

One Layer of Talent Management

by

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## Abstract

The talent management literature remains rife with confusion stemming in part from misdefinitions of the field and in part from overlapping and conflicting messages within the literature. In the research, I parsed down the definition of talent and talent management into two recurring themes – *pivotal positions* and *pivotal people*. I used the theory of lay beliefs, which describe people’s inherent beliefs about the fixedness (i.e., entity theorists) vs. malleability (i.e., incremental theorists) of human attributes to investigate my second category of *pivotal people* and introduce a model of talent identification – one component of talent management and a central and critical issue. In study 1, I used an experiment to examine the effects of performance (high vs. average), potential (high vs. average), and managers’ level of incremental theory on managers’ ratings and rankings about which employees to include in exclusive talent programs. I found that performance and potential positively predicted talent ratings, but that incremental theory did not predict the relationships between either performance or potential and talent ratings, nor did they affect how managers ranked the different employee profiles. In study 2, I used two surveys to examine perceived organizational lay beliefs’ influence on managers’ talent identification and high potential decisions and how they interacted with managers’ lay beliefs. I found that the perceived level of organizational incremental theory positively predicted the value placed on potential compared to performance, but that individual incremental theory had no effect. I also found that individual incremental theory positively predicted the value placed on learning agility compared to ability, and this relationship became stronger as organizations were perceived to hold more incremental theories. Overall, I found partial support for the theory of lay beliefs in organizational contexts. Managers seemed to make talent decisions about the value of performance compared to potential based on the perceived lay theories of their organizations

rather than on their own lay theories. Although there are limitations with student samples and both studies being hypothetical in nature, I recommend that researchers continue to examine the influence of managers' and organizations' lay beliefs on talent identification decisions including their respective outcomes.

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## Chapter I

### Talent Management – Unscrambled

#### **Overview**

The talent management literature is rife with confusion stemming in part from misdefinitions of the field and in part from overlapping and conflicting messages within the literature and within other literatures related to human resource management (HRM). The main purpose of this chapter is to identify and define the key features of talent and talent management to clarify the field and to curb the widespread confusion.

In the research, I parse down the definition of talent and talent management into two recurring themes; namely, talent management as *pivotal positions* and talent management as *pivotal people*. I further subcategorize talent management as pivotal positions into A-positions, hard-to-fill, or leadership positions; and talent management as pivotal people into high performance, high potential, or a combination of both. My review of the literature is more specific compared to the review by Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) who say that talent management is the “...attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of high potential and high performing employees, to fill in key positions... influence on organization’s sustainable competitive advantage.” (p. 50).

In the following sections, I explore a few sources of confusion and highlight examples of ambiguous explanations of talent and talent management as well as of overlapping and conflicting language and terms used throughout the literature. I further explore the categories and subcategories of talent and talent management and propose a set of eleven propositions relating to these categories. I close by summarizing my findings and providing concluding remarks.

#### **Confusion in the talent management literature**



Despite the growing popularity of the field of talent management (e.g., Dries, 2013; Lewis & Heckman, 2006), there remains a lack of consensus about what talent and talent management are and are not (Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013) and how they are different from longer-standing literatures and concepts in the human resource management field (Iles, Preece, & Chuai, 2010; Meyers, van Woerkom, & Dries, 2013). For example, Pepermans, Vloeberghs, and Perkisas (2003) define talent as employees who demonstrate high potential or who have different needs, motivations, and behaviors than regular employees. On a different note, Nijs, Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and Sels (2014) define talent as employees who demonstrate interpersonal and/or intrapersonal excellence. With respect to talent management, Festing, Kornau, and Schäfer (2015) say that it encompasses activities that attract, develop and retain talented employees. Alternately, Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001) say it is about extracting the strengths of each employee. These few examples showcase the ambiguity in the literature which does not help to demonstrate how talent and talent management are distinct or useful compared to other concepts and fields.

According to Dries (2013), the “vague but appealing rhetoric” surrounding talent management contributes to criticisms about whether it is a management fad rather than an enduring and useful concept (p.3). This may further stem from research that unsuccessfully distinguishes talent management from related fields. For instance, Rothwell (2011) explains that succession planning involves developing pools of employees for promotions whereas “talent management involves attracting, developing, and retaining the best people” (p. 1). This explanation could be more specific and does not help to truly elucidate how talent management is unique from succession planning or any other field in the HR domain. Buzz words and compelling-sounding bits and bytes reveal little and instead contribute to confusion for those

interested in understanding the subject and extending its contribution to research and practice. In the following paragraphs, I review a few other examples highlighting ambiguous explanations of talent and talent management and the use of overlapping language and terms.

**Ambiguous explanations of the field.** Cappelli (2008) explains that “talent management is a matter of anticipating the need for human capital and setting out a plan to meet it’ (p.1). This is arguably similar to human resource planning which is described as “ensuring that the right person is in the right job at the right time” (Jackson & Schuler, 1990, p.223). Another example by Schiemann (2014) states that talent management is "the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences, values, habits, and behaviours of all labor that is brought to bear on the organization's mission" (p.282). This definition could be more specific and is open to many different interpretations. This author further ties this definition to the talent lifecycle, which he describes as “attracting and acquiring talent to onboarding, developing, managing, retaining and even recovering talent” (p.281). Similar descriptions are offered by countless other scholars such as Festing et al. (2015) who describe that talent management encompasses activities that attract, develop and retain talented employees, which parallels the vague definition offered by Rothwell (2011) mentioned above.

Adding to the confusion are authors such as Slan-Jerusalim (2009) who defines succession management as identifying high potential employees and offering career development opportunities in preparation for future leadership roles; but, in earlier research this author defines talent management by exactly the same terms (Slan-Jerusalim & Hausdorf, 2007). These authors further describe that succession systems help organizations attract, develop, and retain talented employees, which is reiterated by countless others (e.g., Anonymous, 2011; McDonald, 2008a, 2008b). These descriptions mirror and directly overlap with descriptions of succession

management which is described as a long-term approach to meet present and future talent needs so that an organization can achieve its mission and business objectives (Rothwell, 2002). This ambiguity makes the field appear inconsistent.

**Overlapping language and terms.** There are also countless instances of overlapping language and terms described throughout the literature. As an example, in research related to the creation of a leadership pipeline, both Conger and Fulmer (2003) and Groves (2007) do not explicitly refer to their research as talent management, but rather as succession management or “the marriage of succession planning and talent development” (Groves, 2007, p.240). However, messages and terms in their research directly overlap with messages and terms in the talent management literature, with examples such as, ‘talent reviews’, ‘identifying star potential’, ‘transparency’, and ‘leadership or talent pipeline’. A question is whether these researchers are contributing to leadership pipelines, talent management, neither, or both.

Additional confusion stems from the use of non-distinct terms such as competencies, strengths, and abilities. To elaborate, competencies are described as behaviors, skills, knowledge, and values (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012) that contribute to being successful in a role (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001; Garavan, Carbery, & Rock, 2012). Examples of competencies include “manages diversity” or “sets a compelling vision” (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001, p.19). Similarly, strengths are described as each employee’s natural talents that can be developed into skills and knowledge that contribute to future high performance (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001). Example of strengths seem to mirror examples of abilities, which are described as either cognitive abilities (Hough & Oswald, 2000), natural ability in at least one domain developed into expressed abilities or talents (Gagné, 2004), past performance (Silzer & Church, 2010), or as part of human capital which is described as a stock of competencies, knowledge, personal attributes,

and an ability to perform labor (Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010). In general, it seems that strengths and abilities reflect whether someone can develop the right competencies to be successful in a job, but this is rarely if ever specified in the literature, nor is the incremental value justified regarding each of these concepts.

In general, there seems to be no real consensus about the most suitable term or language and instead there is a haphazard focus on one term over another despite that these concepts describe similar if not the same ideas. The lack of cohesion among researchers with respect to language pulls the field in a myriad of directions, contributes to disorder in the literature, and raises questions about the unique theoretical contribution of talent and talent management. Authors seem to be relaying similar or the same messages but referring to and labelling them differently.

### **Categorization of the defining features of talent and talent management**

According to Walker and Avant (2011), defining attributes are features or characteristics that are most frequently associated, provide the broadest insight, and help clarify how a construct is different from related constructs. To uncover the defining attributes or features of talent and talent management, I explore recurring themes and definitions in the literature and examine how they overlap with or differ from one another. In Figure 1, I organize conceptualizations of talent and talent management into two broad categories: (1) pivotal positions (e.g., Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005), and (2) pivotal people (e.g., Golik & Blanco, 2014). In the following sections, I explore each category including the subcategories and characterizations or indicators of each. Where appropriate, I discuss talent management practices associated with the different conceptualizations that reflect other defining features of the field.

### **Talent management as a focus on pivotal positions**

In general, pivotal positions are typically described as either A-positions (e.g., Huselid, Beatty, & Becker, 2005), hard-to-fill (e.g., Garrow & Hirsh, 2008; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Rothwell & Poduch, 2004), or leadership and senior-level (e.g., Cope, 1998; Slan-Jerusalim & Hausdorf, 2007). Similar to the strategic human resource management (SHRM) field, which repositions general human resource management from an operational to a strategic position (Golding, 2010), talent management involves identifying strategic roles that are most likely to contribute to an organization's strategic and competitive advantage (Huselid, Beatty, & Becker, 2005). However, talent management is meant to be less egalitarian than SHRM (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Meyers et al., 2013) and involves differentiating the workforce from the best or most strategic positions to the most superfluous or unnecessary positions (Huselid & Becker, 2011). In the following sections, I review the different conceptualizations of what constitutes a pivotal position and provide reasons why A-positions may be the most reflective of talent and talent management.

**A-positions.** A-positions are thought to contribute the most disproportionately to achieving an organization's strategy compared to B-positions which are more supportive or C-positions which offer little value (Huselid et al., 2005). Becker and Huselid (2006) argue that highly talented employees are only valuable to an organization if they occupy positions that add to the organization's strategic objectives. Because some positions in an organization potentially create more value than others, the authors advise a differentiated approach to managing employees as per the strategic importance of their jobs.

Hughes and Rog (2008) provide a broad definition of talent management where they point out that it is ideally for all employees (which is debatable), but most especially for those who are in key positions. Erickson, Schwartz, and Ensell (2012) further recommend identifying

critical workforce segments where the employees who fill these roles provide a disproportionate share of revenue and are most responsible for executing an organization's strategy. In general, Huselid and his colleagues strongly endorse the relevance of A-positions to talent and talent management while many other researchers allude to A-positions as part of their broader definitions of talent management (e.g., Erickson et al., 2012; Hughes & Rog, 2008).

To accurately identify A-positions, Huselid et al. (2005) explain that it is necessary to clearly understand the strategy of the organization and then identify which jobs are most pivotal and critical to achieving that strategy. As an example, Wal-Mart has a low-cost strategy that requires excellent logistic capabilities, information systems, and a management focus on efficiency and cost reduction so that positions that further these aims are considered pivotal (Huselid et al., 2005). Another example, Nordstrom and Costco as organizations both strive for superior customer satisfaction, however, this is achieved via different pivotal positions at each organization (Huselid et al., 2005). For instance, at Nordstrom, personalized service is vital and front line staff disproportionately contribute to achieving this aim; whereas at Costco, there are almost no front-line staff and instead purchasing managers help to achieve low prices, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. Overall, A-positions are strongly tied to their disproportionate contribution to achieving an organization's unique business strategy.

**Difficult to fill and leadership positions.** Difficult or hard to fill positions, which can also include leadership positions, stem from perceptions of a pending shortage of workers coming with expected mass retirement of baby boomers and an ageing workforce combined with lower birth rates (e.g., Helton & Soubik, 2004; Herrera, 2002; Wade, 2012), changing work values (Green, 2000), and changing work arrangements (e.g., Langan, 2000). In their broad definition of talent management, Erickson et al. (2012) also describe workforce segments that are

difficult to replace due to skills shortages and skilled roles that require high barriers to entry such as high level education and costly designations. They describe a competitive environment where organizations are constantly competing to outbid one another to attract the best talent where the authors stress the importance of retaining such limited talent pools. This rhetoric seems especially popular amongst consultants (e.g., Erickson et al., 2012), however it is reiterated by researchers (e.g., Pepermans et al., 2003).

In general, Garrow and Hirsh (2008) recommend a proactive approach for hard to fill positions which they categorize as either functional, critical, or leadership. They describe functional groups as difficult to recruit and retain due to constantly upgrading skill requirements and contend that younger employees are most suitable for development into these roles. They describe critical posts as often requiring the recruitment of external candidates. And, lastly, they align with many researchers (Church & Rotolo, 2013; e.g., Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Groves, 2007; Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015) who believe that the main focus of talent management is the future leader supply, often referred to as the leadership pipeline (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2001).

The conceptualizations of hard-to-fill and leadership positions imply rare or higher positions within an organization's hierarchy (e.g., Garavan et al., 2012). This contrasts conceptualization of A-positions which theoretically can be at any level of an organization's hierarchy (Huselid et al., 2005). For instance, in a pharmaceutical organization, A-positions might encompass all sales positions, which is a decidedly mid-level position; or, at a luxury spa A-positions might include janitorial staff, which is a decidedly lower-level position. Employees who fill these positions directly and importantly contribute to the experience of customers, which is a key feature of these types of organizations' strategies and success. To elaborate further, Huselid et al. (2005) describe how a compliance officer at a large organization would be a

member of the executive team, be paid a high salary, have a unique and perhaps difficult to find skill-set, and make important decisions that support the organization's strategy, but there is limited upside once a certain standard has been met. It is important that standards do not fall to poor levels and mistakes in these positions can be costly, but the upside from very good performance to excellent performance is not exponentially beneficial in the same way as it would be in A-positions.

Huselid et al. (2005) further explain that variability in performance is a marker of A-positions because a well performing employee in an A-position represents a disproportionate upside to achieving an organization's strategic objectives. In this sense, talent management as *pivotal positions* is tied to talent management as *pivotal people*, elaborated in the subsequent section. Huselid et al. (2005) explain that a sales employee performing in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile generates 5 to 10 times more revenue than an employee performing in the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Notably, B and C positions have less or non-existent upside to high performance relative to other employees in the same role. For example, a high performing front sales staff at Costco does not offer a disproportionate strategic benefit compared to an average performing sales staff because, as mentioned previously, front line sales is not a pivotal position at this type of organization.

In summary, hard to fill and leadership positions are important but they do not necessarily contribute disproportionately to achieving the organizational strategy or generate revenue in the same way as A-positions. Of course, there are instances when they do; for example, a CEO position is a difficult-to-fill and leadership position and it is also an A-position in that it should disproportionately contribute to achieving organizational strategy and robust revenues. Overall, A-positions are unique to each organization and strongly relate to how



disproportionately they contribute to achieving an organization's strategy, which leads to the first proposition:

*Proposition 1: A-positions are a feature of talent management, can be at any level of an organization's hierarchy, and do not necessarily include hard to fill or leadership positions.*

**Talent management practices in relation to pivotal positions.** How talent management is approached may be explained by the notion of pivotal positions. For instance, an ongoing debate in the literature regards how exclusive or inclusive talent management programs should be (Gallardo-Gallardo, Nijs, Dries, & Gallo, 2015). Many researchers contend that talent management must be exclusive by nature but that exclusivity exists on a continuum (Dries, 2013) cited as ranging anywhere between 1 – 20 percent (e.g., Becker, Huselid, & Beatty, 2009; Gelens, Hofmans, Dries, & Pepermans, 2014; Stahl et al., 2012). However, despite trends towards exclusivity (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a), cohorts of scholars continue to endorse the benefits of inclusivity (e.g., Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001; Yost & Chang, 2009) and the contribution of teamwork, culture, and effective systems to organizational success (e.g., Pfeffer, 2001). In certain situations, some scholars even recommend including all employees in talent programs (Silzer & Dowell, 2010). For instance, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015) argue that in luxury hotels, frontline and behind-the-scene employees play equally important roles in delivering the high-quality service expected in this type of organization and thus more inclusive talent programs are thought to be required to meet strategic objectives.

Notably, however, many researchers point out that exclusive and inclusive are contradictory by nature and talent management cannot encompass both (e.g., Dries, 2013). This is compounded by a scarcity of available data to support either perspective (Hughes & Rog,

2008; Lewis & Heckman, 2006) or either's impact on business performance or the engagement of employees, especially those not included in talent management programs (Garavan et al., 2012). Thus, and as per the definition of pivotal positions, which stand apart due to their disproportionate contribution to achieving organizational strategy, talent management must be exclusive by nature with a focus on the most strategic positions relative to all other positions.

In summary, organizational strategy determines the number of pivotal positions which at least in part establishes the level of exclusivity of talent management programs so that organizations with many pivotal positions might take more inclusive approaches (i.e., less exclusive) and organizations with fewer pivotal positions might take more exclusive approaches. Situations that include all employees do not represent talent management but are rather more reflective of HRM or SHRM.

*Proposition 2: Exclusivity is a feature of talent management.*

### **Talent management as a focus on pivotal people**

Even more than pivotal positions, talent and talent management are frequently associated with people, typically described as either high performers, high potentials, or a combination of both. Talent as pivotal people parallels aspects of the human capital literature in that organizations are thought to derive competitive advantage from the competencies, knowledge, and social capital (Farndale et al., 2010) of talented individuals who make up the human capital pool (e.g., Cheese, Thomas, & Craig, 2008; Wright, McMahan, & McWilliams, 1994). It also parallels workforce differentiation (Huselid & Becker, 2011) or the differential management of employees based on their relative potential to contribute to the competitive advantage of their organizations (Lepak & Snell, 1999), which is tied to the notion of A-positions, described previously. In the following sections, I explore high performance, high potential, the

characteristics of ability, motivation, learning agility, person-organization fit, and the combination of both high performance and high potential. Again, where appropriate, I discuss talent management practices related to the different categories to showcase other defining features of the field.

**High performance.** A plethora of authors describe talent as demonstrating high job performance (e.g., Becker et al., 2009; Nijs et al., 2014). For example, in the giftedness literature Gagné (2004) describes talent as mastery or outstanding performance. Nijs et al. (2014) also conceptualize the outcome of talent as interpersonal excellence among others and/or as intrapersonal excellence within oneself. These authors further explain that interpersonal excellence separates the talented from the non-talented and is more prevalent in competitive contexts and more exclusive approaches to talent management.

In general, high performance is easily observed and high performers are sometimes referred to as *high flyers* to reflect their proven or demonstrated success or track record (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a). Mäkelä, Björkman, and Ehrnrooth (2010) further note that being a member of a high-performing team or doing visible work are important in classifying organizational talent, which introduces the notion of bias in talent identification, reiterated by other scholars who find that instincts and preferences bias talent decisions (e.g., Mellahi & Collings, 2010; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). Despite evidence of biased decision making, various authors confirm that most organizations operationalize and identify talent by focusing on past performance (e.g., Silzer & Church, 2009) where supervisor-rated performance is the most important predictor of talent category (Dries, Van Acker, & Verbruggen, 2012), and HR practitioners consider above-average job performance

as most important in assessments (Cope, 1998; Dries & Pepermans, 2007a). I thus propose the following:

*Proposition 3: High performance is a feature of talent and talent management.*

**Talent management practices in relation to high performance.** How talent management is approached may be also be explained by the notion of high performance. For instance, Lepak and Snell (1999) describe talent as value and uniqueness and Smart (2006) claims that only 25 percent of employees are high performing at most organizations making them important to retain. Examples of retention strategies recommended throughout the literature include compensation, rewards, and recognition (Arora, 2012; Menefee & Murphy, 2004), training and development (Haider et al., 2015; Picchio & van Ours, 2011), and creating a desirable organizational culture (Arora, 2012; Haider et al., 2015). Transparent talent programs may help organizations retain high performers by sharing talent plans with them, which reflects a promise or commitment to these employees (Herriot & Pemberton, 1996; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994) that signals their secured futures at an organization (Slan-Jerusalim & Hausdorf, 2007; Wells, 2003). In principle, high performers in pivotal positions may represent the most exclusive talent pool at an organization who warrant special attention with respect to retention strategies.

Taking things further, some scholars recommend that all positions be filled with A-performers, referred to as top-grading (Smart, 2006). However, other scholars distinctly recommend against this and say that managing B and C performers is vital to an organization's success and is a method to maintain high costs (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). This latter point of view aligns with talent management as pivotal positions because it would be costly to hire A performers for B and C positions who do not offer a

disproportionate benefit compared to weaker performers in the same roles (Huselid et al., 2005). Cope (1998) describes high performers who are not in pivotal roles as *high professionals* and typically working in administrative or operational roles, but further notes that organizations find it difficult to communicate this message to those employees who are looking or expect to move into more pivotal roles or less administrative roles, which leads to the next proposition:

*Proposition 4: Retaining high performing individuals in pivotal positions is a feature of talent management. Retaining high performing individuals in non-pivotal positions is not a feature of talent management but rather a feature of HRM.*

**High potential.** High potential may be the alluring counterpart to high performance in that it is also a recurring and perhaps more-hyped concept in talent and talent management discourse. High potential employees are thought to advance at a faster pace, demonstrate different needs, motivations, and behaviors than regular employees (Pepermans et al., 2003), and possess natural abilities that will help them become more than what they currently are (Cope, 1998; Silzer & Church, 2009). Some criticize this definition, however, saying that it is based on past performance, which is thought to be flawed (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000), and constitutes halo bias, or attributing positive attributes to someone based on demonstrated but unrelated attributes (Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015). In general, the term high potential is said to be over-used and it is not often clear what researchers mean (Silzer & Church, 2010).

Fundamentally, high-performance is observable whereas high-potential is not and thus it is a latent characteristic or trait that is characterized by relevant indicators. In this way, high potential is uncertain in that an individual identified as high potential, via relevant indicators, may never achieve greatness (Tormala, Jia, & Norton, 2012). Overall, mastery of job-related competencies (i.e., behaviors, knowledge, skills that contribute to an employee's success in a

job) relate to high performance whereas indicators of ability to learn, develop, and perform well in broader careers relate to high potential (Pepermans et al., 2003) and reflect possibility and promise (Altman, 1997). Despite fundamental difference between high performance and high potential, current performance remains the primary indicator of being identified as high potential (Silzer & Church, 2009) such that being a high performer increases the odds of being identified as a high potential by 2.5 times (Dries, Van Acker, et al., 2012, p.278). However, high performance should not reflect high potential and a key question is what constitutes the indicators of high potential.

To explore this question, I refer to Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz (2013) description of talent as *characteristics* of people. Gallardo-Gallardo and colleagues argue that talent can be represented by a natural ability, a mastery, commitment, or fit. However, many of those constructs (e.g., “mastery”) remain broadly defined and they do not directly describe how those constructs can be measured (and thus used to identify talents, for instance). I propose four more specific characteristics derived from their work and argue that they specifically represent indicators of high potential (vs. talent in general). Those four key characteristics are ability (related to cognitive ability or intelligence), motivation (related to demonstrating behaviors that indicate interest in being part of an organization’s talent supply), learning agility (Dries, Vantilborgh, & Pepermans, 2012), and person-organization (PO) fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005) represent at least four characteristics of high potential. In summary, Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of *characteristics* of people when conceptualizing talent, and my four indicators of talent reflect this.

People tend to realize their potential when they demonstrate high cognitive ability (e.g., Faßhauer, Frese, & Evers, 2015; Gonzalez, 2005; Kuncel, Rose, Ejiogu, & Yang, 2014) via

completing complex tasks (e.g., math and science courses) but also through motivation (e.g., attendance; Trusty & Niles, 2004), and learning opportunities and stimulation (e.g., Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013; Molfese et al., 2002; Schulz et al., 2002). In addition, PO fit is not only positively related to organizational attraction (Judge & Cable, 1997), but also to job satisfaction and in-role performance (Gregory, Albritton, & Osmonbekov, 2010), the capability to influence in-group members (Conner, 2014), and negatively related to absenteeism and frequent job changes (Conner, 2014). Based on the comprehensive extant literature – which is briefly highlighted in this paragraph – I argue that, at a minimum, components of these four characteristics must be present for an employee to be identified as high potential.

Acknowledging this point, it may be noteworthy to highlight a variety of other characteristics that instead or additionally represent latent characteristics of high potential including business knowledge or mastery (e.g., McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994), interpersonal or social skills (e.g., McCall, 1994; Rubin, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2002), affective commitment (e.g., Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993), courage (e.g., McCall, 1994) and self-confidence (e.g., McCauley et al., 1994), ease in dealing with issues (e.g., Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991), being a team player (Regine, 2009), supervisor sponsorship (Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999), emotional intelligence (Sadri, 2012), working hard and career sponsorship (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), integrity (e.g., Gottlieb & Sanzgiri, 1996), or self-development (London & Smither, 1999). Despite this plethora of other possibilities, many of the characteristics outlined in this paragraph have been studied in the context of leadership potential (e.g., interpersonal or social skills) where I am arguing that leadership is not necessarily contained within the spheres of talent or talent management. Furthermore, some of these characteristics may be perceived as being more important to specific jobs and roles (e.g.,

integrity in banking and finance), in comparison to the four characteristics that I chose to examine which could arguably apply to any job. Furthermore, I aim to build from Gallardo-Gallardo, et al. (2013) because their work represents a good starting point and allows me as a researcher to build from other researchers' work bolstering overall consensus in the field.

In the following sections, I explore the four indicators of high potential proposed in this research and some corresponding talent management practices including providing opportunity, as additional defining features of talent and talent management.

**Ability.** Although Gagné (2004) describes high performance as talent, he also argues that there needs to be some level of ability. According to Ackerman (2014) no researcher has demonstrated stellar performance with individuals who had not already proven themselves through intellectual ability tests and educational success. Ackerman further argues that while deliberate practice may be necessary to meet expert levels of performance, having an innate ability is more essential, along with other factors (see Kulasegaram, Grierson, & Norman, 2013). In conjunction, Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001) argue that skills and knowledge are easy to teach, whereas behavioral job competencies related to talent are difficult or impossible to teach. These authors offer examples of behavioral competencies as enduring traits such as empathy, assertiveness, focus, and competitiveness.

In sum, Buckingham and Vosburgh (2001) recommend that people develop their innate or natural strengths (i.e., abilities) to achieve the desired organizational outcomes rather than try to master the natural strengths (i.e., abilities) of others who might achieve organizational outcomes in different ways. For example, an employee in an entry finance position might demonstrate innate mathematical abilities by attaining high scores when passing difficult financial board exams (e.g., Chartered Financial Accountant). In another way, a successful



salesperson may have suitable extroverted personality traits that manifest as innate abilities that help the salesperson make customers feel at ease, increasing customers' fidelity to an organization, which boost sales and assists the organization to achieve its strategic goals. In general, specific abilities in one employee may be difficult or impossible to teach to different employees who are inherently different, but who may be equally successful via different personal mechanisms reflective of their own unique abilities. This leads to the following proposition:

*Proposition 5: Ability is a characteristic of high potential which is a feature of talent and talent management.*

**Motivation.** Most organizations focus solely on output – typically operationalized as past performance – in their assessments of talent (Silzer & Church, 2009); however, motivation, passion, and loving one's job are cited as being underappreciated in talent management research and practice (Dries, 2013). According to Gagné (2004, 2009) the most significant interpersonal component of his giftedness model concerns motivational issues. This is because deliberate practice is not thought to be inherently enjoyable (Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007) so employees must be motivated to engage in the talent development process to overcome obstacles, tedium, and occasional failure (Gagné, 2004). This is further echoed in research by Drake and Winner (2013) who find that interest, drive, and desire to work comes from within and are not forced from external pressures. These descriptions are reflective of intrinsic motivation, or doing something for the pleasure and enjoyment of it (Deci, 1973) and state motivation, or interest in a particularly activity rather than someone's overall or trait motivation (Fridhandler, 1986).

A number of other scholarly research report positive relationships between motivation and developing expertise (Latham & Pinder, 2005), which is confirmed in empirical

investigations by Dries and Pepermans (2007a, p. 95) who find that organisational representatives identify behavioral attributes such as proactiveness and career initiative in their conceptualization of high-potential qualities. Overall, Garavan, Carbery, and Rock (2012) note that there is a trend toward individuals needing to be self-directed (i.e., motivated) in their own talent development. In this way, motivation may be more likely to be regarded as a characteristic that can change and that is dependent on an individual and the context within which they work (i.e., relationships with supervisor and coworkers, and culture and context of the organization).

Furthermore, Vinchur, Schippmann, Switzer, and Roth (1998) find that interest in one's job is significantly related to supervisors' ratings and to employees' objective performance. Research on desire and effort applies to employees in organizational contexts, which is confirmed by Wong and Csikszentmihalyi (1991) who argue that developing cognitive abilities or potential is emotionally draining and requires motivation. These authors cite several scholarly papers that report the positive relationship between motivation and developing expertise. Furthermore, Gagné (2004) explains how motivation relates to goal-setting processes (e.g., identifying and selecting interests, needs, motives, passions, values) and volition relates to goal-attainment behaviors (e.g., resource and time allocation, delay of gratification, effort, perseverance, self-regulation; p.127). Goal setting processes and goal attainment behaviors arguably reflect the effort required when an employee is striving to be part of an organization's talent pool. This is confirmed in empirical investigations by Dries and Pepermans (2007a) who find that organisational representatives identify behavioral attributes such as proactiveness and career initiative in their conceptualization of high-potential qualities.

Overall, Garavan, Carbery, and Rock (2012) note that there is a trend toward individuals needing to be self-directed (i.e., motivated) in their own talent development, however, the focus

of talent development is typically to benefit the organization rather than the individual. Returning to the example of the employee in an entry level finance position, pursuing financial designations typically requires extensive studying outside of work hours and demonstrates or signals the employee's motivation to succeed in career related goals and perhaps their interest in being counted as part of an organization's talent pool, which leads to the following proposition:

*Proposition 6: Motivation as demonstrated in behaviors that indicate interest in being part of the talent pool and be involved in talent development is a characteristic of high potential, which is a feature of talent and talent management.*

**Learning agility.** Learning agility represents another characteristic of high potential and is described as the speed of learning (i.e., processing and perceptual speed) and flexibility across and within situations (cognitive flexibility; DeRue, Ashford, & Myers, 2012). Learning agility is a concept that is not well defined theoretically or even yet reliably measured (Mitchinson, Gerard, Roloff, & Burke, 2012). It is described as one component of the ability to learn (DeRue et al., 2012) and may overlap with descriptions of cognitive ability. For instance, general mental ability is often described as the ability to learn or to develop ability rather than as intelligence (e.g., Hunter, 1986), which is thought to be more genetically based (Schmidt, 2002).

In general, many people believe that there is more to intelligence than what is measured by standard IQ tests (Neisser et al., 1996; Sternberg, 1985; Sternberg, Conway, Ketron, & Bernstein, 1981; Sternberg & Kaufman, 1998; Sternberg, Wagner, Williams, & Horvath, 1995). Sternberg and Hedlund (2002) discuss several concepts (e.g., emotional intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, practical intelligence) as examples of broader conceptualizations of intelligence that acknowledge that individuals' have different strengths that may not be measured with traditional intelligence measures. In a similar fashion, learning agility also represents a

conceptualization of intelligence and is encompassed within some of the descriptions offered by Sterberg and Hedlund (2002). For instance, these authors describe practical intelligence as different from basic intelligence and related to concepts such as “street smart”, “savvy”, or possessing “common sense”. These researchers also find that learning or practical intelligence is more predictive of organisational success than basic IQ.

Arun, Coyle, and Hauenstein (2012) further stress the relevance of context and the related attributes of *learning-transfer*, *self-monitoring*, and *goal-setting* to further define the concept of learning agility. In general, learning agility seems to reflect attributes such as openness, flexibility, and adaptability in challenging work settings and many researchers link it to high potential. For example, Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) report that an employee’s ability to learn from experience is a marker of high-potential and of being able to produce successful results and career success when working in new situations. Likewise, in their empirical research, Dries et al. (2012) find that high learning agility is a better predictor than high job performance for being identified as high potential. Lastly, Winner and Drake (2013) and Gagné (2015) describe talent as ease and speed in learning.

Some researchers describe learning agility as vital in the dynamic and unpredictable business world and as the ability to learn from one’s experiences and apply that learning to new and different situations (Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2004). Eichinger and Lombardo (2004) further define learning agility as being able and willing to derive meaning from all kinds of experience. Learning agility has also been linked to resilience (Povah, 2012), comfort with dealing with uncertainty (Bennett, Verwey, & van der Merwe, 2016) and adaptability (Zhu et al., 2013). Lastly, Spreitzer et al. (1997) find that learning agility is an early indicator of international executive potential.

Overall, learning agility reflects being able to quickly recognize patterns in new situations, receive constructive criticism, make quick and appropriate changes that contribute to short and long-term success, and quickly and flexibly apply connections between past experiences to successfully apply relevant knowledge and forgo inappropriate knowledge in new experiences (DeRue et al., 2012). It may be positively correlated with openness as one of the five facets of personality and inversely related to arrogance. For example, an expatriate who successfully transitions from working in one country to another, or a manager who successfully switches from leading one team or functional area to another team or functional area might be marked as someone with high learning agility (DeRue et al., 2012). This leads to the following proposition:

*Proposition 7: Learning agility is a characteristic of high potential, which is a feature of talent and talent management.*

**Person-organization fit.** High potential may not simply be about ability, motivation, and learning agility. For instance, Ulrich and Smallwood (2012) recommend that talent is a function of competence, commitment, and contribution, such that deficiencies in one are not compensated by excellence in others. Competence and commitment arguably reflect ability and motivation, respectively, whereas contribution is described as finding meaning on a personal level in work to maintain interest in the talent development process. Per this description, contribution could relate to an employee's fit with their organization, or, more specifically, their person-organization (PO) fit, which is described as a sense of correlation between an employee's values and their organization's values (Kristof, 1996). Employees who experience high PO fit are said to feel that they belong (Wei, 2015) and are more committed to staying at their organizations over the long

term (Valentine, Godkin, & Lucero, 2002; Wei, 2015). In general, PO fit is a psychological tie between the goals, values, and needs of the employee and their organization (Mahal, 2012).

