

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

UNDERSTANDING THE AFFECTIVE AND BEHAVIORAL  
REACTIONS OF EMPLOYEES TOWARDS TALENT  
IDENTIFICATION: A MIDDLE-EASTERN VIEWPOINT

by  
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# ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Sherine Mohamad El Sayed for Master of Arts  
Major: Human Resources Management

Title: Understand the Affective and Behavioral Reactions of Employees Towards Talent Identification: A Middle-Eastern Viewpoint.

Today, Learning and Development has become a major pillar for the advancement of talent (people) and achievement of strategic business goals (organizations) through well-established attraction, development and retention practices. Talent identification practices allow organizations to cluster their employees in order to serve their developmental needs in the most effective and efficient way.

This project dives into employee emotions and reactions towards talent identification. Using the Gioia method, I have analyzed data gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with employees within organizations that implement formal processes for high-potential identification within the MENA region. Findings indicate that common themes emerge among employees who do not pass the selection process across different aspects: affective reactions such as anger, anxiety and disappointment and behavioral reactions such as disengagement, loss of productivity and higher intent to leave and mainly due to false expectations, low perceived procedural justice, lack of follow up and absence of developmental opportunities. Findings also revealed that this talent identification process can also have a negative impact on employees who are identified as high-potential talent, if it is not implemented properly.

This project provides significant contribution by developing a holistic understanding of an employee-centric perspective towards talent identification and high-potential selection within organizations in the MENA region. Finally, important implications for HR and suggestions for HRD professionals are discussed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	1
ABSTRACT .....	2
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	6
TABLES .....	7
ABBREVIATIONS .....	8
INTRODUCTION .....	9
A. Purpose of the Study .....	11
B. Research Objectives .....	11
C. Research Questions .....	12
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	13
A. The Global Talent Management Scene.....	13
B. The Different Views of Talent Management .....	14
C. Exploring Talent Management Practices in the Arab Middle East.....	15
D. The Purpose of Talent Segmentation and High-Potential Identification.....	16
E. The Impact of Non-High Potential Identification .....	18
METHODOLOGY .....	24
A. Research Approach .....	24

B. Data Collection Method .....	24
C. Sampling Process .....	25
D. Interview Sites .....	26
E. Recruitment of Participants .....	27
F. Interviews .....	27
J. Data Analysis Method .....	29
<b>FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>35</b>
A. Perceptions of the High-Potential Selection Process by Non-Talent.....	37
1. Perceived Procedural Justice .....	37
2. Perceived Distributive Justice.....	39
B. Affective Reactions of Non-High Potential Employees .....	40
1. Anger .....	40
2. Disappointment.....	41
3. Anxiety and Frustration .....	41
4. Discomfort .....	42
C. Behavioral Reactions of Non-High Potential Employees .....	43
1. Engagement Level and Work Withdrawal.....	43
2. Intent to Leave .....	44
3. Initiative for Self-Development.....	44
4. Seeking Organizational Support .....	45
<b>DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>47</b>
A. Discussion .....	47

1. Perceptions of the High-Potential Selection Process by Non-Talent .....	47
2. Affective and Behavioral Reactions of Non-High Potential Employees.....	48
B. Implications for HR and Recommendations for HRD Professionals.....	49
1. Implications .....	49
2. Recommendations.....	49
C. Limitations and Future Research Directions.....	53
D. Reflexivity and Positionality.....	54
<b>APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>APPENDIX II: EMAIL TO ADMINISTRATION .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>APPENDIX III: EMAIL TO POTENTIAL CANDIDATES .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>APPENDIX IV: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>65</b>



## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figure

2.1 The Affective Events Theory Summary (adapted from Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) .....	19
2.2 Antecedent, Outcomes and Moderation of High-Potential Identification (adapted from Dries et al., 2012) .....	21
4.3 Aggregate Dimensions and Second-Order Concepts Related to Non-High Potential Employees .....	36

## TABLES

Table

3.1. Interview Participants Demographics.....	28
3.2 High-Potential Employees Interviews' Analysis - Gioia Method.....	30
3.3 Non-High Potential Employees Interviews' Analysis - Gioia Method.....	32

## ABBREVIATIONS

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Countries  
HR: Human Resources  
HRD: Human Resources Development  
HRM: Human Resources Management  
L&D: Learning & Development  
MENA: Middle East and North Africa  
TM: Talent Management

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since McKinsey framed the war for talent in 2001, Learning and Development (L&D) has become a major pillar for the advancement of the talent and achievement of strategic business goals of any organization through the attraction, recruitment, and retention of talent (Cui et al., 2018). Learning and Development encompass the different activities an organization engages in to develop and retain talent: training, development programs, online learning to mention a few (Saxena, 2013). Talent identification and segregation allow organizations to cluster their employees in order to serve their developmental needs in the most effective and efficient way.

The identification of high potential employees and engaging in workplace differentiation when it comes to learning opportunities are very common talent management processes (Saxena, 2013). The talent management practice of identifying high potentials and dedicating specific learning and development activities for them is very prominent across industries and across countries. As defined, it is indeed a crucial practice which allows organizations to retain top talent and ensure the availability of success planning for critical roles (Folkman & Zenger, 2017).

However, little is known about the reactions of employees identified as non-high potentials in the process and its impact on the organization. If high potentials identification is important for organizations to retain talent and if the process of this talent management practice may have a repercussion on employees who are left out, then more needs to be known about the perception of the high potentials' identification process and its impact on non-high potential employees to be able to optimize this talent management

practice and maximize its benefits for both the organizations and the employees. This is why it is important to understand the selection process of high potentials and any effect it may have on the employees who are identified as non-high potentials. This is much needed because we need to ensure that we are using the practice in the most beneficial (efficient, fair, unbiased, inclusive) way, straying away from discriminatory elitism, and addressing the career development needs of the employees whether they are identified as high potentials or not.

An area of concern or interest to this study is the understanding of the affective reactions and behavior of the employees identified as non-high potentials. Research has shown that there is definitely an impact of this practice on employees involved, whether positive or negative (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Dries et al., 2012; Gelens et al., 2014; Jyoti & Rani, 2014; McDonnell et al., 2017; Payambarpour & Hooi, 2015; Rebeták & Farkašová, 2015). Several studies have been conducted in recent years (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Gelens et al., 2014), mainly in North European setting, on the factors that influence non-high potentials and their reactions translated into specific workplace behavior. Through a qualitative research study, Gelens et al. (2014) found definite negative correlation between employees being identified as non-high potential and job satisfaction, work effort and their perception of procedural justice. According to Bjorkman et al., those who perceive that they have been identified as talent are more likely to be associated with all attitudes examined (commitment to increasing performance demands, active support of strategic priorities; and lower turnover intent) as opposed to the ones identified as non-talent (2013). Understanding and managing the emotions and behavioral reactions of non-high potentials as well as providing them with the right guidance and support from the organization's perspective is thus much needed because, if not managed properly, this

TM practice will have a negative impact on the concerned employees' engagement and satisfaction levels, and in turn, their productivity, their commitment to supporting the organization's strategy and their intention to leave (Bjorkman et al., 2013).

When it comes to the Middle-Eastern talent management scene, scholars have been interested in dissecting the concept and theories of talent management through multiple interesting lenses: post-structuralist, post-colonialist, critical feminist, and a gendered and elitist discourse on all scales of TM – global, national, and local levels (Makarem et al., 2019; Metcalfe et al., 2021). Considering TM practices on global, national, and institutional levels will allow a greater understanding of TM as a theory or concept (Al Ariss et al., 2014), however, there are not many studies conducted on the current practices, especially from an employee-centric perspective.

### **A. Purpose of the Study**

Zooming in on corporate and individual talent management, the purpose of this study is to examine and understand the emotional reactions and behavior of employees who were identified as non-high potentials within the Arab Middle-Eastern context, suggesting solutions for HRD professionals and guidelines to consider the appropriate performance management and career development for these employees, who constitute the larger population within organizations.

### **B. Research Objectives**

The objective of my research is to focus on the talent management process of high-potential identification to provide Human Resources Development (HRD) professionals with basis to:

- Explore the process of identification of high-potential employees within their organizations.
- Understand the affective and behavioral reactions of non-high potentials and their behavior within the workplace towards talent segmentation.
- Identify the needed development of non-high potentials and suggest appropriate learning opportunities (developmental plans, coaching, mentoring, training programs, etc.) to manage the affective and behavioral responses of employees identified as non-high potential.

### **C. Research Questions**

The study will focus on answering the following questions in order to achieve the objectives in the previous section:

- How does the employee identified as non-high potential perceive the selection process?
- What are the affective reactions of employees identified as non-high potential?
- What are the behavioral reactions of employees identified as non-high potential?
- What HRM/HRD practices are needed to manage the affective and behavioral responses of employees identified as non-high potential and provide them with suitable learning opportunities?

