans can be made, indicating a more inclusive approach.

Succession planning outcomes. All three interviewees indicated secured leadership pipeline and employee development as outcomes of succession planning from effective talent management practices to sustain business continuity. The findings are partially in line with the literature that was analyzed.

Experts were also asked what is missing in their opinion in the succession planning process. Two things were revealed. First, interviewees mentioned that the succession map files are not used well enough. This was supported by another participant who mentioned that a more proactive approach is needed, meaning succession plans should be used to develop people who are seen to have potential and help them grow into a particular role instead of using succession planning as a reactive approach and using it only to fill in the vacancies.

Second, transparency was one of the crucial talent management practices named by the participants, yet improvement is still needed to make the whole process transparent and for employees to be aware of their own development. Additionally, it was mentioned that people with technical backgrounds feel like they cannot grow beyond their roles. Therefore, ensuring employees on their possible learning journeys is important. Due to technical background, employees could not have experience being people leaders, thus significance of growing the leaders with the right competencies is highlighted. In this process, HR could help have valuable conversations. Last but not least, a participant mentioned to not forget the main reason of succession planning:

“We (..) all of the management (...) should all remind ourselves that succession management and planning is about identifying opportunities for people, but it should not be a limitation. Just because an employee might not be on the list to become an architect doesn't mean that they cannot.” (Interview 3).

In conclusion, succession planning itself is perceived as an exclusive approach of TM, focusing on employees in higher grades, critical positions, and specific leadership programs. On the other hand, the main practices mentioned by the interviewed participants consisted of inclusive talent management approach. Talent development practices like coaching and performance

management in terms of develop-and-perform conversations, as well as transparency and involvement of senior management are practices that can be accessible to all employees. Points of improvement for succession planning included a transparent process throughout the whole organization toward employees and their own development opportunities.

Table 4.

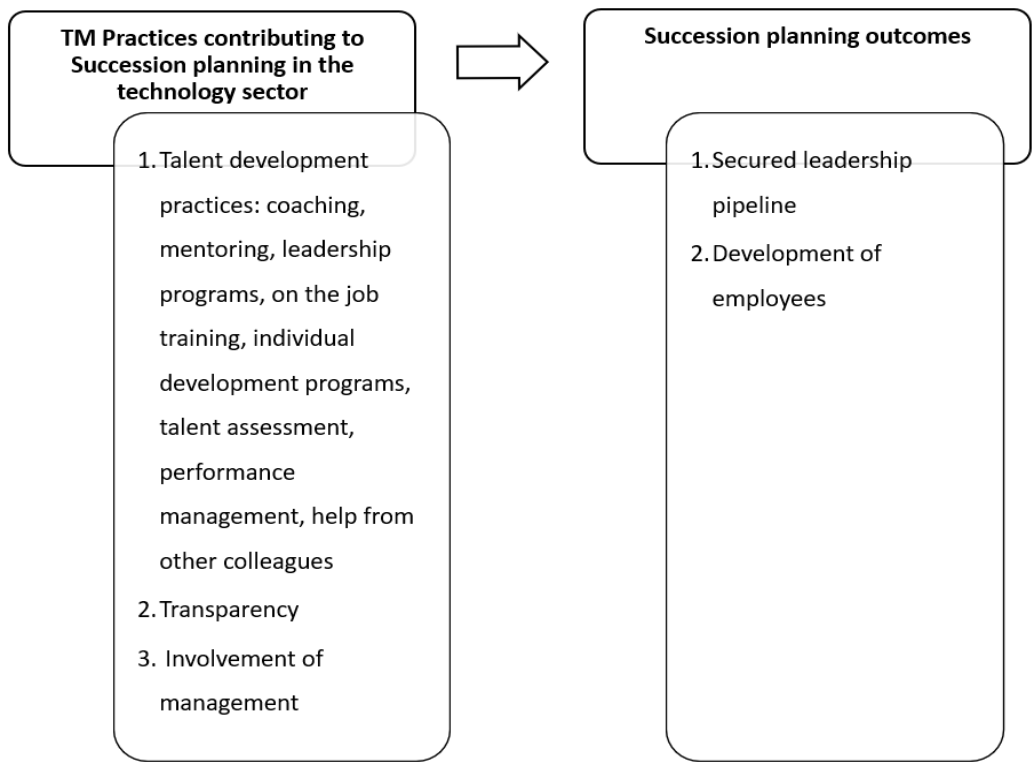
Main findings of the talent management practices mentioned contributing to succession planning in the technology sector