PO fit has been found to predict people's behavior including in work contexts such as job performance (Bright, 2007; McCulloch & Turban, 2007; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Dilchert, 2005), that internal successors are more successful than external recruits (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a), and that matching pivotal position with a pivotal talent leads to high organisational commitment (Kristof, 1996), which further contributes to extra-role performance (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Evidence further suggests that PO fit is related to attraction to the organization, socialization, and work outcomes (see Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Verquer, Beehr, & Wagner, 2003), supervisory ratings, contextual performance, and career success (i.e., salary and job level; Bretz & Judge, 1994; Goodman & Svyantek, 1999).

Jobs consist of both task requirements and people requirements (Robles, 2012). Cognitive ability may not be related to people requirements such as how well an individual works and cooperates with others in the organization (Day & Silverman, 1989). In general, PO fit contributes to individuals' needs being met because individuals work with others who have similar characteristics (Kristof, 1996). More broadly, researchers suggest that organizations should select individuals who fit the requirements of the job and the values of the organization (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991). Returning to the example of the entry level finance employee, if the employee senses a strong match between their values and their organization's values and/or if they have a good relationship and feel inspired by their supervisor or fellow co-workers, then the employee may be more willing to stay and feel more committed to their organization over the long term despite setbacks experienced throughout a career, which leads to the next proposition:

*Proposition 8: Person-organization fit is a characteristic of high potential, which is a feature of talent and talent management.*

**Talent management practices in relation to high potential.** How talent management is approached may further be explained by the notion of high potential. For instance, even more than high performance employees, high-potential employees are thought to represent a small and elite proportion of the workforce (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a) anywhere from .001 to 10 percent (Dries, 2013), or up to 15 percent (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2012). In general, organizations are said to struggle to fill strategic roles from within because of an insufficient pipeline of high-potential employees (i.e., war for talent; Beechler & Woodward, 2009), which is thought to constrain organizational growth (Ready & Conger, 2007). Overall, a general message reflected in the literature concerns shortages of potential career incumbents (Tucker, Kao, & Verma, 2005). In this way high potential employees may not only be thought of as valuable, but also rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991), which suggests that high potential employees are even more valuable and unique compared to high performing employees.

Once employees are identified and placed into the rare category of high potential, talent management is often described as the differential management based on employees' relative potential to contribute to the competitive advantage of their organizations (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Scholars recommend step-by-step development including job rotations, offering opportunities not typically available to other employees and within a shortened timeline (Fulmer, Stumpf, & Bleak, 2009; Garrow & Hirsh, 2008), and tracking performance on development assignments to inform succession planning (Groves, 2007). A main message seems to be that high potentials should be developed to become the organization's talent who will succeed into leadership or broader positions rather than specifically into A-positions. Overall, internal development is

preferred over external acquisition of talent (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a; Garavan et al., 2012), however, talent development is under explored in the academic literature (Garavan et al., 2012). I propose the following:

*Proposition 9: Development of high potential employees to become talent at their organization and succeed in pivotal positions is a feature of talent management.*

Finally, many scholars recommend that high potential employees require the opportunity to develop their abilities (e.g., Cummings & Oldham, 1997; Derr, Jones, & Toomey, 1988; Houghton & DiLiello, 2010). Leskiw and Singh (2007) recommend learning systems that involve action and opportunities for development, relationship building, and feedback. For instance, employees might be sent to multinational locations to work on real organizational issues or assigned to challenging job assignments and job rotations (Zenger & Folkman, 2003). In this way, active learning systems give employees the opportunity to demonstrate the characteristics of high potential (i.e., ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit).

Challenging work predicts promotability over and above job performance and job tenure (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, & Klehe, 2009) such that employees who are highly monitored (e.g., call centre employees) may have less opportunity to develop, prove, and demonstrate indicators of high potential compared to employees who have more discretion and latitude over how they perform their jobs (e.g., pharmaceutical sales representatives). This latter cohort of employees may thus more readily be identified as high potential and fall within the definitional boundaries of talent and talent management compared to the former cohort of employees who may never be identified as talent. Finally, Dries et al. (2012) report that career variety is positively associated with learning agility, which predicts high potential identification. I thus propose the following:



*Proposition 10: Providing opportunity for career variety (changing roles, progress, trajectory, mobility) for high potential employees is a feature of talent management.*

**Combination of performance and potential.** To close the discussion on talent management as pivotal people, I address the combination of performance and potential where both are frequently referred to in descriptions of talent and talent management (e.g., Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Golik & Blanco, 2014). Nijs et al. (2014) further conceptualize talent as an ability component and an affective component, where the outcome of talent is excellence either interpersonal and/or intrapersonal excellence. The ability component arguably reflects ability and perhaps learning agility as characteristics or indicators of high potential outlined in the current research. The affect component arguably reflects motivation and PO fit as further characteristics or indicators of high potential again outlined in the current research. Finally, the excellence component arguably reflects high performance. Approaches to talent and talent management may depend on which component is weighted as being more important, which reflects concepts of value and uniqueness.

In general, both high performance and high potential are cited as being valuable and unique, however, high potential tends to edge out high performance regarding both. First, as mentioned previously, potential is uncertain compared to performance and is something that must be uncovered (Tormala et al., 2012). Furthermore, research suggests preferences for potential over performance (e.g., Gal & Rucker, 2010; Tormala & Rucker, 2007) due to more favorable responses to uncertain as opposed to certain events (e.g., Lee & Qiu, 2009) and more in-depth processing required in uncertain situations (e.g., Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Second, high potential is cited as comprising as few as .001 or up to 15 percent of a workforce (e.g., Dries, 2013), whereas high performance is cited as comprising around 25

percent of a workforce (Smart, 2006). Despite indications that high potential is more valued and unique compared to job performance, decision makers continue to use job performance to make decisions about which employees are thought to have high potential (Dries, Van Acker, et al., 2012). This, however, and as mentioned previously, is flawed due to fundamental differences between the two concepts as well as due to biases and other unobservable pitfalls.

Finally, various researchers (e.g., Groysberg, Nanda, & Nohria, 2004) cite sources such as the Corporate Leadership Council (2005) which claims that most high potentials are high performers. This, however, does not acknowledge (1) under-achievers who have low performance but demonstrate indicators of high potential and (2) high potential employee whose performance plunges when introduced into new situations (e.g., Groysberg, Sant, & Abrahams, 2008). In general, assessing levels of both performance and potential is another feature of talent and talent management and I thus propose the following:

*Proposition 11: Considering both performance and potential to make talent decisions is a feature of talent management.*

## **Summary**

The talent management literature remains messy and confusing despite that it has been over ten years since Lewis and Heckman's (2006) critical review and their pointing out a lack of common definition and evidence underpinning the field's practice. There remains countless examples that do not adequately elucidate talent and talent management including the description of 'talentship' as a decision science "to increase the success of the organization by improving decisions that depend on or impact talent resources" (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005, p.25); or talent management as "a strategic and holistic approach to both HR and business planning or a new route to organizational effectiveness... so that everyone reaches their potential" (Ashton &

Morton, 2005, p.30). The use of the word *everyone* by Ashton and Morton confuses whether talent management is meant for everyone and is thus a rebranding of HRM or whether it is more elitist and meant for a select few, which is reiterated by innumerable other authors (e.g., Collings & Mellahi, 2009). To quell the confusion, I propose that the defining features of talent and talent management fall into two broad categories, namely talent management as pivotal positions and talent management as pivotal people. In the following sections, I summarize the conceptualizations of each of my proposed talent and talent management conceptions.

**Talent management as pivotal positions.** Talent management as pivotal positions often refers to A-positions, hard-to-fill, and/or leadership positions. I propose that A-positions are most akin to pivotal positions in that they offer the most disproportionate benefit to achieving an organization's strategy (Huselid et al., 2005). A-positions can be at any level of an organization's hierarchy (Huselid et al., 2005) which is different from conceptualizations of hard to fill (e.g., Garrow & Hirsh, 2008) or leadership positions (e.g., Cope, 1998), which are typically ascribed as rare or higher up in an organization's hierarchy. These latter positions, however, may not fall within the definitional boundaries of pivotal positions or of talent and talent management (Huselid et al., 2005).

**Exclusivity as a feature of talent management.** I further propose that talent management must be exclusive by nature and that exclusivity is a defining feature that separates it from other fields. In general, organizational strategy determines the number of pivotal positions, which in turn at least partially determines the exclusivity of talent management. Organizations with many pivotal positions may take more inclusive approaches to talent programs whereas organizations with fewer pivotal positions may take more exclusive approaches. Programs that include or involve all employees no longer fall under the definitional

boundaries of talent management and are instead more akin to HRM or SHRM where all positions are perhaps treated equally.

Despite trends toward exclusivity in both practice and research, some scholars continue to extol the benefits of inclusive approaches, teamwork, organizational culture, and effective organizational systems (e.g., Pfeffer, 2001). However, there is little research that examines the outcomes of exclusive versus more inclusive talent management programs (Hughes & Rog, 2008). In theory, there is no reason why organizations cannot take exclusive approaches to talent management programs and encourage teamwork and organizational cultures that help to attain strategic objectives.

**Talent management as pivotal people.** Talent management as pivotal people encompasses topics related to high performance, high potential, or a combination of both. High performance is obvious and can be easily observed and measured and high performers are sometimes referred to as *high flyers* to reflect their proven success or track record (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a). Most organizations operationalize and identify talent by focusing on past performance (e.g., Silzer & Church, 2009) where supervisor-rated performance is the most important predictor of talent category (Dries, Van Acker, et al., 2012). High performing employees in pivotal positions may represent the most exclusive pool of an organization's talent supply and retaining these employees is usually an important feature of talent management.

More difficult to pinpoint is high potential, which reflects something that is uncovered or untapped (Pepermans et al., 2003) and reflects possibility and promise (Altman, 1997), but also something uncertain. In comparison to high performance, which is easy to measure and observe, organizations must figure out how to identify high potential by pinpointing and measuring its key characteristics or indicators. Despite fundamental difference between high performance and high

potential, current performance remains the primary indicator for being identified as high potential (Silzer & Church, 2009), which is fundamentally flawed decisions making. To avoid this pitfall, I explore the roles of ability, motivation (related to behaviors that demonstrate interest in being part of the talent supply), learning agility, and person-organization fit as characteristics or indicators of high potential. I further propose that development opportunities and providing career variety (progress, trajectory, mobility) for high potential employees are other defining features of talent management. Some employees may demonstrate the characteristics of high potential after being provided with the opportunity to do so through development or career variety more than other employees provided with the same opportunities.

**Combination of high performance and high potential.** Researchers and organizations often include both high performance and high potential in their descriptions of talent and talent management. Approaches to talent and talent management may depend on how high performance and high potential are weighted in comparison to each other or which one is considered as being more important. While both high performance and high potential are cited as being valuable and unique, high potential tends to edge out high performance regarding both. Despite this, job performance remains the number one indicator for being identified as high potential (Dries, Van Acker, et al., 2012).

Lastly, some researchers cite that most high potentials are high performers (e.g., Groysberg et al., 2004), however this fails to capture or explain under-achievers who have low performance but who demonstrate indicators of high potential or high potential employee whose performance plunges when introduced into new situations (e.g., Groysberg et al., 2008). In general, assessing levels of both performance and potential is another feature of talent and talent management.

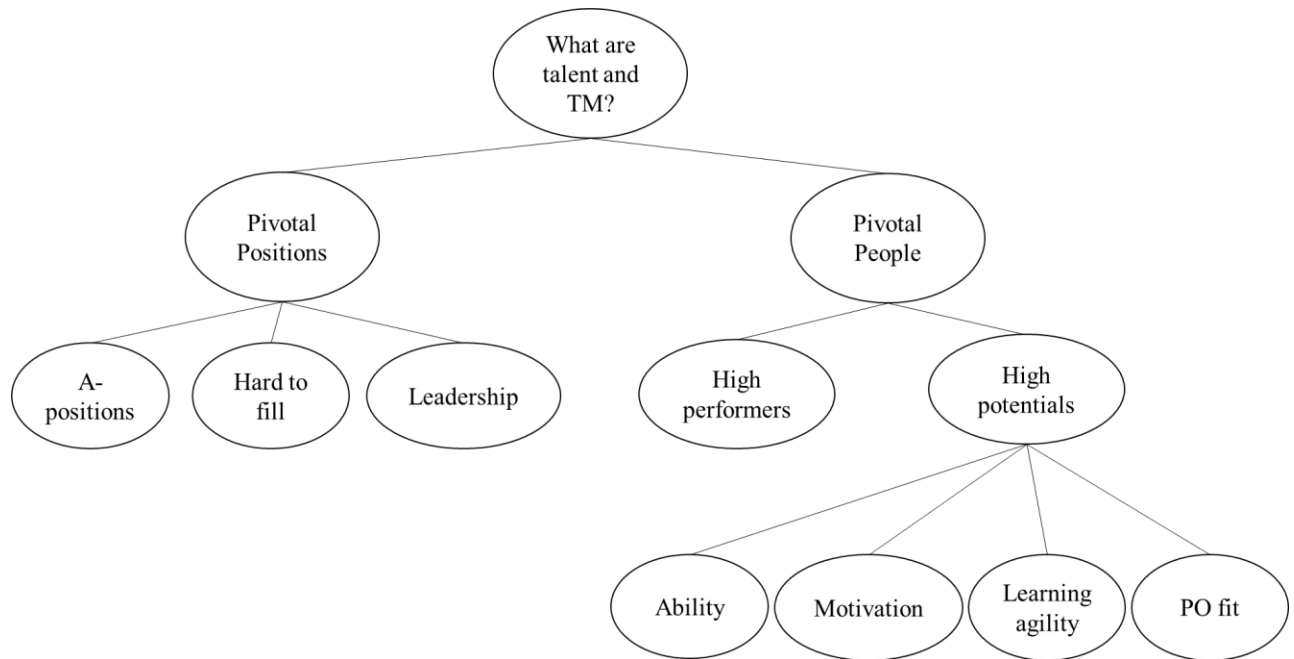
In sum, talent management is a focus on the relative best in an organization in that some roles will be more pivotal relative to other roles, some employees will be better performers relative to other employees within pivotal roles, and, lastly, some employee will demonstrate high potential when provided with opportunities compared to other employees provided the same opportunities. Thus, talent management is an exclusive focus on the relative best with respect to both positions and people.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the confusion in the literature, I showcase consensus among the concepts of pivotal positions, high performance, high potential, learning agility, PO fit, and the importance of each regarding their disproportionate contribution to achieving organizational strategy. Exclusivity is a defining feature of talent management but empirical research is needed to understand how organizations determine the level of exclusivity and the outcomes of varying levels of exclusivity on organizational performance and on employees included or not included in the talent management programs. In conclusion, it would be beneficial to build from one unified frame of reference or starting point and move forward together to avoid further confounding the field through misdefinitions and the use of overlapping language and terms. These events muddle and stall the progress and unique contribution of talent and talent management. It is imperative that researchers stop proffering compelling-sounding but vague or misdefined descriptions of talent and talent management that contribute little more than buzz words that confuse rather than clarify the field.

Figure 1

Categorization of talent and talent management



Notes: TM = talent management; PO = person-organization

## Chapter II

### A Model of Talent Identification

#### **Overview**

The talent management literature is frequently faulted for a lack of empirical research with notably little attention from the individual point of view (Guest, 1999; Thunnissen, 2015). In their review, Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) report that theory is often used to back up authors' lines of reasoning rather than to contribute to existing theory or to understand underlying mechanisms involved in talent management practices. To bridge this gap, I explore the effects of different employee information when managers are deciding who is talented and who has high potential. I build from the theory of lay beliefs, which are also referred to as implicit-, self-, or lay-theories, and describe people's inherent beliefs about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes (people's entity vs. incremental theory, respectively; Molden, Plaks, & Dweck, 2006). In the following sections, I review the theory, the definitions of talent management and talent identification in the context of the current research, and present a model of talent identification along with accompanying research questions.

#### **Lay beliefs**

Conceptions about the fixedness versus malleability of human attributes represent one class of beliefs which help people feel a sense of control of their lives or their environment and predict how people encode, integrate, retrieve, and explain personal as well as other peoples' nature and behavior (Dweck & Molden, 2008). People can ascribe to both types of beliefs (fixed vs. malleable Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995b), but most have a tendency toward one type (Plaks, Levy, & Dweck, 2009) and are referred to as either *entity theorists* (ETs) who regard human attributes as mostly fixed or as *incremental theorists* (ITs)



who regard human attributes as mostly malleable where both types of theorists are thought to be evenly distributed in the population (Dweck, 1999; e.g., Erdley & Dweck, 1993). Similar to individuals, organizations also vary in the types of lay beliefs held. As examples, Enron was once described as a performance-driven organization where its past leaders touted a “culture of genius” (Elkind & McLean, 2006) and endorsed attributes typically valued by entity theorists. In contrast, the culture at Xerox is described as supporting the development, improvement, and personal growth of its employees (George & McLean, 2007), and endorsing attributes typically valued by incremental theorists.

The theory of lay beliefs is appropriate in the context of the current research; first, because measures of these belief systems do not significantly correlate with level of education, general indices of personality such as the Big Five traits, political attitudes, confidence, or intelligence, establishing that it may be pertinent to consider their effects in social science and decision research (Plaks et al., 2009). Second, there is little empirical research about talent identification (please see Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016 for a review of the empirical literature). Third, Plaks et al. (2009) note that researchers tend to assume one or the other belief system among study participants or subjects, but remark that this assumption is misleading due to inter- and intrapersonal variability in the tendency to form impressions from either an entity or incremental perspective. In theory, both managers and organizations that are perceived to vary in their lay beliefs should contribute to different types of talent identification decisions making it pertinent and interesting to investigate these effects. Lastly, Heslin, Vandewalle, and Latham (2006) report that managers’ implicit person theory significantly contribute to their willingness to coach their employees, which provides compelling evidence for the effects of lay beliefs in managerial decisions regarding their employees. Other research in this stream shows that implicit

theories influence goal orientation (VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997), performance appraisals (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2008), enactment of procedural justice (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2011), judgements of potential (Heslin, 2009), and employee engagement (Keating & Heslin, 2015). Thus, the current research can serve to extend this stream of research bolstering its contribution to both the field of talent management and to the theory of lay beliefs.

### **Talent management and talent identification**

In the current research, talent and talent management are defined as a focus on *pivotal people* – or employees who are described as either high performers, high potentials, or a combination of both (Becker et al., 2009; Nijs et al., 2014). Talent identification is a primary topic studied in the talent management literature (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016) and is described as one component of talent management. It is a central and critical issue, however there is a scarcity of literature on how managers make talent identification decisions in organizational settings. In general, talent management involves the selective application of certain resources and development programs to a specific subset of identified key employees or pivotal people.

### **A model of talent identification and accompanying research questions**

In this chapter, I introduce a model of talent identification as presented in Figure 2, in which I suggest that managers consider both high performance and high potential in their talent identification decisions. I further suggest that high potential is assessed via four characteristics, namely, ability, motivation, learning agility, and person-organization fit. Lastly, the lay beliefs of managers and of organizations are expected to influence managers' considerations of the components outlined in the model, and organizations' lay beliefs are further expected to interact with managers' lay beliefs when they are making talent identification decisions.

Through this research, I hope to shed light on the following questions: (1) How do managers consider different information about employees when making decisions about which employees are talented? (2) How do managers' lay beliefs influence their considerations about different employee information? (a) How do decisions differ between a manager who holds an entity theory, believing that there is little that anyone can do to change oneself, and a manager who holds an incremental theory, believing that anyone can change under the right circumstance? (3) How do organizational lay beliefs influence managers' talent decisions? (4) How do the lay beliefs of organizations interact with the lay beliefs of managers? (a) When both organizations and managers hold similar lay beliefs, do managers' decisions follow predictable patterns? (b) When organizations and managers hold different lay beliefs, are managers' decisions swayed toward the lay beliefs of the organization? In other words, do the lay beliefs of organizations hold more clout compared to the lay beliefs of individual managers in talent identification decisions?

To shed light on these questions, I begin by exploring how managers consider each of the following: high performance, high potential, the characteristics of ability, motivation, learning agility, and person-organization (PO) fit in their talent identification decisions. Throughout the chapter, I integrate theory about managers' lay beliefs about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes to introduce propositions concerning the mechanisms underlying talent identification. I further address the influence of organizational lay beliefs on managers' talent identification decisions. Lastly, I summarize the theoretical implications and contributions to talent management research, provide directions for future research, and concluding remarks.

### **High performance**

A variety of authors describe talent as demonstrating high performance (e.g., Becker et al., 2009; Nijs et al., 2014). For example, in the giftedness literature, Gagné (2004) describes talent as mastery or outstanding performance and Nijs et al. (2014) conceptualize the outcome of talent as interpersonal excellence among others. Thus, high performers are usually included as part of a talent identification process, which typically leads to employees being chosen into an organization's talent pool, offered development opportunities, performance rewards, and management attention (King, 2016). In this way, talent identification reflects an exclusive approach to talent management where the workforce is differentiated into A, B, C, and D players (Huselid, Beatty, & Becker, 2005) and only those regarded as the best are afforded the benefits of talent programs.

Because lay beliefs are inherent, I expect that they will factor into how managers consider high performance when identifying talent. For instance, lay beliefs differently influence people's judgment of others (Plaks et al., 2009) such that entity theorists (ETs) tend to infer global traits more readily and strongly from behavior and to see traits as explanations for inherent nature and future behavior (Dweck, 1999; Levy & Dweck, 1998). ETs also tend to believe in static systems with straightforward cause and effect laws and make rapid global judgements about others (Dweck et al., 1995b; Plaks et al., 2009), and rely on observing people's dispositions even with limited exposure (Dweck, Hong, & Chiu, 1993). ETs also tend to believe that performance is a direct reflection of intelligence regardless of knowing important details such as the difficulty of the task completed (Dweck, 1999). In contrast, incremental theorists (ITs) are more likely to focus on mediating processes (goals, needs, emotion states; Levy & Dweck, 1998) and are less likely to see traits or current performance as explanations or to make predictions about a person's inherent nature and future behavior (Dweck, 1999; Levy & Dweck,

1998). ITs also tend to believe in more dynamic systems characterized by change, context, and process, and focus more on psychological mediators (Dweck et al., 1995b).

Because high performance is easy to measure and certain (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a), managers naturally consider it in decisions related to talent identification, which is confirmed in much of the talent literature (e.g., Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012; Nijs et al., 2014). However, because ETs predict greater consistency in people's behavior in the long term compared to ITs (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995a), I expect that ETs will be more drawn to the obviousness of high performance, considering it to be fixed over the long term, and, thus, as more important in talent identification decisions compared to the way that ITs will consider high performance. I thus introduce the first two propositions of the chapter:

*Proposition 1a: High performance will be considered in talent identification decisions such that an employee with high performance is more likely to be identified as talented.*

*Proposition 1b: ET managers will give more weight to high performance in talent identification decisions compared to IT managers.*

### **High potential**

High potential is another recurring and perhaps more-hyped concept in talent and talent management discourse. High potential employees are thought to advance at a faster pace, demonstrate different needs, motivations, and behaviors than regular employees (Pepermans et al., 2003), and possess natural abilities that will help them become more than what they are currently (Cope, 1998; Silzer & Church, 2009). In general, the term high potential is thought to be over-used and it is not often clear what researchers mean by the term (Silzer & Church, 2010). In contrast to high performance, which is easily and readily observed and measured (Dries &

Pepermans, 2007b), high potential is more difficult to pinpoint, observe, or measure (Dweck, 1999; Tormala et al., 2012).

Research suggests preferences for potential over performance (e.g., Gal & Rucker, 2010; Tormala & Rucker, 2007) due to more favorable responses to uncertain as opposed to certain events (e.g., Lee & Qiu, 2009), which is explained by more in-depth processing required in uncertain situations (e.g., Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). This, however, may be more likely for ITs because compared to ETs, who tend to use traits (Chiu et al., 1997; Levy & Dweck, 1998; Plaks et al., 2009) when trying to predict and understand peoples' nature and behavior, ITs are more likely to consider the situation, processes, and a person's psychology including their goals and feelings (Chiu et al., 1997; Plaks et al., 2009). In general, ITs are more drawn to context-sensitive psychological processes when trying to understand and describe human nature and behavior (Chiu et al., 1997; Plaks et al., 2009) whereas ETs are more drawn to observable, obvious traits, and current behaviors.

Furthermore, managers who hold more incremental theories tend to offer help and coaching to underperforming employees compared to managers who hold more entity theories (Heslin et al., 2006; Zhang & Zhang, 2008). This tendency likely reflects ITs belief in potential and the possibility of change which overrides signals such as low performance (Plaks et al., 2009). In general, when making inferences, ETs tend to incorporate information about stable dispositions but not about dynamic situations whereas ITs do the opposite and tend to incorporate information about dynamic situations but not about stable traits (Dweck, 1999; Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998).

Finally, ETs and ITs also assign different importance to hereditary and the environment (Dweck, 1999) such that ETs believe that traits are innate whereas ITs believe that traits are a

result of experience (Mueller & Dweck, 1998) believing that people have the potential to grow, change, or improve. ETs and ITs might make similar judgements about others but ITs are less likely to believe in the veracity of judgements (Plaks et al., 2009) so that when predicting the future behavior and actions of employees, ITs are more likely to consider information such as an individual's psychology or the situation, rather than relying on obvious indicators such as current high performance.

Overall, managers will consider high potential in decisions related to talent identification, which is confirmed in the talent literature (e.g., Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012; Nijs et al., 2014), however, an entity theory is defined by the belief that basic change is not possible, whereas an incremental theory is defined by the belief that personal change is always possible (Dweck, 1999). Thus, ITs will be more drawn to high potential compared to ETs, and will regard it as a characteristic that represents uncertainty and future promise, which leads to the next two propositions:

*Proposition 2a: High potential will be considered in talent identification decisions such that an employee with high potential is more likely to be identified as talented.*

*Proposition 2b: IT managers will give more weight to high potential in talent identification decisions compared to ET managers.*

### **The characteristics of high potential**

Because high-potential is not directly observable or easy to measure, it is a latent trait that is characterized by relevant characteristics (Dweck, 1999). In this way, high potential is uncertain in that an individual identified as high potential may or may not achieve greatness (Tormala et al., 2012). Overall, mastery of job-related competencies (i.e., behaviors, knowledge, skills that contribute to an employee's success in a job) relate to high performance whereas

indicators of ability to learn, develop, and perform well in broader careers should relate to high potential (Pepermans et al., 2003), reflecting possibility and promise (Altman, 1997). Despite fundamental difference between high performance – which is easy to observe and measure – and high potential, current performance remains the primary indicator of being identified as high potential (Silzer & Church, 2009) such that being a high performer increases the odds of being identified as a high potential by 2.5 times (Dries, Van Acker, et al., 2012, p.278). However, an employee identified as high potential may never achieve greatness or demonstrate high performance. Thus, high performance should not reflect high potential and a key question is what constitutes the characteristics of high potential.

To explore this question, I refer to Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, and González-Cruz (2013) description of talent as *characteristics* of people. Gallardo-Gallardo and colleagues argue that talent can be represented by a natural ability, a mastery, commitment, or fit. However, many of those constructs (e.g., “mastery”) remain broadly defined and they do not directly describe how those constructs can be measured (and thus used to identify talents, for instance). I propose four more specific characteristics derived from their work and argue that they specifically represent indicators of high potential (vs. talent in general). Those four key characteristics are ability (related to cognitive ability or intelligence), motivation (related to demonstrating behaviors that indicate interest in being part of an organization’s talent supply), learning agility (Dries, Vantilborgh, & Pepermans, 2012), and person-organization (PO) fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005) represent at least four characteristics of high potential. I explore each of these characteristics in the following paragraph.

First, Gagné (2004) describes high performance as talent, however, he argues that there needs to be some level of innate ability. Ackerman (2014) also argues that no researcher has



demonstrated stellar performance with individuals who had not already proven themselves through intellectual ability tests and educational success. Second, most organizations focus solely on output – typically operationalized as past performance – in their assessments of talent (Silzer & Church, 2009); however, motivation, passion, and loving one’s job are cited as being underappreciated in talent management research and practice (Dries, 2013). According to Gagné (2004, 2009) the most significant interpersonal component of his giftedness model concerns motivational issues. Third, learning agility is described as the speed of learning and flexibility across and within situations (cognitive flexibility; DeRue, Ashford, & Myers, 2012), and Lomardo and Eichinger (2000) report that it is a marker of high-potential and of being able to produce successful results and career success when working in new situations. Lastly, person-organization (PO) fit is described as a high sense of correlation between an employee’s values and their organization’s values (Kristof, 1996). Researchers find that perceptions of high PO fit reduce turnover intentions of highly valued employees (2015), that there is a link between PO fit and job performance (e.g., Bright, 2007), that internal successors are more successful than external recruits (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a), and that matching pivotal position with a pivotal talent leads to high organisational commitment (Kristof, 1996), which further contributes to extra-role performance (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Again, because lay beliefs are inherent, I expect that they will also factor into how managers consider these proposed characteristics of high potential such that they will be considered differently by managers depending on their varying lay beliefs. To elaborate, individuals implicitly understand that their meaning systems represent the cornerstones of their social cognition and people deploy psychological defenses to ward off threats to their theory to preserve the subjective sense that their meaning system is an effective tool for making sense of

human nature and behavior (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Plaks, Grant, & Dweck, 2005). People further demonstrate anxiety when their theory is violated and engage in motivated processing distortions such as selective attention or selective scrutiny to preserve the validity of their inherent theory (Plaks et al., 2005). For instance, ETs tend to focus on trait-consistent behavior (e.g., a person with high cognitive ability doing well). In contrast, ITs tend to focus on trait-inconsistent information (a person with high cognitive ability doing poorly; Plaks et al., 2005). I thus expect that different managers will place different weight on the different characteristics of potential depending on their inherent lay beliefs. I explore these ideas in more detail in the following subsections.

**Ability.** I specifically refer to cognitive ability, *g*, or intelligence, which is thought to be genetic (Schmidt, 2002) and refers to verbal, numerical, and spatial ability, and is positively correlated with work outcomes such as knowledge acquisition, training, and job performance (Hough & Oswald, 2000). General cognitive ability is considered by many to be the best indicator for selecting individuals because it is a well-established (Sternberg & Hedlund, 2002), valid predictor of performance and learning across a variety of jobs (Lubinski, Webb, Morelock, & Benbow, 2001; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), where this relationship is moderated by the complexity of the job, such that general cognitive ability or *g* becomes more important as jobs become more complex (Gottfredson, 2002).

In relation to lay theories, Dweck and Leggett (1988) were some of first to theorize about the lay beliefs of intelligence and to examine the relationship between goals and cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. According to Dweck (1999), there is no true consensus about what intelligence actually represents even with respect to IQ scores. The traditional view (e.g., Jensen, 1969; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998; Spearman, 1927) defines intelligence or ability as a

latent factor that contributes to the competencies needed for success. Intelligence is alternately described as an ability to learn and acquire new knowledge and skills (e.g., Schmidt, 2002; Snyderman & Rothman, 1987). Sometimes general intelligence or *g* is studied as a global construct, and other times it is studied as a construct at the top of a hierarchy of ability constructs (see Sternberg & Hedlund, 2002 for a review). Certain seminal researchers believe in isolating pure intelligence factoring out other variables such as personality and effort (e.g., Jensen, 1969) whereas others regard variables such as effort as germane to intelligence (e.g., Wechsler, 1950).

In relation to these conceptions of intelligence, Dweck and Leggett (1988) report that ETs tend to believe that intelligence is fixed, concrete, and internal whereas ITs tend to believe that intelligence is malleable, dynamic, and can be increased. In addition, ETs tend to view failure as a sign of low intelligence whereas ITs view failure as a cue to try something different or to use a different strategy. Overall, Mueller and Dweck (1998) find that ETs view intelligence as attributed to mostly innate ability, whereas ITs view intelligence as attributed to mostly effort. Thus, in the context of talent identification, I expect that ability will be viewed differently by the two types of theorists where ETs may regard it as either present or not present and ITs may regard it as something that can be fostered and developed.

In summary, because cognitive ability is often cited as a marker of talent (e.g., Gagné, 1999; Nijs et al., 2014), viewed as crucial to being successful in important jobs and roles (Hough & Oswald, 2000), and often discussed as though it is genetically fixed (e.g., Gagné, 2004), I expect that ETs will consider ability as a more important characteristic of high potential compared to ITs, which leads to the next two propositions:

*Proposition 3a: Cognitive ability will be considered as a characteristic of high potential such that higher ability will contribute to perceptions of higher potential.*

*Proposition 3b: ET managers will give more weight to cognitive ability as a characteristic of high potential compared to IT managers.*

**Motivation.** Work motivation is defined as the amount of effort a person puts into a job and stems from internal as well as external sources (i.e., work environment or context) which compels work-related behaviors including how it is done, at what intensity, toward what ends, and for how long (Latham & Pinder, 2005). In the current research, I define motivation as behaviors that reflect interest in being part of an organization's talent supply such that employees must be motivated to engage in the talent development process to overcome obstacles, tedium, and occasional failure (Gagné, 2004). This is echoed by Drake and Winner (2013) who find that interest, drive, and desire to work come from within and are not forced from external pressures. Wong and Csikszentmihalyi (1991) also argue that developing cognitive abilities or potential is emotionally draining and requires motivation. These descriptions may be more reflective of *intrinsic* motivation, or doing something for the pleasure and enjoyment of it (Deci, 1973, 1975) and *state* motivation, or interest in a particular activity rather than someone's overall or *trait* motivation (Fridhandler, 1986), which reflect internal traits such as conscientiousness (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1994).