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **A. The Global Talent Management Scene**

With globalization, the war for talent as McKinsey & Company called it since 2001, and the acceleration of digitalization, retaining and investing in top talent became essential for succession planning for organizations who have to rethink their talent management approach (Saxena, 2013). Defined as a set of practices that allow for talent attraction and retention, Talent Management (TM) became a crucial procedure that needs to be implemented in the most effective, efficient, and strategic way (McDonnell et al., 2017; Saxena, 2013). It is always important to ensure that the TM strategy is aligned with the organizational and business strategy (Collings et al., 2019; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Jyoti & Rani, 2014). Whether it's on employees or organization, TM practices have a positive impact on overall performance (Payambarpour & Hooi, 2015) mediated by variables such as employee engagement, motivation, and alignment with the strategic direction of the organization (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Relying mainly on so-called corporate best practices and industry reports, there has been a noticeable lack of theoretical frameworks and concepts with regards to Talent Management (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). Ever since the late 2000s, scholars attempted to theorize these practices by reviewing literature and developing frameworks and academic critiques (Al Ariss et al., 2014). According to Saxena, the main drivers of implementing talent management practices are primarily heightened competition for talent attraction and retention, low levels of employee engagement, managing global and diverse work teams and the dynamicity and volatility



of the business environment (2013). While talent attraction and retention may be at the heart of TM practices on an organizational level, on national and global scale, TM practices allows countries to develop and shape the career types of their talent force, focusing on jobs and skills which prove to be highly impactful on the economy and society (Abeuova & Muratbekova-Touron, 2019). Indeed, considering TM practices on global, national, and institutional levels will allow a greater understanding of TM as a theory or concept (Al Ariss et al., 2014).

## **B. The Different Views of Talent Management**

Talent Management is defined as the process of attracting, identifying, developing and retaining talent (Scullion et al., 2010; Saxena, 2013). The term “talent” has different scopes and definitions: it can encompass all employees within an organization, i.e. the human resources, or can be specific to a certain group, the high potential employees, who are identified as having untapped potential and irreplaceable skillsets (Tansley, 2011; Thunnissen, 2016). Using talent identification and segregation allow organizations to cluster their employees in order to serve their developmental needs in the most effective and efficient way. Iles et al. identify two main views of Talent Management that are common across organizations who implement TM: The Elitist view and the Egalitarian view (2010). The elitist view of TM refers to the practice of talent management that is most common among organization: the identification of high-potential and top-performing employees and the focus on this group in terms of learning, development and growth. This view typically involves concerned employees to undergo assessments (psychometric and aptitude tests, situational judgment tests, competency-based exercises, etc.) to confirm their potential. This view is very common across organizations globally,

is of interest in this study and will be discussed thoroughly in our next sections. On the other hand, the egalitarian, or humanistic type as called by Bolander (2017), refers to the inclusive perspective that considers all employees as talent. This view looks at employees from a humanitarian and social justice perspective and calls for more equitable learning and development opportunities that caters to the different skillsets and talents the employees may have. Understanding these two views and emerging tensions between the two schools of thought put into practice will allow room for the emergence of more inclusive practices, promoting equitability and fairness (Harris & Foster, 2010; Metcalfe et al., 2019; Sheehan & Anderson, 2015).

### **C. Exploring Talent Management Practices in the Arab Middle East**

The focus of scholars within the Arab Middle East (AME) has been central in adding to Human Resources Management in general and TM theory in specific. HRM practices implemented in the region's organizations were mainly working towards reviving economic growth (Afiouni et al., 2013). From a macro level, the value of human capital does not limit itself within the walls of the organization, it is an asset even on a national scale for economic advancement and global scale for matters like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) achievement (Metcalfe et al., 2021). In addition, Al Ariss and Sidani identify the differentiation in approaches between local and expatriate talent, which creates a two-tier management of talent as one of the main challenges of TM in the MENA and GCC regions (2013). Local talent is, in most cases, looked at as fulfilling required quotas and reducing governmental pressures. As stated by Al Ariss and Sidani, while multinational companies in the region may come with their

well-established HR and TM processes and practices, the region still lags in this domain (2013).

Looking at TM from a critical feminist lens allowed Makarem et al. (2019) to unveil the male-dominated, exclusive, and elitist aspects of these practices. Because TM is at the heart of human development on all scales (global, national, and institutional), it is important to problematize it. Being mindful of and proactive about the different processes, and even the gendered wording, will allow us to move into more inclusive TM practices that can support the development of women and other minorities, moving away from hegemonic masculinity prominent globally and in the AME (Makarem et al., 2019).

Arguing Global TM practices may not be relevant in the Middle East, leading scholars are more focusing on more local or individualistic practices (Metcalf et al., 2021). Tlaiss's in-depth interviews with HR professionals revealed the reality of TM practices, notably within the context of Lebanon: organizations follow an exclusive/developable talent strategy when it comes to TM, focusing on specific talent pools for focused positions (2020). These practices promise employee a fast career path in order to avoid the repercussions of the brain drain towards GCC countries and to ensure attractive talent retention (Tlaiss, 2020).

#### **D. The Purpose of Talent Segmentation and High-Potential Identification**

To strategically prepare for leadership and other critical roles within the company, organizations always revert to identifying and developing their most capable, motivated, driven, and responsible employee through formal high-potential (HIPO) learning and development programs (Cui et al., 2018). Talent segmentation through the identification and selection of high potentials and their specialized development are very common

practices in talent management and development (Jyoti & Rani, 2014). The term high potential refers to an employee who holds superior and well-developed competencies and skills that can, through further individual career development, assist the organization in enhancing its performance and achieving its business goals (Rebet'ák & Farkašová, 2015).

Nonetheless, up until today, there is a gap in knowledge about how highly talented individuals are managed and developed (McDonnell et al., 2017). This is mainly because there are different challenges with high-potential development that are yet to be addressed. According to Rebet'ák & Farkašová, the challenges faced in the process of high potential identification are the understanding of the term itself and the selection criteria that may differ from one company to another, the absence of a unique vision for high potential employee development, the involvement of management, the expectations of the identified employees and the reactions of the employees who are left out (2015).

This is why, before diving into the details of high-potential talent identification and its implications, we need to understand the antecedents and consequences of this TM practice. The antecedents of high-potential identification are the business strategy, top-management commitment, and the corporate direction related to talent retention and employee engagement. The consequences of a successful selection and implementation of high-potential development and retention are enhanced financial performance, higher organizational commitment, enhanced employee engagement and higher company attractiveness for talent, yielding an overall competitive advantage (Jyoti & Rani, 2014).

An aspect of high-potential development which was very prominent in academic research is the successful selection and management of high potential (Jyoti & Rani, 2014). While ability, social skills and drive are the main selection criteria, learning ability

and career variety are crucial identifiers of high-potential talent (Dries et al., 2012). According to Dries's research findings, the focus and engagement with on-the-job training and varying work assignment and projects, rather than a sole focus on current job performance, give an accurate indicator of talent (2012). Some of the actions to be taken by the organization and that can really support in high-potential identification and development are the sharing of responsibility with top management, having a transparent, structured and continuously reviewed selection process, providing the high potential employees with accurate expectations and an individual development plan that is regularly revised (Rebet'ák & Farkašová, 2015). Middleton and Surdick add to the criteria that determine the success of high-potential development programs which include having a clear career path, fair procedural justice, willingness of employees to participate in learning activities, open communication, and management commitment (2011).

### **E. The Impact of Non-High Potential Identification**

The area of interest in this research paper was of interest to the academics to a certain extent. Even though this crucial topic was not very prominent in literature, it was nonetheless studied and quantitatively explored by a group of researchers over the recent years who explored the behavioral impact of this TM practice. In this section, we will be discussing the literature covering the Affective Events Theory and the Organizational Justice Theory mainly covering the distributive and procedural justices.

When it comes to emotional reactions, Shaver et al. cluster the emotions human beings feel into 6 main categories: anger, fear, joy, love, sadness, and surprise (1987). This range of emotions includes all that a human can experience and entails an extremely wide array of words and expressions that refers back to each one of them (Izard, 1992).

While studying emotions from the prototype approach as Shaver et al. did, we can also see that human emotions overlap. For example, hurt is a mix of anger and sadness, longing is a mix of sadness and love (Shaver et al., 1987). These clusters of emotions identified in the literature will allow me to define, label, analyze and understand the emotional reactions of the employees in the study.

The TM practice we are discussing involves people and their categorization. This is why it is crucial to understand the psychology behind how every person involved reacts to a certain event. The Affective Events Theory sheds light on the structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). These affective experiences lived at work trigger specific emotional reactions and moods which lead to different work attitudes and behaviors exhibited by the concerned people, as seen in Figure 2.1. Emotions, in that case, is defined as a reaction to an event that triggers feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness directly related to that event. It involves a series of reaction, cognitive and physical that allows us to appraise said event (Frijda, 1993).

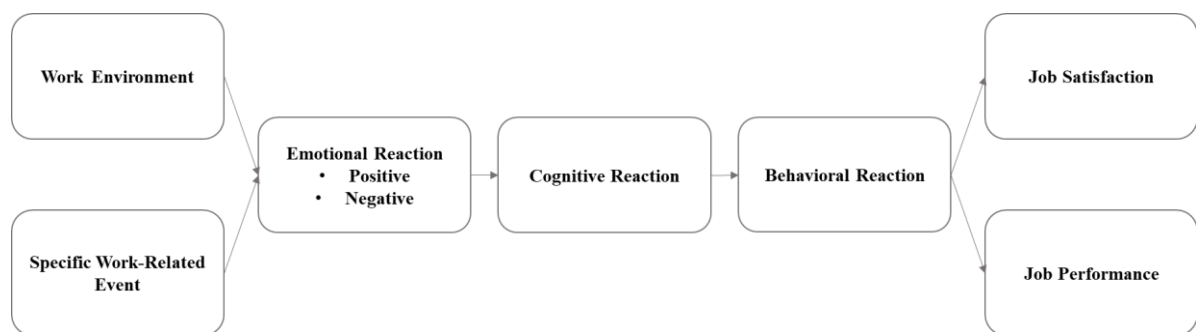


Figure 2.1 The Affective Events Theory Summary (adapted from Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996)

Dries's findings stated that high potentials were engaged in a clearer career path, higher levels of job security and more salary increases over the course of their stay with an organization (2012).