			DM	HRBP	GL
TM Practices	Talent Development practices	Coaching	✓	✓	✓
		Mentoring		✓	✓
		Leadership programs	✓		✓
		On the job training	✓		✓
		Cross department collaboration	✓	✓	✓
		Talent assessment (talent review meetings, potential assessments, succession mapping)	✓	✓	
		Performance management (Develop & Perform conversations)	✓	✓	✓
		Created intermediate role	✓		
		Transparency	✓		✓

	Involvement of management	✓	✓	✓
SP Outcomes	Secured leadership pipeline	✓	✓	✓
	Development of employees	✓	✓	✓
What is missing in the current process of SP?	Use of succession plans	✓	✓	
	Operational part of succession plan (in Workday)	✓	✓	
	Transparency of the process	✓	✓	
	Integrated approach	✓	✓	

Figure 4.

Exploratory interview findings talent management practices contributing to succession planning in the technology sector



Discussion and conclusion

This paper aimed to examine the effective talent management practices that contribute to enhanced succession planning in the technology sector. This was done by looking at the inclusive versus exclusive talent management approach. Although the significance of succession planning and talent management has been researched in various organizational contexts, the field of these two topics together in the technology sector is relatively underdeveloped.

16 articles were analyzed using systematic search, and three interviews were conducted with experts in the technology sector to gain a deeper understanding of its current practices.

The definitions of talent management of the gathered articles were quite broad and inclusive at times, but the practices mentioned in the text illustrate a narrower interpretation, suggesting that all selected articles view succession planning as an exclusive talent management strategy. However, not all articles presented definitions, often only either talent management or succession planning definitions were provided, which could hinder a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

The studies revealed that talent management practices are essential for successful succession planning outcomes, yet it is important to stay critical due to lack of empirical evidence in the data. The most common practices included identifying talent and implementing talent development practices such as mentoring, coaching, and individual development programs to increase employees' knowledge and skills within their work domain and adapt to ongoing technology changes, which could help to nurture organizations' talents (Kim et al., 2014). Involving senior leadership ensures a secure leadership pipeline, decreases turnover intentions, increases retention rates, and provides organizational benefits such as growth, sustainability, and improved financial performance due to successful succession planning. The findings of the

succession planning outcomes differed more between the literature findings and the interviews. Ensured leadership pipeline was a common finding. However, interviewees also mentioned employee development as a succession planning outcome.

Although succession planning is typically focused on selecting high-level employees and critical positions, the interviewed employees working in the technology sector emphasized the importance of talent development practices accessible to all employees, such as coaching and performance management through development and performance conversations. Furthermore, transparency and involvement of senior management should encourage transparent communication with employees by having ongoing conversations with employees (Bhatnagar, 2008). Suggestions for improving succession planning included ensuring and encouraging organizational transparency and clarity regarding employee development and career opportunities.

When it comes to which practices, either inclusive or exclusive, help to contribute to succession planning outcomes, it was found that the combined approach was most effective (Bolander et al., 2017). This means it starts with an inclusive approach of talent identification and development practices offered for all employees (Aljbour et al., 2021), followed by an exclusive approach of identifying talents and providing them with personalized development (Aljbour et al., 2021). However, it is essential to look at this critically as the studies gathered did not include much empirical evidence, which will also be discussed in the limitations later on.