Because motivation is something remarked as important to intrapersonal success (Gagné, 2004), I expect that it will also be considered as a characteristic of high potential such that indications of high motivation will contribute to perceptions of high potential. With respect to lay beliefs, ITs predict inferences that are more specific, conditional, and provisional and tend to focus on effort and strategy rather than on traits such as intelligence or aspects of personality. It is not that ITs do not see and recognize that there are differences between people, but ITs believe that with guidance and effort, anyone can improve or change (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Conversely, ETs tend to rule out motivation and effort as part of success, whereas ITs tend to explicitly include motivation and effort as important features of success (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). I thus expect that ITs will consider motivation as more important compared to ETs when assessing employees for high potential. This leads to the next two propositions:

*Proposition 4a: Motivation will be considered a characteristic of high potential such that higher motivation will contribute to perceptions of high potential.*

*Proposition 4b: IT Managers will give more weight to motivation as a characteristic of high potential compared to ET managers.*

**Learning agility.** Learning agility reflects the speed of learning (i.e., processing and perceptual speed) and flexibility across and within situations (cognitive flexibility; DeRue, Ashford, & Myers, 2012) and it is considered one component of the ability to learn (DeRue et al., 2012). With respect to learning, Arun, Coyle, and Hauenstein (2012) stress the relevance of context and individual, behavioral, and situational variables. These authors explain that *transfer of learning* represents an *individual* cognitive variable regarding the application of new ideas, knowledge, and skills (Ruona, Leimbach, Holton, & Bates, 2002), *self-monitoring* represents a *behavioral* variable used in learning (Snyder, 1974), and *goal setting* represents a *situational* variable that can affect learning outcomes (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010). In this way, different people differ in their demonstrations of learning agility depending on their cognition, how they behave, and under what opportunities or settings they are operating. The latter two (i.e., behavior and situation), most specifically, are subject to variation and depend on context compared to the former (i.e., individual cognition).

In general, learning agility reflects attributes such as openness, flexibility, and adaptability in challenging or changing work settings and being able to see patterns in new

situations and quickly and flexibly apply connections between past experiences to successfully apply relevant knowledge and forgo inappropriate knowledge in new experiences (DeRue et al., 2012). I thus expect that learning agility will be considered as a characteristic of high potential because it demonstrates being able to produce successful results in new situations (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000) such that indications of high learning agility will contribute to perceptions of higher potential. Because ETs ascribe to performance goals where people demonstrate skills and knowledge quickly (Dweck, 1986) compared to ITs, who ascribe to learning goals where people may need to take many different strategies and approaches before they demonstrate mastery and success (Dweck, 1986); and because learning agility is thought to depend on people's behavior and the situation within which they are operating, I expect that ITs will consider learning agility as a more important characteristic of high potential compared to ETs, who believe that individuals are what they are as demonstrated by current or instant performance and thus that learning may not be available or even real. I thus present the next two propositions:

*Proposition 5a: Learning agility will be considered as a characteristic of high potential such that higher indications of learning agility will contribute to perceptions of higher potential.*

*Proposition 5b: IT managers will give more weight to learning agility as a characteristic of high potential compared to ET managers.*

**Person-organization fit.** Person-organization fit describes the correlation between the values of an employee and their organization, reflects the antecedents and consequences of compatibility between an employee and an organization (Kristof, 1996), and represents the psychological ties between the goals, values, and needs of an employee and their organization (Mahal, 2012). Employees experiencing high PO fit feel a sense of belonging (Wei, 2015) and

are more committed to staying at their organizations over the long term (Kristof, 1996; Valentine et al., 2002). For these reasons, internal successors are reported to be more successful compared to external recruits (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a) and employees experiencing high PO fit are more likely to participate in extra-role performance above and beyond their regular job duties (e.g., Collings & Mellahi, 2009; O Reilly & Chatman, 1994),

In general, PO fit is the level of similarity or alignment between an employee's core values and preferences (which are partly derived from personality) and the organization's values and culture. In this way, personality is one component of PO fit such that personality is described as individuals' characteristic styles of thought, feeling, and behavior (McCrae et al., 2000). Research strongly suggests that the big five traits of personality (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness) are similar to temperaments in that they are stable, endogenous, and formed by intrinsic paths of development that are independent of environmental influences (Costa & McCrae, 1986; e.g., McCrae et al., 2000, 2000). These findings are confirmed in studies on genetics (Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001), twins (Loehlin, 1992; Loehlin, McCrae, Costa, & John, 1998; Plomin, Willerman, & Loehlin, 1976) and adoptions (Loehlin, Horn, & Willerman, 1981, 1990), which concur that the big five facets of personality are mostly inherited with little effect from the environment.

Because PO fit is at least partially related to personality, as well as to an employee's goals, values, and needs, and because ETs tend to believe that personality characteristics (and likely attributes including an employee's goals, values, and needs) are fixed despite a person's efforts or motivation to change compared to ITs, who tend to believe that personality characteristics (and likely attributes including an employee's goals, values, and needs) are malleable and can be developed with time and effort (Plaks et al., 2009), I expect that ETs will

consider PO fit as a more important characteristic of high potential compared to ITs, who may tend to believe that PO fit can be developed and fostered. I thus present the next two propositions:

*Proposition 6a: PO fit will be considered as a characteristic of high potential such that higher indications of PO fit will contribute to perceptions of higher potential.*

*Proposition 6b: ET managers will give more weight to PO fit as a characteristic of high potential compared to IT managers.*

### **Organizational lay beliefs**

Similar to individuals, organizations also tend to ascribe to certain belief systems about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes. For instance, Kofman and Senge (1993) find that some organizations focus on competition whereas other focus on learning. To elaborate, evidence suggests that organizations that endorse cultures of genius and performance have employees who behave in performance goal oriented ways (Elkind & McLean, 2006; Morgenson, 2016; Wells, 2016). For instance, due to lofty performance targets set by leaders at Wells-Fargo, over five thousand employees behaved unlawfully and unethically leading to their eventual termination (Egan, 2016) while the CEO and other top leaders were rewarded in stock options directly resulting from the illegal actions of the fired employees (McGrane, 2016). In contrast, organizations such as Xerox that endorse cultures of growth and development (George & McLean, 2007; Leo, 1996) instill learning cultures that foster the organizational commitment of employees (Joo & Park, 2010) and contribute to employee innovative behaviors (Ismail, 2005; Park, Song, Yoon, & Kim, 2014) which are mediated via work engagement (Park et al., 2014). It is also difficult to change organizations, behaviors, and climates and cultures (Schneider, 1987) such that employees tend to act in accordance with their organization's norms and beliefs as a



way to fit in with the corporate culture, meet organizational strategies, and even remain employed. Numerous researchers find that it is difficult to change an organization's culture because it is typically dependent on leadership (e.g., Bate, Khan, & Pye, 2000; Smith, 2003).

For these reasons, I expect that the lay beliefs of organizations will act as a priming mechanism that influence managers' decisions so that they align with organizational beliefs. In the following sections, I explore how organizational lay beliefs might influence which features and characteristics of talent have the greatest effects in talent identification decisions and the interaction of organizations' and managers' lay beliefs on managers' talent decisions.

**The features and characteristics of talent.** I expect that organizations that hold more entity theories (i.e., ET organizations) will be more concerned with performance goals, which may influence and prime managers who work in these organizations to value stable, obvious, and certain features and characteristics of talent such as high performance, ability, and PO fit, as outlined in the previous sections. In contrast, I expect that organizations that hold more incremental theories (i.e., IT organizations) will be more concerned with mastery and learning goals, which may influence and prime managers who work in these organizations to value unstable, less obvious, and more uncertain features and characteristics of talent such as high potential, motivation, and learning agility, again as outlined in previous sections. For instance, some researchers find that managers who work at organizations with learning cultures (i.e., incremental theory) value employees' learning agility (e.g., McGill & Slocum, 1993), which leads to the following four propositions:

*Proposition 7a: The effect of high performance on talent identification decisions will be stronger for managers working in ET organizations.*

*Proposition 7b: The effect of high potential on talent identification decisions will be stronger for managers working in IT organizations.*

*Proposition 8a: The effect of ability as a characteristic of high potential will be stronger for managers working in ET organizations.*

*Proposition 8b: The effect of PO fit as a characteristic of high potential will be stronger for managers working in ET organizations.*

*Proposition 8c: The effect of motivation as a characteristic of high potential will be stronger for managers working in IT organizations.*

*Proposition 8d: The effect of learning agility as a characteristic of high potential will be stronger for managers working in IT organizations.*

**The interaction of organization's and managers' lay beliefs.** Murphy and Dweck (2010) find that displays of an organization's entity or incremental beliefs influence how people describe themselves to gain membership in specific organizations and how they later evaluate and choose among individuals applying for a job in unrelated contexts. Thus, if people infer that an organization endorses an entity belief system or a culture of genius, then people highlight their smarts to win acceptance into these types of organizations. In parallel, when people infer that an organization endorses an incremental belief system or a culture of learning and development, then people highlight their motivation and passion for learning to win acceptance into these types of organizations.

I thus expect that organizations' lay beliefs will interact with managers' lay beliefs and their talent decisions regarding which features and characteristics matter most (e.g., Murphy & Dweck, 2010). Despite that individuals tend to hold one theory or the other, most people acknowledge that each theory has some element of truth to it (Plaks et al., 2009). Thus, entity

and incremental mindsets are malleable and can be manipulated experimentally with priming or teaching (Dweck, 1999) or when offered a replacement theory rather than simply violating a theory (Plaks et al., 2009). In general, people may be primed to adopt either theory as their working theory if presented with a sufficiently compelling message (Dweck, 1999; Plaks et al., 2009).

Furthermore, belief systems are influenced by work context and organizational and personal support systems (Maurer, 2002). For instance, an organization's philosophy including its emphasis on learning and development, supervisor and co-worker expectations, resources provided to employees, and organizational and personal support systems can contribute to people adopting more incremental belief systems (Maurer, 2002). I thus expect that organizational lay beliefs will strengthen or attenuate the effects of individuals' inherent lay beliefs on talent decisions depending on how similar or different individuals and organizational lay beliefs are to one another. In the following sections, I explore the possible interaction effects of organizations' lay beliefs on the relationships between managers' lay beliefs and their consideration of high performance, high potential, and the characteristics ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit.

***High performance and high potential.*** I expect that when individuals and organizations hold similar lay beliefs, managers' decisions should remain in line with *propositions 1b* and *2b*. Specifically, high performance should matter more for managers working in ET organizations and high potential should matter more for managers working in IT organizations. However, when individuals and organizations hold differing lay beliefs, I expect that things may change. More specifically, high performance rather than high potential may matter more for more IT managers working in more ET organizations. In parallel, high potential rather than high

performance may matter more for more ET managers working in more IT organizations. In other words, I expect that managers will give more weight to features of talent that are less associated with their inherent lay beliefs. In a nutshell, when the lay beliefs of individuals and managers are similar, organization's lay beliefs will strengthen the effects of managers' lay beliefs on talent decisions. Conversely, when the lay beliefs of individuals and managers are different, organization's lay beliefs will attenuate the effects of managers' lay beliefs on talent decisions. This leads to the following two propositions:

*Proposition 9a: High performance rather than high potential will have a stronger effect on talent identification decisions for more IT managers working in more ET organizations compared to more IT managers working in more IT organizations.*

*Proposition 9b: High potential rather than high performance will have a stronger effect on talent identification decisions for more ET managers working in more IT organizations compared to more ET managers working in more ET organizations.*

***The characteristics of potential.*** I further expect that similar predictions can be made about the characteristics of high potential such that when individuals and organizations hold similar lay beliefs, decisions will remain in line with *propositions 3b, 4b, 5b, and 6b*. Specifically, ability and PO fit will matter more to more ET managers working in more ET organizations and motivation and learning agility will matter more to more IT managers working in more IT organizations. However, when individuals and organizations hold different lay beliefs, I expect that things will change such that, ability and PO fit rather than motivation and learning agility will matter more to more IT managers working in more ET organizations and motivation and learning agility rather than ability and PO fit will matter more to more ET

managers working in more IT organizations. In other words, managers will give more weight to features of talent that are less associated with their inherent lay belief.

In summary, when the lay beliefs of individuals and managers are similar, organization's lay beliefs will strengthen the effects of managers' lay beliefs on talent decisions. Conversely, when the lay beliefs of individuals and managers are different, organization's lay beliefs will attenuate the effects of managers' lay beliefs on talent decisions. This leads to the following two propositions:

*Proposition 10a: When assessing high potential, both ability and PO fit will have greater effects compared to both motivation and learning agility on more IT managers working in more ET organizations compared to more IT managers working in more IT organizations.*

*Proposition 10b: When assessing high potential, both motivation and learning agility will have greater effects compared to both ability and PO fit on more ET managers working in more IT organizations compared to more ET managers working in more ET organizations.*

## **Discussion**

### **Theoretical implications and contributions to talent management research**

In this chapter, I presented a model of talent identification grounded in the theory of lay beliefs regarding the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes. My hope is that this research will contribute to the theory and body of knowledge of talent management, which is lacking (Iles et al., 2010; Thunnissen & Van Arensbergen, 2015). In my model (presented in Figure 2), I outline employee information or features and characteristics of talent that are likely considered when managers are identifying talented employees. Through the model, I explore and make

predictions regarding the influence of both managers' and organizations' lay beliefs on talent identification decisions. Overall, I suggest that talent identification decisions involve consideration of high performance, high potential, ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit.

The model goes beyond existing empirical research about talent identification as there is little empirical research about the topic and none employing theories concerning the lay beliefs of managers and organizations (please see Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016 for a review of the empirical literature). Plaks et al. (2009) note that researchers tend to assume one or the other belief system among study participants or subjects, but remark that this assumption is misleading due to inter- and intrapersonal variability in the tendency to form impressions from either an entity or incremental perspective. Furthermore, measures of these belief systems are not found to correlate significantly with level of education, general indices of personality such as the Big Five traits, political attitudes, confidence, or intelligence (Plaks et al., 2009), establishing that it may be pertinent to consider the effects of lay beliefs in social science and decision research.

Overall, I expect that high performance will matter more to more ET managers in their talent identification decisions because more ET managers should regard high performance as more certain and fixed compared to more IT managers (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a). In contrast, I expect that high potential will matter more to more IT managers in their talent identification decisions because more IT managers should regard high potential as more uncertain and as a better bet on future high performance compared to more ET managers (Tormala et al., 2012).

I further suggest through the model that ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit represent characteristics of high potential where ability and PO fit should matter more to more ET managers due to overarching beliefs that people's characteristic are fixed and stable, which

aligns with the prevailing research about these two characteristics (e.g., Maurer, Wrenn, Pierce, Tross, & Collins, 2003; Schneider, 1987). In contrast, I expect that motivation and learning agility should matter more to more IT managers due to fundamental beliefs that people can change and grow, which aligns with prevailing research about these two characteristics (e.g., Arun et al., 2012; Drake & Winner, 2013).

I further expect that these effects will be strengthened when managers and organizations hold similar lay beliefs. However, when individuals and organizations hold differing lay beliefs, I expect that things may change such that high performance rather than high potential will matter more to more IT managers working in more ET organizations and high potential rather than high performance will matter more to more ET managers working in more IT organizations. Similarly, in high potential assessments, ability and PO fit rather than motivation and learning agility should matter more to more IT managers working in more ET organizations whereas motivation and learning agility rather than ability and PO fit should matter more to more ET managers working in more IT organizations. In other words, when the individuals do not hold similar lay beliefs to their organizations, I expect that organizational lay beliefs will attenuate the effects of managers' lay beliefs on their considerations of which features and characteristics matter most.

Possible practical contributions of the research may include furthering understanding of why managers make different types of decisions about which employees are identified as talent and offering insight into different preferences for high performance vs. high potential and which characteristics of high potential have the biggest effect when assessing this latent and somewhat mysterious construct.

### **Directions for future research**

I presented 10 research propositions that can generate novel empirical research. Current evidence indicates that both high performance (e.g., Becker et al., 2009; Nijs et al., 2014) and high potential (Silzer & Church, 2010) are considered in talent decisions, however, some researchers note a preference for high performance (e.g., Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012; Nijs et al., 2014) whereas others note a preference for potential (Tormala et al., 2012). The precise mechanisms of talent identification decisions have not been examined in relation to managerial lay beliefs about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes.

To test these ideas, researchers could first examine how high performance and high potential are considered in talent identification decisions (*Propositions 1a* and *2a*) and further measure the influence of managers' lay beliefs on performance and potential and talent identification decisions (*Propositions 2b* and *2b*). For instance, using an experiment, researchers could measure the lay beliefs of a group of managers and then ask these managers to choose between similar candidates for inclusion in an organization's talent program where some candidates would be described with high performance indicators and average potential indicators and other candidates would be described with high potential indicators and average performance indicators. This would provide insight into whether the effect of high performance is stronger for more ET managers compared to more IT managers and whether the effect of high potential is stronger for more IT managers compared to more ET managers.

Researchers could also employ longitudinal research designs to examine the difference in decision outcomes between more ET managers and more IT managers and which type of theorists might be more successful in identifying talent (i.e., more accurate, more efficient) in different contexts. For instance, it might be advantageous as an ET to be good at making quick judgments about others (Dweck, 1999), but ETs are often unwilling to alter their judgments



when faced with new and conflicting information (Erdley & Dweck, 1993) and may even ignore conflicting information (Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001). It would be interesting to test how these findings affect actual talent identification decisions in actual organizations over the long term.

Future research could also investigate the effect of organizational lay beliefs on managers' consideration of high performance and high potential (*Propositions 7a* and *7b*) and the moderating mechanisms suggested in *Propositions 9a* and *9b*. For instance, using an experimental design, researchers could measure the lay beliefs of managers and then ask these managers to imagine that they work for an organization that either holds an entity or incremental theory, with each condition being assigned randomly. Again, these managers would be asked to choose between similar candidates for inclusion in an organization's talent program where some candidates would be described as relatively higher on performance compared to potential and other candidates would be described as relatively higher on potential compared to performance. This would provide insight into whether differences in the lay beliefs of managers and organizations contribute to the construct that is less associated with managers' inherent lay belief (i.e., high potential for more ET managers and high performance for more IT managers) having a greater effect than the construct more associated with a manager's lay beliefs (i.e., high performance for more ET managers and high potential for more IT managers). Field studies using organizations that are known to endorse entity or incremental theories may be an even more fruitful avenue to test these propositions.

Future research could involve similar studies that examine the effects of ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit when managers are assessing high potential (*Propositions 3a, 4a, 5a, and 6a*) and further examine the effect of managers' lay belief on these assessments

(*Propositions 3b, 4b, 5b, and 6b*). For instance, again using an experimental research design, researchers could measure the lay beliefs of a group of managers and then ask these managers to identify high potential amongst various experimental conditions. For instance, using a fully crossed design, each condition would describe an employee who is either high or average on each of the four characteristics (i.e., ability, motivation, learning ability, or PO fit). Managers would then rate the conditions on high potential which would provide insight into whether the effects of both high ability and high PO fit are stronger for more ET managers compared to more IT managers and whether the effects of both high motivation and high learning agility are stronger for more IT managers compared to more ET managers. Again, longitudinal studies could be used to examine the difference in decision outcomes between more ET managers compared to more IT managers and which type of theorist might be more successful in assessing high potential (i.e., more accurate, more efficient) in different contexts.

Future research could also investigate the influence of organizational lay beliefs on managers' consideration of ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit (*Propositions 8a, 8b, 8c, and 8d*) and investigate the moderating mechanisms suggested in *Propositions 10a and 10b*. For instance, again using an experiment, researchers could measure the lay beliefs of a group of managers and then ask these managers to imagine that they work for an organization that either holds either an entity or incremental theory (randomly assigned). These managers would then be asked to rate a series of experimental condition, where each condition would describe an employee who is either high or average on each of the four characteristics (i.e., ability, motivation, learning ability, or PO fit). This would provide insight into how organizational lay beliefs influence managers' decisions and how they interact with managers' lay beliefs. For instance, do differences in the lay beliefs of managers and organizations contribute to the

characteristics that are less associated with managers' inherent lay belief (i.e., motivation and learning agility for more ET managers and ability and PO fit for more IT managers) having greater effects than the constructs that are more associated with managers' lay beliefs (i.e., ability and PO fit for more ET managers and motivation and learning agility for more IT managers)? Field studies involving organizations that are known to endorse either entity or incremental theories may again be a more fruitful avenue to test the propositions.

These questions have been explored to some extent (e.g., Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012) but there is not a lot of research on the mechanisms of these decisions. Some research that exists includes Murphy and Dweck (2010) who find that exposure to an organizations' lay theories does not shape people's self-concepts and thus it remains unknown whether organizations' theories affect people's chronically endorsed self-theories in the long term. Further, Murphy and Dweck (2010) find that applicants for membership into clubs prefer to be judged based on more malleable attributes such as motivation and effort rather than more fixed constructs such as ability and high performance. The proposed research may provide back up and insight into previous reports and findings.

Notably, long-term investigations can be costly and difficult to undertake including challenges of finding the appropriate sample and ensuring that participants remain in the study to examine long-term outcomes. To make empirical examination more feasible, researchers could focus on a limited number of paths and test a limited number of the research propositions in the model or they could test several propositions over subsequent studies.

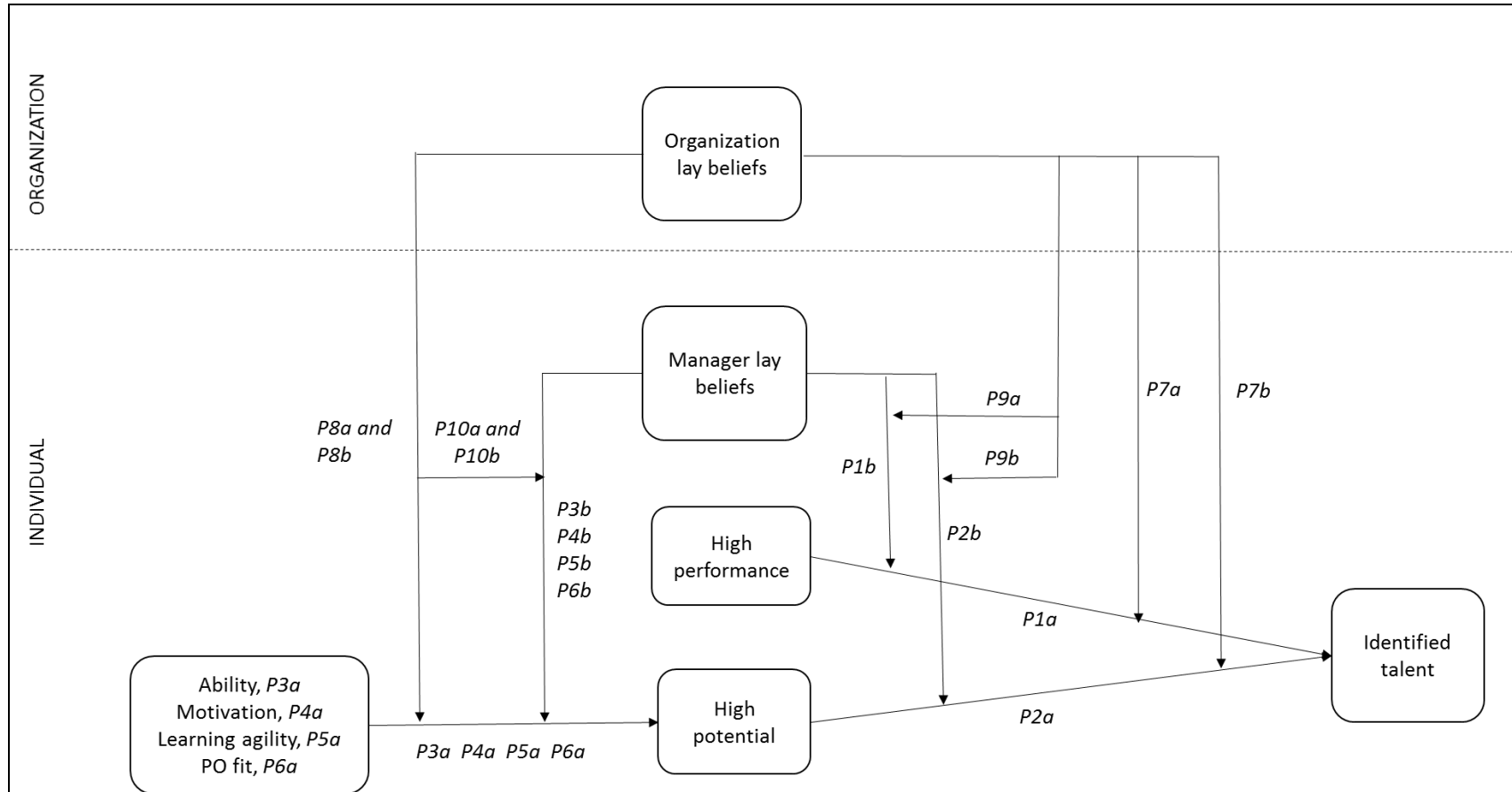
## **Conclusion**

There is not a lot of empirical research about talent management and the mechanism underlying talent identification decisions. Building from the theory of lay beliefs about the

fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes, I offer a model of talent identification where I explore how managers consider different features and characteristics of talent; namely, performance, potential, ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit. I offer 10 testable research propositions derived from the model to explore how managers' and organizations' lay beliefs affect the mechanisms of talent identification. In summary, I encourage researchers to contemplate the effects of managers' and organizations' lay beliefs on talent identification decisions.

Figure 2

A model of talent identification



## Chapter III

### Study 1

In chapter II, I described future studies that could investigate the mechanisms of talent identification, which is one aspect of talent management and concerns how organizational managers decide which employees constitute the organization's talent or *pivotal people*. Pivotal people represent employees who are typically described as either high performers, high potentials, or a combination of both (e.g., Becker et al., 2009; Nijs et al., 2014). To explore the mechanisms underlying talent identification, I build from the theory of lay beliefs which reflect people's perceptions about themselves, about others, and about success and failure (Dweck, 1999). Lay beliefs are thought to exist on a continuum; however, most people have a tendency toward one type (e.g., Plaks et al., 2009) and are referred to as either *entity theorists* (ETs) who regard human attributes as mostly fixed or as *incremental theorists* (ITs) who regard human attributes as mostly malleable.

In this study, I specifically examine managers' consideration of high performance and high potential in talent identification decisions and how their considerations might be influenced by their inherent lay beliefs. As such, I examine my first and second research questions: (1) How do managers consider high performance and high potential when making decisions about which employees are talented? (2) How are managers' considerations influenced by their lay beliefs? (a) How do decisions differ between a manager who holds an entity theory, believing that there is little that anyone can do to change oneself, and a manager who holds an incremental theory, believing that anyone can change under the right circumstance? In the following sections, I review the literature to introduce four hypotheses tested in the study.

#### **Performance and potential in talent identification**

**High performance.** With respect to performance, people with more entity theories (referred to as ETs) tend to infer global traits more readily and strongly from behavior and to see traits as explanations for people's inherent nature and future behavior (Dweck, 1999; Levy & Dweck, 1998). In contrast, people with more incremental theories (referred to as ITs) tend to focus on specific mediating processes (goals, needs, emotion states; Levy & Dweck, 1998). Because high performance is easy to measure and certain (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a), managers naturally consider it in decisions related to talent identification, which is confirmed in much of the talent literature (e.g., Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012; Nijs et al., 2014). However, because ETs predict greater consistency in people's behavior in the long term, I expect that they will consider high performance as being more important compared to ITs (Dweck et al., 1995a). This leads to the first three hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1a: High performance will be related to higher talent ratings.*

*Hypothesis 1b: The effect of high performance on talent ratings will be stronger for more ET managers compared to more IT managers.*

*Hypothesis 1c: More ET managers are more likely to rank employees with high performance, but average potential as either their first or second choice for inclusion in exclusive talent management programs compared to more IT managers.*

**High potential.** When organizations are competing to survive in complex and dynamic markets and when employees must adapt quickly into new roles with expanding responsibilities, high performance may not be the only thing that matters or even the most useful indicator of future performance in different and more complex roles (Groysberg et al., 2004). Unlike high-performance, high potential is not observable and thus it is more uncertain in that an individual identified as high potential may never achieve greatness (Tormala et al., 2012). In contrast to

ETs, who tend to rely on easy to observe traits to help them understand and describe human nature and behavior, ITs tend to rely on context-sensitive psychological processes (Chiu et al., 1997; Plaks et al., 2009). I thus expect that ITs will be more drawn to high potential when identifying talent compared to ETs (who will be more drawn to performance). In general, all managers may consider high potential in decisions related to talent identification (e.g., Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012; Nijs et al., 2014); however, an entity theory is defined by the belief that basic change is not likely, whereas an incremental theory is defined by the belief that personal change is always possible (Dweck, 1999). I thus expect that ITs will be drawn to high potential more than ETs, which leads to the next three hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2a: High potential will be related to higher talent ratings.*

*Hypothesis 2b: The effect of high potential on talent ratings will be stronger for more IT managers compared to more ET managers.*

*Hypothesis 2c: More IT managers are more likely to rank employees with average performance, but high potential as either their first or second choice for inclusion in exclusive talent management programs compared to more ET managers.*

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 104 students (58 women, 45 men, and 1 missing) registered in the Bachelor of Commerce program at the University of Manitoba, which was an appropriate sample size based on an effect size of  $f^2 = .33$  in line with past research related to lay beliefs (e.g., Heslin, Latham, & VandeWalle, 2005; who report R square values of .20 and .30 in their five studies). Please see Appendix A for G power output. Each student was awarded a 0.5 bonus point toward a course of their choice as compensation for participating in the study.



The mean (*M*) age of the participants was 22 years, with a standard deviation (*SD*) of 4.88, and range of 18 – 57 years. More than two thirds of the student were in second (42%) or third (28%) year at university, 6% were in first year, 14% were in fourth year, and 12% were in fifth year or higher. Seventy-two percent of the participants had taken at least one HR related course, making the participants a more reasonable proxy to real managers (Wheeler, Shanine, Leon, & Whitman, 2014). The participants were 44% White, 22% Asian, 8% Black, 7% Filipino, 7% Indian, and 12% other. Ninety-six percent of participants had work experience ranging from one month to over ten years and 19% of the participants had work experience hiring employees. This work experience and completed business courses should contribute to the participants being familiar with the concepts of high performance and perhaps high potential and how they are treated in organizational contexts including academic environments. The experiment was also designed to represent a situation that could be realistic or feasible for these students.

### **Materials and procedure**

**Creating the study conditions.** I created the study conditions by fully crossing two levels of performance (high and average) and two levels of potential (high and average) to create 4 unique conditions: average performance – average potential (APerf – APot); high performance – average potential (HPerf – APot), average performance – high potential (APerf – HPot); and high performance – high potential (HPerf – HPot). All profiles were described as sales employees and equally represented women and men, however, all the profiles were White to avoid the confound effects of race or visible minorities in organizational decision making (e.g., Roberts, 2010). To improve realism and to help participants remember each profile, I accompanied each with a photograph randomly selected from Karolinska Directed Emotional Faces pictures (Lundqvist, Flykt, & Öhman, 1998). I also included irrelevant administrative

information (e.g., department, date hired, manager name, salary band, etc.), as well as the first and last names of the employee, and ratings on punctuality, sales performance, and learning agility where all profiles had similar ratings on punctuality to avoid confound effects. To further increase realism, I also included other information describing positive attributes that were unrelated to either performance or potential. I borrowed the extraneous information – that was always positive – from example employee reviews and included descriptions such as: “Is courteous and friendly toward co-workers.” “Has a strong work ethic” “Understands company mission, culture, and values” “Has good public speaking skills.” “Works well with co-workers and exhibits a team-focused mindset.” “Consistently exhibits behaviors that properly represent the company’s mission, culture, and values.” Please see Appendix B to view the six conditions.

**Pilot study.** To investigate whether the materials and manipulations were interpreted as expected, I ran two pilot studies. For the two pilot studies, I created repeats of each of the mixed conditions (i.e., HPerf – APot and Aperf – HPot) to double check that I had properly manipulated information related to performance and potential and to provide myself more options when choosing the most reliable conditions to use in the main study. I thus had a total of six performance by potential conditions represented by six fictitious employee profiles for the two pilot studies.

In the first pilot study, I asked 3 lay people to complete the full experiment slowly while “thinking-aloud” so that I could observe how each reacted and interpreted the different conditions. This helped ensure that there were no technical glitches, that the instructions were clear, and that the study worked as intended. In the second pilot study, I pretested the quality of the study conditions by paying a nominal fee (i.e., \$1 USD per respondent) to recruit 30 people (70% men, mean age = 33.73 years, age range = 23 – 55), using Amazon Mechanical Turk

(MTurk), an online data collection system that has several advantages over standard internet samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Landers & Behrend, 2015): It is relatively inexpensive, allows collecting high-quality and reliable data, and reaches samples that are significantly more diverse than typical college samples. After respondents agreed to an online consent form – presented in Appendix C – they were instructed to imagine that they were rating six sales employees on their level of performance and potential, please see Appendix D to view the instructions. I investigated whether the high performance and high potential conditions were rated significantly higher on performance and potential compared to the average performance and average potential conditions, respectively. I also investigated whether each of the two repeated conditions (HPerf – APot and APerf – HPot) had similar effects (i.e., were rated similarly on both performance and potential). After the participants completed the rating exercise – presented in Appendix E – they completed some basic demographic items, outlined in Appendix F. Respondents were also debriefed on the purpose of the study and offered the opportunity to learn about the study results upon its full completion; please see Appendix G to view the debrief information.

***Results and analysis of the pilot study.*** For the first pilot study with 3 lay people, I found that the materials worked and I made minor improvements where necessary. For the second pilot study, I conducted two one-way repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to investigate whether the performance and potential conditions worked in the expected manner. I used the six performance and potential conditions (two levels of both performance and potential fully crossed and two repeats) as the repeated independent variables, and the performance ratings as the dependent variable for one ANOVA and potential ratings as the dependent variable for the

second ANOVA. The means and standard deviations of the performance and potential ratings across the six conditions including the two repeated conditions are presented in Table 1.

For performance ratings, I found that the assumptions of sphericity had not been met, Mauchly's  $X^2(14) = 55.60$ ,  $p < .001$  (Field, 2000; p. 474), so I reported the multivariate statistics, which do not rely on this assumption (Field, 2000; Pallant, 2010). I found a significant main effect for performance across the two conditions, Wilks' Lambda = .16,  $F(5, 25) = 27.17$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .85$ , indicating a large effect size (Cohen, 1988, p. 284). For potential ratings, I also found that the assumptions of sphericity had not been met, Mauchly's  $X^2(14) = 38.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , so again I reported the multivariate statistics. I found a significant main effect for potential across the two conditions, Wilks' Lambda = .12,  $F(5, 25) = 35.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .88$ , indicating a large effect size. This indicated that there were differences between the high and average performance and potential ratings in line with the manipulation.