Another theory that can help us better frame the concept of talent segmentation are the theories of Organizational Justice that combines the procedural and distributive justice. This theory allows us to better understand the perceptions of fairness, justice and equity among employees. Distributive justice is related to the justice and fairness of the outcomes of a certain process compared to the inputs. It suggests that people, or in that case employees, evaluate the outcomes or results by comparing them to their inputs along with a valuable referent, or another similar employee who has received the same category of outcomes or results (Adams, 1965). On the other hand, perceived procedural justice relates to the fairness and transparency involved in the steps of a specific process that people, or employees, go through (Greenberg, 1990b). Oprea found that procedural justice was significantly correlated to distributive justice, and in turn, distributive justice was significantly correlated with organizational commitment (1994). Aligning with Oprea, the major findings from Gelens et al. quantitative study was there are definite positive correlation between identification of employees as high potentials, their job satisfaction and work effort and their perception of distributive procedural justice within the organization. The job satisfaction of high potentials was significantly higher than that of non-high potentials. Employees who were identified as a high potential perceived higher distributive justice than employees who were not (Gelens et al., 2014). Bjorkman et al. found that those who perceive that they have been identified as talent are more likely to be associated with all attitudes examined through their quantitative study: commitment to increasing performance demands, to building competencies that are valuable for their

employers, and to actively support its strategic priorities, higher identification with the focal unit, and lower turnover intent (2013). Moreover, “Employees who were identified as a high potential perceived higher distributive justice than employees who were not.” (Gelens et al., 2014).

While this literature provides us with good basis for understanding the correlation of identification as talent or not with work-related behavioral reactions, we still do not have a full and deep understanding of the reactions and implications of employees identified as non-high potential or are excluded from the talent pool of the organization. The below figure (Figure 2.2) summarizes the antecedents and outcomes of high-potential identification, based on the literature that was reviewed, and adds the employees’ perceived procedural justice and equity as a moderating variable that comes into play in the process.

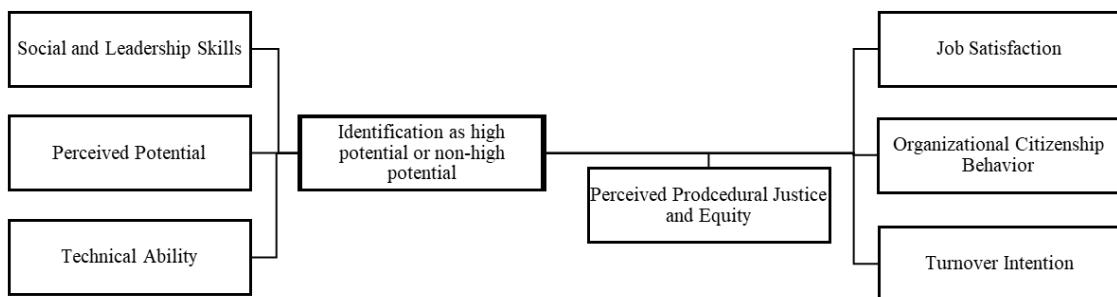


Figure 2.2 Antecedent, Outcomes and Moderation of High-Potential Identification (adapted from Dries et al., 2012)

The Affective Events model can help us better understand the emotional reactions of employees and their affective behaviors at work. While this theory focuses on affective and emotional reactions, there are many studies which show its link to other fundamental aspects such as cognition, behavior, and motivation (Ashkanasy, 2002; Gopinath, 2009;



Tzafrir and Hareli, 2009; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996; Zhang, 2013). Mismanaged emotions at work, especially when negative, can lead to emotional exhaustion which directly affects work attitudes, motivation and ultimately performance (Gopinath, 2011). Indeed, these negative affective reactions such as anger and sadness can lead to decreased motivation which translates into absenteeism and reduced work efforts (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Tzafrir and Hareli came to the conclusion that the negative emotions experienced at work are more likely to be affected by external causes rather than internal ones (2009). This is where the role of perception comes into play when it comes to justice and bias in the process involved. On the other hand, a better understanding of process-based affective reactions and workplace emotions can guide professionals in focusing on enhancing the process or practice with a focus on the human beings involved (Zhang, 2013). While there is wide research about individual psychology and emotions, there is still a lot to uncover on the range and intensity of these emotions and their implications for the employee, the manager, the group, and the organization as a whole (Ashkanasy, 2002; Gopinath, 2011).

By reviewing recent literature, we have seen that the TM function and its practices have been central to Human-Resources-related academic literature (McDonnell et al., 2017). Even so, there is minimal literature that focuses on employees who are identified as non-high potentials and their emotional and behavioral responses, especially within the Middle East where this practice is becoming more and more prominent. These individuals are part of the group of the employees that constitute the majority of the population in the organization's workforce. While both the exclusive and egalitarian views may generate positive outcomes for the organization, especially when critical roles and positions are involved, Iles et al. argues the following:

Adopting an ‘integrated HRM with a selective focus’ perspective and an ‘exclusive-people’ model may cause organizations to focus efforts and resources on attracting and retaining ‘talent’, in the belief that such people are the main drivers of high performance, perhaps to the neglect of other employees (2010).

Indeed, as we have seen throughout my literature review, neglecting the understanding of this TM practice will have a negative impact on the concerned employees’ engagement and satisfaction levels, and in turn, their productivity, their commitment to supporting the organization’s strategy and their intention to leave (Bjorkman et al., 2013). This is why it should be a priority to study the impact of non-selection, how to address their specific development and to rethink the talent management approach for these individuals, transforming this TM practice into more inclusive and equitable practice (Sheehan & Anderson, 2015). My research will add to the existing literature and develop suggestions to allow the consideration of the appropriate development of employees identified by organizations as non-high potential.

# CHAPTER III

## METHODOLOGY

### **A. Research Approach**

The study is conducted through qualitative research due to the nature of the research questions posed, which require a deep understanding of human reactions and potential behavior. It adopts an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm in which the researcher immerses themselves as part of the research itself through extended interactions with the participants (Tuli, 2010). The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm along with a qualitative research methodology allowed me to explore and understand the reactions, feelings, and behavior of the study's target population (employees who have went through a high-potential selection process) through meaningful and deep conversations with them to understand their view and own sensemaking of social realities (Maxwell, 2012).

### **B. Data Collection Method**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect the data needed for this study using a standardized interview guide (refer to Appendix I - Interview Questions). This data collection method is flexible: while guiding the conversations with the key areas to focus on, it leaves some room for the researcher to probe on what is being said by the participants and explore ideas discussed further (Gill et al., 2008). This method is very much suitable for my study as it provides structure to ensure standardization of areas covered across the different participants but still, leave the flexibility to dive into aspects of the questions that may not have been posed through the interview questions developed.

While focus groups may also have been an interesting data collection method, interviews deemed more appropriate as the conversation with the employees identified as both high-potential and non-high potential is considered very confidential and subject to vulnerability, showing emotions, and potentially uncovering future intentions.

### **C. Sampling Process**

The sampling method most fitted with my study is purposeful sampling. This method is based on intentionally selecting participants and sites that allowed me to understand my studied phenomenon further; it allows the researcher to focus on information-rich cases that yield an in-depth study and where they can dig deeper into the central phenomenon that is of interest (Patton, 2014, p.401-402). Among the purposeful sampling strategies that exist, I have used criterion-based sampling to select my study sample. Criterion-based sampling is defined by Suri (2011) as:

This approach is frequently employed by research synthesists to construct a comprehensive understanding of all the studies that meet certain pre-determined criteria. Most research synthesists employ criterion sampling by stating explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria which includes specifications for methodological rigor (p. 69).

As a first step, I started by detecting two regional organizations based in Lebanon/the UAE that implements the high-potential talent identification practice. Two interview sites were selected, one in the retail industry whose regional offices are based in both Beirut and Dubai (Company A), and the other in the pharma retail/healthcare industry, whose regional offices are based in Dubai (Company B). Participants were recruited in Beirut and Dubai because these are the locations from which the researcher operates. After that, I reached out to the HR Manager/Director, Head of Learning and

Development/Talent Performance department or equivalent within the organization, explaining my professional background and the purpose and implications of my study (refer to Appendix II - Email to Administration). An email invitation was sent to all employees by the administration, who is not involved in the process and does not have any undue influence on the employees, explaining the details of the study and how to participate (refer to Appendix III – Email to Potential Candidates). The criterion for recruitment used to select the sample was: going through any form of high-potential selection process over the person’s employment period within the organizational context. These employees, contingent upon their reply to the email, willingness and expressed oral consent (refer to Appendix IV – Informed Consent Form), constituted my sample for the study and are the ones who were interviewed: four participants from each of the two sites selected.