Furthermore, literature and interview findings showed that there is not one clear or underpinning approach, inclusive or exclusive, that could help to determine the most effective talent management practices for achieving succession planning outcomes. This indicates that these concepts still need to be better developed. The lack of studies focusing on succession planning outcomes does not help advance the field.

Limitations

Considering the new insights that this paper brings regarding talent management practices and their impact on succession planning in the technology sector, it is also essential to realize the limitations. The first limitation is the papers' quality, including the sample sizes. Not only quantitative studies were selected, and therefore, only two of 16 articles included effect sizes, making it difficult to interpret the effectiveness of the results. Moreover, some definitions were missing from the articles that did not have enough information to draw conclusions on inclusive and exclusive talent management practices.

The second limitation is the sample of the interviewees. It was mentioned that three different positions were interviewed and different questions were asked. The responsibilities of interviewees differed and have different roles and responsibilities when it comes to talent management and succession planning; for example, HRBP had more of an advisory role and explained how the stakeholders are guided in order to have conversations with employees, yet it is unknown how HRBP would approach this interview if the conversation would have been in terms of their own succession planning. Therefore, three interviews to generalize the technology sector is insufficient.

Implications and recommendations

This paper identifies effective talent management practices for technology organizations to enhance their succession planning process. While limited research has been done on succession planning, this paper adds to the existing literature and analyzes inclusive and exclusive talent management approaches. Moreover, experts from HR and people-leading perspectives were interviewed for exploratory reasons to understand the practices used in the technology sector.

This thesis's findings help organizations gain an overview of which practices are mostly used and contribute the most to succession planning. Therefore, the organization's stakeholders who are involved with people management, such as managers or HR professionals, could use these findings. However, in future research, it is recommended to include larger groups of different stakeholders to understand the views from different perspectives. Furthermore, it is important to understand that integrating the processes instead of solely focusing on one increases the effectiveness of succession planning. However, companies overlook the importance of combined processes (Pandey & Sharma, 2014).

This thesis examined the research question: *“What are the most effective talent management practices to enhance succession planning in the technology sector?”*. Literature and interviews with professionals from the technology sector indicated the significance of inclusive and exclusive TM approaches. They found the importance of TM practices that include talent identification and development, transparency, and management involvement to ensure leadership pipeline, reduce turnover intentions, organizational benefits, and development of employees as an outcome of effective talent management. The approach of combining inclusive and exclusive was the most effective. Future research should include more empirical evidence to determine the best practices and address the gap in the field. Therefore, organizations can only grow as fast as their people do, highlighting the importance of continuously developing people to unlock their fullest potential.

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Appendix A

Table 3. Search Terms

Search Terms	APA PsycInfo, Business Source Ultimate
S1: ti("succession planning*") OR ab("succession planning*")	912
S2: ti ("leadership pipeline*") OR ab("leadership pipeline*")	74
S3: ti ("talent pipeline*")OR ab("talent pipeline*")	71
S4: ti("talent management*") OR ab("talent management*")	1729
S5: S1 OR S2 OR S3	1,040
S6: S5 AND S4	86