To investigate whether each of the two repeated profile conditions (HPerf – APot and APerf – HPot) contributed to similar performance and potential ratings, I conducted a series of pairwise comparisons, using a Bonferroni adjustment to account for the inflated  $p$ -values. For the two HPerf – APot conditions, I did not find significant differences between either performance ratings  $M_1 = 4.07$ ,  $SD_1 = .79$ ;  $M_2 = 4.13$ ,  $SD_2 = .94$ , *mean difference (MD)* =  $-.07$ , *standard error (SE)* =  $.14$ , *confidence interval (CI)* =  $-.50 - .37$ ,  $p = 1.00$ , or potential ratings,  $M_1 = 3.30$ ,  $SD_1 = .75$ ;  $M_2 = 3.63$ ,  $SD_2 = .89$ ,  $MD = -.33$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $CI = -.80 - .14$ ,  $p = .46$ . For the two APerf – HPot conditions, I also did not find significant differences between either performance ratings,  $M_1 = 3.17$ ,  $SD_1 = .53$ ;  $M_2 = 3.20$ ,  $SD_2 = .48$ ,  $MD = -.03$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $CI = -.25 - .32$ ,  $p = 1.00$ , or potential ratings  $M_1 = 4.03$ ,  $SD_1 = .85$ ;  $M_2 = 4.10$ ,  $SD_2 = .89$ ,  $MD = -.07$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $CI = -.64 - .51$ ,  $p = 1.00$ . The fact that each of the two repeated conditions obtained equivalent scores was

reassuring and suggested that the ancillary information (i.e., name, picture, education, etc.) had limited to no impact on the ratings. Based on these findings, I chose to retain the first variant of the HPerf – APot condition, which was rated lower on potential, and the second variant of the APerf – HPot condition, for the main study.

To ensure that all other conditions were significantly different, I also conducted a series of pairwise comparisons, using a Bonferroni adjustment to account for the inflated  $p$ -values. For performance ratings, I found that the APerf – APot condition ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = .41$ ) was rated significantly lower compared to the HPerf – APot condition, variant 1,  $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = .79$ ,  $MD = -1.10$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $CI = -1.59 - -.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and the HPerf – HPot condition,  $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = .73$ ,  $MD = -1.53$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $CI = -1.96 - -1.11$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, the APerf – APot condition was not rated significantly lower compared to either variant of the APerf – HPot condition: variant 1,  $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .53$ ,  $MD = -.13$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $CI = -.47 - .20$ ,  $p = 1.00$ , or variant 2,  $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .48$ ,  $MD = -.17$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $CI = -.55 - .21$ ,  $p = 1.00$ . Lastly, I found that the HPerf – HPot condition ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = .73$ ) was rated significantly higher compared to both the HPerf – APot condition, variant 1,  $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = .79$ ,  $MD = .50$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $CI = .07 - .93$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the APerf – HPot condition, variant 2,  $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .49$ ,  $MD = 1.37$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $CI = .87 - 1.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results indicated that the performance manipulation worked as intended and that participants made ratings in the expected directions (i.e., higher conditions were rated higher compared to average conditions) and based on the study conditions rather than on ancillary information. Despite that the APerf – APot condition was not rated significantly lower on performance compared to either variant of the APerf – HPot condition, I chose to retain the second variant for the main study.

For potential, I found that the APerf – APot condition ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) was rated significantly lower compared to both variants of the HPerf – APot condition: variant 1,  $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .75$ ,  $MD = -.57$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $CI = -1.11 - -.02$ ,  $p < .05$ , variant 2,  $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .89$ ,  $MD = -.90$ ,  $SE = .21$ ,  $CI = -1.56 - -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ; both variants of the APerf – HPot condition: variant 1,  $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = .85$ ,  $MD = -1.30$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $CI = -1.95 - -.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ; variant 2,  $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = .87$ ,  $MD = -1.37$ ,  $SE = .21$ ,  $CI = -2.04 - -2.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and the HPerf – HPot condition,  $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = .48$ ,  $MD = -2.07$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $CI = -2.62 - -1.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . I further found that the HPerf – HPot condition was rated significantly higher compared to both variants of the HPerf – APot condition: variant 1,  $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .75$ ,  $MD = 1.50$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $CI = .97 - 2.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , variant 2,  $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = .89$ ,  $MD = 1.17$ ,  $SE = .19$ ,  $CI = .57 - 1.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and both variants of the APerf – HPot condition: variant 1,  $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = .85$ ,  $MD = .77$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $CI = .37 - 1.16$ ,  $p < .001$ , and variant 2,  $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = .89$ ,  $MD = .70$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $CI = .21 - 1.19$ ,  $p = .001$ . These results indicated that the potential manipulation worked as intended and that participants made ratings in the expected directions (i.e., higher conditions were rated higher compared to average conditions) and based on the study conditions rather than on ancillary information. Overall and based on these findings, I concluded that the manipulations used in the four study conditions were effective at contributing to predicted expectations.

**Main study.** I presented the main study's materials with both paper and online materials such that each participant received printed copies of the four profiles, of which there were three versions, which were randomly assigned. The three versions, presented in Appendix H, differed regarding the names, sex, and other details (e.g., city, place of school) associated with each profile. This helped to ensure that results would be influenced by the manipulated conditions (performance and potential) rather than the ancillary information. The profiles were not stapled

together so that they appeared in random order and participants could flip back and forth between each profile to review, compare, and contrast them.

The experiment took place in a room in the Business School and ten participants at a time could register for each session. During each session, participants were asked to sit in front of a computer where each was separated with a cardboard divider so that participants could not see the materials or responses of their neighbours. Participants were given the survey link, which they typed into a web browser using the computer at their respective workstations. Participants were asked to agree to an online consent form – presented in Appendix I. The instructions – outlined in Appendix J – asked participants to imagine that they were currently a member of the human resource department at the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), a major Canadian retailer, and that they were being asked to rate and rank four sales employees for inclusion into an exclusive talent management program. Participants were informed that the program was intended for those employees thought to contribute the most to meeting the organization’s strategic goals and for those employees who were the most key or valuable to ensuring the organization’s continued success. Please see Appendix K to view the rating and ranking exercise.

## **Measures**

**Performance condition.** I manipulated the high-performance condition by describing the employees’ sales performance as “Frequently exceeds sales targets each quarter”. I also assigned a related percentage of either 112% or 120% regarding meeting sales targets and I assigned an *excellent* rating in the sales performance section of the profiles. I manipulated the average-performance condition by describing the employees’ sales performance as “Meets sales targets most of the time”. I assigned a related percentage of either 72% or 73% regarding reaching sales targets and I assigned a *satisfactory* rating in the sales performance section of the profiles.

**Potential condition.** I manipulated the potential condition by adapting items from a measure by Spreitzer, McCall, and Mahoney (1997) to describe employees' learning agility. I used learning agility as a proxy for potential rather than any of the other three potential indicators because learning agility is more likely to be regarded as malleable (especially compared to ability and PO fit) and is perhaps less well understood or vaguer – which in some ways best mirrors the understanding of potential. Using motivation as a proxy could have been another feasible option; however, motivation seems more distinct from potential and rather as being only one part (rather than a main component) of potential. I thus manipulated the high-potential condition by using combinations of the following sentences: “Demonstrates very effective changes when provided with minimal feedback.” “Often seeks new challenges and opportunities at work.” “Enjoys receiving constructive criticism and is adaptable and flexible with ways to complete work tasks.” I also assigned an *excellent* rating in the learning agility section of these profiles. I manipulated the average-potential condition by using a combination of the following sentences: “Is able to implement change but only when provided with detailed feedback and instructions.” “Is capable of working under new conditions but does not necessarily thrive when asked to do so.” “Sometimes takes advantages of opportunities at work.” “Is open to constructive criticism, but sometimes is uncomfortable when receiving it from certain individuals.” “Makes an effort to be flexible with how work tasks are completed, but tends to stick with current methods rather than incorporate new methods taught during training and development sessions.” I also assigned a *satisfactory* rating in the learning agility section of these profiles.

**Talent ratings.** I asked participants to rate the talent of each employee profile (where each appeared in random order in Qualtrics) with 2-items from Dunn, Mount, Barrick, and Ones (1995) scale of hirability with words changed to match current study conditions: "I would



recommend that this person be selected into the talent program." " I believe that this person would do well in the talent program" and one item from Jawahar and Ferris (2011) scale regarding promotability: "This person is ready for the talent program right now". Each item was accompanied by a five-point scale ranging, with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. The items were forced choice so that participants had to assess each condition, which ensured no missing data. Higher ratings indicated greater likelihood that the employee would be included in the exclusive talent program. The scale reliabilities for all twelve items (4 conditions by 3 items each) was .70.

**Talent rankings.** I also asked participants to rank up to two employee profiles in the order that they would include into the program (profiles for each of the three versions of the four conditions appeared in random order to prevent order effects). I informed participants that they could choose fewer than two employees if they did not feel that there were at least two who met the standards for inclusion in the talent program. Lower scores indicated greater belief that the employee should be included.

**Lay beliefs or measure of incremental theory.** Although it is more desirable to make domain-specific assessments (Chiu et al., 1997), I measured lay beliefs using an 8-item, domain-general measure cited in Dweck (1999). Some example items in the scale included: "The kind of person someone is, is something basic about them, and it can't be changed very much."; "People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed."; "Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that they can do to really change that." I also included two items intended as attention checks: "It is better to marry for love rather than money" and "A tripod has three legs"; however, because there was no right or wrong answer for the first item it was not used to exclude participants because there may have been

legitimate variance in how attentive participants responded. Participants responded adequately to the second item and thus no participants were excluded based on either item.

Each item was accompanied by a six-point scale, with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*, which was the opposite order used by Dweck and her colleagues but I used the same labels as past researchers. By accident, I reverse coded the responses in Qualtrics to match the scale used by Dweck (1999) and her colleagues, so that I had to re-reverse scored items 4, 6, 7, and 8 to create a mean score of lay beliefs so that higher scores indicated tendencies toward incremental beliefs and lower scores indicated tendencies toward entity beliefs. Thus, the items more specifically measured each participants' level of incremental theory (lower scores not only reflect lower incremental theories but also higher entity theories – the two types of theories are reciprocal). Please view Appendix L to view how the items appeared in the study.

All items were significantly correlated with *rs* ranging from .21 to .72. The internal reliability coefficient of the measure was .88, which was comparable to those reported in past studies which range from .85 to .94 (Chiu et al., 1997). The mean score of the scale was 3.46 (*SD* = .79, *range* = 1.38 – 5.13) and the scale was mostly normally distributed with a slight negative kurtosis and skew ( $k = -.30$  and  $s = -.21$ ) indicating that, overall, participants had an inclination toward incremental beliefs compared to entity beliefs. It was not necessary to transform the measure because I was not expecting a normal distribution based on previous research, which reported bimodal distributions. For instance, Chiu, et al. (1997) reported that typically only 15% of their samples fall in the mid-range (i.e., scores between 3.01 and 3.99). These researchers classify participants who score 3.0 or below on this measure as entity theorists; participants who score 4.0 or above as incremental theorists, and those who score between 3.01 and 3.99 as not having a clear theory. In contrast to these researchers, I found that the majority or 42% of

participants (n = 44) scored within this middle range, 30.8% (n = 32) scored in the lower range, and 27% (n = 28) scored in the higher range. Thus, participants in the current research were more moderate or less extreme in their lay beliefs compared to past reports. Chiu, et al. (1997) typically exclude data from the moderate group from group comparisons but retain this data in other analyses such as regression and correlational.

**Demographics.** I asked all participants to indicate their gender, age, ethnicity, years of post-secondary education, approximate years of work experience including part-time work, and years of experience in hiring employees or assessing employee work performance with space provided to allow for qualitative responses. Please see Appendix M to view the demographic items. I collected this information for descriptive purposes. Afterwards, participants were debriefed about the purpose of the study and offered the opportunity to learn about the study results upon its full completion – please see Appendix N to view the debrief information.

### **Results and Analysis**

**Talent ratings and lay beliefs.** I conducted a general linear model (mixed between-within-subjects' ANOVA) to investigate whether high performance (*H1a*) and high potential (*H2a*) would be related to higher talent ratings, and whether the effects of performance on talent ratings would be stronger for managers who score lower on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more ET managers; *H1b*) and whether the effects of potential on talent ratings would be stronger for managers who score higher on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more IT managers, *H2b*). I used performance as one repeated within-subject independent variable (average performance and high performance), potential as another repeated within-subject independent variable (average potential and high potential), participants' level of incremental theory (i.e., their lay beliefs) as the between-subject independent variable, and talent ratings for inclusion in the talent program as

the dependent variable. I found a significant main effect of performance on talent ratings, Wilks Lambda = .39,  $F(1, 76) = 118.78$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .61$ , thus supporting *H1a*; and a significant main effect of potential on talent ratings, Wilks Lambda = .37,  $F(1, 76) = 129.31$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .63$ , thus supporting *H2a*. To ease interpretation when investigating *H1b* and *H2b*, I followed the example of Chiu et al. (1997) and grouped lay beliefs (i.e., measure of incremental theory) into 3 categories, low: 1.00 to 3.00 ( $M = 2.00$ ), moderate: between 3.01 and 3.99 ( $M = 3.5$ ), and high: 4.00 to 6.00 ( $M = 5.00$ ). I did not find a significant interaction effect of incremental theories on the relationship between performance and talent ratings, Wilks Lambda = 1.00,  $F(2, 101) = .00$ ,  $p = 1.00$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ , thus not supporting *H1b*. I also did not find a significant interaction effect of incremental theories on the relationship between potential and talent ratings, Wilks Lambda = .98,  $F(2, 101) = 1.15$ ,  $p = .31$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ , thus not supporting *H2b*. Please see Figure 3 to view a depiction of the ratings across the three levels of incremental theory.

**Talent rankings and lay beliefs.** I conducted two logistic regressions to investigate whether managers who scored lower on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more ET managers) were more likely to rank the HPerf – APot condition as either their first or second choice compared to managers who scored higher on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more IT managers, *H1c*) and whether managers who scored higher on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more IT managers) were more likely to rank the APerf – HPot condition as either their first or second choice compared to managers who scored lower on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more ET managers, *H2c*). I again categorized lay beliefs (i.e., measure of incremental theory) into low, moderate, and high and used this as the categorical independent variable, and I created a new variable called “*ranked as either first or second choice*” (coded as *No* = 0 and *Yes* = 1) as the categorical dependent

variable. Please see Table 2 to view the frequencies of how each condition was ranked by the three categories (i.e., low, moderate, high) of incremental theory (i.e., lay beliefs).

I did not find a significant effect between managers who scored lower on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more ET managers) being more likely to rank the HPerf – APot condition as a first or second choice compared to managers who score higher on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more IT managers),  $\chi^2(2, N = 104) = 3.27, p = .19$ , indicating that the model was not able to distinguish between more ET managers and more IT managers regarding how this condition was ranked, thus not supporting *H1c*. The model explained between .31% (Cox and Snell R square) and .41% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in ranking the HPerf – APot condition as either a first or second choice, and correctly classified only 57.7% of the cases which was not significantly better than the null model which correctly classified 55.8% of the cases.

I also did not find a significant effect between managers who scored higher on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more IT managers) being more likely to rank the APerf – HPot condition as a first or second choice compared to managers who scored lower on incremental lay beliefs (i.e., more ET managers),  $\chi^2(2, N = 105) = 1.35, p = .51$ , indicating that the model was also not able to distinguish between more IT managers and more ET managers regarding how this condition was ranked, thus not supporting *H2c*. The model explained between 1.3% (Cox and Snell R square) and 1.7% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in ranking the APerf – HPot condition as either a first or second choice, and correctly classified only 57.7% of the cases which was the same as the null model which also correctly classified 57.7% of the cases.

### **Discussion**

In this study, I investigated the effects of four different performance and potential conditions on managers' talent ratings and rankings. I further investigated how these decisions

might be influenced by manager's lay beliefs regarding the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes. I found significant main effects for both performance and potential on talent ratings, such that as either went from average to high, talent ratings also increased indicating that people were more likely to include employees with high performance or high potential in exclusive talent management programs. When categorizing lay beliefs or incremental theories into three groups (low, moderate, and high), I did not find a significant moderating effect of incremental theory on either of the relationships between performance and talent ratings or between potential and talent ratings. Furthermore, I did not find that incremental theory had a significant effect on how participants ranked the two mixed conditions (HPerf – APot and APerf – HPot). I expand on each of these findings in the following paragraphs.

The finding that high performance and high potential contributed to higher talent ratings compared to average performance and average potential is not necessarily surprising and demonstrates that managers utilize performance and potential in expected patterns. The non-significant moderating effect of incremental theories on performance and talent ratings and on potential and talent ratings and the lack of significant differences found between managers' rankings are inconsistent with my predictions and with the assumptions of the theory of lay beliefs. In the following paragraphs, I elaborate on possible reasons for the non-significant findings through a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the research, limitations of the study, future research ideas, and close by providing concluding remarks.

### **Theoretical contribution**

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributed to both lay belief research (but did not support this theory) as well as to talent identification research. Despite that the findings did not strengthen the theory of lay beliefs, participants did demonstrate a range of scores in their lay

beliefs (i.e., level of incremental theory). As noted at the outset of this chapter, most people have a tendency toward one type of lay belief (Plaks et al., 2009); however, in the current study, I found that the majority of participants did not hold a strong leaning toward either type of lay beliefs (i.e., most participants scored in the moderate range). The more normally distributed measure was not consistent with past reports by many notable researchers who report bimodally distributed measures.

For instance, Plaks et al. (2001) explain that typically 40 to 45% of individuals tend to one or the other type of lay beliefs and typically only 10 to 20% of individuals do not have a well-defined or consistent theory (p. 881), which is significantly different from the majority of participants in the current study (42%) who scored in the moderate range, whereas 30.8% scored in the lower range, and 27% scored in the higher range. In conjunction, Chiu, et al. (1997) report that 19%, 25%, and 36% of their three samples scored in the moderate range of their lay belief measure or between 3.0 and 4.0 (p. 22 – 24). A possible explanation for these differences in distributions may be the type of sample used such that business students respond differently compared to other types of students (e.g., Albaum & Peterson, 2006; Cohen, Pant, & Sharp, 2001; Molnar, Kletke, & Chongwatpol, 2008); however, these studies mainly concern ethical behavior so this may not necessarily explain distribution oddities of a lay beliefs measure.

Another possibility is that I may have primed participants' responses by having them complete the lay belief measure (i.e., level of incremental theory) after the experiment had finished. For instance, participants may have responded in line with the types of decisions they had just made during the experiment. Alternately, participants may have responded in the context of what they believed would be suitable for the company described in the study and for the type of role, namely, sales, and not from the perspective of their own beliefs. This may suggest that

the perceived lay beliefs of the organization or the role in question may play a significant factor in how managers make talent decisions, which would offer some explanation for the non-significant effects of individual incremental theories. In the following paragraphs, I explore other possible explanations for why incremental beliefs did not play a significant role in the study's findings.

**Reasons for non-significant effects of incremental theories.** A possible explanation for the non-significant effects of incremental theories is that talent ratings may have not made a suitable dependent variable because participants could too easily rate each of the mixed conditions similarly as all conditions were relatively good, scoring highly on either performance or potential. This, however, would not explain why the expected predictions did not materialize in the ranking exercise where participants were forced to choose between the two mixed conditions. A possible improvement may have been to make the average conditions more average. This may have made decisions about ratings and ranking more thought-provoking for participants.

For instance, it may have been better to describe the high-performance condition as meeting sales targets by 150% and the average-performance condition as only meeting 60 – 68% of sales targets. In parallel, it may have been better to describe the high-potential condition as an employee who consistently and impressively learns difficult material and applies it to work settings, and the average potential condition as an employee who struggles to learn new things under all new circumstances, etc. These more extreme conditions may have induced more variance in ratings and rankings. A possible drawback may have been a lack of realism because employees who are too low on either performance or potential may appear less likely to be included in considerations for talent programs.



Another possible explanation for the non-significant effects is that perhaps operationalizing potential as learning agility was not appropriate or ideal. For instance, it may have been better to operationalize potential with one of the other indicators or with a combination of the four proposed characteristics of high potential. This may have better encompassed the concept of potential whereas learning agility may have only encompassed one part or a fraction of what potential is thought to represent. A problem with using all four characteristics to operationalize high potential is the need to create an abundance of conditions perhaps making the experiment too complex or too long and inducing boredom (Karren & Barringer, 2002). Alternately, learning agility may have been perceived similarly to cognitive ability, a concept regarded as more fixed, where I was trying to operationalize potential with a concept that might be regarded as more malleable or uncertain, specifically compared to performance. For instance, general mental ability is often described as the ability to learn or to develop ability (e.g., Hunter, 1986), which is arguable similar to learning agility. Finally, people define potential in a multitude of ways, perhaps making this concept difficult to operationalize for experimental purposes, in general.

Lastly, lay beliefs may not operate in talent decisions in the same way as they operate in other contexts such as willingness to persevere in times of difficulty (Mueller & Dweck, 1998), stereotype formation (Levy & Dweck, 1999), social judgments (Erdley & Dweck, 1993), which could indicate a boundary condition of the theory in organizational talent contexts. An explanation for this could be that performance and potential are both viewed as fundamental in talent contexts where one does not compensate for the other regardless of managers' lay beliefs. Future research is needed to investigate this possibility.

### **Practical contributions and future research**

The findings demonstrate that high performance and high potential contribute to higher ratings on talent identification compared to average performance and average potential. These findings suggest that performance and potential are used in appropriate ways in organizational contexts. However, participants were divided between each of the two mixed conditions such that half the participants preferred high performance despite average potential and half the participants preferred high potential despite average performance. This suggests that managers do use different internal decision making mechanisms when identifying talent. This finding may have important implications for employees who want to be part of their organization's talent plans by having knowledge of which features of talent managers value most and why. This finding may also have important implications for organizations because it provides evidence that different managers make different types of talent decisions when presented with the same or similar information. This is interesting because the different decisions types may contribute to different outcomes where some may be more favorable.

It would be germane for researchers to uncover which decisions contribute to more favorable short and long term outcomes. For instance, if employees with higher potential and more average performance experience more fruitful careers over the long-term compared to employees with higher performance and more average potential, then high potential may represent a better talent indicator compared to high performance. Evidence to this end may highlight the value of potential in talent contexts, further propelling interest in understanding what it represents, which, as mentioned previously, is not entirely clear based on the extant literature.

Because lay beliefs (i.e., measured as level of incremental theory), did not explain these differences, it would be interesting to uncover other individual differences that may explain the

different decisions. Possible differences might include psychological traits such as risk aversion or cautiousness and agency vs. stewardship orientations. For instance, managers who work in wealthy organizations are less risk adverse compared to managers who work in organizations with limited budgets (Audia & Greve, 2006); thus, managers from wealthy organizations may make talent decisions based on constructs that are less certain and pertain to growth or the possibility of change (i.e., potential). Alternately, Tosi, Brownlee, Silva, and Katz (2003) find that individual who are agentic invest more in alternatives that maximize profits of an organization compared to individuals who are more stewardship-oriented. Thus, agentic managers may make talent decisions based on either a variety of features (i.e., random assortment of either high performance or high potential) or more certain features of talent (i.e., only high performance) that are most likely to maximize profits.

Lastly, because individual incremental theories did not account for the differences in how managers rated and ranked the condition, it would be interesting to investigate whether the type of organization and/or the type of position drove the results. In other words, participants may have responded while keeping the needs of the organization (i.e., HBC) at the top of their minds or in terms of what they believed would be suitable for the organization's sales employees. It would be interesting to investigate whether different types of organizations (e.g., public vs. private, large vs. small, non-profit vs. profit) and different types of roles (e.g., engineers, doctors, nurses, social workers, financial analysts, bankers) would solicit a different pattern of decisions where lay beliefs might have played a significant role. For instance, perhaps incremental theories matter more when making decision based on the type of organization for which a manager works (e.g., Enron vs. Xerox). Furthermore, perhaps incremental theories matter more when making decision for complex roles (e.g., leadership roles) or more straightforward roles (e.g., cashier) as

compared to the more moderately complex sales role as was investigated in the current research. However, I expect that complex roles may be regarded similarly to how sales roles were regarded because any level of complexity may drive preferences for high potential, whereas, in less complex roles, high performance may matter above all else. However, of note, in recent news events, one organization cited high performance as a reason to ignore sexual harassments complaints against a high ranking engineering employee (Fowler, 2017).

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to the current study that should be addressed. Specifically, the artificial situation that I created in the in the lab to investigate my hypotheses, as well as the student nature of the sample, preclude me from generalizing my model to the general population of those involved in actual talent identification decisions. However, because this study lays the foundation for future work on talent identification, I compromised the external validity (i.e., generalizability) in favor of internal validity (i.e., determining whether talent identification decisions are influenced by individual's lay beliefs about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes).

In addition, I may have primed the way participants made talent ratings by describing an organization with which they were likely familiar and I may have primed how participants responded to the lay beliefs measure by having them respond to the items directly after finishing the experiment. This may suggest that organizational-level factors play an important role. I will at least partially address this question in Study 2 where I will include an investigation of the possible effects of organizational lay beliefs on talent assessments. In study 2, I will also measure participants' individual lay beliefs one week before they answer questions about which

attributes they value most when assessing talent. In general, it may be more suitable to time separate the measure of incremental theories from experimental research and its conditions.

Although I believe it was necessary to establish a realistic experimental condition, the somewhat pretend nature of this study may not entirely mirror actual talent identification in the workplace. That is, managers likely have some form of preexisting relationship and more information about employees. Furthermore, in real life settings, there may be other factors such as politics or biases, which may be difficult to control in experimental research. Further, although student samples are appropriate for universalistic conceptions where one sample is not expected to respond differently compared to other samples (Stevens, 2011), which arguably encompasses lay beliefs (e.g., Dweck, 1999), it would be more ideal to conduct the research in a field setting among actual managers and regarding actual employees and across a range of roles and industries. This would contribute to external validity and generalizability.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the findings were somewhat disappointing because I did not find a significant between group effect on talent ratings and I did not find a significant association between incremental theories and talent rankings. However, this study did reveal that talent identification decisions are influenced by performance and potential, and, interestingly, managers differed with respect to which employees they considered talented where around half the participants preferred employees with high performance (easy to quantify), whereas, half the participants preferred employees with high learning agility, as representative of high potential (less easy to quantify). Unfortunately, the measure of incremental theory did not explain these differences, so it would be useful to uncover what other factors may play or role, or, to alter the study design to better capture the possible effects of lay beliefs. Managers carry implicit theories or lay beliefs and

typically make decisions and judgements about themselves and others with these beliefs covertly at play (Plaks et al., 2009). As research on talent identification continues to advance, lay beliefs may become important to consider and if their role becomes better understood in the context of talent identification, it may contribute to better predictions regarding decisions about individual talent and organizational success.

Table 1

*Pilot study: Mean scores for performance and potential ratings across the six conditions*

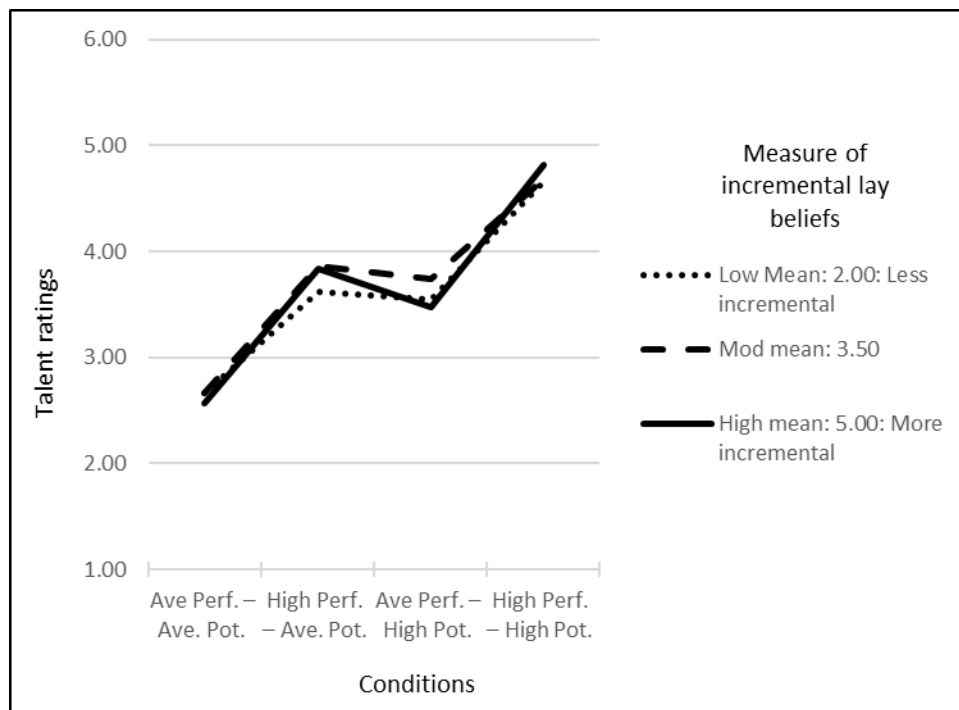
Conditions	Performance condition	Potential Condition	Performance Ratings	Potential Ratings	N
1	Average	Average	3.03 <sup>a</sup> (.41)	2.73 <sup>a</sup> (.87)	30
2	High	Average	4.07 <sup>b</sup> (.79)	3.30 <sup>b</sup> (.75)	30
3 (repeat of 2)	High	Average	4.13 <sup>b</sup> (.94)	3.63 <sup>b</sup> (.89)	30
4	Average	High	3.17 <sup>a</sup> (.53)	4.03 <sup>c</sup> (.85)	30
5 (repeat of 4)	Average	High	3.20 <sup>a</sup> (.48)	4.10 <sup>c</sup> (.89)	30
6	High	High	4.57 <sup>c</sup> (.73)	4.80 <sup>d</sup> (.48)	30

*Notes:* Conditions 2 and 3 were repeats of the high performance – average potential condition and conditions 4 and 5 were repeats of the average performance – high potential condition.

Values and means in each column that have different subscripts differ significantly at  $p < .01$  and means in each column that have the same subscript do not differ significantly. Standard deviations are in brackets.

Figure 3

Mean talent ratings of the performance by potential conditions across low, moderate, and high measures of incremental lay beliefs



*Notes:* Mod = moderate. Low mean reflects more entity beliefs, moderate mean reflects neither strongly entity or incremental beliefs, high means reflect more incremental beliefs.



Table 2

*Frequency of first and second choices of each experimental condition across the levels of incremental theories grouped by low, moderate, and high*

		Participants' level of incremental theory grouped			<i>Totals</i>
		Low: 1.00 to 3.00 (n = 32)	Moderate: 3.01 to 3.99 (n = 44)	High: 4.00 to 6.00 (n = 28)	
Ave Perf. – Ave. Pot.	1st choice	1	0	0	1
	2nd choice	0	1	0	1
High Perf. – Ave. Pot.	1st choice	4	0	1	5
	2nd choice	13	15	13	41
Ave Perf. – High Pot.	1st choice	6	5	2	13
	2nd choice	12	23	12	47
High Perf. – High Pot.	1st choice	21	39	25	85
	2nd choice	7	5	3	15

*Notes:* Low mean reflects more entity beliefs, moderate mean reflects neither strongly entity or incremental beliefs, high means reflect more incremental beliefs

## Chapter IV

### Study 2

In study 1, I investigated my first two research questions regarding how managers consider high performance and high potential in their talent identification decisions and how these decisions might be influenced by managers' individual lay beliefs. In this study, I further my investigation by examining the influence of organizational lay beliefs on the relationship between managers' lay beliefs and their talent identification decisions including their considerations of the four proposed characteristics of high potential.

In the same way that individuals vary in their lay beliefs, organizations also vary in their beliefs about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes. For instance, Kofman and Senge (1993) report that some organizations focus on competition and high performance of their employees whereas others focus on learning and improvement of their employees. As examples, Enron was once described as a performance-driven organization where its past leaders touted a "culture of genius" (Elkind & McLean, 2006) and endorsing attributes typically valued by entity theorists. In contrast, Xerox is often described as supporting the development, improvement, and personal growth of its employees (George & McLean, 2007), and endorsing attributes typically valued by incremental theorists.

In the current study, I consider how managers' talent decisions may be influenced by their perceptions of their organizations' lay beliefs. I specifically consider decisions comparing the value placed on performance compared to the value placed on potential, as well as the value placed on each of the four characteristics of potential – namely, ability, motivation, learning agility, and person-organization (PO) fit – when compared against each another. As an extension to both the theoretical and anecdotal evidence, the current study broadens to address my third

and fourth research questions: (3) How do organizational lay beliefs influence managers' talent decisions? (4) How do the lay beliefs of organizations interact with the lay beliefs of managers? (a) When both organizations and managers hold similar lay beliefs, do managers' decisions follow predictable patterns? (b) When organizations and managers hold different lay beliefs, are managers' decisions swayed toward the lay beliefs of the organization? More specifically, I investigate how managers' and organizations' lay beliefs influence managers' talent decisions, and how organizational lay beliefs moderate the relationship between managers' lay beliefs and their talent decisions. In the following sections, I review the literature to introduce the thirteen hypotheses presented in the study.

### **The value of performance compared to potential and individual lay beliefs**

Lay beliefs describe people's inherent beliefs about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes (people's entity vs. incremental theory, respectively; Molden et al., 2006). Lay beliefs are thought to exist on a continuum; however, most people have a tendency toward one type (e.g., Plaks et al., 2009) and are referred to as either *entity theorists* (ETs) who regard human attributes as mostly fixed or as *incremental theorists* (ITs) who regard human attributes as mostly malleable.

People who score lower on incremental beliefs measures (i.e., more entity theorists, ETs) tend to infer global traits more readily and strongly from other people's behavior and to see these traits as explanations for inherent nature and future behavior (Dweck, 1999; Levy & Dweck, 1998). ETs also make global judgements about others by relying on observations of others' actions (Dweck et al., 1993) and tend to believe that performance is a direct reflection of intelligence regardless of knowing important details such as the difficulty of the task completed (Dweck, 1999). In contrast, people who score higher on incremental beliefs measure (i.e., more

incremental theorists, ITs) are more likely to focus on specific mediating processes (goals, needs, emotion states; Levy & Dweck, 1998) and are less likely to see traits or current performance as explanation or to make predictions about a person's inherent nature and future behavior (Dweck, 1999; Levy & Dweck, 1998). ITs also tend to believe in more dynamic systems characterized by change, context, and process, and focus more on psychological mediators (Dweck et al., 1995b).