#### **D. Interview Sites**

Both interview sites selected operate regionally (mainly MENA and GCC regions). In addition, when it comes to high-potential selection and talent identification, both organizations implement the widely-used 9-box grid to cluster employees into different talent categories based on two variables: Performance and Potential. Performance is evaluated on a yearly basis by the line manager of the concerned employees systematically on different factors: job-related competencies, objectives and organizational values. Potential is assessed through a questionnaire that is also filled out by the line manager regarding the level of potential and growth of the concerned employee. Created by McKinsey in the early 1970s, the 9-Box grid, thus constitutes the

first phase into clustering talent and detecting high-potential talent, defined based on the organization's needs, competencies and objectives (Hanson, 2011, Church et al., 2015).

### **E. Recruitment of Participants**

An employee in an administrative role in the HR department who does not have any undue influence on employees sent the invitation on behalf of the research team, informing them about the research objective, purpose and implications and asking for their interest and consent to participate in the study. The email clearly stated that the study will not have an impact on their current position/performance within the organization and that I am ready to answer any question or concern they may have with a deadline to confirm their participation. Participation in the study did not include any direct reward or benefits.

### **F. Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the course of three weeks to gather the data needed for this study. Each interview did not exceed 30 minutes and was conducted virtually using Cisco WebEx, the platform adopted at AUB. They were conducted in English, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, where the participants' statements were divided by question as per the interview protocol (refer to Appendix I - Interview Questions).

As discussed in the recruitment section, the 8 interviewees volunteered to participate in the study based on an invitation that was shared with them by an administrative employee within their organization who has no undue influence on them or any relation to the high potential selection process. This section will be dedicated to

discuss the general demographics of the subjects along with the general outcomes of the interview process.

Table 3.1. Interview Participants Demographics

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Tenure (years)</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Previous Positions within organization?</b>	<b>High Potential?</b>
1	A	Male	8-10	Specialist Role	Yes, across different departments	Yes
2	A	Female	8-10	Generalist Role	Yes, within the same department	Yes
3	A	Female	+10	Managerial Role	Yes, across different departments	No
4	A	Male	+10	Managerial Role	Yes, within the same department	No
5	B	Male	+10	Managerial Role	Yes, within the same department	Yes
6	B	Male	0-2	Senior Managerial Role	No	No
7	B	Male	0-2	Senior Managerial Role	No	No
8	B	Female	5-7	Mid-Managerial Role	Yes, across different departments	Yes

While the recruitment of participants may have been challenging, the interview process was very smooth and the candidates were keen on expressing themselves fully through the different questions they were asked. Based on pure voluntary participation, there was a fair mix between males and females and different position levels within the sample studied. This is an advantage as I was able to draw a fuller understanding of the process from different perspectives. With the exception of Subject 7, all employees who

participated have undergone a high-potential selection process at their current organization. He still did not go through a formal high-potential selection process at his current organization, however, he underwent this process at his previous organization, this is where I mainly focused the discussion.

## **J. Data Analysis Method**

After the textual data was obtained from transcribing the interviews, the generated data was analyzed with a content analysis technique. “Qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or pattern” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I used conventional content analysis which mainly focuses on the following steps: (1) reading through the textual data and highlighting key words and expressions, (2) noting down comments and impressions on the raw interviews data (3) labeling the data with specific codes that emerge which then becomes the initial coding scheme (4) clustering the codes based on interrelation which then creates meaningful cluster (5) generating definitions for each category, sub-category, code and finally, (6) interpreting, analyzing and potentially, identifying the relationships between the emerged categories and code (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The first step of the analysis entailed reading through the transcribed interview texts and inductively labeling and categorizing the similar expressions and statements used by the interviewees using open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Then, I moved from open-coding to axial coding (see Gioia et al., 2013) where I identified relationships between and among these themes while relying on pre-existing literature concerning relational theory, mainly the Affective Events Theory (Weiss &



Cropanzano, 1996). This method is very helpful because it allows me to support the emerging themes from the open coding by identifying the related theories, conceptualizing them, and grounding them in literature, allowing me to explain the phenomenon under study (Gioia et al., 2013). After the axial coding that generated, sub-categories, I moved into a more theoretical level, gathering my emerging themes into general categories (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). This method allowed me to better understand the affective and behavioral reactions of employees from different clusters towards the high-potential selection process and its outcomes and implications. Table 3.2 below summarizes the data structure and general categories that emerged from the axial coding for the employees identified as high-potential.

Table 3.2 High-Potential Employees Interviews' Analysis - Gioia Method

<b>First-Order Concepts and Statements</b>	<b>Second-Order Themes</b>	<b>Aggregate Dimensions / Theoretical Concepts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There can be biases when it comes to managers recommending certain employees as potential.</li> <li>- They thought about other employees whose managers may be biased or “harsh” in the way they assess performance and potential.</li> <li>- There might be employees who would have been nominated and selected had their line manager been more aware; it depends on the maturity of the managers and their level of awareness.</li> <li>- Satisfied with the outcomes and looking forward for the development program.</li> </ul>	Perceived Distributive Justice (High)	Perceptions of the Identification Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High because they understood the different steps of the process and trusted the judgement of their managers.</li> <li>- Employees did not understand why they were being assessed – whether it will be related to their jobs or employability within the organization or what the purpose is exactly.</li> <li>- No clear criteria were explained as to how potential is measured.</li> <li>- Employees can choose to go through the selection process or withdraw from it.</li> </ul>	Perceived Procedural Justice (High and Low)	

- The process can be enhanced as employees are not really sure if it assesses potential accurately and fairly.		
- Very satisfied and looking forward to the next steps. - It was a boost to confidence and self-esteem. - Looking forward to being re-energized in terms of satisfaction. They don't just want to be doing "okay". - Satisfied with the results and outcomes, however, the development plan that followed lacked follow up and hands on experience, exposure, etc.	Satisfaction	Affective Reactions
- Pretty much happy with the outcomes. - Happy that they got the chance to go through such a selection process.	Happiness	
- Being nominated by the manager is a buildup of efforts from the employee over the years at the organization. - It was a feeling that paid off.	Sense of Pride	
- More excited to take on new roles and additional responsibilities. - Willingly take on additional projects that may not directly relate to their current role. - Productivity was higher after the results came out. - Willingness to take on more tasks and increase scope of work.	Job Performance and Eagerness to Do More	Behavioral Reactions
- Higher engagement and working more closely with the direct manager. - More engaged with team members in terms of communication and cooperation. - More involved in the strategic direction and goals of the organization.	Engagement Level and Work Withdrawal	
- It binds the commitment to the organization through promises of succession and remuneration (managerial positions). - For more junior positions, the program was not linked to a rewards plan.	Intent to Leave (High and Low)	
- Employees believe they already had a sense of self-awareness and it was just confirmed by the results of the process. - Employees were excited for the potential learning journey they were promised as part of being selected. - Reflecting on the feedback and the results allows the employees to develop themselves further in terms of working with their team members and peers. - Need to be more proactive individually towards learning and development. - It was, on one hand, a personal effort to maintain the high-potential status as it is re-evaluated every year. On the other hand, they were expecting growth from the training program that followed.	Initiative for Self-Development	
- The line manager is very flexible and open to giving the employee new tasks and projects to work on. - The selected employees are involved in an external development program.	Seeking Organizational Support	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some of the high-potential employees were at a floating status, without a next step in terms of growth.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some managers were not aware of the process and that their performance rating of employees affected the selection process.</li> <li>- It was the responsibility of both the employees themselves and the organization to ensure the growth that followed the selection.</li> </ul>	<p>Shared Responsibility and Awareness</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being informed through writing (email) gave the candidate the opportunity to read through the results of the assessment in details.</li> <li>- They received personalized development plans to work on individually.</li> <li>- The follow up meeting was scheduled too long after the results were out.</li> <li>- Some employees who are currently in the HiPo program are not aware of the roadmap or plan.</li> <li>- Not very satisfied of the development plan that followed because of the lack of growth opportunities available to grow into.</li> </ul>	<p>Announcement of Results and Follow Up</p>	<p>Suggestions for HRD Practices</p>

As for Table 3.3, it summarizes the general categories and subcategories that emerged from my axial coding for the non-high potential employees and serves as the basis upon which I address my research objectives.