Appendix B.**Table 5.***Descriptives of the studies*

Author & year	Research Question	Population & sample size	Design	Main Findings
Ali & Mehreen, 2019	Impact of succession planning on turnover intentions in banking sector	Commercial banks in Pakistan N=239	Survey method + structural equation model Quantitative research	Succession planning plays a significant role in accelerating employees performance as well as preventing employees of leaving the company by offering them learning and development opportunities that secure them psychologically being skilled and help them develop professionally.
Whysall et al., 2018	Exploration of talent management practices to adapt to transformational changes to business environments	Engineering-led organizations in United Kingdom N=12	Semi structured interviews Qualitative research	Technology is evolving continuously; therefore, it is important to apply the right TM practices. Important part to pay attention is development of middle managers due to them being part of change management
Pandey & Sharma, 2014	Challenges and practices of succession planning	IT, diversified business, automobile organizations in India N=16	Mixed-method research	Succession planning should not be seen as an exercise but more like a systematic approach and should be used in order to reach the goals of the organization and to ensure that the critical positions are filled
Bhatnagar, 2008	Connection between talent management, employee engagement and talent pipeline development	Multinational organization in India that has a presence in more than 190 countries	Mixed – Method research	Most effective TM practice is the one which is specific to the firm and aligned with the business goals and strategies
Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009	Building a talent management strategy based on competency profiling	Pharmaceutical organization in India that has presence in over 40 countries	Case study – Qualitative research	Taking into account different types of talents in the company, different development opportunities were offered. There should be a greater investment in order to identify the key positions to sustain healthy organization throughout time.

Groves K., 2007	Best practices for employees development of leadership pipeline	15 Healthcare organizations in US N=30	Semi structured interviews - Qualitative research	Company's leaders need to engaged and take responsibility of helping employees develop themselves as it would also contribute to promote organizational culture. Increase visibility of employees who have high potential
Jindal & Shaikh, 2021	Talent retention as a mediator of the link between talent management practices and succession planning	Pharmaceutical companies in India N=367	Cross – sectional study – Quantitative research	Organizations need to learn how to utilize the processes of talent identification and talent developments in order to keep and nurture its talents. When companies achieve this, succession planning success will grow.
Kim et al., 2014	Effective talent management practices for managing technical talent	Companies that have programs designed to engineers N=13	Literature review, Interviews and case studies – Qualitative research	Management of technical talent should be different from management of managerial talent due to technical talent having different needs as employees and carrying tacit knowledge that needs to be transferred in order to ensure the continuity of the business.
Church & Seaton, 2022	Learning agility as a main factor for leadership potential	Consulting psychologists	A literature review	Learning agility is crucial for understanding, identifying and developing high potential leaders, especially in senior leadership roles since formal way of assessment of learning agility since it could act as an indicator of a leader with the ability to adapt to the most stressful and complex set of roles
Ghazali et al., 2021	Explore the metrics of effective succession planning	General population	A literature review	In order for succession planning to be effective, and ensure to sustain leadership pipeline, it needs to be planned in a structured way. It is important to look at the outcomes of the succession planning in order to see if the process was successful. Succession planning needs to be in line with business strategy as well and be able to align with rapidly changing environment.
Barnett & Davis, 2008	Best practices in succession planning	General population	Literature review	Develop the leaders appropriately, coach them in order for them to be good leaders for their own employees. Strategies like succession planning need to start from the top management.
Bano et al., 2022	Best practices of succession planning in any type of organizations	General population	Systematic literature review	Succession planning is more effective when all employees are aware of its process. Creating development plans individually for employees helps to show company's commitment to employees career growth.
Hor et al., 2010	Creating a leadership development program contributing to succession planning	Semiconductor company in Taiwan	A literature review and interviews	Main factor that contribute to succession planning is a leadership development program which includes five main competencies to develop: significance of cost management, leading change, problem solving, flexibility and management of conflict.
McQuade et al., 2007	Impact of losing company's knowledge	Universities in 5 countries (DE, IR, NL, P, SL) N=30	Interviews - Qualitative research	It is crucial in the company to find strategies of talent management in order to prevent losing the knowledge in the company, for which mentorship and succession planning could help. Training and education as well as succession planning should be more available to the employees.
Rothwell & Poduch, 2004	Examining the succession planning of technical talent	Government Agency in US	Article + a case study (interview)	The importance of sustaining the implicit memory within the organization when people retire.
Zhang et al., 2023	Impact of succession planning on firm performance	General population	Literature review, systematic approach	Succession planning could improve company's financial performance, yet multiple factors are involved like size of the firm, nature of the organization.

Table 6.