Because of this, I expect that when identifying talent, more ET managers will value features and characteristics that are perceived as being more fixed; and, in contrast, more IT managers will value features and characteristics that are perceived as being less fixed. To elaborate, high performance is easily observed and high performers are sometimes referred to as *high flyers* to reflect their proven or demonstrated success or track record (Dries & Pepermans, 2007a). In contrast, potential is not observable and is a latent trait that is characterized by relevant indicators. In this way, high potential is uncertain in that an individual identified as high potential – via relevant indicators – may or may not achieve greatness (Tormala et al., 2012). I thus expect that, overall, people with more incremental theories will consider potential to be more important compared to performance in their talent decisions, which leads to the next hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3a: Individuals' incremental theories will contribute more weight to potential compared to performance.*

### **The influence of organizational lay beliefs on managers' talent decisions**

From an organizational context, Murphy and Dweck (2010) find that displays of organizations' entity or incremental beliefs influence how people describe themselves in order to gain membership into these organizations and also how people later evaluate and choose among individuals applying for jobs in unrelated contexts. Furthermore, because organizations' climates

and cultures are difficult to change (Schneider, 1987), managers might make decisions that best accord with their organization's norms and beliefs as a way to fit in with the corporate culture, meet their organization's needs, and even to remain employed.

In the same way that ETs predict greater consistency in people's behavior in the long term (Dweck et al., 1995a), I expect that managers who work at organizations that are perceived to hold more entity theories will regard performance as most important when identifying talent and will endorse decisions that demonstrate beliefs that employees who performed well in the past, will perform well again in the future. In contrast, in the same way that ITs believe in change and the capability for people to learn and grow (Dweck et al., 1995a), I expect that managers who work in organizations that are perceived to hold more incremental theories will regard potential as most important when identifying talent, and will endorse decisions that demonstrate beliefs that an employee who showed indications of being able to develop, change, or improve represents a better bet on future performance, which leads to the next hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3b: Higher perceived organizational incremental theories will contribute more weight to potential compared to performance.*

I further expect that perceived organizational beliefs will interact with the relationship between the lay beliefs of managers and their talent decisions. More specifically, I expect that organizational lay beliefs will strengthen or attenuate the effects of managers' lay beliefs on talent decisions. For example, I expect that a manager who scores lower on incremental beliefs (i.e., more ET manager) working in an organization perceived to also hold lower incremental beliefs (i.e., more ET organization) will weight performance – or features of talent that are more typically associated with entity theories – more than if these managers were working in an organization perceived to also hold higher incremental theories (i.e., more incremental beliefs).

Alternately, I expect that a manager who scores higher on incremental beliefs (i.e., more IT manager) working in an organization perceived to hold more incremental beliefs (i.e., more IT organization), will weight potential – or features of talent that are more typically associated with incremental theories – more than if these managers were working in an organization perceived to hold lower incremental theories (i.e., more entity beliefs). In other words, organizational lay beliefs will prime how managers make talent decisions, strengthening or weakening the effects of their own lay beliefs on their decisions.

*Hypothesis 3c: The effect of individuals' incremental theories on potential will be stronger when organizations are perceived to have more incremental beliefs.*

### **The characteristics of high potential**

In the research, I propose that ability (related to cognitive ability or intelligence), motivation (related to demonstrating behaviors that indicate interest in being part of an organization's talent supply), learning agility, and person-organization (PO) fit represent the key characteristics or indicators of high potential. I propose these four characteristics as indicators of potential because many researchers demonstrate that people tend to realize their potential when they demonstrate high cognitive ability (e.g., Faßhauer et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2005; Kuncel et al., 2014) via completing complex tasks (e.g., math and science courses) but also through motivation (e.g., attendance; Trusty & Niles, 2004). Further, researchers have shown that realized potential stems not only from biology (e.g., inherent cognitive ability) but also from learning opportunities and stimulation (e.g., Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013; Molfese et al., 2002; Schulz et al., 2002); and, finally, PO fit is not only positively related to organizational attraction (Judge & Cable, 1997), but also to job satisfaction and in-role performance (Gregory et al., 2010), the capability to influence in-group members (Conner, 2014), and is negatively related to

absenteeism and frequent job changes (Conner, 2014). I thus argue that, at a minimum, components of these four characteristics must be present for an employee to be identified as high potential and I expect that managers' lay beliefs (i.e., level of incremental theory) will play a role in how different managers consider these characteristics when assessing employees for high potential.

Specifically, I expect managers to focus on the characteristics that they believe are most important and to minimize characteristics that are less salient as per their lay beliefs. To elaborate, people deploy psychological defenses to ward off threats to their theory and to preserve the subjective sense that their meaning system is an effective tool for making sense of human nature and behavior (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Plaks et al., 2005). ETs do this by focusing on trait-consistent behavior (e.g., a person with high cognitive ability doing well) whereas ITs do this by focusing on trait-inconsistent information (a person with high cognitive ability doing poorly; Plaks et al., 2005).

Thus, when making talent decisions, different managers may emphasize certain characteristics of potential and minimize or dismiss others as way to feel confident in their inherent beliefs and to feel a sense of security in knowing that how they perceive the world makes sense and is reliable. In the following sections, I briefly explore each of the four characteristics in the context of the study, and then I outline my expectations regarding how individual and organizational lay beliefs will influence considerations of these characteristics when making talent decisions before introducing my next ten hypotheses.

**The proposed characteristics of high potential.** First, I refer to ability as general cognitive ability (*g*) or intelligence, which is often discussed as something that is fixed (e.g., Gagné, 2004) and stable over a person's life. In this way, ability may be regarded as a

characteristic that is dichotomously viewed as either present or absent, and as a characteristic that remains fixed with respect to individual employees working at organizations.

Second, in talent management research, motivation, passion, and loving one's job are cited as being underappreciated (Dries, 2013) such that an employee might demonstrate high ability, but without motivation, success may be less likely. According to Gagné (2004, 2009) the most significant interpersonal component of his giftedness model concerns motivational issues. This is because deliberate practice is not thought to be inherently enjoyable (Ericsson et al., 2007) so employees must be motivated to engage in the talent development process to overcome obstacles, tedium, and occasional failure (Gagné, 2004). In this way, motivation may be more likely to be regarded as a characteristic that can change, develop, and grow amongst employees in organizational contexts.

Third, learning agility is described as the speed of learning (i.e., processing and perceptual speed) and flexibility across and within situations (cognitive flexibility; DeRue et al., 2012). Employees who demonstrate learning agility are shown to exhibit behaviours such as seeking out new challenges; seeking feedback from others, and self-reflection. Naturally, some people may be more interested in these types of behaviors or improving and thus may demonstrate higher levels of learning agility regardless of their level of genetic intelligence (Wang & Beier, 2012). In this way, learning agility may be more likely to be regarded as a characteristic that can change, develop, and grow amongst employees in organizational contexts.

Lastly, person-organization (PO) fit represents the psychological ties between the goals, values, and needs of an employee and their organization (Mahal, 2012) and reflects the antecedents and consequences of compatibility between an employee and an organization (Kristof, 1996). Jobs consist of both task requirements and people requirements (Robles, 2012).



Cognitive ability may be less related to people requirements such as how well an individual works and cooperates with others in the organization (Day & Silverman, 1989) compared to PO fit, as an example. To elaborate, PO fit contributes to individuals' needs being met because individuals work with others who have similar characteristics (Kristof, 1996). More broadly, researchers suggest that organizations should select individuals who fit the requirements of the job and the values of the organization (Bowen et al., 1991). In many ways, PO fit reflects concepts of personality research, where the evidence strongly suggests that personality is endogenous and formed by intrinsic paths of development that are independent of environmental influences and are stable over a person's life (Costa & McCrae, 1986; e.g., McCrae et al., 2000, 2000). Thus and similar to personality – PO fit may be regarded as something that is dichotomously regarded as either present or absent; and as something that is difficult to change or develop (e.g., Schneider, 1987); thus, best established during the selection process, rather than after an employee has been hired.

**Individual lay beliefs.** With respect to ability and PO fit, the evidence suggests that ETs tend to concur with prevalent evidence regarding cognitive ability and personality as both being mostly fixed, concrete, and internal despite a person's efforts or motivation to change (Dweck, 1999). In direct contrast, and despite prevalent evidence, ITs tend to believe that cognitive ability and personality are malleable, dynamic, and can be changed and developed over time and with effort (Dweck, 1999; Plaks et al., 2009). ETs also tend to view failure as a sign of low intelligence whereas ITs view failure as a cue to try something different or to use a different strategy (Dweck, 1999). For these reasons, I expect that ET managers will value cognitive ability and PO fit as the more important characteristics when identifying employees for high potential compared to IT managers.

With respect to motivation and learning agility, ETs prefer to pursue performance goals and enjoy demonstrating their skills and knowledge quickly, with ease, and minimal effort (Dweck, 1986). In direct contrast, ITs believe in the importance of motivation and prefer to pursue learning goals, enjoying challenges that induce trial and error in the hopes of achieving growth, development, and eventual mastery and success (Dweck, 1986). Overall, ITs predict inferences that are more specific to a situation, conditional, and provisional and tend to focus on effort and strategy rather than on traits such cognitive ability or personality. ITs also believe that people can learn, change, and improve, whereas ETs believe that individuals are what they are as demonstrated by current performance and quick mastery (Dweck, 1999). Overall, ITs tend to believe that effort and motivation are important markers of success whereas ETs believe that effort and motivation reflect lower likelihood of success. For these reasons, I expect that ITs will value motivation and learning agility as the more important characteristics of high potential compared to ETs, which leads to the next four hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4a: Individual incremental theories will give more weight to motivation compared to cognitive ability.*

*Hypothesis 4b: Individual incremental theories will give more weight to motivation compared to PO fit.*

*Hypothesis 5a: Individual incremental theories will give more weight to learning agility compared to cognitive ability.*

*Hypothesis 5b: Individual incremental theories will give more weight to learning agility compared to PO fit.*

**Influence of organizational lay beliefs.** I further expect that organizational lay beliefs will prime how managers make decisions about the characteristics of potential. More

specifically, managers who work at organizations that are perceived to hold more entity beliefs (i.e., lower levels of incremental theories) should treat cognitive ability and PO fit as more important when making talent identification decisions; and I expect that these managers will be more likely to believe that people cannot change their cognitive ability or how well they fit in with an organization over time. In contrast, managers who work at organizations that are perceived to hold more incremental theories (i.e., higher levels of incremental theories), should treat motivation and learning agility as most important when making talent identification decisions – because overarching beliefs at this type of organization should endorse ideas that motivation and efforts are valued. Some researchers even describe how organizations with learning cultures (more incremental theories), value employees' learning agility (e.g., McGill & Slocum, 1993) where talent is regarded as something that is acquirable such that employees can be developed into talent (Meyers et al., 2013), which leads to the next four hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4c: Managers who perceive that their organizations hold more incremental theories will give more weight to motivation compared to cognitive ability.*

*Hypothesis 4d: Managers who perceive that their organizations hold more incremental theories will give more weight to motivation compared to PO fit.*

*Hypothesis 5c: Managers who perceive that their organizations hold more incremental theories will give more weight to learning agility compared to cognitive ability.*

*Hypothesis 5d: Managers who perceive that their organizations hold more incremental theories will give more weight to learning agility compared to PO fit.*

Finally, I expect that perceived organizational beliefs will interact with the lay beliefs of managers working at these organizations. More specifically, I expect that organizational lay beliefs will strengthen or attenuate the effects of managers' lay beliefs on talent decisions. For

example, I expect that a manager who scores lower on incremental beliefs (i.e., more ET manager) working in an organization perceived to also hold lower incremental beliefs (i.e., more ET organization) will weight cognitive ability and PO fit – or characteristics that are more typically associated with entity theories – more than if these managers were working in an organization perceived to hold higher incremental theories (i.e., more IT organization).

Alternately, I expect that a manager who scores higher on incremental beliefs (i.e., more IT manager) working in an organization that is perceived to hold more incremental beliefs (i.e., more IT organization), will weight motivation and learning agility – or characteristics that are more typically associated with incremental theories – more than if these managers were working in an organization that is perceived to hold lower incremental theories (i.e., more ET organization). In other words, organizational lay beliefs will prime how managers make talent decisions, strengthening or weakening the effects of their own lay beliefs on their decisions, which leads to the last two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4e: The effect of individual incremental theories on motivation will be stronger as managers perceive their organizations to hold more incremental theories.*

*Hypothesis 5e: The effect of individual incremental theories on learning agility will be stronger as managers perceive their organizations to hold more incremental theories.*

## **Method**

### **Participants**

I used two time-separated surveys on a sample of students who were registered in Masters of Business Administration (MBA) courses at the University of Manitoba. At time 1, I recruited 112 MBA students to complete the first part of the study. One week later, I emailed the same students a link to the second part of the study. Seventy-eight students responded (50 men,

22 women, and 6 did not provide this information) for a response rate of 69%. This was an appropriate sample size based on an effect size of  $f^2 = .33$  in line with past research related to lay beliefs (e.g., Heslin et al., 2005; who reported *R square* values of .20 and .30 in their five studies; please see Appendix A for G power output).

MBA students represent a valuable population as proxies for real managers because they are either working part-time and thus have a current employer or have more than 2 – 5 years of job experience where the majority have had a job within the past year. As such, MBA students can appropriately rate the degree to which they see their organization as having entity vs. incremental lay beliefs (Wheeler et al., 2014). They can also answer questions about their general attitude toward how talent decisions ought to be made, in principle, in their organizations. The study was also designed to represent situations which could be realistic or feasible for these types of students. Each student was offered the choice of either a 1% bonus mark for an MBA course that was occurring at the same time as data collection or a \$5 gift card to Starbucks – upon completion of both parts of the study.

The mean (*M*) age of the participants was 32 years (standard deviation, *SD*, = 7.19, *range* = 23 – 52 years). Forty-seven percent of the students (*n* = 37) were full-time, 41% (*n* = 32) were part-time, and 12% (*n* = 9) described themselves as “other” or did not provide this information. Fifty-one percent of the participants had hiring experience, 31% had experience choosing employees to include in talent programs, and 19% had experience making training recommendations. This practical and real world experience among a good proportion of the participants should have helped to bolster the external validity of the study’s findings (i.e., generalizability). Seventy-four percent of the students’ most recent work experience took place in Canada, 18% from abroad, and 8% did not provide this information. Almost half (46%) of the

participants were White, 18% were Indian, 13% were Asian, 8% were Black, 7% described themselves as “other”, and 8% did not provide this information.

### **Materials and procedure**

To investigate the effects of individual and organizational lay beliefs, and their interaction effect on decisions regarding which characteristics matter most when identifying organizational talent, I conducted two surveys, time separated by about one week. This also hopefully helped avoid participants guessing the purpose of the study and avoid the possible priming effect of participants thinking about individual lay beliefs when answering items about the perceived lay beliefs of their organizations. Surveys offer ecological validity by asking participants what they do and have done rather than what they might hypothetically do in a contrived situation and thus provide self-reported behavior or behavioral intentions, rather than general attitudes. Surveys are also a reliable method to describe a large population of people (Babbie, 1990; Janes, 2001).

**Pilot study.** I first conducted a pilot study using 3 lay people one at a time asking each to complete the two surveys and “think-aloud” so that I could investigate how they reacted and interpreted the bipolar measures and to ensure that the study material worked as intended (e.g., no technical issues, instructions were clear). I found that the materials worked and I made minor revisions where necessary.

**Main study.** For the main study, I linked the two time-separated surveys via participants’ email addresses, which I subsequently deleted to comply with Ethics obligations. For the first part, students were recruited at the beginning of their class or just before their class break. I asked the students to agree to a consent form – as outlined in Appendix O – before asking them to complete the same individual lay beliefs measures as was used in study 1, and to provide their

email addresses. Please refer to Appendix P to view the materials for the first part. One week later, I emailed a weblink to the online portion of the second part of the study.

For the second part, participants were asked to imagine that their supervisor at their most recent or current place of employment was requesting their opinions about which characteristics are most important when deciding which employees to include in exclusive talent management programs (i.e., talent identification decisions), and when assessing which employees have high potential (i.e., high potential assessment). Participants were asked to imagine that the talent program at their most recent or current place of employment was intended for those employees seen as contributing the most to meeting the organization's strategic goals and for those employees who were considered the most key or valuable to ensuring the organization's continued success. Please see Appendix Q to review the instructions for part two. Before providing their opinions about which characteristics were most important, participants responded to a 3-item organizational lay beliefs measure regarding their most recent or current place of employment – please see Appendix R to view how the items appeared in the study.

Participants then answered a series of bipolar scales pitting the different features of talent and high potential characteristics against one another where participants indicated which they believed were most valued and to what extent. By using bipolar scales, I forced participants to weigh the characteristics against each other, and, by not providing a choice of “both or neither feature or characteristic are important”, I avoided invariance in responses. I created multi-item scales to avoid issues with phrasing effects from a single item. The items appeared in random order for each set of the following pairs: (1) The value placed on performance compared to potential, (2) the value placed on ability compared to motivation, (3) the value placed on ability compared to learning agility, (4) the value placed on PO fit compared to motivation, and (5) the

value placed on PO fit compared to learning agility. All items were forced choice so that participants answered all pairs leaving no missing values unless participants failed to complete the survey (i.e., dropped out of the study at some point). Means, standard deviations, Cronbach alphas, and inter-correlations among each of the study variables are presented in Table 3.

## Measures

**Individual lay beliefs or measure of incremental theory.** Although it is more desirable to make domain-specific assessments (Chiu et al., 1997), I again measured participants' lay beliefs using Dweck's (1999), eight-item measure of domain-general implicit person theory. The eight items appeared in random order and a couple of example items were as follows: "The kind of person someone is, is something basic about them, and it can't be changed very much."; "People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed." I also included the same two items from study 1 intended as attention checks, however, because participants responded adequately and because there may have been legitimate variance in how attentive participants responded, no participants were excluded based on either item. Each item was accompanied by a six-point scale, with 1 = *strongly disagree* and 6 = *strongly agree*, which is the opposite order as the scale used by Dweck and her colleagues but the labels used were the same as those used by past researchers.

The entity theory items (items 1, 2, 4, and 7) were reverse scored and a mean score of lay beliefs was calculated using the eight items such that higher scores indicated a tendency toward incremental beliefs and lower scores indicated a tendency toward entity beliefs. Thus, the items more specifically measured each participants' level of incremental theory (thus lower scores not only reflected lower incremental theories but also higher entity theories – the two types of theories are reciprocal). The mean score of the scale was 3.63 ( $SD = .84$ ,  $range = 1.88 - 5.38$ ).



All items were significantly correlated with  $r$ s ranging from .26 to .73. The internal reliability coefficient of the measure was .88, which was comparable to those reported in past studies which range from .85 to .94 (e.g., Chiu et al., 1997).

The scale was mostly normally distributed with slightly negative kurtosis and skew ( $k = -.63$  and  $s = -.06$ ) indicating that participants were more inclined to incremental theories compared to entity theories. It was not necessary to transform the measure because I was not expecting a normal distribution based on previous research, where the measure has been reported to be more bimodally distributed (e.g., Chiu et al., 1997). In contrast to previous reports, however, I found that more than a third (39%) of the participants ( $n = 30$ ) were categorized in the moderate range (with scores between 3.01 and 3.99), 26% ( $n = 20$ ) were categorized in the lower range (with scores between 1.00 and 3.00), and 36% ( $n = 28$ ) were categorized in the upper range (with scores between 4.00 and 6.00).

**Organization lay beliefs or measure of incremental theory.** Participants' perceptions of their organizations' lay beliefs was measured using Kam, Risavy, Perunovic, and Plant's (2014) three-item measure but changing the word *supervisor* with *organization*. The three items appeared in random order and were worded as follows: "My organization believes that employees really can't do much to change their ability at work." "In regards to employees, my organization believes that ability at work is something about employees that we can't change very much.", and "My organization believes that employees can learn new things, but that we can't really change our basic ability." Kam et al. (2014) used a 7-point scale to measure each of their items, however, to better align with the scale used to measure individual incremental theories (i.e., lay beliefs), each item was accompanied by a scale ranging from 1 to 6, with 1 = *strongly disagree*, and 6 = *strongly agree*.

All items were reverse scored so that a higher value represented stronger perceived incrementalism in the organization (i.e., the scale was a measure of an organization's perceived level of incremental theory, such that lower scores not only reflected lower incremental theories but also higher entity theories – again, the two types of theories are reciprocal). The mean score of the scale was 4.26 ( $SD = .92$ ,  $range = 2.00 - 6.00$ ). The three items were significantly correlated with  $rs$  ranging from .65 to .74. The internal reliability coefficient of the measure was .87, which is comparable to the reliability of .95 reported by Kam et al. (2014). The scale was mostly normally distributed with slightly negative kurtosis and skew ( $k = -.45$  and  $s = -.36$ ) indicating that participants were more inclined to perceive that their organizations held more incremental beliefs compared to entity beliefs.

**The value placed on performance compared to potential.** I created six items for a bipolar scale to measure how participants valued high performance compared to high potential. The performance descriptions were constructed by adapting high performance descriptions from studies such as Wright and Cropanzano (2000). The potential descriptions were adapted from Spreitzer et al. (1997) *Prospector* scale for rating the potential of aspiring international executives. I introduced the items with the following root sentence: “Following are some pairs of descriptions of what matters most when deciding which employees should be included in talent programs. For each pair, please indicate which item you believe is most important.”

The six items appeared in random order and some example items were as follows: “Delivers exceptional results vs. Shows an ability to improve”, “Performs very well in his/her role vs. Seeks out roles that challenged him/her”, “Is naturally a high performer vs. Is motivated and ambitious”. Each item was accompanied by a scale ranging from 1 – 6 with the first three points referring to performance, with 1 = *much more important*, 2 = *more important*, 3 = *slightly*

*more important*; and the last three points referring to potential, with 4 = *slightly more important*, 5 = *more important*, 6 = *much more important*. Thus, a neutral or mid-point was not offered as a response option.

I created the dependent variable for each participant by calculating the mean score for the six items such that the possible minimum score was 1 (answering 1 to all 6 items), indicating tendencies to believe that high performance was more important; and the possible maximum score was 6 (answering 6 to all 6 items), indicating tendencies to believe that high potential was more important. The mean score of the scale was 3.91 ( $SD = 1.12$ ,  $range = 1 - 6$ ). The scale reliability was .82. Please see Appendix S to review how the items appeared in the study.

**The characteristics of high potential.** I created five items for each of the four bipolar scales to measure how participants valued each of the proposed characteristics of high potential against one another. I introduced each measure with the following root sentence: “Following are some pairs of descriptions regarding what matters most when deciding which employees should be assessed as having high potential. For each pair, please indicate which item you believe is most important.” Again, each item was accompanied by a scale ranging from 1 – 6 with the first three points referring to the characteristics proposed to be more important to entity theorists (i.e., cognitive ability and PO fit), with 1 = *much more important*, 2 = *more important*, 3 = *slightly more important*; and the last three points referring to the characteristics proposed to be more important to incremental theorists (i.e., motivation and learning agility), with 4 = *slightly more important*, 5 = *more important*, 6 = *much more important*. Again, a neutral or mid-point was not provided as a response option.

I created the dependent variables for each participant by calculating the mean score for each of the five items such that the possible minimum score for each scale was 1 (answering 1 to

all 5 items), indicating tendencies to believe that either cognitive ability or PO fit was more important; and the possible maximum score for each scale was 6 (answering 6 to all 5 items), indicating tendencies to believe that either motivation or learning agility was more important.

***The value placed on cognitive ability compared to motivation.*** The ability descriptions were adapted from Gagné (2009) descriptions of cognitive ability or intelligence. The motivation descriptions were adapted from Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, and Tighe (1994) intrinsic motivation work scale. The five items appeared in random order and some example items were worded as follows: “Has a very high IQ score vs. Enjoys his/her job very much.” “Processes training materials and methods in greater depth than others vs. Enjoys work and has fun when working.”. The lower end of the scale reflected ability as being more important and the higher end of the scale reflected motivation as being more important (i.e., the scale was a measure of the value placed on motivation compared to cognitive ability). The mean score of the scale was 3.83 ( $SD = .01$ ,  $range = 1.6 - 6.00$ ). The scale reliability was .64. Please see Appendix T to review how the items appeared in the study.

***The value placed on cognitive ability compared to learning agility.*** The cognitive ability descriptions were again adapted from Gagné (2009) descriptions of intelligence. The learning agility descriptions were again adapted from Spreitzer et al. (1997) *Prospector* scale for rating the potential of aspiring international executives. The five items appeared in random order and some example items were worded as follows: “Has a very high IQ vs. Adapts and makes effective changes when given feedback”, “Excels in math and tricky subjects vs. Enjoys challenges and new situations or working out of his/her comfort zone.” The lower end of the scale reflected ability as being more important and the higher end of the scale reflected learning agility as being more important (i.e., the scale was a measure of the value placed on learning

agility compared to ability). The mean score of the scale was 4.10 ( $SD = .91$ ,  $range = 1.60 - 6.00$ ). The scale reliability was .74. Please see Appendix U to review how the items appeared in the study.

***The value placed on PO fit compared to motivation.*** The PO fit descriptions were adapted from Judge and Cable (1997) PO fit scale. The motivation descriptions were again adapted from Amabile, et al. (1994) intrinsic motivation work scale. The five items appeared in random order and some example items were worded as follows: “The employee's values and personality highly match the values and personality of other employees' at the organization vs. Enjoys his/her job very much.”, “The things that the employee values in life are very similar to the things that the organization values vs. Enjoys work and has fun when working.” The lower end of the scale reflected high PO fit as being more important and the higher end of the scale reflected high motivation as being more important (i.e., the scale was a measure of the value placed on motivation compared to PO fit). The mean score of the scale was 3.06 ( $SD = 1.07$ ,  $range = 1 - 6$ ). The scale reliability was .86. Please see Appendix V to review how the items appeared in the study.

***The value placed on PO fit compared to learning agility.*** The PO fit descriptions were again adapted from Judge and Cable (1997) PO fit scale. The learning agility descriptions were again adapted from Spreitzer et al. (1997) *Prospector* scale for rating the potential of aspiring international executives. The five items appeared in random order and some example items were worded as follows: “His/her values and personality highly match the values and personality of other employees vs. Adapts and makes effective changes when given feedback.”, “Fits in very well with the organization because his/her values and personality fit well with employees' values and personality vs. Enjoys challenges and new situations or working out of his/her comfort

zone.” The lower end of the scale reflected PO fit as being more important and the higher end of the scale reflected learning agility as being more important (i.e., the scale was a measure of the value placed on learning agility compared to PO fit). The mean score of the scale was 3.70 ( $SD = 1.11$ ,  $range = 1 - 6$ ). The scale reliability was .84. Please see Appendix W to review how the items appeared in the study.

**Demographics.** I asked all participants to indicate their gender, age, ethnicity, student-status, experience or involvement with high potential employees and talent programs – as either managers or as identified talents, years of experience in hiring employees or assessing employee work performance, experience providing training recommendations for employees, with space provided to allow for qualitative responses, job title, area of study, and tenure at current or most recent place of employment. I collected this information for descriptive purposes. Please view Appendix X to review how the demographic items appeared in the study. Participants were debriefed on the purpose of the study after answering the demographics items and were offered the opportunity to learn about the study results. Please view Appendix Y to review the debrief information.

## **Results and Analysis**

Each of the scales exhibited acceptable reliability. The means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and zero-order correlations for all the study variables are presented in Table 3.

### **Tests of hypotheses**

To investigate all my main effect hypotheses ( $H3a$ ,  $H3b$ ,  $H4a$ ,  $H4b$ ,  $H4c$ ,  $H4d$ ,  $H5a$ ,  $H5b$ ,  $H5c$ ,  $H5d$ ), I ran multiple linear regressions analyses in SPSS. I used individual incremental lay beliefs and organizational incremental lay beliefs as the two continuous independent variables, and ratings on each of the bipolar scales as the continuous dependent variables. To test my

moderation hypotheses (*H3c*, *H4e*, *H5e*), I used Hayes' (2013, Model 1) procedure for testing moderation in OLS regression. I used individual incremental lay beliefs as the continuous independent variable, organizational incremental lay beliefs as the continuous moderator variable, and ratings on each of the bipolar scales as the dependent variables. I mean-centered individual and organizational incremental lay beliefs prior to analysis in order to facilitate interpretation (Hayes, 2015). To generate confidence intervals around the estimated effects, I used 10,000 bootstrapped samples. All results are presented in Table 4.

**The value placed on potential compared to performance.** In step 1, when investigating whether incremental theories were more strongly related to the value placed on potential compared to performance (*H3a* and *H3b*), I did not find a significant effect for individual incremental lay beliefs ( $b = .05$ ,  $se = .16$ ,  $p = .74$ ); however, I did find a significant effect for organizational incremental lay beliefs ( $b = .30$ ,  $se = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The two incremental beliefs measures explained 6.9% of the variance in the model,  $F(2, 73) = 2.67$ ,  $p = .08$  (not including the interaction term). In step 2, when investigating whether the effect of incremental theories on the value placed on potential was stronger in organizations perceived as having more incremental theories (i.e., more IT organizations, *H3c*), I did not find evidence of a significant interaction effect,  $b = .14$  ( $se = .16$ ),  $t(3, 72) = .87$ ,  $p = .39$ . The confidence intervals around the estimated interaction term included zero (95% *LLCI* =  $-.18$ ; *ULCI* =  $.46$ ). The interaction explained an additional 1% of variance in the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ . Overall, the findings were consistent with my predictions in *H3b* – that perceived organizational incremental theories would influence the value placed on potential compared to performance, but not in *H3a* – that individual incremental theories would influence the value placed on potential compared to performance, or in *H3c* – that

the effect of individual incremental theories would be strengthened as organizational lay beliefs were perceived as being more incremental.

**The value placed on motivation compared to ability.** In step 1, when investigating whether incremental theories were more strongly related to the value placed on motivation compared to ability (*H4a* and *H4c*), I did not find a significant effect for individual incremental lay beliefs ( $b = .01, se = .13, p = .10$ ), or for organizational incremental lay beliefs ( $b = -.03, se = .12, p = .79$ ). The two incremental beliefs measures did not explain any variance in the model,  $F(2, 72) = .04, p = .96$  (not including the interaction term). In step 2, when investigating whether the effect of incremental theories on the value placed on motivation compared to ability was stronger in organizations that were perceived to hold more incremental theories (i.e., IT organizations, *H4e*), I did not find evidence of a significant interaction effect,  $b = -.06, (se = .14), t(3, 71) = -.47, p = .64$ . The confidence intervals around the estimated interaction term included zero ( $95\% LLCI = -.34; ULCI = .21$ ). The interaction only explained an additional .3% of variance in the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ . This was not consistent with my predictions in *H4a*, *H4c*, or *H4e* that individual and organizational incremental theories would influence the value placed on motivation and that the effect of individual incremental theories would be strengthened as organizational lay beliefs were perceived as being more incremental.

**The value placed on learning agility compared to ability.** In step 1, when investigating whether incremental theories were more strongly related to the value placed on learning agility compared to ability (*H5a* and *H5c*), I did not find a significant effect for individual incremental lay beliefs ( $b = .08, se = .13, p = .54$ ), or for organizational incremental lay beliefs ( $b = .17, se = .12, p = .17$ ). The two incremental beliefs measures explained 4.1% of the variance in the model,  $F(2, 72) = 1.53, p = .22$  (not including the interaction term). In step 2, when investigating



whether the effect was stronger for organizations perceived as holding more incremental theories (i.e., more IT organizations, *H5e*), I found evidence of a significant interaction effect,  $b = .33$  ( $se = .13$ ),  $t(3, 71) = 2.55$ ,  $p < .05$ . The confidence intervals around the estimated interaction term did not include zero (95% *LLCI* = .07; *ULCI* = .60). The interaction explained an additional 8.1% of variance in the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .08$ .

To better understand this interaction, I examined the effect at the mean of organizational incremental lay beliefs, and at one standard deviation above and below the mean, please see Figure 4. At one standard deviation above the average on organizational incremental lay beliefs, individual incremental lay beliefs had a significant positive effect on the value placed on learning agility compared to motivation,  $b = .35$  ( $se = .17$ ),  $t(1, 71) = 2.10$ ,  $p < .05$  (95% *CI*s .02 to .68). However, both at the mean ( $b = .04$ ,  $se = .13$ ,  $t(1, 71) = .32$ ,  $p = .75$ , 95% *CI*s -.22 to .30) and at one standard deviation under the mean of organizational incremental lay beliefs ( $b = -.27$ ,  $se = .19$ ,  $t(1, 71) = -1.41$ ,  $p = .16$ , 95% *CI*s -.64 to .11), individual incremental lay beliefs had no significant effect on the value placed on learning agility compared to ability.

I also used the Johnson-Neyman regions of significance estimate to test at which levels of organizational incremental lay beliefs there was an effect of individual incremental lay beliefs on the importance of learning agility compared to ability. The Johnson-Neyman estimate was generated using the PROCESS tool (Hayes, 2013). I found two transition points between statistical significance and non-significance. When organizational lay incremental beliefs were more than .93 SDs above the mean, individual incremental lay beliefs had a significant positive effect on the value placed on learning agility,  $bs = .35$  to  $.62$  ( $ses = .17$  to  $.27$ ),  $ts(1, 71) = 2.10$  to  $2.51$ ,  $p < .05$  (95% *CI*s .02 to 1.11). When organizational lay incremental beliefs were more than 1.87 SDs below the mean, individual incremental lay beliefs had a significant negative effect on

the value placed on learning agility,  $bs = -.58$  to  $-.72$  ( $ses = .29$  to  $.34$ ),  $ts(1, 71) = -2.12$  to  $-2.00$ ,  $p < .05$  (95% *CI*s  $-1.17$  to  $-.04$ ). The findings were not consistent with my predictions in *H5a* and *H5c* that individual and organizational incremental theories would influence the value placed on learning agility. However, the significant interaction was consistent with my predictions in *H5e* that the effect of individual incremental theories would be strengthened as organizational lay beliefs were perceived as being more incremental.