Table 3.3 Non-High Potential Employees Interviews' Analysis - Gioia Method

<p><b>First-Order Concepts and Statements</b></p>	<p><b>Second-Order Themes</b></p>	<p><b>Aggregate Dimensions/Theoretical Concepts</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It was fair to an extent, but was missing a lot of information.</li> <li>- There is no interaction with the line manager through the whole process so they might not understand clearly why they were not selected or recommended in the first place.</li> <li>- Employees were not satisfied with the results.</li> </ul>	<p>Low Perceived Distributive Justice</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rather low because of the missing information and lack of clarity.</li> <li>- The missing information regarding the whole process reduces from the transparency of how the high-potential employees are selected.</li> <li>- There was no clear procedure or criteria that explained why a curtailed employee was selected and why another one wasn't.</li> </ul>	<p>Low Perceived Procedural Justice</p>	<p>Perceptions of the Identification Process</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The employee was angry at the results and wanted to take action immediately.</li> <li>- The discomfort and anger grew when the selected employees started the development program.</li> </ul>	Anger	Affective Reactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If there was awareness about the selection process and how they were being assessed, they would have behaved differently.</li> <li>- The employee felt bad and blamed it on themselves partially, and on the concerned department mostly.</li> </ul>	Disappointment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frustration due to the lack of awareness of what is required or what is being assessed.</li> <li>- There were feelings of stress with regards to the timeline.</li> <li>- There was no follow up session or meeting with regards to the results which created a lot of frustration due to uncertainty.</li> </ul>	Anxiety and Frustration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Satisfaction levels are definitely oscillating.</li> <li>- The idea of this practice is rewarding because you are being recognized by your organization however, the way it is implemented may not be the best.</li> <li>- The employee was dissatisfied with the way they received the results and that the follow up meeting took too long to be scheduled.</li> <li>- The results weren't very easy to digest, especially with no guidance from HR.</li> <li>- The employees needed additional explanations on the report that was shared to them by email, which left some gray areas of understanding.</li> </ul>	Discomfort	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refraining from taking on additional tasks that may fall from the scope of work.</li> <li>- Employees were less eager to complete tasks and do more than what was required for a period of time after the announcement of the results.</li> </ul>	Job Performance and Eagerness to Do More	Behavioral Reactions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change in the way they interacted with their team members, less engagement and involvement.</li> <li>- Less willingness to help colleagues in matters that do not relate directly to their jobs.</li> </ul>	Engagement Level and Work Withdrawal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three of the employees are currently looking for another job.</li> <li>- In the thought process, it was more a cognitive than an affective reaction; growth will happen in a different organization rather than the current one.</li> </ul>	Intent to Leave (High and Low)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging in self-development on a personal level through certifications and other learning initiatives.</li> <li>- Since the follow up meeting took too long, the employees had their own conclusion as to how they should address their areas of improvement.</li> </ul>	Initiative for Self-Development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The manager was only recognizing the results achieved and not the journey that led to them.</li> <li>- Two of the employees were promised a new opportunity that included a change in title and compensation, but it did not happen.</li> </ul>	Seeking Organizational Support	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The pool of annually-selected employees maybe could be better, could be bigger, and could be in different fields. Not only to focus on the interest of the company, but rather may be on individual interests as well.</li> <li>- It could have been more detailed as to what to expect and what to prepare for the assessment.</li> <li>- The manager lacked awareness about the selection process and how their rating impacted the results.</li> </ul>	Shared Responsibility and Awareness	Suggestions for HRD Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The feedback by the results of the selection process can be constructive and developmental if received with an open and positive mindset.</li> <li>- There was no follow up session or meeting with regards to the results.</li> </ul>	Announcemen t of Results and Follow Up	

Although time-consuming, this qualitative data analysis method allowed me to understand the key components of the emotional reactions of the employees, their explanation and the potential or actual behavior an employee identified as non-high potential may engage in and provided me with solid basis for the findings and discussion sections. In the next chapter, I will be discussing the findings of the thematic content analysis of all 8 interviews using the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013). As for Table 3.3, it summarizes the general categories and subcategories that emerged from my axial coding for the non-high potential employees and serves as the basis upon which I address my research objectives.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter will be dedicated to discussing the findings of the data analysis using the open-coding and Gioia methods (Gioia et al., 2013). After having transcribed and went through coding the textual data, at a first glimpse, different categories emerge among the interviewees. The first category is the employees who were selected as high potential and who were satisfied and engaged with their job and organization. The second category are the employees who were not selected as high potentials and displayed a certain level of dissatisfaction and negative behavior. Finally, and unexpectedly, a third category emerged, which was constituted by the employees who were selected as high potential talent yet who were dissatisfied and showed some negative behavior. Table 3.3 summarizes my detailed findings from the interviews for non-high potential employees with the general themes, sub-categories and aggregated dimensions, where the first-order concepts which will be further discussed in the following sections. Figure 4.3 allows the focus on the 2<sup>nd</sup>-order concepts and aggregate dimensions that are the most prominent among non-high potential employees. As seen in Table 3.1, I have added pseudonyms to better identify the participants and to quote them in the findings section.

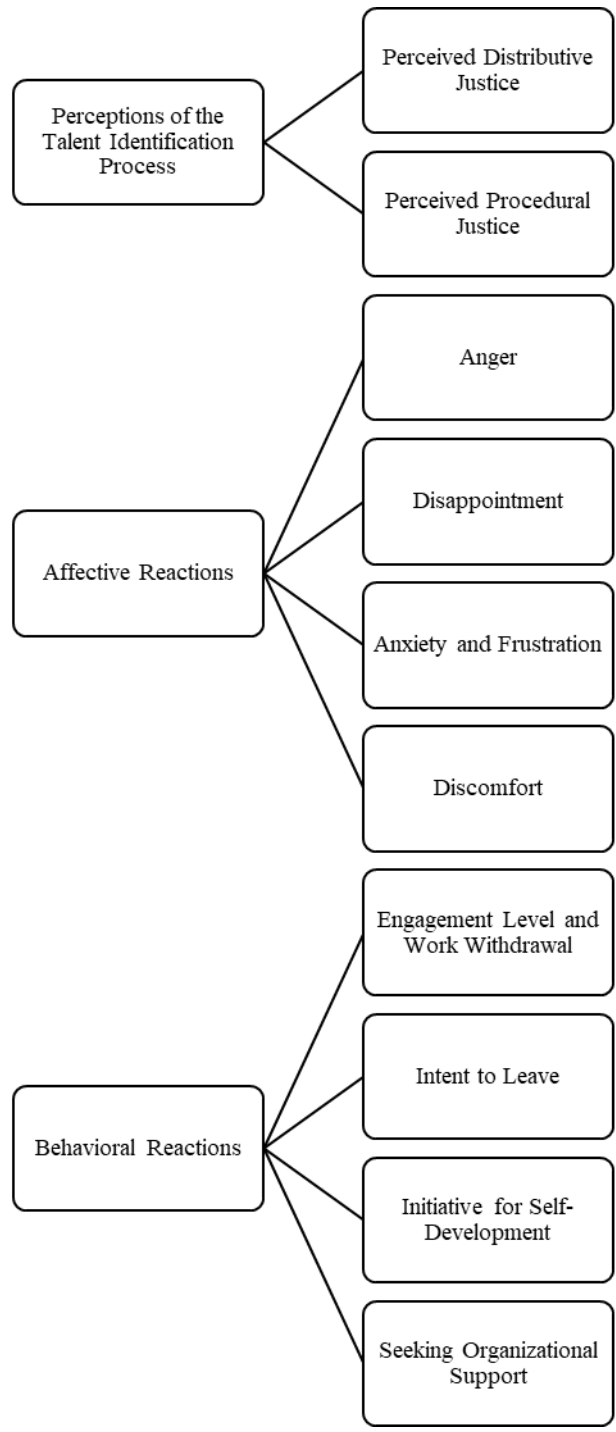


Figure 4.3 Aggregate Dimensions and Second-Order Concepts Related to Non-High Potential Employees

## **A. Perceptions of the High-Potential Selection Process by Non-Talent**

Based on my findings, this section will dive into the perceptions of non-high potential employees of the selection process they went through within their organizations to answer my first research question. The common method of talent selection and identification across organizations was a recommendation by the line manager based on performance appraisal results in addition to an assessment center that included different tools: psychometric tests, aptitude tests, in-tray group behavioral exercises, among others. The employees were then informed of the results through e-mail with a detailed report of their performance in the assessment center. I will dive into the two main second-order concepts under the dimension of perceptions (see Table 3.3 and Figure 4.3): perceived procedural justice and perceived distributive justice, explaining each of the two and the illustrative statements and quotations from the interviews.

### ***1. Perceived Procedural Justice***

The theme of “Perceived Procedural Justice” gathers the statements and concepts that show the extent to which a person finds the process that led to a certain outcome is fair and just. In this study’s case, it is the perception of the selection process that led to the employees being identified as high potential or non-high potential. It encompasses the belief that all employees have an equal chance in being involved and participating in the process. In addition, this theme relates to the treatment of the employees in the same way and using the same tools and criteria throughout the process.

In terms of fairness, the general tendency of non-high potential employees was that the process was fair; among them Hassan. He stated that:

“It is fair and transparent in the sense that you use the same questionnaire across all your team members. So, there is no room for individual questions



or different questions. All the people are assessed based on a certain set of questions. In that sense, it is fair; because we may not all have the same skillsets but we work along the same general competencies.”

*(Hassan)*

Transparency describes the degree to which all information about the process and the criteria used for selection are clear and well-communicated to all stakeholders. With regards to transparency of the process, the narrative was a bit different among the employees interviewed. Indeed, there was a strong agreement towards the fact that the process, across organizations, is not as transparent as it should be. Karim’s thought process was along the lines of:

“Is this going to be related with my job performance? Or is it just going to be in an evaluative form of a descriptive form of tests? Yes, like to describe me as an employee?”.

*(Karim)*

This statement shows the lack of information as to what the employees are being assessed on and the transparency of the criteria and the purpose of the potential assessment. That same employee, ahead of the assessment, reached out to top-management to ensure that it was not related to their employability or a potential restructuring and potential wave of lay-offs. Reiterating what was mentioned, Hadi was very persistent and stated:

“There needs to be more transparency. And more importantly, they need to be more clear criteria onto how these people are selected. So, you know, there was no clarity from my side as to why my manager was sent this form about me. Obviously, I mean, I was referred to as somebody who's high performing and may have potential, but there were no clear criteria as what as to what I did, what are the actions? What did I accomplish for me to qualify?”.

*(Hadi)*

Combining the debatable fairness and the lack of transparency, the perceived procedural justice by the concerned employees was rather low, due to the lack of

understanding of the high-potential identification practice itself. Reiterating the point of transparency and the fairness of the procedure, Hadi shared:

“I just got to know from her (my manager) that she had finished the form, and I did not eventually qualify for the high potential position. Now, it seems like my manager herself did not know the process very clearly. Maybe other managers were more aware which made the process favor certain employees. Because after she filled out the form, she went back to me and she apologized for not scoring me hired to go into this type of program. So that was a bit of a funny, funny exercise to kind of do”.