Main findings of the talent management practices mentioned contributing to succession planning in the technology sector

			DM (department manager)	HRBP (human resource business partner)	GL (group lead)
TM Practices	Talent Development practices	Coaching	“Employee always has to take the lead and to make a proposal, like, this is what I want to do, because that's the most powerful. And then the manager can start with some coaching”	“Just really emphasize them to talk about the 70/20/10 learning principle that we apply within x and to take that into account those conversations.”	“Maybe some coaching or maybe can we link them to somebody that's senior on your side
		Mentoring	“We do in the discussion, we always ask also the manager already, like, what are the current development steps and is the person still developing well in the role? Are there new trainings, mentoring needs, or is there new assignment needs?”		“Can also be special assignments, more learning on the job. It could be mentorship or There are other ways for them to grow these skills that is not specifically that program.”
		Leadership programs	“Current leadership programs, for example, they focus on coaching skills, some other aspects, about learning about yourself, business leadership, or different leadership styles. Yeah. Like either it's coaching or even plotting your own strengths or		“That we try to match the career and growth ambitions of the employees, taking into account also their potential when we nominate people for this program”

			leadership programs. So I think everything comes to talent development anyway.”		
	On the job training	“Giving certain assignments, extra assignments, take a load off of an existing project lead in case you want to become a project lead.”	“Just really emphasize them to talk about the 70/20/10 learning principle that we apply within x and to take that into account those conversations”	“can also be special assignments, more learning on the job. It could be mentorship or There are other ways for them to grow these skills that is not specifically that program”	
	Cross departmental help	“and DM succession that we prepared it, so I took them to the one of last year, and I just updated it, and John did the same, and Kevin did the same, and then we merged it together, discussed it, and then we made some changes”	“I tried to really encourage and motivate those employees, those managers, and what I also do is I try to put it on the agenda of staff meetings so people can share their best practices with each other”	So let's say I have somebody who has the ambition to become a scrum master, but maybe they have never tried being a scrum master and all the scrum masters report to the software GLs. So then I would ask Maurice or Eppo, for example, can you pick this up? Can you help this person?”	
	Talent assessment (talent review meetings, potential assessments, succession mapping)	“We have HR calendar that helps us with that, combining it with the yeah the talent review and potential assessments so we do the potential assessments uh that based on that and we also make them a mapping on the succession..”	a manual succession planning exercise that we do as part of the talent review and succession management topic. And that is part of the HR year calendar		
	Performance management (Develop & Perform)	“Wat are the current development steps and is the person still developing well in the role? Are there new trainings, mentoring needs, or is there new assignment needs? Do you have a help request?”	“Development journey can be discussed, taking the 70/20/10 learning principle into account.”	“we have these formal moments in the D&P cycle to talk about career ambitions and next steps. But that's to be honest for me, that's a constantly ongoing conversation with the employees in my group”	

	conversations, individual development plans)	“So then there's opportunity, at least, for the group managers to come up with help requests.”	“Emphasize and close off with the need of following this conversation up with individual employees. I know that the reality is that some managers don't have the time or don't have the focus to do it.”	“Then we are constantly talking about how do this do the things that you're doing today, help you grow and prepare you for the next steps.”
	Created Intermediate role	“So if someone is really concretely wanting, for example, to become a group lead, so can we then create, for example, a group team lead position, have the person working on that for a year or two years, and then being well prepared to make that step to a group manager?”		
	Transparency	“Transparency on training programs and possibilities help a lot.”		<p>“ I see much more transparency here at x from managers. Than in my previous company. So there the system was very transparent, but the managers were not”</p> <p>” Because my manager is transparent with me and motivates me he's role modeling to me and so it motivates me to also do the same with my group right?”</p>
	Involvement of management	“what you typically see is it's often make the line management responsible that we do content-wise	“we have a talent review meeting including a department manager in including group	“so it starts this leadership mindset transformation starts from the top.”