**The value placed on motivation compared to PO fit.** In step 1, when investigating whether incremental theories were more strongly related to the value placed on motivation compared to PO fit (*H4b* and *H4d*), I did not find a significant effect for individual incremental lay beliefs ( $b = -.28$ ,  $se = .16$ ,  $p = .08$ ), or for organizational incremental lay beliefs ( $b = .01$ ,  $se = .14$ ,  $p = .09$ ). The two incremental beliefs measures explained 4.6% of variance in the model,  $F(2, 69) = 1.68$ ,  $p = .19$  (not including the interaction term). In step 2, when investigating whether the effect of incremental theories on the importance of motivation was stronger in organizations perceived as holding more incremental theories (i.e., more IT organizations, *H4e*), I did not find evidence of a significant interaction effect,  $B = -.24$  ( $se = .16$ ),  $t(3, 68) = -1.47$ ,  $p = .15$ . The confidence intervals around the estimated interaction term included zero (95% *LLCI* =  $-.56$ ; *ULCI* =  $.08$ ). The interaction explained an additional 3.0% of variance in the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ . This was not consistent with my predictions in *H4b*, *H4d*, or *H4e* that individual and organizational incremental theories would influence the value placed on motivation and that the effect of individual incremental theories would be strengthened as organizational lay beliefs were perceived as being more incremental. Of note, the effect of incremental lay beliefs was not in the expected direction such that more IT individuals valued PO fit rather than motivation in organizations perceived as holding more incremental theories.

**The value placed on learning agility compared to PO fit.** In step 1, when investigating whether incremental theories were more strongly related to the value placed on learning agility compared to PO fit (*H5b* and *H5d*), I did not find a significant effect for individual incremental lay beliefs ( $b = -.05, se = .17, p = .76$ ), or for organizational incremental lay beliefs ( $b = .17, se = .15, p = .26$ ). The two incremental beliefs measures explained 1.8% of the variance in the model,  $F(2, 69) = .64, p = .53$  (not including the interaction term). In step 2, when investigating whether the effect of incremental theories on learning agility would be stronger in organizations perceived as holding more incremental theories (i.e., more IT organizations, *H5e*), I did not find evidence of a significant interaction effect,  $b = .13 (se = .17), t(3, 68) = .78, p = .44$ . The confidence intervals around the estimated interaction term did include zero (95% *LLCI* =  $-.21$ ; *ULCI* =  $.47$ ). The interaction explained an additional .9% of variance in the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .01$ . This was not consistent with my predictions in *H5b*, *H5d*, or *H5e* that individual and organizational incremental theories would influence the value placed on learning agility, and that the effect of individual incremental theories would be strengthened as organizational lay beliefs were perceived as more incremental. Of note, the effect of incremental lay beliefs was again not in the expected direction such that more IT individuals valued PO fit rather than learning agility.

### **Additional data exploration**

I first ran a post-hoc analysis of the correlation analysis to better understand many of the non-significant effects regarding the influence of incremental theories on preferences for the various pairs of characteristics (e.g., performance vs. potential, ability vs. motivation). This raised additional questions about how the characteristics were viewed compared to each other and about the validity of the data (i.e., individual incremental theories should be positively correlated with perceived organizational incremental theories). I also investigated the mean

scores of the scales to better understand many of the non-significant effects regarding the influence of incremental theories on preferences for the various pairs of characteristics (e.g., performance vs. potential, ability vs. motivation). This raised questions about which characteristics were most associated with potential and in which order, regardless of lay beliefs. This post-hoc analysis was also expected provide a general contribution to the literature and valuable insight for future research iterations (i.e., which characteristics to exclude or include). Finally, I also ran analyses examining the effects of demographic variables on talent decisions because incremental theories did not explain variances in the values managers placed on the features and characteristics. These raised questions about whether there were other characteristics of the sample that might explain these variances.

**Descriptives of the data.** Although not formerly hypothesized, the correlation analysis indicated that overall most variables were correlated in predicted patterns. For instance, the degree to which both individuals' and organizations' incremental lay beliefs were positively associated indicated that individuals with more incremental theories worked at organizations perceived as also holding more incremental theories ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, the level of perceived organizational incremental beliefs was positively associated with the value placed on potential ( $r = .26, p < .05$ ), suggesting that managers working at organizations perceived to hold more incremental theories valued potential more than performance. With respect to the proposed features and characteristics of talent and high potential, when managers valued potential more than performance, they also valued motivation more than ability ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), and learning agility more than ability ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ) and learning agility more than PO fit ( $r = .29, p = .01$ ), suggesting that managers think of potential as being more akin to motivation and learning agility compared to ability and PO fit. When managers valued motivation more than PO fit, they also

valued learning agility more than ability ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ) and more than PO fit ( $r = .55, p < .01$ ), suggesting that managers may have associated motivation with learning agility, and vice versa, compared to associating either with either ability or PO fit.

**Investigation of mean scores.** Although also not formerly hypothesized, I also investigated whether the mean scores of each scale were significantly different from than the central score of 3.50 for each scale, where there would be no general preference for either characteristic compared each of the bipolar pairs. I found that the mean score of the value placed on potential compared to performance ( $M = 3.91$ ) was skewed towards potential and was significantly greater than the central score of the scale,  $t(75) = 3.24, p < .01$ . This suggested that regardless of incremental beliefs, potential was valued more compared to performance. Further, the mean score of the value placed on motivation compared to ability ( $M = 3.83$ ) was also significantly greater than the central score of the scale,  $t(74) = 3.21, p < .01$ . This suggested that regardless of incremental beliefs, motivation was valued more compared to ability.

Furthermore, the mean score of the value placed on learning agility compared to ability ( $M = 4.10$ ) was also significantly greater than the central score of the scale,  $t(74) = 5.69, p < .01$ . This suggested that regardless of incremental beliefs, learning agility was valued more compared to ability. Finally, the mean score of the value placed on motivation compared to PO fit ( $M = 3.06$ ) was significantly lower than the central score of the scale,  $t(71) = -3.52, p < .01$ , suggesting that regardless of incremental beliefs, PO fit was valued more compared to motivation. And, lastly, the mean score of the value placed on learning agility compared to PO fit ( $M = 3.70$ ) was not significantly different than the central score of the scale,  $t(71) = 1.51, p = .14$ , suggesting that regardless of incremental lay beliefs, learning agility was valued equally to PO fit.

**Effect of demographic variables on talent decisions.** Although not formerly hypothesized, I ran a multiple regression to investigate whether a few demographics variables including age (categorized as 30 and under, between 31 and 40, and 41 and older), gender (*Man* = 0, *Woman* = 1), hiring and assessing experience (*No* = 0, *Yes* = 1), experience choosing people for important roles (*No* = 0, *Yes* = 1), recommending employees for training programs (*No* = 0, *Yes* = 1), and experience in Canada or abroad (*Canada* = 0, *Abroad* = 1), were more strongly related to the value placed on any of the features or characteristics in any of the bipolar scales. I did not find a significant effect for any of the demographic variables on any of the decisions (all  $ps > .01$ ).

### **Discussion**

In this study, I investigated the moderating effects of perceived organizational incremental beliefs on the relationship between the individuals' incremental beliefs and managers' talent decisions. I found that organizational incremental lay beliefs positively predicted the value placed on potential but this was not true for individual incremental beliefs. I also found that the effect of individual incremental beliefs on the value placed on learning agility became stronger as organizational lay beliefs were perceived as being more incremental, but this was only true when the value of learning agility was compared to motivation and not to PO fit. These two significant findings supported my hypotheses, whereas all other findings were non-significant and some results may suggest contradictions to the theory of lay beliefs. In the following paragraphs, I elaborate on the theoretical contributions, practical contribution, future research possibilities, and limitations of the current study.

#### **Theoretical implications**

**The value of potential when compared to performance.** The significant finding that individuals working in organizations perceived to hold more incremental theories tended to value potential over performance, but that individual incremental lay beliefs had no direct effect on the value of potential, supported the theory of lay beliefs only from an organizational point of view. This may suggest that managers considered the needs and values of their organizations rather than their own personal needs and values when making talent decisions. This may explain the non-significant findings in study 1 where individual incremental theories also did not have a significant effect on talent ratings and rankings. This is contrary to education and stereotype research where individual lay beliefs do influence how people make judgements about themselves, about students, and about others, in general (Dweck, 1999). Why individual lay beliefs did not influence talent decisions in the context of the current research may warrant future investigation; however, I elaborate on possible reasons below.

This finding did bolster the anecdotal evidence that potential – a concept that is perhaps less fixed and thus capable of being developed – is more valued in organizations perceived to hold more incremental theories (e.g., Xerox), compared to performance – a more certain or fixed concept – being more valued in organizations perceived to hold more entity theories (e.g., Enron). Current research suggests that most organizations operationalize and identify talent by focusing on past performance (e.g., Silzer & Church, 2009) where supervisor-rated performance is the most important predictor of talent category (Dries, Van Acker, et al., 2012), and HR practitioners consider above-average job performance as most important in assessments (Cope, 1998; Dries & Pepermans, 2007a). My results suggest that on average, participants seemed to value potential slightly more than performance when it was set up as a trade-off – and this seemed to be influenced by the degree to which an organization was perceived to have greater

incremental vs. entity beliefs. This was further confirmed by the finding that the mean score of the scale was skewed towards potential and was significantly higher than the central score where there would be no general preference for either potential or performance. It is possible that on paper, potential sounded more appealing compared to performance, but this may not transfer in real-life settings where high performance may be more salient and thus preferred. Future field study research could test these ideas more explicitly.

**The importance of the different potential characteristics.** The significant finding that individuals with more incremental beliefs working in organizations perceived to hold more incremental theories tended to value learning agility over ability was in the expected direction, and indicated that the theory of lay beliefs was effective in making predictions about how managers identify talent. Of note, the interaction effects were not observed when organizational lay beliefs were moderate, which is a group typically omitted in lay belief research (Chiu et al., 1997) such that lay beliefs predictions operate outside the moderate range, where there would be no tendencies toward either theory. In general, this finding contributed and bolstered the credibility of the theory of lay beliefs.

Notably, I did not find the same effects when the value placed on learning agility was compared to the value placed on PO fit. This may suggest that there is something different happening when managers are valuing learning agility compared to ability than when they are valuing learning agility compared to PO fit. For instance, it may suggest that PO fit is a more important or unique characteristic compared to ability when assessing potential and that PO fit appeals to both entity and incremental theorists and thus represents a boundary condition to the theory of lay beliefs.



This is somewhat confirmed in the investigation of the value placed on motivation compared to PO fit. Despite that there were no significant effects of incremental theories, the mean score of the scale was significantly skewed toward PO fit indicating that regardless of level of incremental theory (i.e., type of lay belief), PO fit was preferred compared to motivation.

This finding might be explained by the PO fit literature (Kristof, 1996) such that people tend to work at organizations that hold similar beliefs and values to their own; and evidence related to the attraction-selection-attrition ASA literature (Schneider, 1987) such that organizations tend to attract, select, and retain employees who are similar to others in the organization. It is possible that this could have a negative effect on minorities and other marginalized groups who may have more difficulty fitting into any type of organizational culture (e.g., Roberts, 2010). Overall, PO fit was more valued compared to motivation by all participants. The finding is arguably further bolstered by the positive correlation between managers with more incremental theories being more likely to work in organizations perceived to hold more incremental theories (i.e., more similar to each other) – or, in other words, people work at organizations that hold similar beliefs to their own (i.e., higher PO fit). Of note, however, this correlation was moderate ( $r = .29$ ), which might be explained by the sample used. More specifically, it is possible that at least some of the MBA students from the study were hoping to either move up from or out of their current or most recent position and/or employer, thus sensing mismatches between their beliefs and their perceived beliefs of their organizations.

It is possible that learning agility and ability are more similar concepts compared to learning agility and PO fit which are decidedly more distinct from one another making it more thought provoking for participants when comparing the value of the former pair. Thus, in talent identification contexts, the theory of lay beliefs may operate best when comparing more similar

concepts because more different concepts (i.e., ability and motivation) are more likely to both be regarded as important. This is different from education research where ability and motivation induce significantly different preferences between entity and incremental theorists (e.g., Dweck, 1999).

To elaborate on this point, the non-significant effect of either organizations' or individual's incremental theory on the value placed on motivation compared to ability contradicted reports in other fields where incremental theories do predict significant differences between preferences for motivation compared to ability. Specifically, individuals who hold more incremental theories significantly value motivation over ability and individuals who hold more entity theories significantly value ability over motivation. It is not clear why an organization context would contradict past findings in education and stereotype research. It is possible that participants answered in a manner to how they preferred to be judged – which, per Murphy and Dweck (2010) and Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, and Stiles (1997) – is based on effort and motivation rather than on ability. Of note, motivation was more generally preferred compared to ability as indicated by the mean score of the bipolar scale.

In general, this finding may suggest that organizational contexts represent a boundary condition of the theory of lay beliefs. This may be because of the shorter term psychological contracts in organizational contexts compared to in educational contexts. This is supported with evidence of declining tenure of employees (Bidwell, 2013), and weaker psychological ties between employees and their organizations (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005). Furthermore, organizations seek quick and effective long and short-term results from talented employees, whereas educators seek the long-term development of all students. An employee who demonstrates both high ability and motivation may likely be regarded as valuable regardless of

managers' and organizations' lay beliefs because this employee might be less expensive to train, more strategic to develop, and perhaps easier to manage. This mindset may distinctly contradict an education mindset, such that trying to save on training or strategically developing a student to derive a monetary benefit for a school or scholarly organization is not a typical strategy in educational settings (e.g., Gunzenhauser, 2003; Mason, 2008). Furthermore, if an employee is missing a vital characteristic, such as motivation, there is no long-term contract and employees can be let go, replaced, and passed over. A consequence might include voluntary turnover (i.e., the employee choosing to leave the organization), which is not an option typically available to students at school, especially grade school (which would involve an intervention to stop truancy; Henry, 2007). A worst-case scenario in an education context would be a student who is ignored and passed through at minimum standards, who might struggle in life post-graduation. A worst-case scenario in an organization context would be an employee who stays with an organization due to continuance commitment (must stay to earn an income) or due to a normative commitment (ought to stay because it is expected) and not due to an affective commitment (being truly engaged; Meyer et al., 1993). Arguably, this type of employee is not interested in being part of his or her organization's talent pool nor would they be considered for talent programs by managers at their organization. Fundamental differences between profit and non-profit organizations – and educational environments – may impact the usefulness and predictability of the theory of lay beliefs when predicting effects that are specific to the value of motivation compared to ability.

Lastly, and perhaps worthy of further investigation, there were key differences between the lay beliefs of the study's sample and samples reported in other research. To elaborate, a third of the study's participants scored in the mid range of the incremental beliefs measure. Past

studies report as few as 10% of participants falling within the moderate range (e.g., Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck, 1999). This may have made it more difficult to find significant effects because participants were more moderate in their lay beliefs compared to reports in other fields. In study 1, I suggested that these differences might be due to using business students who may answer certain questions differently compared to other samples, but this typically concerns ethics or ethical behavior (e.g., Albaum & Peterson, 2006). To elaborate, in general students find cheating more acceptable when using technology (Molnar et al., 2008) and are less ethically aware, have lower ethical orientations, and higher intentions to perform unethical acts compared to working professionals (Cohen et al., 2001). This research may not help explain oddities in the distributions of a lay beliefs measure, but student samples may have responded in a more normally-distributed pattern compared to how working professionals would have responded despite that lay beliefs is a universalistic conception (Stevens, 2011). In addition, participants' incremental beliefs were measured one week before they provided opinions about which characteristics matter most in talent decisions so participants were not primed by the study conditions when answering this measure as the participants had been in study 1.

### **Practical implications**

The results of the study indicate that organizations play a significant role in how managers value potential compared to performance, and how managers value learning agility compared to ability. This finding could offer real awareness to managers regarding the influence that their organizations have on their decisions about the value of potential compared to performance and the value of learning agility compared to motivation.

The finding that managers who scored higher on incremental theory valued learning agility more than ability and that this effect was strengthened when organizations were perceived

to also hold more incremental theories, may suggest that these types of managers and organizations likely encourage learning, risk, and taking on challenging-work assignments, perhaps limiting fear of failure amongst their employees. It is possible, that more ET employees may not fit in as well in these organizations because talent identification decisions would be inconsistent with their lay beliefs and preferences. In contrast, more IT employees may feel a strong sense of fit, which may enhance their feelings of job satisfaction. The outcomes of these scenarios would be interesting to investigate in future research. It would also be interesting to investigate organizational performance because focusing on learning rather than on ability contributes to better long term performance because people are more likely to persist when faced with challenges (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Mueller & Dweck, 1998), but past research has mainly involved educational contexts. I did not find a discernable pattern when probing whether a specific industry was more common when organizational lay beliefs were one standard deviation above the mean (i.e., holding more incremental beliefs).

Another practical contribution is insight into which talent characteristics matter most to certain types of organizations and managers (but only with respect to performance compared to potential and learning agility compared to motivation). This may help talented employees make better career choices and organizations make better selection choices by matching preferences regarding talent identification decisions. It is possible that the four characteristics proposed to represent high potential did not apply to participants in the study or their organizations. In that sense, potential may be a strongly context specific trait. In this case, other characteristics may have induced significant findings and can be explored in future research.

Finally, the hint that all managers valued PO fit over motivation may suggest the seeds of more exclusive environments, where talent programs might typically be reserved for employees

who are most similar to others at the organization. Of note, PO fit was not preferred compared to learning agility (preferred about equally). Overall, the study may provide evidence regarding organizations being difficult contexts for minorities and other marginalized groups who generally face more challenges fitting in anywhere (e.g., Roberts, 2010) such that, in general, motivation is seen as less valuable compared to PO fit.

### **Future research**

Future research could first involve replicating the significant findings (and retest the non-significant findings) using a field study with actual talent managers at actual organizations and across different industries such as healthcare, education, finance, or technology. Of note, I did not pit the characteristics that were proposed to be more similar against one another (i.e., cognitive ability against PO fit and motivation against learning agility) so I did not gain insight into how managers regarded these characteristics. Thus, future research could include comparisons of the more similarly pairs of characteristics. It is possible that learning agility and PO fit are more “stand-alone” or separate but still integral components of potential. Gaining a greater understanding of these two characteristics significantly linked to higher incremental theories and the short and long-term outcomes of talent decisions based on these characteristics may be worthy of future research.

Future research could also investigate the different career paths of identified talent in more incremental compared to more entity organizations because the criteria used to identify talent should be different (i.e., potential and learning agility). It would also be interesting to measure the career and organization satisfaction of both talented individuals and those not identified as talented in both types of organization, which may provide insight into the

psychological costs of basing talent decisions on performance metrics compared to potential metrics (Meyers et al., 2013).

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to the current study that should be addressed. Specifically, the surveys that I created to investigate my hypotheses, as well as the student nature of the sample, preclude me from generalizing my model to the general population of talent identification. However, because this study lays the foundation for future work on talent identification, I decided to compromise the external validity (i.e., generalizability) in favor of internal validity (i.e., determining whether talent identification decisions are influenced by individual and organizational lay beliefs). Student samples are also appropriate for universalistic conceptions where one sample is not expected to respond differently compared to other samples (Stevens, 2011), which arguably encompasses lay beliefs (e.g., Dweck, 1999). Although the study participants were MBA and other graduate students who have more work experience compared to undergraduate students, it would be ideal to conduct the research in a field setting amongst actual managers and regarding actual employees and across a range of industries. This would contribute to external validity and generalizability.

Furthermore, this was a cross-sectional research design that relied on survey data. Future research designs may benefit from the inclusion of a qualitative approach to understand how managers consider different talent features and characteristics when identifying talent. Future research could ideally involve field studies where researchers investigate talent decisions among different types of organizations (e.g., profit and non-profit) over time such that profit organizations typically are trying to maximize gain, whereas non-profit organizations are typically more concerned with the betterment of some entity, which might be more similar to

educational environments, which are typically interested in bettering their students. Other variables could be investigated besides the constructs studied in the current study such as job satisfaction, career projections of identified and non-identified talent, and organizational and unit performance.

Lastly, it is relevant to address that both potential and learning agility were operationalized using Spreitzer et al. (1997) *Prospector* measure for rating the potential of aspiring international executives. This may be a flaw of the current study because it would contribute to potential naturally being more associated with learning agility, and thus, perhaps not as true of an effect (i.e., it may have confounded the effects because they were operationalized the same way). Furthermore, perceived organizational incremental beliefs were measured with three items that each contained the word “ability”. This may have influenced how participants responded to these items and may not have accurately represented the perceived incremental theories of participants’ organizations, but rather perceptions about how organizations regard employees’ ability – as being either fixed or malleable.

## **Conclusion**

The most exciting finding of this study was that incremental theories helped make accurate predictions about how managers valued potential when compared to performance and learning agility when compared to ability. The non-significant effects between incremental theories and the other features and characteristics of talent may point to boundary conditions of the theory of lay beliefs in organizational contexts, perhaps specifically involving managers from mid-Western Canada, who may not be significantly different compared to Canadians in other parts of the country. As research on talent identification continues to advance, lay beliefs may become important to consider and if their role becomes better understood in the context of talent



identification, it may contribute to better predictions regarding talent and organizational success.

Alternately, there may be other theories such as PO fit, or Attraction-Selection-Attrition that explain how and why talent identification decisions are made by different managers.

Table 3

*Means, standard deviations, and interclass correlations*

	Mean (SD)	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Individual lay beliefs	3.63 (.84)	78	<b>.88</b>						
2. Organizational lay beliefs	4.26 (.92)	78	.29**	<b>.87</b>					
3. Performance vs. Potential ratings	3.91 (1.12)	76	.11	.26*	<b>.82</b>				
4. Ability vs. Motivation ratings	3.83 (.90)	75	.00	-.03	.37**	<b>.64</b>			
5. Ability vs. Learning Agility ratings	4.10 (.91)	75	.12	.19	.52**	.52**	<b>.74</b>		
6. PO fit vs. Motivation ratings	3.06 (1.07)	72	-.22	-.05	.21	.40**	.25*	<b>.86</b>	
7. PO fit vs. Learning Agility ratings	3.70 (1.11)	72	.00	.13	.29*	.14	.39**	.55**	<b>.84</b>

Note: Cronbach alpha's along the diagonal.

\* p &lt; .05. \*\* p &lt; .01.

N = number of participants per analysis; SD = standard deviation; PO = person-organization

Table 4 *Multiple regression predicting the value placed on the features and characteristics of talent and high potential*

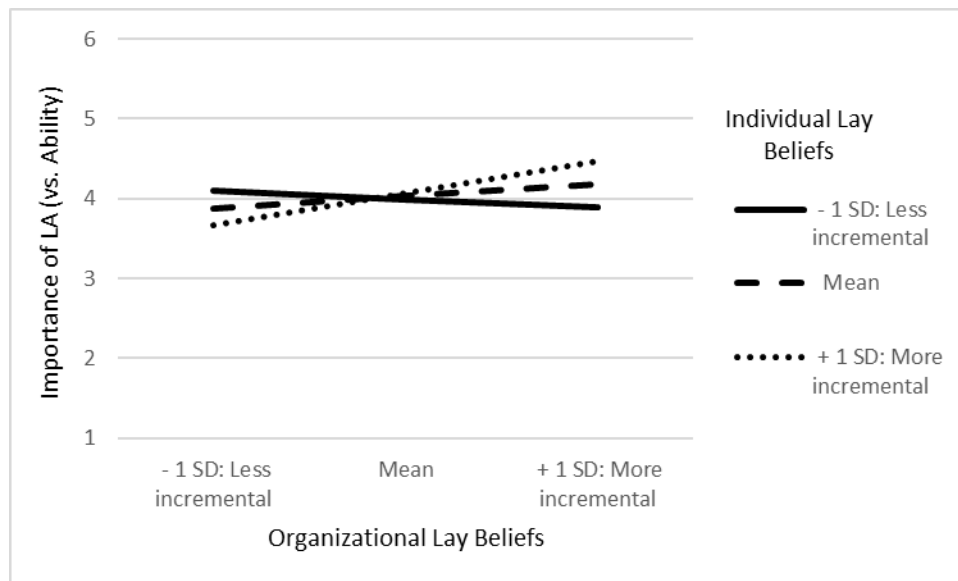
Predictors	Step 1	Step 2	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Outcome: Value placed on potential compared to performance</b>						
Constant	2.44** (.72)	3.89** (.13)	29.96	.00	3.63	4.14
ILB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	.05 (.16)	.04 (.16)	0.27	.79	-0.28	0.37
OLB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	.30* (.14)	.29* (.14)	2.06	.04	0.01	0.58
ILB x OLB		.14 (.16)	0.87	.39	-0.18	0.46
<i>F</i>	2.67	2.04				
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.08				
$\Delta R^2$		0.01				
<b>Outcome: Value placed on motivation compared to ability</b>						
Constant	3.93** (.61)	3.84** (.11)	34.86	.00	3.63	4.07
ILB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	.01 (.13)	.02 (.14)	0.16	.87	-0.25	0.30
OLB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	-.03 (.12)	-.03 (.12)	-0.26	.79	-0.27	0.21
ILB x OLB		-.06 (.14)	-0.47	.64	-0.34	0.21
<i>F</i>	0.04	0.10				
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.00				
$\Delta R^2$		0.00				
<b>Outcome: Value placed on learning agility compared to ability</b>						
Constant	3.10** (.60)	4.03** (.10)	38.41	.00	3.82	4.24
ILB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	.08 (.13)	.04 (.13)	0.32	.75	-0.22	0.30
OLB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	.17 (.12)	.16 (.12)	1.39	.17	-0.07	0.39
ILB x OLB		.33* (.13)	2.55	.01	0.07	0.60
<i>F</i>	1.53	3.27*				
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.12				
$\Delta R^2$		0.08				
<b>Conditional effects with OLB mean centered <math>\pm</math> 1 SD</b>						
-1 SD (-.92)		-.27 (.19)	-1.41	.16	-0.64	0.11
<i>M</i>		.04 (.13)	0.32	.75	-0.22	0.30
1 SD (.92)		.35 (.17)	2.10	.04	0.02	0.68
<b>Outcome: Value placed on motivation compared to PO fit</b>						
Constant	4.02** (.72)	3.11** (.13)	24.08	.00	2.85	3.37
ILB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	-.28 (.16)	-.26 (.16)	-1.62	.11	-0.58	0.06
OLB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	.01 (.14)	.02 (.14)	0.15	.88	-0.26	0.30
ILB x OLB		-.24 (.16)	-1.47	.15	-0.56	0.08
<i>F</i>	1.68	1.86				
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.05	0.08				
$\Delta R^2$		0.03				
<b>Conditional effects with OLB mean centered <math>\pm</math> 1 SD</b>						
-1 SD (-.92)		-.04 (.23)	-0.19	.85	-0.51	0.42
<i>M</i>		-.26 (.16)	-1.62	.11	-0.58	0.06
1 SD (.92)		-.48 (.21)	-2.32	.02	-0.89	-0.07
<b>Outcome: Value placed on learning agility compared to PO fit</b>						
Constant	3.16** (.75)	3.67** (.14)	26.75	.00	3.39	3.94
ILB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	-.05 (.17)	-.07 (.17)	-0.41	.69	-0.41	0.27
OLB (i.e., measure of incremental theory)	.17 (.15)	.17 (.15)	1.11	.27	-0.13	0.47
ILB x OLB		.13 (.17)	0.78	.44	-0.21	0.47
<i>F</i>	0.64	0.63				
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.03				
$\Delta R^2$		0.01				

Notes: Notes:  $N = 76, 75, 75, 72, 72$ , respectively. ILB = individual lay beliefs; OLB = organizational lay beliefs; LLCI = lower level confidence interval; ULCI = upper level confidence interval; PO = person-organization; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Values are unstandardised b-values, with standard errors in parentheses; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Figure 4

Interaction effect of mean-centered organization and individual lay beliefs on learning agility compared to ability



Notes: SD = standard deviation, LA = learning agility

## Chapter V

### General Discussion

Despite that it has been over ten years since Lewis and Heckman (1996) critical review of the talent management literature, the field remains rife with confusion stemming in part from misdefinitions of the field and in part from overlapping and conflicting messages within the literature and within other literatures related to human resource management (HRM). The field is also faulted for a lack of empirical research with notably little attention from the individual point of view where the impact of the line manager is under-explored (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016; Guest, 1999; Thunnissen, 2015). In my dissertation, I aimed to address these gaps; first, by parsing down the definition of talent and talent management into two recurring themes described throughout the literature, and, second, by using the theory of lay beliefs to investigate the mechanisms of talent identification, which I describe as one layer of talent management.

#### **Defining talent and talent management**

After an extensive review of the extant literature, I began this dissertation by categorizing talent management into two broad categories; namely, talent management as *pivotal positions* and talent management as *pivotal people*. I further categorized pivotal positions as A-positions, hard to fill, and leadership. Despite these subcategories, I found that based on what talent management fundamentally represents, A-positions are the most reflective of talent management whereas the latter categories may or may not fall within the realm of talent or talent management. This is distinct from many other researchers' ideas of talent management (e.g., Church & Rotolo, 2013; e.g., Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Groves, 2007; Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015) while parallel to a handful of others (e.g., Erickson et al., 2012; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Huselid et

al., 2005). I further proposed that pivotal people, as the second broad category of talent and talent management, represent employees who are either high performers, high potentials, or some combination of both. Lastly, I proposed four characteristics of high potential, a term that is frequently used in research and practice, but its meaning remains unclear (Silzer & Church, 2010).

### **Applying the theory of lay beliefs to talent identification research**

In their review, Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) report that theory is often used to back up authors' lines of reasoning rather than to contribute to existing theory or to understand underlying mechanisms involved in talent management practices. These authors review the empirical literature and highlight the primary theories and research topics investigated in the field, which they find include knowledge management at the organizational level; agility, motivation, engagement, and organizational commitment at the individual level; and the resource dependency framework at the level of different stakeholders' roles. I took a perhaps more micro approach and used the theory of lay beliefs to make predictions about how managers make talent identification decisions based on information about employees' performance and potential and the four proposed characteristics of high potential: ability, motivation, learning agility, and person organization (PO fit). Of note, I also used the theory of lay beliefs to contribute to the theory rather than to simply back up my line of reasoning.

Lay beliefs represent people's inherent beliefs about whether human attributes are mostly fixed or mostly malleable (people's entity vs. incremental theory, respectively; Molden et al., 2006). Lay beliefs help people feel a sense of control of their lives or the environment and predict how people encode, integrate, retrieve, and explain personal as well as other peoples' nature and behavior (Dweck & Molden, 2008). People can ascribe to both types of beliefs (fixed

vs. malleable; Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck et al., 1995a), but most have a tendency toward one type (Plaks et al., 2009) such that *entity theorists* (ETs) tend to regard human attributes as fixed and *incremental theorists* (ITs) tend to regard human attributes as malleable where both types of theorists are found to be evenly distributed in the population (e.g., Dweck, 1999; Erdley & Dweck, 1993).

**The influence of individual lay beliefs on talent identification decisions.** Individuals implicitly understand that their meaning systems represent the cornerstones of their social cognition and people deploy psychological defenses to ward off threats to their theory to preserve the subjective sense that their meaning system is an effective tool for making sense of human nature and behavior (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Plaks et al., 2005). For instance, ETs tend to focus on trait-consistent behavior (e.g., a person with high cognitive ability doing well). In contrast, ITs tend to focus on trait-inconsistent information (a person with high cognitive ability doing poorly; Plaks et al., 2005).

Because more ET individuals predict greater consistency in people's behavior in the long term compared to ITs (Dweck et al., 1995a), I expected them to be drawn to the obviousness of high performance and to consider it as more important in talent identification decisions compared to more IT individuals. In contrast, because more IT individuals are drawn to context-sensitive psychological processes when trying to understand and describe human nature and behavior (Chiu et al., 1997; Plaks et al., 2009), I expected them to be drawn to the less obvious and harder to observe latent characteristic of high potential.

Furthermore, I expected that more ET individuals would value ability and PO fit as more important characteristics of high potential compared to motivation and learning agility, because, based on the extant literature, the two former characteristics are more likely to be regarded as

fixed and harder to change (e.g., Gagné, 2004; Kristof, 1996). In contrast, I expected that more IT individuals would value motivation and learning agility as more important characteristics of high potential compared to ability and PO fit because, because based on the extant literature, the two former characteristics are more likely regarded as malleable and capable of change (e.g., Ericsson et al., 2007; Wang & Beier, 2012).

### **The influence of organizational lay beliefs on talent identification decisions.**

Organizations also tend to ascribe to belief systems about the fixedness vs. malleability of human attributes. Because individual belief systems are influenced by work contexts and organizational and personal support systems (Maurer, 2002) and because people have been found to adopt either theory as their working theory if presented with a sufficiently compelling message (Dweck, 1999; Plaks et al., 2009), I expected that participants would be primed by the perceived lay beliefs of their organizations so that their decisions would best align with their organization's perceived beliefs. I further expected that when individuals held similar lay beliefs to their organization, that the effect of lay beliefs on their talent decisions would be strengthened by their organization's lay beliefs. Conversely, when individuals held different lay beliefs to their organization, that the effect of lay beliefs on their talent decisions would be attenuated by their organization's lay beliefs.

In summary, my talent identification model presented and tested in the research went beyond existing empirical research about talent identification as there is little research about the topic and none investigating the effects of individual and organizational lay beliefs. Plaks et al. (2009) further note that researchers tend to assume one or the other belief system among study participants or subjects, but this assumption is misleading due to inter- and intrapersonal variability in the tendency to form impressions from either an entity or incremental perspective.



Furthermore, measures of lay beliefs do not significantly correlate with level of education, general indices of personality such as the Big Five traits, political attitudes, confidence, or intelligence (Plaks et al., 2009), establishing that lay beliefs might be pertinent to consider in social science and decision research.

### **Overall findings of the two studies**

In study 1, I used an experiment to investigate how managers rated and ranked four conditions which varied on descriptions of performance and potential – each described as either average or high. In study 2, I used two time-separated surveys to investigate the additional influence of perceived organizational lay beliefs on how managers valued potential compared to performance, and how they valued the proposed characteristics of potential – when compared against one another; and how organizational lay beliefs interacted with managers' individual lay beliefs when they were making decisions related to talent identification.