*(Hadi)*

## ***2. Perceived Distributive Justice***

The theme of “Perceived Distributive Justice” gathers the statements and concepts that show the extent to which an employee finds the outcomes of a specific process is fair and just, not looking at the process in itself, but rather at the outcomes versus the inputs that were put in by the employee in terms of their own perceptions of their skills, job performance and so on. Perceptions of distributive justice are based on the theory of Organizational Justice that is explained in the Literature Review. As we have seen through theory, perceived distributive justice is significantly correlated with the perceived procedural justice. The below statement shared by Rana shows the low perceived distributive justice experienced, where she was not happy with the outcomes and believed she should have passed the selection process successfully:

“I was disappointed ... with my organization, because I believe I had the potential”.

*(Rana)*

The perceived procedural and distributive justices both scored rather low as per my findings. These perceptions of the process and its outcomes are directly tied with the affective reactions of non-high potential employees which I will be discussing next.

## **B. Affective Reactions of Non-High Potential Employees**

Based on the outcomes of my findings, this section will dive into the affective reactions of employees identified as non-high potential to answer my second research question. As discussed in the literature review, the Affective Events Theory sheds light on the structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). These affective experiences, or emotions, are triggered by work-related experiences and can be positive or negative. Emotions, in that case, is defined as a reaction to an event that triggers feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness directly related to that event (Frijda, 1993). I categorized the statements and concepts extracted from the textual data into 4 main categories of emotions and affective reactions: anger, disappointment, anxiety and discomfort (see Table 3.3 and Figure 4.3). Coding for the affective reactions was useful in better understanding how the employees typically feel about and deal with the outcomes of the TM practice of interest. In the following sections, I will be discussing each affective reaction alone and representative quotations extracted from the interview data.

### ***1. Anger***

The “Anger” theme from the interviews represents the feeling of rage, extreme frustration, deep unpleasantness (Shaver et al., 1987), and wanting to take immediate action with regards to the outcomes of the selection process. “I was angry and frustrated and wanted to understand what happened, what went wrong”, shared Rana.

Feelings of anger were mostly heightened at the very beginning, right after the results were announced by email. These feelings of anger then transformed into discomfort and anxiety as to what was coming next.

## ***2. Disappointment***

The “Disappointment” theme was comprised of all the statements that describe the employee’s feelings of disappointment towards the results of the selection process and blame, whether towards themselves, their managers or the organization itself. Disappointment feelings among employees was very common, where they put the blame on two different sides: on one hand, themselves, for not successfully preparing for and passing the assessment and on the other hand, on the organization or their manager for not knowing what was expected from them. Rana and Hadi are two of the cases where disappointment was the most obvious through their statements.

“I was disappointed, disappointed with myself, for not being prepared enough and with my organization, because I believe I had the potential”.

*(Rana)*

“I blamed it on my manager because had she known the impact of her answers, she might have taken in it more seriously. After the results were announced, she called me into her office to apologize”.

*(Hadi)*

## ***3. Anxiety and Frustration***

The third affective reaction and emerging theme I will be discussing falls under “Anxiety and Frustration”. This second-order theme gathers the feelings of worry, concern and stress emerging among non-high potential employees with regards to the TM practice. A statement shared by Rana was:

“I was frustrated when the results came out because it wasn't for me clear that they assessed”, adding that “it was vague, and I was shocked, because I would have behaved differently. If I knew that I had to be present, if you want, I would have interfered more in the different exercises.”

*(Rana)*

The feelings of concern and stress not only impact the assessment center itself but also extend to the outcomes of practice. Employees were worried and concerned about their status and future within the organization.

#### ***4. Discomfort***

The fourth affective reaction I will discuss may be argued to be an outcome of both the affective and behavioral reactions of employees, depending on how we frame it. In the study, the theme of “Discomfort” relates to the feelings of displeasure, lack of enjoyment and sadness (Shaver et al., 1987), when it comes to the high-potential selection process results. The level of discomfort was rather high among employees who were identified as non-high potential. The idea of the practice was very appealing because they were recognized by their organization, however, dissatisfaction and discomfort grew along with the announcement of the results and the lack of follow up which left some grey areas of understanding for these employees. Rana, whose overall experience was the most negative among the participants, stated:

“It's not very easy to digest. So, surely your motivation level will not be the same. And it grew further where your discomfort in the organization grows. Once the program starts to take place, and you see the other colleagues are growing in this program. Yes, this is what the discomfort is, not directly, you know, like, it will grow with time.”

*(Rana)*

This comes to show that the level of discomfort grows over time for these employees, along with the other negative affective behavior, which will eventually be translated into the behavioral reactions I will be discussing next.

### **C. Behavioral Reactions of Non-High Potential Employees**

The third and final group of most significant second-order themes are gathered into the behavioral reactions of employees identified as non-high potential (see Table 3.3 and Figure 4.3). The findings of this section will allow me to answer my third research question about the behavior that these employees may or may not engage in. With regards to the Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), these affective experiences lived at work trigger specific emotional reactions and moods which lead to different work attitudes and behaviors exhibited by the concerned people, as I will show in the following sections through statements and illustrative quotations, that help employees make sense of and deal with the said event.

#### ***1. Engagement Level and Work Withdrawal***

The employee's "Engagement Level" here refers to their involvement in day-to-day activities that may not be directly related to their current role, in addition to displaying organizational citizenship behavior such as cooperation with team members, supporting the organization's strategic directions, voluntarily supporting others with additional tasks, etc. "Work Withdrawal" is one of the behaviors exhibited when the engagement level drops and refers to a noticeable decrease in the employee's engagement where the employee starts to complete less tasks, which affects the overall productivity and job performance, and refrain from taking on additional tasks that may not directly relate to their current job.

To showcase this theme, Hadi shared with me the following:

“I felt demotivated and did not have the urge to complete my tasks as I did before the results were announced. I needed some time to get back on track and motivate myself again”.

*(Hadi)*

The employees identified as non-high potential noticed themselves less engaged with their team members as well as less involvement with the organization’s strategic projects. This was also reflected through loss of productivity for a specific period that followed the announcement of the results.

## ***2. Intent to Leave***

“Intent to Leave” is the exhibited behavior that shows intention or entails active thinking of the employee about leaving their current organization for another organization or career path. Out of the non-high potential employees who were interviewed as part of the study, three are currently looking for other opportunities. One of the employees clearly stated “I am looking for a job”. Hadi was very open during the discussion and specified:

“My thought process was: if my growth will not happen here, then maybe it's going to happen elsewhere.”

*(Hadi)*

## ***3. Initiative for Self-Development***

The theme of “Initiative for Self-Development” here is the concepts that relate to the actions taken by employees on a personal level to invest in their growth and development. Employees who were identified as non-high potential were more likely to

be involved in developmental activities on a personal level such as earning certifications and engaging in online learning courses.

“I made it my personal task to go into the details of the feedback and try to understand it. I also completed a professional certification related to my job”.

*(Karim)*

Since the follow up session after the announcement of the results either took too long to happen or never happened at all, they tried to make by themselves sense of the feedback and report that was shared as part of completing the assessment center.

#### ***4. Seeking Organizational Support***

“Seeking Organizational Support” is the behavior of reaching out to the current organization for support when it comes to development and career growth. This theme gathers all the statements and concepts that show whether or not employees reach out to their organization for this specific kind of support, after not being selected as a high-potential. Employees who were identified as non-high potential were less likely to seek organizational or managerial support when it comes to their career growth. Two of the employees were promised a new opportunity that included a change in title and compensation, but it did not happen. With her feelings still lingering, Rana shared:

“They were only recognizing the results, not the journey before. Well, support and recognition were only done by saying like “very good job”, “we didn't expect this from you”, “amazing, you fight it everything by your own and the results are tremendous”. It was only words, this was the only point of motion.”

*(Rana)*

The affective reactions, coupled with the behavioral reactions I have discussed, come to show the negative impact a mismanaged TM practice may have on an



organization and its employees on different facets of its overall performance and environment.

I have discussed, in detail, the findings of the semi-structured interviews with regards to the perceptions of the selection process as well as the affective and behavioral reactions of employees identified as non-high potential. I will now dive into the discussion and practical implications of my study along with the recommendations for HRD professionals.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **A. Discussion**

In this study, I have explored in-depth the phenomenon of high-potential selection, taking it from an employee-centric perspective. I was able, through semi-structured interviews, to uncover and explore the affective and behavioral reactions of employees towards talent identification. The following sections will be dedicated to linking the answers to my research questions to existing literature, discussing study implications and limitations, in addition to future research directions.

Taken together, my main contributions suggest that this widely-used TM practice can have a negative impact on non-high potential employees and high-potential employees, both to different extents, if not implemented properly. My study also suggests that a more inclusive talent identification approach can enhance an organization's culture and overall performance, while focusing on different employee clusters.

#### ***1. Perceptions of the High-Potential Selection Process by Non-Talent***

The perceptions of non-high potential employees of the selection process are rather negative. Even though the general tendency is to believe that the process is fair, especially because all employees are eligible to be recommended and are evaluated using the same tools (the performance appraisals and potential questionnaires), there is a question mark with regards to the transparency of the process and the lack of information

provided. In addition, aligned with the results found through Gelens et al.'s quantitative study, the perceived procedural justice for this group of employees is low (2014).