		the right succession planning especially the contents making sure that that's done”	leads and eventually also employees are of course involved as a follow up exercise.”	
Inclusive vs exclusive approach*	Inclusive		also because also the people that are simply the oil in the machine, the people who do the work, perform the work and who we can build on. These people also require such a conversation because also within their job or horizontal move. In the in the next, uh, in the next future also need to be supported and guided so the hence the importance again of development talking about the thing. “, we could benefit from a more inclusive approach, looking at the ambition that we have as a company”	“I say constantly but formally in the D&P moments but we're always talking about it and typically I initiate the conversation. I see that a few people do it themselves .. then they tend to take ownership of their career more and then they initiate the conversation”
	Exclusive	“We focus on the key positions, key roles, which is difficult to get succession.” “job grade 12 plus, that's mandatory,”	It's exclusive at this point, since it's only mandatory for job grade 12 plus senior positions. But if you look into. Really inclusiveness, we do have some exercises added in our talent review meetings, in our preparations for those talent review	“So formally it's for key roles and we keep indeed this list “ “In terms of the talent programs, I mean, we prioritize, let's say, the employees that are relevant for the specific talent program. For example, we have the Top Gun program that is for software mainly. So then, of course, software people get

			meetings to really make sure that we do succession planning, We do, and the consideration of a high potentials. With a more inclusive mindset.	prioritized for that. We have the OLA and the leadership program that is more for people who want to grow.”
SP Outcomes	Secured leadership pipeline	“... which people we do have in mind as successors and is that pipeline filled well enough”	So looking at the upcoming growth expected, we also consider so while defining critical rules how much growth for each critical role do we foresee? So how many people do we actually need to have in our succession pooling?	“ones (succession plans) that there's not a lot of names, then we see that as critical, and we start thinking, okay, what can we do there, to mitigate the risk that then we don't have anybody ready for this role the next round”
	Development of employees	“ the other goal of succession planning, to develop and perform. We have these D&P sessions. Then we make use of it. Then we also align with the person. Okay. What's your career ambition?... we make that alignment with the person and also what are the needs in development”	“..to identify who would be ready and who needs still development and whether the overall succession planning is considered healthy or not.”	“all of management should all remind ourselves is that succession management and planning is about identifying opportunities for people.”
What is missing?/ what can we still learn? Implications	Use of succession plans	“..... we still, if there is an open position coming, we don't make you well enough use of the files (succession maps).	“we currently use it from a reactive approach ...where the reactive approach is the current way of working is whenever we have a vacancy, we look into succession pooling and we hope that there is a	

			<p>succession pooling actually created with people in it that are ready to fulfill a role that is open or vacant now where you would actually have to switch to a more proactive approach... We proactively develop the people that we see potential reaching a certain role”</p>	
	<p>Transparency of the process</p>	<p>“for the people it's important that they see potential to grow. That's also motivating them. And there we do have still quite some work to do. Not understanding, well, what is my potential growth in the company? And we have a big company. If you're an engineer in job grade seven, what are my possibilities? So can I go technical career? What does it mean? How far can I go as a technical career? What kind of roles? What would my work look like? What's my responsibility? Not only salary, but also what's my impact? And the learning journeys.”</p>	<p>really required to do is to in those follow up conversations with individual employees is that we also transparently share the outlook of someone's development, which is not happening a lot in the organization</p>	
	<p>Integrated approach</p>	<p>“So in my view, it's more the integrated approach. So we typically, not everybody is seeing it like that. We see it always just as a simple procedure</p>	<p>“I mean identifying is something that is just simply part of our way of thinking. But making that a strategical view, but also at</p>	

		<p>or exercise, like, let's do the succession management plan, let's fill out the file, and I'm done. Yeah. And that doesn't work. So what we need to do is have to really do conversation with people.”</p>	<p>the same time, so going higher up, making that a strategical view, connecting it to strategic workforce planning.”</p>	
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