In study 1, I found that performance and potential positively predicted talent ratings. However, incremental theories (i.e., participants' lay beliefs) did not strengthen the relationships between performance and talent ratings or potential and talent ratings. Furthermore, managers who scored lower on incremental theories (i.e., more ET managers) were not more inclined to rank the high performance – average potential condition as their first or second choice for inclusion in the talent management program compared to managers who scored higher on incremental theories (i.e., more IT managers). Likewise, managers who scored higher on incremental theories (i.e., more IT managers) were also not more likely to rank the average performance – high potential condition as their first or second choice compared to managers who scored lower on incremental theories (i.e., more ET managers). These findings were not in line with my expectations such that individual lay beliefs did not predict how managers rated and

ranked sales employees at the organizations described in the study (i.e., The Hudson's Bay Corporation, HBC). This may have been because the conditions were not extreme enough and thus not as thought provoking as they could have been. Alternately, participants may have responded while considering the needs of the organization and the role in question (i.e., sales), rather than their own personal beliefs, thus confounding the results.

In study 2, incremental lay beliefs positively predicted the value placed on potential, but this was only true for organizational lay beliefs and not true for individual lay beliefs. In addition, individuals' level of incremental beliefs positively predicted the value placed on learning agility, and this relationship became stronger as organizational lay beliefs were perceived as being more incremental. This was only significant when the value placed on learning agility was compared to the value placed on ability and not to the value placed on person-organization (PO) fit. These two findings supported my hypotheses, whereas all other findings were nonsignificant.

Thus, overall, I found partial support for the theory of lay beliefs in organizational or business contexts. Based on study 2, managers seemed to make talent decisions about the value of performance compared to potential based on the perceived lay theories of their organizations rather than on their own personal lay theories. Study 1 may have been flawed because I did not control for organization type or the type of position and these factors may have influenced the results – perhaps diminishing or eliminating the effects of individual incremental theory. However, I also did not find an effect of individual incremental beliefs on the value placed on potential in Study 2, which may suggest that individual lay theories truly do not influence these decisions. Of note, however, I measured perceived organizational lay beliefs (study 2) where each item asked about how organizations viewed their employees' abilities. Thus, it is possible

that this measure did not accurately capture the incremental theories of organizations, but rather opinions about how much one's organization believes that their employees' ability can change.

Lastly, the significant finding that individuals with more incremental beliefs working in organizations perceived to hold more incremental theories tended to value learning agility over ability (study 2) was in the expected direction and may suggest that there is something about learning agility when compared to ability that made lay beliefs an effective theory for making accurate predictions about how managers identify talent, but not when comparing the value of learning agility to PO fit. It is possible that learning agility and ability are more similar concepts compared to learning agility and PO fit which are decidedly more distinct from one another making it more thought provoking for participants when comparing the competing values of the former pair. Thus, in talent identification contexts, the theory of lay beliefs may operate best when comparing more similar concepts because more different concepts (i.e., ability and motivation) may be more likely to both be regarded as important. This is different from education research where ability and motivation induce significantly different preferences between entity and incremental theorists (e.g., Dweck, 1999).

In the following sections, I explore the theoretical, practical, methodological implications of my dissertation. I close with a thorough discussion of future research ideas, and, offer my concluding thoughts.

### **Theoretical Implications**

My findings have important implications for current understanding of talent management and talent identification. To begin, Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) report that empirical talent scholars are rarely precise about what they mean by talent. Based on their review of the empirical research, these researchers define talent management as “the systematic

attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of high potential and high performing employees, to fill in key positions which have significant influence on organization's sustainable competitive advantage.” (p. 50). In Chapter 1, I came up with a similar conceptualization of talent and talent management, which is reassuring because it demonstrates that there is growing consensus amongst researchers, which Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunnissen (2016) also note. However, I took things further with my two empirical studies to investigate the components of my definition, in the hopes of gaining a more nuanced understanding of talent management, specifically related to how managers identify talent based on information about employee's performance, potential, and, the proposed characteristics of potential – a concept that is not entirely clear in the literature.

Second, in study 1, participants were about equally divided between whether they preferred the high performance – average potential employee or the average performance – high potential employee, which suggests that there may be fundamental differences between managers that leads them to identify different employees as talented. Lay beliefs did not account for these differences either legitimately such that perhaps another theory could better predict these differences, or, because of how performance and potential were operationalized.

For instance, potential may have been better operationalized by using various combinations of the proposed characteristics in the current research (i.e., ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit) such that specific combinations of the characteristics might reflect potential more than any one of the characteristics on its own. Thus, operationalizing potential as learning agility may have contributed to the non-significant findings and may have made it more difficult to capture the effects of incremental theories on each of the relationships between performance and potential and talent ratings and rankings. Because the four proposed

characteristics vary with respect to the extent to which they may be viewed as fixed or malleable, lay beliefs may not operate as reliably when making judgements that use people's potential as a cue compared to educational research and stereotype research – where potential may not be a construct that is typically investigated. In other words, potential may not be as straightforward because it is a latent construct that is indicated by perhaps numerous and various indicators making it complicated to study or control. It is also possible, that the effects of incremental theories may have been better captured if I had operationalized high potential with alternative characteristics not included in the current research (e.g., social skills, affective commitment, self-confidence). Finally, I could have been more direct by using statements such as “this employee is viewed as having high (average) potential” and “this employee is viewed as having high (average) performance”.

Third, in study 2, the finding that in organizations perceived to hold more incremental theories, managers valued potential more compared to performance confirmed past research that individuals demonstrate preferences for potential (Tormala et al., 2012). This is explained by more favorable responses to uncertain as opposed to certain events (e.g., Lee & Qiu, 2009) due to more in-depth processing required in uncertain situations (e.g., Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). The current research suggests that this effect is truer for those managers who perceive that their organizations hold more incremental theories. In parallel, this findings provide evidence that managers who work at organizations perceive to hold more entity theories are more likely to use obvious indicators such as performance when predicting future behavior (Chiu et al., 1997; Levy & Dweck, 1998; Plaks et al., 2009) and identifying talent.

Of note, the mean score of the scale was significantly higher than the central score indicating that, on average, participants preferred potential more than performance. This is not

consistent with past research where current performance remains the primary indicator of being identified as high potential (Silzer & Church, 2009) such that being a high performer increases the odds of being identified as a high potential by 2.5 times (Dries, Van Acker, et al., 2012, p.278). It is possible that potential sounded more appealing on paper, but in real situations, performance may be more salient and thus talent decisions may be based on the latter. Field research would be required to test this.

Fourth, the finding that more IT managers working in more IT organizations valued learning agility more compared to ability (study 2) confirmed past research that learning agility is a better predictor of being identified as high potential than job performance (Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012). To elaborate, Dries and her colleagues found that high performance was a precondition to being identified as a high potential, but that learning agility was an overriding criterion for separating high potentials from non-high potentials. Their findings confirmed earlier reports that it is more common for a high potential employee to be a high performer than for a high performing employee to be high potential. Because more IT managers working in more IT organizations valued learning agility more than ability, these manager may make better talent decisions because they are using learning agility to make talent decisions, which may represent high potential better than ability (Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012), and thus be a better indicator of future high performance.

This finding may also have contributed to distinguishing genetic intelligence (i.e., how ability was operationalized in the research) from learning agility, a concept that is not well defined theoretically or even has a well-established measure (Mitchinson et al., 2012). To elaborate, learning agility is described as one component of the ability to learn (DeRue et al., 2012) and seems to overlap with descriptions of cognitive ability. For instance, general mental

ability is often described as the ability to learn or to develop ability rather than as intelligence (e.g., Hunter, 1986), which is thought to be more genetically based (Schmidt, 2002). In general, many people believe that there is more to intelligence than what is measured by standard IQ tests (e.g., Sternberg, 1984, 1997). For instance, Sternberg and Hedlund (2002) discuss several concepts (e.g., emotional intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, practical intelligence) as examples of broader conceptualizations of intelligence that acknowledge that individuals' have different strengths that may not be measured with traditional intelligence measures. These authors describe practical intelligence as being different from basic intelligence and related to concepts such as "street smart", "savvy", or possessing "common sense". These researchers also find that practical intelligence is more predictive of organizational success than basic IQ. In general, learning agility may reflect how well someone adapts to new situations, receives constructive criticism, and makes quick and appropriate changes that contribute to short and long-term success and may overlap with conceptions of practical intelligence. The findings of the current research indicated that learning agility was viewed differently compared to ability and that more IT managers in more IT organizations significantly valued learning agility more than ability.

Fifth, PO fit and learning agility seemed to be more valued compared to motivation and ability based on means scores of these scales being significantly different compared to the central score (study 2). This finding may contribute to a more concrete understanding of what potential represents in organizational contexts, or, in other words, which characteristics are valued most by managers when assessing high potential, regardless of lay beliefs. Of note, in many ways, PO fit is contrary to incremental beliefs (i.e., emphasis on change and development) because PO fit represents judgements about how similar an employee is to others at an organization, which is a

more fixed concept and distinct from ideas of growth and change and thus more reflective of entity beliefs. The finding that all managers valued PO fit over motivation may suggest that regardless of whether PO fit is viewed as fixed or malleable, it is important to all managers in organizational context and, hence, may represent a boundary condition to the theory of lay beliefs.

Lastly, the non-significant effect of either organizations' or individual's incremental theory on valuing motivation compared to ability contradicted reports in other fields where more incremental theories consistently demonstrate significant preferences for motivation compared to ability. It is not clear why an organization context would contradict past findings in other fields, but it is possible that participants answered in a manner to how they preferred to be judged – which according to Murphy and Dweck (2010) and Truss et al. (1997) – is based on effort and motivation rather than on ability. This finding may suggest that organizational contexts represent a boundary condition of the theory of lay beliefs. This may be because of the shorter term psychological contracts in organizational contexts compared to in educational contexts. This is supported with evidence of declining tenure of employees (Bidwell, 2013), and weaker psychological ties between employees and their organizations (Arthur et al., 2005).

Of note, despite evidence that people tend to realize their potential when they demonstrate high cognitive ability (e.g., Faßhauer et al., 2015; Gonzalez, 2005; Kuncel et al., 2014), through motivation (e.g., attendance; Trusty & Niles, 2004). learning opportunities and stimulation (e.g., Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013; Molfese et al., 2002; Schulz et al., 2002), and the abundant benefits of PO fit, there may have been other characteristics more representative of high potential (e.g., interpersonal or social skills, McCall, 1994; Rubin et al., 2002; courage,



McCall, 1994; ease in dealing with issues, Black et al., 1991) to certain participants involved in study 2.

### **Practical Implications**

In addition to the theoretical implications of my findings, my dissertation studies also speak to practice. At the broadest level, my finding that managers who work at organizations that are perceived to hold more incremental theories tend to value potential over performance suggests that managers made talent decisions while implicitly considering their organizational lay beliefs rather than their own. This may explain why I did not find significant effects of individual lay beliefs on talent ratings and rankings in study 1. This finding implies the influence of organizational lay beliefs and perhaps the non-existent influence of individual lay beliefs on talent decisions related to performance and potential. This finding may suggest that more IT individuals working in more IT organizations make better talent identification decisions because past performance is not the most appropriate predictor of future performance in new roles or contexts and is subject to bias and other unobservable pitfalls (Dries, Vantilborgh, et al., 2012; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2000; Pepermans et al., 2003).

Furthermore, at the broadest level, my finding that managers who hold more incremental beliefs and who work at organizations that are perceived to hold more incremental beliefs tend to value learning agility over ability but not over PO fit may suggest that organizations with more incremental beliefs may foster cultures that encourage learning, risk taking, and growth. Conversely, organizations with less incremental beliefs may foster cultures that encourage competition, and performance at the expense of learning. Knowing this could help improve fit between what both employees and organizations are looking for in talent programs and other HR initiatives. In general, the research provides insight for organizational leaders, managers, and

employees regarding which characteristics matter most in talent decisions. This insight could help to improve actual fit for employees and organizations when making decisions about where to work and for whom and vice versa.

Lastly, the finding that PO fit was valued more compared to motivation across all types of individuals as per the mean scores of the scale being significantly different compared to the central score may suggest more exclusive cultures amongst these types of managers and organizations. This may contribute to challenges for minorities and other marginalized groups who have more trouble fitting in anywhere (e.g., Roberts, 2010). For instance, it is possible that in organizations where PO fit is considered the most important antecedent to being identified as high potential, that talented individuals will be similar to one another and the value of motivation may be minimized, presenting a further challenge to marginalized groups (e.g., male dominated culture at Uber; Fowler, 2017). Finally, high potential may be context specific which may explain the lack of significant findings because it is possible that the characteristics chosen in the study did not apply to the participants' real life experience.

### **Methodological Implications**

Studying talent identification decisions is an important avenue for future research, but it is not without difficulties. For example, although I could manipulate performance and potential conditions in the pilot study and in study 1, there are countless other unseen variables that are more difficult to control outside of a lab experiment, such as office politics, friendships, gender biases, revolutions that drive large scales changes (e.g., technology). Long term research is also difficult in organizational research because employees leave organizations, switch careers, or drop out of studies, to cite a few challenges. Furthermore, organizations are proprietary with respect to their information especially concerning talent management. It is also challenging to

follow employees who are passed over in talent decisions and then who leave their organizations to seek opportunities elsewhere; and it is impossible to investigate the different outcomes if the passed over employee had been selected into a talent program or position.

As such, although lab-based experiments and vignette designs are a useful starting point for establishing that talent decisions are affected by high performance and high potential (i.e., internal validity), researchers need to employ different techniques to study how organizations and managers actually identify talent using high performance and high potential and the characteristics of ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit (i.e., ecological validity). As expected in a relatively young field, the majority of the empirical research is based on descriptive research, mainly coming from qualitative research designs (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). Furthermore, nearly half of the qualitative papers in talent management research are based on mostly single-case case studies (e.g., Huang & Tansley, 2012); and mixed method studies use a combination of questionnaires with interviews, focus groups and/or the Delphi technique, which is a forecasting technique that involves interviewing a panel of experts to make predictions.

An alternative for future research may be to use event-based diary design where managers report how talented employee are performing in their roles. This would allow researchers to examine the actual experiences of talent employees' success or failure – from the perspective of the involved managers – on a regular basis. Another alternative may be to use a critical incident unit of analysis for interview and questionnaire designs (Flanagan, 1954), where participants are asked to give the details of specific incidents where an employee identified as talented (i.e., included in an exclusive talent program) – either themselves or someone else – worked in a positive way or succeeded and another situation where someone else may have

worked in a negative way or failed. The participants could provide opinions on the target employee's performance, potential, ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit. Both the event-based diary design and the critical incident technique would allow researchers to assess the successes and failure of identified talents as well as measure other factors between participants and the talented employee (e.g., managers and HR professionals who either personally invested in the talent decision or not).

### **Next Steps for Talent Identification Research**

There are various next steps that could be taken to investigate the reasons behind the lack of support for my proposed theoretical model regarding talent identification. To begin, researchers could continue to explore talent identification using the theory of lay beliefs. Alternately, researchers could explore talent identification using a different theory. I explore each of these approaches in the following sections.

#### **Theory of lay beliefs**

A first step in a future research agenda could attempt to replicate the results of the current research with actual managers at actual organizations. This could be done by measuring the lay beliefs of managers, as well as the perceived lay beliefs of the organizations for which they work. It would be necessary to measure the performance and potential of the employees who are being assessed for talent programs. In theory, performance should be straightforward to measure, however, because potential is a latent construct, managers could give their subjective opinion about each employee's potential (i.e., ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit). In conjunction, employees could be asked to complete established measures of each the four proposed characteristics of high potential (ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit). This first step would specifically investigate whether individual and organizational incremental

theories positively relate to both potential and learning agility in assessments of talent identification – through inclusion in talent programs – and high potential assessments, respectively. (Alternately, different characteristics of high potential could be used that are determined based on different contexts).

Second, most of the research on talent management has been from the organizational perspective. (e.g. talent management practices or the organizational talent management outcomes), while few focus on issues at the employee level (such as employee well-being; Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). Thus, investigating the career and organization satisfaction of both talented and non-talented employee in both types of organization may provide insight into the psychological costs of basing talent decisions on performance metrics compared to potential metrics. It may be interesting to investigate the turnover rate of managers who work at organizations that are not perceived as having similar lay beliefs to their own. For instance, are managers who hold differing lay beliefs compared to their employing organization more likely to turnover compared to managers who hold similar lay beliefs to their employing organizations?

Furthermore, it may be possible to follow the careers of talented employees (or perhaps recently accepted graduate students in different programs such as law or medicine) in one organization (perhaps new recruits would be a good population) and measure their cognitive ability, motivation, learning agility, and PO fit, and then promote each employee into similar roles but in different locations and then investigate the outcomes over time. There would be many variables that would need to be controlled for such as location, political climate, leader-member exchange, and team cohesion.

Understanding the outcomes of talent identification decisions can further contribute to society by understanding what contributes to a more stable work force, happier and more successful employees, and more successful organizations – both of which can help society through greater tax dollars and job creation through growing organizations. In general, it would be interesting to investigate the impact of talent management on multiple stakeholders and to compare the different perspectives explicitly, which may increase knowledge of the exclusive talent management approach and its effectiveness under different conditions of incremental theory vs. entity theory.

A third step in a research agenda could investigate outcomes after talent identification decisions have been made and which decisions contribute to better outcomes for the organization, the employees (including the non-talents), and society. For instance, do more incremental managers working in more incremental organizations make better talent identification decisions that contribute to better long term success for the organization and the employee compared to less incremental managers working in less incremental organizations? To investigate these questions, future research could investigate the different career paths of identified talent in more incremental compared to less incremental (i.e., more entity) organizations because the criteria used to identify talent should be different (i.e., potential and learning agility in more incremental organizations; performance and ability in less incremental organizations). It may be interesting to investigate how similar identified talents are to each other because, in general, PO fit was preferred more compared to motivation. This may highlight challenges faced by minorities and other marginalized groups who have more challenges fitting in anywhere.

As I discussed in the Methodological Implications section above, event based diary methods and critical incident research methods may be useful tools in these first proposed research steps of a research agenda. For example, researchers could ask managers to provide details about past examples of employees who were included and who were not included in talent programs. Managers would retroactively assess the talented and non-talented employees – those not included in talent programs – on their performance and the four characteristics of potential. Archival organizational materials could provide further details and information. Managers could then provide details on which talented employees succeeded, which ones failed, and other related outcomes (e.g., voluntary turnover).

A fourth step in a research agenda could test other individual differences between managers that might account for the finding in study 1 that managers were about equally divided between whether they preferred the high performance – average potential employee or the average performance – high potential employee as either a first or second choices for inclusion in exclusive talent programs. Lay beliefs or level of incremental theory did not explain these differences, so it would be interesting to investigate other possible differences between these two types of managers that might contribute to different decision making.

### **Alternate theories**

Possible theoretical frameworks that might better explain the differences include psychological traits such as risk aversion or cautiousness, agency vs. organizational stewardship, or type A personalities and competitiveness. For instance, managers who work in wealthy organizations are found to be less risk adverse compared to managers who work in organizations that are more budget conscience (Audia & Greve, 2006); thus, managers from wealthier organizations may make talent decisions based on constructs that are susceptible to change

including potential, motivation, or learning agility because they may be more comfortable with risk and making bets on future performance. Alternately, Tosi, et al. (2003) find that individuals who are agentic invest more in alternatives that maximize profits of an organization compared to individuals who are more stewardship-oriented. Thus, agentic managers may make talent decisions based on either a more diverse mix of features and characteristics or based on high performance and high cognitive ability features and characteristics because these are perhaps regarded as more certain and perhaps provide more certainty for agentic managers predicting future high performance. Lastly, managers with type A personalities demonstrate high needs for control, are highly competitive, seek challenges, and focus on immediate actions and outcomes (Rayburn & Rayburn, 1996). Thus, these managers may make talent decisions based on constructs that are certain including performance, high cognitive ability, or high PO fit.

Finally, it may be fruitful to investigate cross-country comparisons such that managers and organizations from more individualistic societies may demonstrate different patterns in what they believe matters most in talent identification decisions compared to more collectivist societies. For instance, LeFebvre and Franke (2013) find that people with higher levels of individualism tend to be more rational in their decision processing, while those with higher levels of collectivism tend to be more dependent and less likely to betray the interests of members of more central ingroups in favor of less central ingroups. Thus, in countries with more individualistic cultures (e.g., Canada and the U.S.), talent decisions may be based on more constructs regarded as more certain, such as performance and ability, compared to in countries with more collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan), where talent decision may be based on concepts such as PO fit, regardless of performance.

### **Other research questions related to talent identification**



In addition to examining how lay beliefs influence talent decisions, there are several additional research questions concerning talent identification that I was not able to address in my dissertation, but that I believe warrant future study. For instance, it would be interesting to examine differences between talent identification processes for A-positions, senior leadership positions, and hard to fill that are all deemed as pivotal. Talent identification of high-level roles should overlap with other literatures including leadership selection and development and succession planning so it would be useful to uncover the unique theoretical and practical contributions that talent management offers when studying talent identification concerning higher level, pivotal roles.

Furthermore, it may be useful to investigate the return on investment for talent management in low level roles (e.g., call centre employees) compared to moderate level roles (e.g., pharmaceutical sales employees), and compared to high level roles (e.g., CEOs). For instance, is talent management easier and less costly for organizations that have mostly low level pivotal roles compared to organizations that have higher level pivotal roles because low level roles may be easier to fill? This type of insight could contribute to the organizational strategy literature by deciding which types of pivotal roles an organization wants to focus on when establishing its strategy and long-term goals.

### **Limitations**

Before closing, I review the limitations of the research. First, both studies were cross sectional and used student samples, which limited the external validity of the research (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Moscoso, 2000). In real life, HR managers likely have more information about employees. Second, using a well-known organization (The Bay) and sales positions in study 1 may have confounded the results by failing to control for these variables. Third, participants in

study 1 may have been primed when responding to incremental theory items because they responded to these immediately after completing the rating and ranking exercises. It may have been a good idea to time separate this measure from the main study. Fourth, in study 1, it was too easy to rate and rank the employees similarly as they were at least average in one domain (either performance or potential) and high on the other domain. In this way, the employees' profiles may have not been thought provoking enough. Operationalizing high potential using various combinations of the proposed characteristics may have made the study too complex by requiring too many crossed conditions. Alternately, it may have been better to operationalize performance and potential more directly (e.g., "this employee is considered high or average performance/potential"); even more specifically for high potential which was operationalized with items describing high learning agility, which may have not fully captured the essence of this construct. Because the four proposed characteristics may vary with respect to the extent to which they are viewed as fixed or malleable may suggest that the theory of lay beliefs does not operate as reliably when making judgements about potential such that it is not as straightforward because it is a latent construct.

Fifth, in study 2, the measure to capture perceived organizational lay theories may not have been valid because the word 'ability' was used in each item and hence may have captured beliefs about how much organizations believe their employees can change their abilities rather than their actual lay beliefs. Furthermore, in study 2, the lack of significant findings between preferences for ability and motivation based on level of incremental theory may indicate an overarching flaw of the research. Finally, the measures of lay beliefs in both studies were not bimodally distributed, which was not in line with previous researcher (e.g., Dweck, 1999), where as few as 10% of participants are reported to fall within the moderate range.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the importance of talent identification and how it affects both individual and organization makes it crucial to its continued study. The theory of lay beliefs appeared to sometimes be an effective tool for making predictions about how managers valued performance compared to potential and learning agility compared to ability, but, overall, lay beliefs may not be the most applicable theory in organizational research as compared to education research and may represent a boundary condition to the theory. However, future research including field studies are needed before ruling out the effects of both individual and organizational lay beliefs on managers' talent decisions.

In general, and as I have begun in my dissertation research, talent management scholars must continue the pursuit of understanding what talent management is, what makes it unique, how its underlying processes (i.e., talent identification) work, and how well these processes work from the perspective of multiple stakeholders including managers and employees – including investigating job satisfaction, career satisfaction, of both talents and non-talents. Examining the utility or outcomes of these decisions should further advance not only talent management but also other fields related to organizational strategy and decision making.

## Chapter VI

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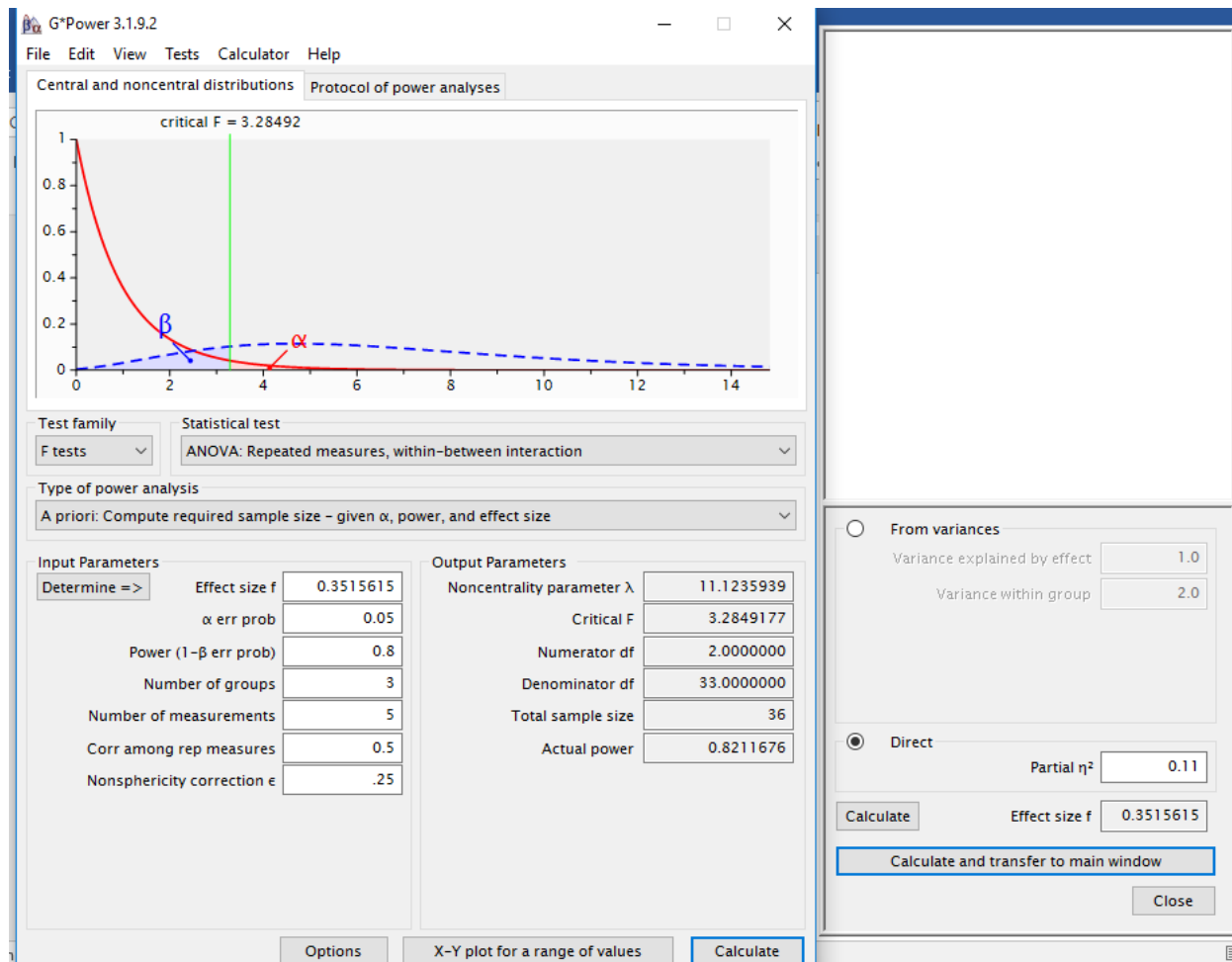
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## Chapter VII

## Appendix A

## G power output for study 1 and 2

## Study 1

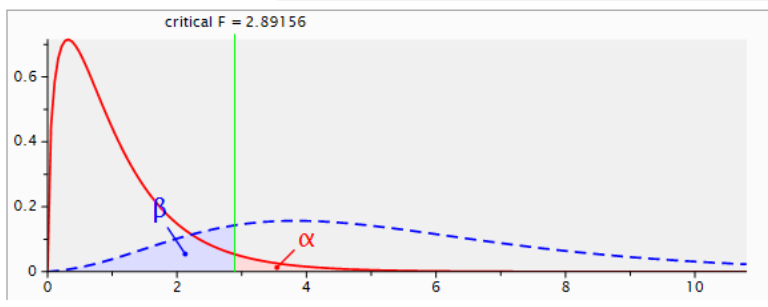


## Study 2

G\*Power 3.1.9.2

File Edit View Tests Calculator Help

Central and noncentral distributions Protocol of power analyses



critical F = 2.89156

Test family: F tests

Statistical test: Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R<sup>2</sup> deviation from zero

Type of power analysis: A priori: Compute required sample size - given  $\alpha$ , power, and effect size

Input Parameters

Determine =>

Effect size $f^2$	0.3333333
$\alpha$ err prob	0.05
Power ( $1 - \beta$ err prob)	0.8
Number of predictors	3

Output Parameters

Noncentrality parameter $\lambda$	12.3333321
Critical F	2.8915635
Numerator df	3
Denominator df	33
Total sample size	37
Actual power	0.8018830

X-Y plot for a range of values Calculate

From correlation coefficient

Squared multiple correlation  $\rho^2$  0.25

From predictor correlations

Number of predictors 3

Squared multiple correlation  $\rho^2$  ?

Specify matrices

Calculate Effect size  $f^2$  0.3333333

Calculate and transfer to main window

Close

## Appendix B

## Six Conditions tested in both pilot studies of study 1



HBC HR Dept. CONFIDENTIAL

## Employee Profile

## Employee Information

<i>Name</i>	Jason Saches	<i>Employee ID</i>	005478
<i>Job Title</i>	Sales Associate	<i>Education</i>	B. Comm. McGill
<i>Department</i>	Sales – Montreal, Canada	<i>Today's Date</i>	February 27, 2017
<i>Date Hired</i>	December 2, 2014	<i>Manager</i>	Dennis Wilmat
<i>Probation end</i>	March 2, 2015	<i>Salary Level</i>	Band 5

## Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 =	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
<i>Attendance/Punctuality</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Jason has a good attendance record and is usually on time.				
<i>Sales Performance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Jason exceeds his sales targets each quarter.				
<i>Learning agility</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Jason takes a few tries before succeeding at implementing change requested by his manager.				

## Evaluation

Jason has excellent sales performance and, on average, he meets his sales targets by 120% each quarter. His manager is happy and feels that Jason can maintain his strong sales record. The manager notes that Jason is capable of implementing change but usually requires detailed feedback and instructions before accomplishing successful change. Therefore, the manager must double check and provide additional feedback to ensure that Jason implements



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instructions and required changes. Jason has good MS Office skills and enjoys giving presentations during work meetings and events.

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HR Department notes:

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HR Manager and Supervisors Signatures	<i>D. Wilmat</i>	Date	<i>February 27, 2017</i>
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HBC HR Dept. CONFIDENTIAL

## Employee Profile

### Employee Information

<i>Name</i>	Samantha Kay	<i>Employee ID</i>	003299
<i>Job Title</i>	Sales Associate	<i>Education</i>	B. Arts U of Toronto
<i>Department</i>	Sales – Toronto, Canada	<i>Today's Date</i>	February 10, 2017
<i>Date Hired</i>	January 31, 2015	<i>Manager</i>	Payton Cowan
<i>Probation end</i>	April 31, 2015	<i>Salary Level</i>	Band 4

### Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
<i>Attendance/Punctuality</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Samantha is usually prompt at the start of each work day.				
<i>Sales Performance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Samantha has satisfactory sales performance.				
<i>Learning agility</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Samantha seeks challenges and is usually first among her teammates to accept difficult tasks or assignments.				

### Evaluation

Samantha has decent sales performance and, on average, she meets sales targets by 73% each quarter. The manager is satisfied with Samantha and feels that Samantha can at least maintain her sales performance. The manager notes that Samantha often seeks new challenges and opportunities at work and is typically the first to volunteer for difficult tasks and assignments. Samantha maintains a positive attitude which keep morale up amongst her teammates. Samantha helps to keep her department neat and organized.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager and  
Supervisor Signature

*P. Cowan*

Date

*25 Feb 2017*

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## Employee Profile

### Employee Information

<i>Name</i>	Loren Easton	<i>Employee ID</i>	001214
<i>Job Title</i>	Sales Associate	<i>Education</i>	B. Comm. York U.
<i>Department</i>	Sales – Toronto, Canada	<i>Today's Date</i>	February 15, 2017
<i>Date Hired</i>	February 26, 2015	<i>Manager</i>	Evie Hanson
<i>Probation end</i>	May 26, 2015	<i>Salary Level</i>	Band 4

### Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 =	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
<i>Attendance/Punctuality</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Loren typically arrives 15 minutes early for her shifts.				
<i>Sales Performance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Loren consistently exceeds her sales targets each quarter.				
<i>Learning agility</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Loren enjoys receiving constructive criticism and implements quick changes and improvements with ease.				

### Evaluation

Loren has excellent sales performance and, on average, she meets her sales targets by 112% each quarter. Her manager feels that Loren has a natural flair for sales. The manager also finds that Loren is very open to constructive criticism and feedback and implements very effective changes with minimal supervision and instructions. Loren handles herself and her relationship with her co-workers very well and is friendly towards everyone.

HR Department notes:

HR Manager Signature	<i>Eric Hanson</i>	Date	<i>20/02/2017</i>
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## Employee Profile

### Employee Information

<i>Name</i>	Marissa Russell	<i>Employee ID</i>	001618
<i>Job Title</i>	Sales Associate	<i>Education</i>	BFA, Concordia U.
<i>Department</i>	Sales – Montreal, Canada	<i>Today's Date</i>	February 10, 2017
<i>Date Hired</i>	December 4, 2014	<i>Manager</i>	Gabrielle Weber
<i>Probation end</i>	March 4, 2015	<i>Salary Level</i>	Band 5

### Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 =	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
<i>Attendance/Punctuality</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Marissa is punctual for her shifts.				
<i>Sales Performance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Marissa consistently exceeds her sales targets each quarter.				
<i>Learning ability</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Marissa takes extra time to implement new techniques taught during training sessions.				