However, as opposed to what Gelens et al. stated, the perceived procedural justice was even low for the employees who were selected as high-potentials due to the lack of transparency as to what was assessed and the purpose of the different assessments, as seen in Table 3.2. This, on the long run, may impact the credibility and positive effect of such practices within organizations for both employee clusters.

## ***2. Affective and Behavioral Reactions of Non-High Potential Employees***

As I have discussed throughout the study, the affective reactions of employees identified as non-high potential fall under anger, anxiety and frustration, disappointment and discomfort. Gopinath found that mismanaged emotions at work, especially when negative, can lead to emotional exhaustion which directly affects work attitudes, motivation and ultimately performance (2011). On the other side of the spectrum, and as seen in Table 3.2, the affective reactions of high-potential employees fall under positive categories such as: happiness, satisfaction and sense of pride. This is important to consider because, according to Bjorkman et al., those who perceive that they have been identified as talent are more likely to be associated with all attitudes examined (commitment to increasing performance demands, active support of strategic priorities; and lower turnover intent) as opposed to the ones identified as non-talent (2013). In contrast, and as seen in Table 3.2, high-potential employees are more likely to exhibit behaviors such as an enhanced job performance, eagerness to do more, an increase in engagement and motivation, a lower intent to leave and they are more likely to reach out to the organization for support with regards to their career growth and development.

Indeed, my findings align with Bjorkman et al.'s findings, adding to the behavioral reactions of non-high potential employees work withdrawal, higher intent to leave, more initiative for personal self-development and less seeking support from the organization with regards to career development.

## **B. Implications for HR and Recommendations for HRD Professionals**

### ***1. Implications***

This study involves practical implications within the field of Talent Management. The findings added new literature to an area in talent management which is not yet well developed in terms of research, notably in the MENA region. The main beneficiaries of the study are the organizations in the region as they can gain insights on its TM practices. Because the region still lags in terms of structured TM processes (Al Ariss & Sidani, 2013), the study findings and discussion shed light to organizations and HRD professionals on Talent Management practices, more specifically talent segmentation practices, and the suggestions they can take into consideration to enhance them and make them more inclusive.

### ***2. Recommendations***

As a main contribution and reiteration of my study findings, and to answer my fourth and final research question, below are the key components and suggestions for talent identification practices HRD professionals may consider implementing and following:

a. Establishing a Structured Process and Follow Up Cycle

Before considering the implementation of such complex and crucial TM practices, HRD professionals are advised to have a well-structured process. This process begins by defining the purpose, goals and objectives of implementing a high-potential identification and development program. This is important because the understanding of the term high-potential itself and the selection criteria that may differ from one company to another (Rebet'ák & Farkašová, 2015). This suggestion also involves the definition of all the different phases and steps that employees will pass through, including responsibilities and timelines for each one. The selection tools should be chosen according the needs of the organizations, based on clear criteria and competencies that truly assess the potential of employees in future job roles and positions, as opposed to assessing their performance in their current roles. The process should undeniably include a follow up cycle, whether the employees are selected as high-potential or not. This step is very important, especially for the employees labeled as non-high potential because it allows room for discussion, explanation and managing expectations properly which will be discussed in the following sections.

b. Raising Awareness among Employees and Managers Alike

It is important for HRD professionals to consider all stakeholders concerned when implementing a talent identification practice. This is because this talent management process does not only impact the concerned employees, but also the managers who are heavily involved in the selection process through the performance appraisals and potential assessments. It is suggested for the HR team responsible of this practice to hold awareness meetings for the different audiences: top-management, rating managers, employees

concerned in which the process, criteria, selection tools and the competencies that will be assessed are explained thoroughly to ensure fairness, transparency and high perceived procedural justice. In addition, it allows all stakeholders to understand the advantages of such a practice and its impact on the employees and the organization.

Within these awareness sessions, and in any follow up meeting that follows, it is also very important for HRD professionals to manage expectations of the stakeholders properly. Ensuring a transparent and fair process allows for that, especially with the follow up sessions that come after the results are announced. When it comes to dealing with employees' careers within the organization, overpromising should be avoided, especially when it comes to matters that are not directly within the HRD professionals' span of control such as the availability of opportunities to grow into.

c. Ensuring Opportunities for Career Growth and Development

Throughout the study findings and discussion, I have confirmed that the high-potential identification process may have a negative impact on high-potential employees, if not managed properly. This is why, to avoid any negative repercussion even on the top-performers, HRD professionals should have a career growth and development plan that addresses the professional needs of the selected employees, linking the outcomes of the practice to a clear succession and remuneration plan. High-Potential development programs are usually designed to prepare a talent pool for critical roles and for succession. In the case where there is no growth opportunity directly linked to the program, HRD professionals should consider linking it to another form of career growth, whether it's a horizontal and diagonal move for the concerned employee, a project-based assignment, or even a long-term investment plan within the organization. This is crucial for two main

reasons: first of all, as the study findings have proven, high-potential employees may also exhibit negative behavioral reactions such as lower engagement levels, less seeking support from the organization and feelings of frustration due to the lack of proper follow up and unavailability of growth opportunities on the long term. In addition, it is important because the focus and engagement with on-the-job training and varying work assignment and projects, rather than a sole focus on current job performance, give an accurate indicator of talent (Dries et al., 2012)

d. Developing Learning Opportunities and Career Growth Alternatives for Non-High Potential Employees

Managing the affective and behavioral reactions of employees identified as non-high potential is crucial for the organization to ensure talent retention, increased productivity, and thus, enhanced overall performance. This is why it is crucial to have a developmental plan for any employee involved in this selection process, whether they pass the assessment center or not. For the employees who are identified as non-high potential, HRD professionals are advised to set the follow up meeting shortly after the results announcement to ensure that the employees are well informed and heard. In addition, designing a holistic learning and development plan that fits their related areas of improvement can be very helpful in managing their reactions, as well as maintaining their engagement and motivation levels. It is advised that the plan includes different forms of development such as coaching and mentoring, job shadowing, on-the-job assignments, among others. In certain cases, it is also suggested to consider cross-functional exposure or career opportunities in other departments or fields for the concerned employee, depending on their interests and skillsets, ensuring they can perform within the organization at their full potential. By ensuring such a holistic approach, we move

towards more inclusive practices that allow the development of talent across different minorities and clusters of employees who are usually left out (Harrisr & Foster, 2010; Makarem et al., 2019; Metcalfe et al., 2019; Sheehan & Anderson, 2015).

Through the implementation of this series of recommendations, we can aim for the distributive and procedural justice of the practice to be well established. In addition, we are better able to predict and manage the emotions of the concerned employees, minimizing the feelings of anger, anxiety, frustration, disappointment and discomfort and thus, better managing the behavioral reactions of our talent to avoid negative repercussions on themselves and the organization.

### **C. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

The study includes certain limitations. The sample of employees interviewed is relatively small and from two organization in specific industries only. It can provide good insights and basis but may not be generalizable in multiple contexts. My findings however, as an advantage to the subjective interpretation of the results, also support to the value of using a qualitative approach to better understand the emotions and behavioral reactions of employees who are at the center of these widely-used TM practices and raises awareness about this critical issue.

In addition, I only studied the phenomenon of interest from the employees' point of view where it would be interesting to dive into the views of line managers and HRD professionals to develop a holistic understanding of the practice's implications. Moreover, the economic, political, and social crises of Lebanon were not mentioned throughout the study but may also have an impact on the findings, especially for the employees who were based in Lebanon at the time of the selection process and the study.



Further research by other scholars can include topics like diversity and inclusion matters in talent management and high-potential training programs with relation to gender and other protected characteristics. Gender would be interesting angle to study and understand the dynamics between line managers and recommended employees. For instance, if the gender of the line manager has an impact on the employees' perceptions of the selection process, or if the gender of the employees has an impact on their perceptions of the results. Another line of work can be related to understanding the effectiveness and impact of the selection tools used in TM practices. It would also be interesting to dive into TM practices within the ongoing crisis in Lebanon and other developing MENA and GCC countries.

#### **D. Reflexivity and Positionality**

My name is Sherine El Sayed and I have close to 4 years of experience in the Learning and Development field across the region. Throughout this study, I have studied the perceptions, emotions and behavioral reactions of employees towards talent identification and the high-potential selection process. As an L&D professional, I stand by fair, transparent and equitable TM practices for all employees that unlocks their potential.

I have studied the phenomenon of high potential selection mainly from a Social Justice perspective with the assumption that all employees are talent. Looking at it from a business perspective, organizations have an overall strategy and business goals directed towards achieving their bottom-line. With regards to TM practices across organizations in the MENA region, and in my opinion, an organization should engage in an elitist TM practice, or high-potential development program, only when it is preparing specific talent

for critical roles or succession planning. However, this practice should surely, from my point of view, be complimented by a more egalitarian approach that grants learning and development opportunities to all talent, and by that, I mean all employees, as per their developmental and professional career needs. Having more inclusive TM practices will allow the development and growth of women and other gender minorities across organizations in addition to the fulfilment of the overall business strategy and objectives. As stated in the future research directions, we still have a way to go in terms of research about gender and its impact on TM practices and their outcomes.