### Evaluation

Marissa has excellent sales performance and, on average, she meets her sales targets by 115% each quarter. Her manager notes that Marissa rarely makes errors at work and is extremely accurate when cashing out at the end of each shift. Marissa makes an effort to be flexible with how tasks are completed but likes to stick her usual methods. Eventually, however, Marissa will adopt new approaches or techniques taught during training sessions. Marissa is happy to help co-workers and departments when needed and Marissa maintains a positive and sunny disposition.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager and Supervisor Signatures	<i>G. Weber</i>	Date	<i>1 march 2017</i>
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## Employee Profile

### Employee Information

<i>Name</i>	Asher Duke	<i>Employee ID</i>	007764
<i>Job Title</i>	Sales Associate	<i>Education</i>	B. Comm. U of Calgary
<i>Department</i>	Sales – Calgary, Canada	<i>Today's Date</i>	February 25, 2017
<i>Date Hired</i>	June 16, 2015	<i>Manager</i>	Salvatore Rivera
<i>Probation end</i>	September 16, 2015	<i>Salary Level</i>	Band 4

### Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 =	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
<i>Attendance/Punctuality</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Asher is punctual with his attendance and has never taken a sick day.				
<i>Sales Performance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Asher has satisfactory sales performance.				
<i>Learning ability</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Asher is quick to understand new technology and implements changes that help his teammates and the organization.				

### Evaluation

Asher has decent sales performance and, on average, meets sales targets by 72% each quarter. The manager is satisfied and feels that Asher can at least maintain his sales performance. Asher is excellent at learning complex information related to work technology and is very good at teaching tricky material to his co-workers which benefits the organization as a whole. Asher is always happy to help others, demonstrating his commitment to teamwork and being part of his work team. Asher maintains a competent and professional demeanor when interacting with others at work.



HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Sal Rivera	Date	March 4, 2017
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HBC HR Dept. CONFIDENTIAL

## Employee Profile

### Employee Information

<i>Name</i>	Justin Esponzoza	<i>Employee ID</i>	003344
<i>Job Title</i>	Sales Associate	<i>Education</i>	B Arts, UBC
<i>Department</i>	Sales – Vancouver, BC	<i>Today's Date</i>	February 10, 2017
<i>Date Hired</i>	February 22, 2015	<i>Manager</i>	Devan Hong
<i>Probation end</i>	May 22, 2015	<i>Salary Level</i>	Band 5

### Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 =	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
<i>Attendance/Punctuality</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Justin typically arrives early for his shifts and is dependable with time management.				
<i>Sales Performance</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Justin has satisfactory sales performance.				
<i>Learning ability</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>	Justin prefers to receive feedback from his direct supervisor rather than from other managers or more senior co-workers.				

### Evaluation

Justin has decent sales performance and, on average, he meets his sales targets by 73% each quarter. Justin is open to feedback but sometimes seems uncomfortable when receiving feedback from managers' other than his direct supervisor or from more senior co-workers. Justin exhibits behaviors that properly represent the company's mission, vision, and values, and is a team player. Justin is polite and respectful towards customers and co-workers.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Devan Hong	Date	February 22, '17
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## Appendix C

### Online consent form for both pilot studies used in Study 1

Research Title: Investigating Talent Characteristics

Investigator: Francoise Cadigan, Ph.D. Candidate, Phone: +1 204 981-9179, email: umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca

Advisor: Nicolas Roulin, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, 406 Drake Center, 181 Freedman Crescent, Phone: +1 204 480-1046,

Email: Nicolas.Roulin@umanitoba.ca

Committee member: Lukas Neville, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, 412 Drake Center, 181 Freedman Crescent, Phone: +1 204 474- 9061,

Email: Lukas.Neville@umanitoba.ca

Committee member: Robert Renaud, Ph.D., Assistant Department Head and Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, 227A Education Building, 71 Curry Place, Phone: +1 204 474-9017, Email: Robert.Renaud@umanitoba.ca

This consent form (a copy of which can be downloaded here if you choose to do so), is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information that is not included, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

In the survey, you will be asked to imagine that you are a member of the HR department at a major retailer. As part of the Human Resource (HR) department, you will be asked to review 6 fictitious employee profiles and rate the level of performance and potential of each employee. Your participation will require about 10 minutes and you will be compensated \$1 US upon successful completion. Your responses will not impact an actual organization or actual employees. Your participation will contribute to scientific research and may enrich how business decisions are made at actual organizations. You will not be penalized if you choose to not participate or if you decide to withdraw from the study, however, you must at least complete the questions regarding the employee profiles and click through to the end of the survey in order to receive payment from MTurk.

Please be assured that your responses to all questions will remain completely confidential. Responses that you provide will be stored on the secured computer of the investigator and will be destroyed by deletion and overwriting after the study has been transformed into scientific publications. No identifying information will be kept on any data file. Only the principal investigators and research associates will have access to data. Results will be reported in aggregate (i.e., averages will be used rather than specific numbers). Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. No information allowing your responses to be traced back to you will be collected by the investigator and your responses will remain anonymous in all final reports. If you would like more information about the study or the results found, please feel free to contact: umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca. The results of this research are primarily intended for academic purposes, and will be disseminated through scientific conferences or publications.

At the end of the study, you will be debriefed about the detailed objective of the research and if you would like to receive a summary of the results you will have the option to link to a separate page where you may provide your email address. This will ensure that your email address is separated from your responses to assure your anonymity.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or by email [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

## Appendix D

### Instructions for pilot study using MTURK

Please imagine that you are a member of the Human Resource department at the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), one of the fastest-growing department store retailers in the world. It has a successful formula for driving the performance of high quality stores, and offering all-channel merchandise, taking advantage of real estate holdings, and growing through acquisitions and joint ventures. It is one of the oldest companies in North America and its portfolio includes twenty banners, in formats ranging from luxury to moderate department stores to off-price fashion shopping destinations, with more than 620 stores and 76,000 employees around the world. The organization holds banner stores in North America, Europe, and Australia. HBC has significant investments in real estate joint ventures and it has partnered with property investments groups in Canada, the United States, Australia, and Europe.

As a member of the HR team, you are being asked to **review the employee profiles of six sales employees**. The organization is in the process of selecting its **best employees** to include in an exclusive **talent management program**. The program is intended for those employees regarded as **contributing the most to meeting the organization's strategic goals** and who are considered the **most valuable or key** to ensuring the organization's continued success.

HBC values **your good recommendations** so that the **right employees** are selected into the program.

You will evaluate the **performance and potential** of each of the six employees.

## Appendix E

## Rating exercise in pilot study in MTURK

1. **Please click on the names below to review each employee's profile.** Each profile will open in a **new window** which you can **magnify** to view better.

2. Please feel free to take notes and compare and contrast the employees against one another.

3. Once you feel that you have had sufficient time to **familiarize yourself with each profile**, please assess the (i) **performance** of each employee, defined as the employee's current productivity, and the (ii) **potential** of each employee, defined as their ability or potential to contribute the organization's needs in the future.

4. Please **keep this window open** to return to the survey.

Please review {Average performance – Average Potential}'s profile. Please evaluate the employee's level of performance and level of potential.

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Neither low nor high (3)	High (4)	Very high (5)
Level of performance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of potential (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please review {Average performance – High Potential – Version 1}'s profile. Please evaluate the employee's level of performance and potential.

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Neither low nor high (3)	High (4)	Very high (5)
Level of performance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of potential (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please review {High performance – Average Potential – Version 1}'s profile. Please evaluate the employee's level of performance and potential.

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Neither low nor high (3)	High (4)	Very high (5)
Level of performance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of potential (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please review {Average performance – High Potential – Version 2}'s profile. Please evaluate the employee's level of performance and potential.

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Neither low nor high (3)	High (4)	Very high (5)
Level of performance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of potential (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please review {High performance – Average Potential – Version 2}'s profile. Please evaluate the employee's level of performance and potential.

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Neither low nor high (3)	High (4)	Very high (5)
Level of performance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of potential (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please review {High performance – High Potential}'s profile. Please evaluate the employee's level of performance and potential.

	Very low (1)	Low (2)	Neither low nor high (3)	High (4)	Very high (5)
Level of performance (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of potential (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



## Appendix F

## Demographic items asked for pilot study in MTURK

To finish the study, please answer a few demographic questions about yourself. The information you provide will be kept confidential.

What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Other; please provide: \_\_\_\_\_

How old are you?

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Latin-American
- Middle Eastern
- Aboriginal or First Nations
- Indian
- Filipino
- Other; please provide a description \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have experience hiring and assessing employees based on their performance and/or potential?

- Yes; please provide details on how many months and years of experience you have:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- No
- Other; please explain \_\_\_\_\_

In your job, do you have experience choosing people for important roles?

- Yes; please describe your experience \_\_\_\_\_
- No
- Other; please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

In your job, do you have experience recommending or choosing people for training programs that get people ready for important roles?

- Yes; please describe your experience: \_\_\_\_\_
- No
- Other; please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your most recent or current job title?

How long have you worked at your most recent or current place of employment?

What type of industry is your most recent or current place of employment?

- Biotechnology/Pharmaceuticals
- Communication/Computers
- Construction/Manufacturing
- Energy/Utility/Natural Resources
- Finance/Banking/Insurance
- Health Care/Personal Services
- Professional Services
- Retail
- Government/Education/Nonprofit
- Transportation
- Education
- Psychology/Psychiatry
- Restaurant or Service industry
- Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Study debrief for pilot study in MTURK

#### **Thank you for your participation in this study!**

The main purpose of this study is to examine how managers make talent identification decisions depending how they perceive characteristics of talented employees including their performance and potential. Most people subscribe to one of two types of lay beliefs, or conceptions about the fixedness or changeability of human attributes. I expect that people who subscribe to entity theories, believing that human attributes are mostly fixed, are likely to place more importance on obvious and easy to observe features and characteristics such as high performance. In contrast, I expect that people who subscribe to incremental theories, believing that human attributes are mostly malleable or changeable, are likely to place more importance on less obvious and less easy to observe features and characteristics such as high potential. These findings may help explain how differing lay beliefs of managers influence which employees are identified as talented at actual organizations.

It is hoped that the knowledge gained through this research will contribute to the theoretical understanding of talent identification decisions, which, in turn, will contribute to practical knowledge in the business and organizational communities.

The study is a partial requirement for my doctoral research at the University of Manitoba and the results will be submitted to human resource related journals and conferences.

If you have any additional question about this study, please contact [umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca).

## Appendix H

Three experimental versions of the four conditions randomly assigned in study 1

**Version 1**

HBC HR Dept. CONFIDENTIAL

## Employee Information

Name	Jason Saches	Employee ID	005478
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. McGill
Department	Sales – Montreal, Canada	Today's Date	February 27, 2017
Date Hired	December 2, 2014	Manager	Dennis Wilmat
Probation end	March 2, 2015	Salary Level	Band 5

## Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Jason has a good attendance record and is usually on time.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Jason exceeds his sales targets each quarter.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Jason takes a few tries before succeeding at implementing change requested by his				

## Evaluation

Jason has excellent sales performance and, on average, he meets his sales targets by 120% each quarter. His manager is happy and feels that Jason can maintain his strong sales record. The manager notes that Jason is capable of implementing change but usually requires detailed feedback and instructions before accomplishing successful change. Therefore, the manager must double check and provide additional feedback to ensure that Jason implements instructions and required changes. Jason has good MS Office skills and enjoys giving presentations during work meetings and events.

HR Department notes:

HR Manager and Supervisors Signatures	D, Wilmat	Date	February 27, 2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Loren Easton	Employee ID	001214
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. York U.
Department	Sales – Toronto, Canada	Today's Date	February 15, 2017
Date Hired	February 26, 2015	Manager	Evie Hanson
Probation end	May 26, 2015	Salary Level	Band 4

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comment	Loren typically arrives 15 minutes early for her shifts.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment	Loren consistently exceeds her sales targets each quarter.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment	Loren enjoys receiving constructive criticism and implements quick changes and improvements with ease.				

Evaluation

Loren has excellent sales performance and, on average, she meets her sales targets by 112% each quarter. Her manager feels that Loren has a natural flair for sales. The manager also finds that Loren is very open to constructive criticism and feedback and implements very effective changes with minimal supervision and instructions. Loren handles herself and her relationship with her co-workers very well and is friendly towards everyone.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Evie Hanson	Date	20/02/2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Asher Duke	Employee ID	007764
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. U of Calgary
Department	Sales – Calgary, Canada	Today's Date	February 25, 2017
Date Hired	June 16, 2015	Manager	Salvatore Rivera
Probation end	September 16, 2015	Salary Level	Band 4

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Asher is punctual with his attendance and has never taken a sick day.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Asher has satisfactory sales performance.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Asher is quick to understand new technology and implements changes that help his teammates and the organization.				

Evaluation

Asher has decent sales performance and, on average, meets sales targets by 72% each quarter. The manager is satisfied and feels that Asher can at least maintain his sales performance. Asher is excellent at learning complex information related to work technology and is very good at teaching tricky material to his co-workers which benefits the organization as a whole. Asher is always happy to help others, demonstrating his commitment to teamwork and being part of his work team. Asher maintains a competent and professional demeanor when interacting with others at work.

HR Department notes:



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HR Manager Signature	Sal Rivera	Date	March 4, 2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Justin Esponzoza	Employee ID	003344
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B Arts, UBC
Department	Sales – Vancouver, BC	Today’s Date	February 10, 2017
Date Hired	February 22, 2015	Manager	Devan Hong
Probation end	May 22, 2015	Salary Level	Band 5

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin typically arrives early for his shifts and is dependable with time management.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin has satisfactory sales performance.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin prefers to receive feedback from his direct supervisor rather than from other managers or more senior co-workers.				

Evaluation

Justin has decent sales performance and, on average, he meets his sales targets by 73% each quarter. Justin is open to feedback but sometimes seems uncomfortable when receiving feedback from managers’ other than his direct supervisor or from more senior co-workers. Justin exhibits behaviors that properly represent the company’s mission, vision, and values, and is a team player. Justin is polite and respectful towards customers and co-workers.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Devan Hong	Date	February 22, '17
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## Version 2



HBC HR Dept. CONFIDENTIAL

## Employee Profile

## Employee Information

Name	Samantha Kay	Employee ID	005478
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. Dalhousie U.
Department	Sales – Halifax, NS	Today's Date	February 27, 2017
Date Hired	December 2, 2014	Manager	Dennis Wilmat
Probation end	March 2, 2015	Salary Level	Band 4

## Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Samantha has a good attendance record and is usually on time.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Samantha exceeds her sales targets each quarter.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Samantha takes a few tries before succeeding at implementing change requested by her manager.				

## Evaluation

Samantha has excellent sales performance and, on average, she meets sales targets by 120% each quarter. Her manager is happy and feels that Samantha can maintain her strong record. The manager notes that Samantha is capable of implementing change but usually requires detailed feedback and instructions before accomplishing successful change. Therefore, the manager must double check and provide additional feedback to ensure that Samantha implements instructions and required changes. Samantha is polite and respectful towards customers and co-workers.

HR Department notes:

HR Manager and Supervisors Signatures	D, Wilmat		Date February 27, 2017
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HBC HR Dept. CONFIDENTIAL



Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Justin Esponzoza	Employee ID	001214
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. McGill
Department	Sales – Montreal, QC	Today's Date	February 15, 2017
Date Hired	February 26, 2015	Manager	Evie Hanson
Probation end	May 26, 2015	Salary Level	Band 5

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin typically arrives 15 minutes early for his shifts.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin consistently exceeds his sales targets each quarter.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin enjoys receiving constructive criticism and implements quick changes and improvements with ease.				

Evaluation

Justin has excellent sales performance and, on average, he meets sales targets by 112% each quarter. His manager feels that Justin has a natural flair for sales. The manager also finds that Justin is very open to constructive criticism and feedback and implements very effective changes with minimal supervision and instructions. Justin is always happy to help others, demonstrating his commitment to teamwork and being part of his work team.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Evie Hanson	Date	20/02/2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Marissa Russell	Employee ID	007764
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Fine Arts, UBC
Department	Sales – Vancouver, BC	Today’s Date	February 25, 2017
Date Hired	June 16, 2015	Manager	Salvatore Rivera
Probation end	September 16, 2015	Salary Level	Band 4

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Marissa is punctual with her attendance and has never taken a sick day.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Marissa has satisfactory sales performance.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Marissa is quick to understand new technology and implements changes that help her teammates and the organization.				

Evaluation

Marissa has decent sales performance and, on average, reaches targets by 72% each quarter. The manager is satisfied and feels that Marissa can maintain her sales performance. Marissa is excellent at learning complex information related to work technology and is very good at teaching tricky material to her co-workers which benefits the organization as a whole. Marissa maintains a competent and professional demeanor when interacting with others at work. Marissa handles herself and her relationships with her co-workers very well and is friendly towards everyone.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Sal Rivera		Date March 4, 2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Loren Easton	Employee ID	003344
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. U of Calgary
Department	Sales – Edmonton, AB	Today's Date	February 10, 2017
Date Hired	February 22, 2015	Manager	Devan Hong
Probation end	May 22, 2015	Salary Level	Band 5

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Loren typically arrives early for her shifts and is dependable with time management.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Loren has satisfactory sales performance.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Loren prefers to receive feedback from her direct supervisor rather than from other managers or more senior co-workers.				

Evaluation

Loren has decent sales performance and, on average, she reaches sales targets by 73% each quarter. The manager is satisfied and feels that Loren can maintain her sales performance. Loren is open to feedback but sometimes seems uncomfortable when receiving feedback from managers' other than her direct supervisor or from more senior co-workers. Loren exhibits behaviors that properly represent the company's mission, vision, and values, and is a team player. Loren has good MS Office skills and enjoys giving presentations during work meetings and events.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Devan Hong	Date	February 22, '17
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**Version 3**



HBC HR Dept. CONFIDENTIAL

Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Justin Esponzoza	Employee ID	005478
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. Queen's U.
Department	Sales – Toronto, ON	Today's Date	February 27, 2017
Date Hired	December 2, 2014	Manager	Dennis Wilmat
Probation end	March 2, 2015	Salary Level	Band 5

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin has a good attendance record and has never taken a sick day.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin exceeds his sales targets each quarter.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Justin takes a few tries before succeeding at implementing change requested by his manager.				

Evaluation

Justin has excellent sales performance and, on average, he meets sales targets by 120% each quarter. His manager is happy and feels that Justin can maintain his strong record. The manager notes that Justin is capable of implementing change but usually requires detailed feedback and instructions before accomplishing successful change. The manager must double check and provide additional feedback to ensure that Justin implements instructions and required changes. Justin is always happy to help others, demonstrating his commitment to teamwork and being part of his work team.

HR Department notes:

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HR & Manager Signature	D, Wilmat		Date February 27, 2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Samantha Kay	Employee ID	001214
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Fine Arts, Concordia
Department	Sales – Toronto, Canada	Today's Date	February 15, 2017
Date Hired	February 26, 2015	Manager	Evie Hanson
Probation end	May 26, 2015	Salary Level	Band 4

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Samantha typically arrives 15 minutes early for her shifts.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Samantha consistently exceeds her sales targets each quarter.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Samantha enjoys receiving constructive criticism and implements quick changes and improvements with ease.				

Evaluation

Samantha has excellent sales performance and, on average, she meets her sales targets by 112% each quarter. Her manager feels that Samantha has a natural flair for sales. The manager also finds that Samantha is very open to constructive criticism and feedback and implements very effective changes with minimal supervision and instructions. Samantha exhibits behaviors that properly represent the company's mission, vision, and values, and is a team player. Samantha is polite and respectful towards customers and co-workers.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Evie Hanson	Date	20/02/2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Loren Easton	Employee ID	007764
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. McGill
Department	Sales – Montreal, Canada	Today's Date	February 25, 2017
Date Hired	June 16, 2015	Manager	Salvatore Rivera
Probation end	September 16, 2015	Salary Level	Band 4

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Loren is punctual with her attendance and has never taken a sick day.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Loren has satisfactory sales performance.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Loren is quick to understand new technology and implements changes that help her teammates and the organization.				

Evaluation

Loren has good sales performance and, on average, she reaches sales targets by 72% each quarter. The manager is satisfied and feels that Loren can maintain her performance. Loren is excellent at learning complex information related to work technology and is very good at teaching tricky material to her co-workers which benefits the organization as a whole and demonstrates her commitment to the work team. Loren maintains a competent and professional demeanor at work. Loren has good MS Office skills and enjoys giving presentations during work meetings and events.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Sal Rivera	Date	March 4, 2017
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Employee Profile

Employee Information

Name	Asher Duke	Employee ID	003344
Job Title	Sales Associate	Education	B. Comm. York U.
Department	Sales – Toronto, ON	Today’s Date	February 10, 2017
Date Hired	February 22, 2015	Manager	Devan Hong
Probation end	May 22, 2015	Salary Level	Band 5

Ratings on work details

	1 = Poor	2 = Fair	3 = Satisfactory	4 = Good	5 = Excellent
Attendance/Punctuality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Asher typically arrives early for his shifts and is dependable with time management.				
Sales Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Asher has satisfactory sales performance.				
Learning agility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments	Asher prefers to receive feedback from his direct supervisor rather than from other managers or more senior co-workers.				

Evaluation

Asher has good sales performance and, on average, he reaches sales targets by 73% each quarter. Asher is open to feedback but sometimes seems uncomfortable when receiving feedback from managers’ other than his direct supervisor or from more senior co-workers. Asher handles himself and his relationships with his co-workers very well and is friendly towards everyone. Asher maintains a positive attitude which keep morale up amongst his teammates. Asher helps to keep his department neat and organized.

HR Department notes:

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HR Manager Signature	Devan Hong	Date	February 22, '17
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## Appendix I

## Consent form for Study 1

Research Title: Identifying Talent

Investigator: Francoise Cadigan, Ph.D. Candidate, Phone: +1 204 981-9179, email: umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca

Advisor: Nicolas Roulin, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, 406 Drake Center, 181 Freedman Crescent, Phone: +1 204 480-1046, Email: Nicolas.Roulin@umanitoba.ca

Committee member: Lukas Neville, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, 412 Drake Center, 181 Freedman Crescent, Phone: +1 204 474- 9061, Email: Lukas.Neville@umanitoba.ca

Committee member: Robert Renaud, Ph.D., Department Head and Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, 227A Education Building, 71 Curry Place, Phone: +1 204 474-9017, Email: Robert.Renaud@umanitoba.ca

This consent form (a copy of which can be downloaded here if you choose to do so), is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information that is not included, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

In the study, you will be asked to imagine that you are a member of the Human Resource (HR) department at the Hudson's Bay Corporation (HBC). As a member of the HR department, you are being asked to review 4 employee profiles to recommend into an exclusive talent management program taking place at the organization. You will rate each employee on how much you believe that they should be included in the talent program and then you will rank your top two employee choices for inclusion in the program. Your participation will require about 10 – 15 minutes and your responses will not impact an actual organization or actual employees. You will be compensated with 0.5 bonus marks through the SONA portal for your participation. Your participation will contribute to scientific research and may enrich how business decisions are made at actual organizations. You will not be penalized if you do not wish to participate or if you withdraw from the study, however, you will not receive bonus marks in the event of non-participation or non-completion.

Please be assured that your responses to all questions will remain completely confidential. Responses that you provide will be stored on the secured computer of the investigator and will be destroyed by deletion and overwriting after the study has been transformed into scientific publications. No identifying information will be kept on any data file. Only the principal investigators and research associates will have access to data. Results will be reported in aggregate (i.e., averages will be used rather than specific numbers). Any information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. No information allowing your responses to be traced back to you will be collected by the investigator and your responses will remain anonymous in all final reports. If you would like more information about the study or the results found, please feel free to contact: umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca. The results of this

research are primarily intended for academic purposes, and will be disseminated through scientific conferences or publications.

At the end of the study, you will be debriefed about the detailed objective of the research and if you would like to receive a summary of the results you will have the option to link to a separate page where you may provide your email address. This will ensure that your email address is separated from your responses to assure your anonymity.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or by email [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

## Appendix J

### Instructions for Study 1

Please imagine that you are a member of the human resource department at Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), one of the fastest-growing department store retailers in the world. It has a successful formula for driving the performance of high quality stores, and offering all-channel merchandise, taking advantage of real estate holdings, and growing through acquisitions and joint ventures. It is one of the oldest companies in North America and its portfolio includes sixteen banners, in formats ranging from luxury to moderate department stores to off price fashion shopping destinations, with more than 620 stores and 76,000 employees around the world. The organization holds banner stores in North America and in Europe. HBC has significant investments in real estate joint ventures and it has partnered with property investments groups in Canada, the United States, Australia, and Europe.

As a member of the HR team, **you are being asked to review the profiles of 4 different sales employees**. The organization is in the process of selecting its **best employees** to include in an exclusive **talent management program**. The program is intended for those employees regarded as **contributing the most to meeting the organization's strategic goals** and who are considered the **most valuable or key** to ensuring the organization's continued success.

HBC values **your good recommendations** so that the **right employees** are selected into the program.

You will **first rate each employee** on whether to include in talent program and then you will **recommend your top two employees** for inclusion in the program.

## Appendix K

## Materials for Study 1

Please take some time to review each of the 4 employee profiles at your workstation. Please feel free to take notes on the paper provided and to compare and contrast the employees against one another. Once you feel that you have had sufficient time to familiarize yourself with each profile, please respond to the items below for each of the 4 employees. On the following page, you will rank your top 2 choices. You will not be able to return to this page so please take good notes as you require.

Please review {Average performance – Average Potential}'s profile. Please indicate your agreement with the below statements regarding whether to include this employee in the talent program.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I would recommend that this employee be selected into the talent program at HBC.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee would do well in the talent program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee is ready for the talent program right now.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please review {High performance – Average Potential}'s profile. Please indicate your agreement with the below statements regarding whether to include this employee in the talent program.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I would recommend that this employee be selected into the talent program at HBC.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee would do well in the talent program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee is ready for the talent program right now.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please review {Average performance – High Potential}'s profile. Please indicate your agreement with the below statements regarding whether to include this employee in the talent program.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I would recommend that this employee be selected into the talent program at HBC.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee would do well in the talent program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee is ready for the talent program right now.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Please review {High performance – High Potential}'s profile. Please indicate your agreement with the below statements regarding whether to include this employee in the talent program.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I would recommend that this employee be selected into the talent program at HBC.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee would do well in the talent program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that this employee is ready for the talent program right now.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

-----page break-----

Now please drag and drop your top two choices in the order that you would recommend the employees into the talent program. You must choose two employees.

Top two employee picks
_____ \${e://Field/Average Performance – Average Potential}
_____ \${e://Field/Average Performance – High Potential}
_____ \${e://Field/High Performance – Average Potential}
_____ \${e://Field/High Performance – High Potential}



## Appendix M

## Demographic items asked in study 1

To finish the study, please answer a few demographic questions about yourself. The information you provide will be kept confidential.

What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Other; please provide: \_\_\_\_\_

How old are you?

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Latin-American
- Middle Eastern
- Aboriginal or First Nations
- Indian
- Filipino
- Other; please provide a description \_\_\_\_\_

What year of university are you currently completing?

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year
- 5th year or higher
- Other; please explain \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how many months and/or years of work experience do you have?

Do you have experience hiring and assessing employees based on their performance?

Yes; and if so approximately how many employees have you assessed:

\_\_\_\_\_

No

Other; please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

How many HR related courses have you taken?

## Appendix N

### Debrief for study 1

#### **Thank you for your participation in this study!**

The main purpose of this study is to examine how managers make talent identification decisions depending how they perceive characteristics of talented employees including their performance and potential. Most people subscribe to one of two types of lay beliefs, or conceptions about the fixedness or changeability of human attributes. I expect that people who subscribe to entity theories, believing that human attributes are mostly fixed, are likely to place more importance on obvious and easy to observe features such as high performance. In contrast, I expect that people who subscribe to incremental theories, believing that human attributes are mostly malleable or changeable, are likely to place more importance on less obvious and less easy to observe features and characteristics such as high potential. These findings may explain how managers' differing lay beliefs influence which employees are identified as talented at actual organizations.

It is hoped that the knowledge gained through this research will contribute to the theoretical understanding of talent identification decisions, which, in turn, will contribute to practical knowledge in the business and organizational communities.

The study is a partial requirement for my doctoral research at the University of Manitoba and the results will be submitted to journals and conferences related to human resource management.

If you have any additional question about this study, please contact [umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca).

## Appendix O

## Consent for study 2

Research Title: Investigating Talent Characteristics

Investigator: Francoise Cadigan, Ph.D. Candidate, Phone: +1 204 981-9179, email: umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca

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Committee member: Robert Renaud, Ph.D., Assistant Department Head and Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, 227A Education Building, 71 Curry Place, Phone: +1 204 474-9017, Email: Robert.Renaud@umanitoba.ca

This consent form, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information that is not included, please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This study is organized in two parts, the first part taking about 5 minutes and the second part taking about 10 to 15 minutes. In the first part, you will provide your email address and you will answer a few questions about how you view the attributes of other people. About one week later, you will be sent an email where you will be asked to imagine that your current or most recent place of employment is requesting your opinion about which employee characteristics are most important when selecting employees into exclusive talent management programs and when assessing which employees have high potential. Your responses will not impact an actual organization or actual employees. Your participation will contribute to scientific research and may enrich how business decisions are made at actual organizations. At the end of the two parts you will have the choice to receive either a 1% bonus mark or a \$5 gift card; however, if you do not complete the two parts, then you will not be compensated.

Please be assured that your responses to all questions will remain completely confidential. There will be no access to data except by the investigator and her research associates. No information allowing your responses to be traced back to you will be collected by the research team and your responses will remain anonymous in all final reports. If you would like more information about the study or the results found, please feel free to contact: umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca. The results of this research are primarily intended for academic purposes, and will be disseminated through scientific conferences or publications. All the data will be stored in the secured computer of the investigator and will be destroyed after the study has been transformed into scientific publications.

At the end of the study, you will be debriefed about the detailed objective of the research. You will also have the option to link to a separate survey to provide your email address to receive a summary report describing the main findings of the study. This separate survey will ensure your anonymity by being unconnected to your responses to the two study parts.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 204-474-7122 or by email [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

- Yes, I would like to participate.
- No, I do not wish to participate.

## Appendix P

## Materials for the first part of study 2

Please respond to the below questions. In approximately one week, I will email you **part II**, which, upon completion, will end your participation. Please be sure to **include** your email address in the space provided so that I may send you part II.

Please **drop off** this completed form to your professor/instructor at **the end of the lecture** so that I may collect it after class.

Your email address:

---

Please clearly mark your **level of agreement** regarding the following ten statements:





## Appendix Q

## Instruction for second part of Study 2

Please imagine that you are being asked by your most recent or current place of employment to **give your opinion on which employee characteristics matter most** when choosing which employees to **include in exclusive talent programs** and when deciding which employees have **high potential**. Please imagine that the talent program at your organization is intended for **those employees regarded as contributing the most** to meeting the organization's strategic goals and who are considered the **most valuable or key** to ensuring the organization's continued success.

Your organization is **counting on your good managerial recommendations** in order that the **right employee characteristics are given more weight** when **selecting** employees into **talent programs** and when **assessing** which employees have **high potential**.

You will **answer a series of bipolar scales** where you must **choose which characteristics are most important**.















## Appendix X

## Demographics items asked in Study 2

To finish the study, please answer a few demographic questions about yourself. The information you provide will be kept confidential.

What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Other; please provide: \_\_\_\_\_

How old are you?

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black
- Asian
- Latin-American
- Middle Eastern
- Aboriginal or First Nations
- Indian
- Filipino
- Other; please provide a description \_\_\_\_\_

What is your area of study?

- Finance or Financial Analyst
- Leadership and Organizations
- Marketing
- Supply Chain Management
- Generalist
- Other, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a full or part-time student?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Other, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have experience hiring and assessing employees based on their performance and/or potential?

- Yes; and please provide details on how many months and years of experience you have:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- No
- Other; please explain \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have experience choosing people for important roles?

- Yes; if so please describe your experience \_\_\_\_\_
- No
- Other; please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have experience recommending or choosing people for training programs that get people ready for important roles?

- Yes; please describe your experience: \_\_\_\_\_
- No
- Other; please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your most recent or current job title?

How long did you work or have you worked at your most recent or current place of employment?

Is your most recent work experience in Canada or abroad?

- Canada
- Abroad; please indicate where: \_\_\_\_\_

What type of industry is your most recent or current place of employment?

- Biotechnology/Pharmaceuticals
- Communication/Computers
- Construction/Manufacturing
- Energy/Utility/Natural Resources
- Finance/Banking/Insurance
- Health Care/Personal Services
- Professional Services
- Retail
- Government/Education/Nonprofit
- Transportation
- Education
- Other; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

What is the approximate size of your most recent or current place of employment?

- 1 - 50 employees
- 51 - 200 employees
- 201 - 500 employees
- 501 - 1000 employees
- 1001 - 5000 employees
- 5001 - 10,000 employees
- Over 10,000 employees

## Appendix Y

### Debrief for Study 2

#### **Thank you for your participation in this study!**

The main purpose of this study is to examine how managers make talent identification decisions depending how they perceive characteristics of employees including their performance and potential. Most people subscribe to one of two types of lay beliefs, or conceptions about the fixedness or changeability of human attributes. I expect that people who subscribe to entity theories, believing that human attributes are mostly fixed, are likely to place more importance on obvious and easy to observe features such as high performance, cognitive ability, and person-organization fit. In contrast, I expect that people who subscribe to incremental theories, believing that human attributes are mostly malleable or changeable, are likely to place more importance on less obvious and less easy to observe features and characteristics such as high potential, motivation, and learning agility. These findings may help explain how managers' differing lay beliefs influence which employees are identified as talented in actual organizations.

It is hoped that the knowledge gained through this research will contribute to the theoretical understanding of talent identification decisions, which, in turn, will contribute to practical knowledge in the business and organizational communities.

The study is a partial requirement for my doctoral research at the University of Manitoba and the results will be submitted to human resource related journals and conferences.

If you have any additional question about this study, please contact [umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca](mailto:umcadigf@myumanitoba.ca).