# APPENDIX I:

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please state the below demographics:

- Gender: Male/Female/Other/Prefer not to say
- Position: Managerial/Non-Managerial/Generalist/Specialist/Administrative
- Range for Tenure: 0-2 years/3-5 years/ 5-7 years/8-10 years/More than 10 years

**Probe:** Did you previously hold another position at your current organization?

2. How would you describe the high-potentials selection and identification process at your current organization?

3. What are the different steps you have gone through in this process?

- Probe:** - What are the different assessments you went through?  
- How was your experience in each one?

4. How was your experience throughout? How did you perceive the overall process?

**Probe:** To what extent was the process fair and transparent?

5. How were you informed of the results?

- Probe:** - What was the communication channel through which you have been informed?  
- What are your thoughts and feelings on the results?

6. How did you feel after being informed of the high-potential selection process results?

**Probe:** Please describe your emotional state at the time.

7. What thoughts came to your mind after being informed of the high-potential selection process results?

8. How did your behavior at work changed after being informed of the high-potential selection process results?

- Probe:** - How would you describe your engagement level and commitment to the organization?  
- Tell me about a challenging/difficult situation you were faced after receiving the results.

**9.** What kind of support does the organization currently provide to support your career development?

**Probe:** - To what extent are you happy/satisfied with it?

- What additional initiatives do you wish that your organization implements to further support your career development?

**10.** Would you consider taking or did you take action regarding your development at the organization or your career in general?

**Probe:** - If yes, what kind of action?

- To what extent was your manager/organization supportive?

**11.** How would you describe your overall job satisfaction in your current organization?

**12.** How do you currently approach or deal with your mental health and wellbeing in general?

## APPENDIX II:

### EMAIL TO ADMINISTRATION

#### **AUB Social & Behavioral Sciences INVITATION**

##### **Invitation to Participate in a Research Study**

**This notice is for an AUB-IRB Approved Research Study**

**for Dr. Yasmeen Makarem at AUB.**

**ym13@aub.edu.lb**

**\*It is not an Official Message from AUB\***

We are kindly seeking your support to invite your employees to participate in a research study that aims to understand and enhance human resources and talent management practices in the MENA region.

As part of the MHRM program at the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business – American University of Beirut, we are conducting a study titled “Understanding the affective and behavioral reactions of employees towards talent identification: A Middle-Eastern viewpoint.”. The study focuses on Human Resources Management practices within organizations in the region. The study aims to understand the emotional and behavior reactions of employees within the workplace in a Middle Eastern context. It will focus on a specific talent management practice which is the identification of high potential employees within organizations. For this, we are conducting a series of employee-centric interviews within different organizations to understand their point of view and discuss the matter of talent selection.

Your employees will be asked to participate in an interview to give their opinion and experience about the high-potential selection practice.

You are contacted because we are targeting regional organizations who implement this practice for their employees.

The estimated time to complete this interview is approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The interview will be held virtually using the platform Cisco WebEx.

Please read the consent form which includes all information related to participation, withdrawal, data keeping and safety and privacy and consider whether you want your employees to be involved in the study.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the research team: Sherine El Sayed, MHRM student at AUB and co-investigator in the study

- Email: [sme59@mail.aub.edu](mailto:sme59@mail.aub.edu)
- Mobile Phone: +961 3 890 271 OR +971 50 341 6068

For information regarding study rights or concerns, please contact the below AUB office:

Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB)

American University of Beirut

Riad El Solh, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon

- Phone: 00961 -1-350000 or 1 374374, ext: 5445
- Fax: +961 1 738025
- Email: [irb@aub.edu.lb](mailto:irb@aub.edu.lb)

APPENDIX III:  
EMAIL TO POTENTIAL CANDIDATES  
**AUB Social & Behavioral Sciences  
INVITATION**

**Invitation to Participate in a Research Study**

**This notice is for an AUB-IRB Approved Research Study  
for Dr. Yasmeeen Makarem at AUB.**

**ym13@aub.edu.lb**

\*It is not an Official Message from AUB\*

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to understand and enhance human resources and talent management practices in the MENA region.

As part of the MHRM program at the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business – American University of Beirut, we are conducting a study titled “Understanding the affective and behavioral reactions of employees towards talent identification: A Middle-Eastern viewpoint.”. The study focuses on Human Resources Management practices within organizations in the region.

The study aims to understand the emotional and behavior reactions of employees within the workplace in a Middle Eastern context. It will focus on a specific talent management practice which is the identification of high potential employees within organizations. For this, we are conducting a series of employee-centric interviews within different organizations to understand your point of view and discuss the matter of talent selection.

You will be asked to participate in an interview to give their opinion and experience about the high-potential selection practice.

You are contacted because we are targeting employees who have went through a high-potential selection process within a regional organization.

The estimated time to complete this interview is approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The interview will be held virtually using the platform Cisco WebEx.

Please read the consent form which includes all information related to participation, withdrawal, data keeping and safety and privacy.

If you wish to participate in the study, please send an email to Sherine El Sayed, the co-investigator and main researcher in this study on: sme59@mail.aub.edu by Monday, March 28, 2022, the latest.

After that, you will be contacted by the interviewer to set a suitable date and time for the interview.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the research team: Sherine El Sayed, MHRM student at AUB and co-investigator in the study

- Email: sme59@mail.aub.edu
- Mobile Phone: +961 3 890 271 OR +971 50 341 6068

For information regarding study rights or concerns, please contact the below AUB office:

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- Phone: 00961 -1-350000 or 1 374374, ext: 5445
- Fax: +961 1 738025
- Email: irb@aub.edu.lb

Thanking you in advance for your collaboration!



## APPENDIX IV:

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#### **Informed Consent Form for Interview**

Understanding the affective and behavioral reactions of employees towards talent identification: A Middle-Eastern viewpoint.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Yasmeen Makarem, Assistant Professor  
Suliman S. Olayan School of Business  
American University of Beirut

As part of the MHRM program at the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business – American University of Beirut, we are conducting a study that focuses on Human Resources Management practices within organizations in the region. The study aims to understand the emotional and behavior reactions of employees within the workplace in a Middle Eastern context. It will focus on a specific talent management practice which is the identification of high potential employees within organizations. For this, we are conducting a series of employee-centric interviews to understand their point of view and discuss the matter of talent selection.

Please read the following sections carefully to ensure you are providing us with your informed consent. You will be provided a copy of the statement to keep as well.

#### **Participation in the Study**

Participation is on a purely voluntary basis.

We will be interviewing between 7 to 10 employees from different organizations. The interviews will be held virtually through a safe and secure platform, WebEx, where access to virtual rooms is restricted to invited participants.

I will interview you for about 30-45 minutes with questions related to your current job. Participation in the study will involve the recollection of work-related events that may trigger certain emotions and feelings, however, will not have an impact on their current or future position within the organization or their overall employability.

Participation in the study will not involve any direct benefit or monetary reward.

Yourself and other participants are/were recruited by reaching out to regional organizations and seeking the support of HR/administrative staff who shared an email invitation to which you reply in case you wish to participate in the study.

Benefits of the study include potentially enhanced talent management practices within the HR department. This will shed light on the decisions made with regards to the development of employees within the organization(s), however they are labeled or identified. The study aims for more inclusive and employee-centric HRD practices in the region.

#### **Withdrawal from the Study**

If you do not wish to answer any particular question in the interview, you may skip the question by saying “skip” during the interview.

If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to answer any questions, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. We can take a break, stop, and continue at a later date, or stop altogether. You will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation at any time.

In case you are found not fitting the inclusion criteria, meaning you did not go through the high-potential selection process, you will be withdrawn from the study. Please note that this does not involve any risk or penalty.

Refusal to answer or withdrawal from the study will involve no loss of benefits, no penalty, nor will it affect your relationship with AUB/AUBMC.

### **Data Keeping**

All data collected are treated as confidential information. All data shared with my two advisors are aggregated data and have no identifiers that could be linked to your personal responses. Completed interview will be kept on my password-protected computer. Data will be monitored and may be audited by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at AUB, while assuring confidentiality.

Three years after the end of the research study, the taped interviews will be destroyed. I will keep aggregated research data on my computer files for future use in other talent management-related research studies.

### **Interview Recording**

I would like to tape record this interview so as to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these tapes in a locked file on my password-protected computer. They will only be used by me. The interview tapes will not be shared with my advisors. Only the aggregated data from the interviews (which will have no identifiers) will be shared.

You may still participate in the interview if you do not want to be taped. In that case, detailed hand-written notes will be taken.

### **Contact Details**

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [sme59@mail.aub.edu](mailto:sme59@mail.aub.edu) , Suliman S. Olayan School of Business, American University of Beirut, telephone: +961 3 890 271.

You may also reach out to the Principal Investigator heading the study, Dr. Yasmeeen Makarem, [ym13@aub.edu.lb](mailto:ym13@aub.edu.lb), Suliman S. Olayan School of Business, American University of Beirut.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or concerns regarding the approval related to the study (Recruitment, Data Collection), you can contact the following office at American University of Beirut:

Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB)

American University of Beirut

Riad El Solh, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon

Phone: 00961 -1-350000 or 1 374374, ext: 5445

Fax: +961 1 738025

Email: [irb@aub.edu.lb](mailto:irb@aub.edu.lb)

**Do you voluntarily consent to take part of the study?**

(Oral consent is needed)

**Consent to Record Interview**

(Question should be posed at the start of the recording)

Do you also voluntarily consent to this interview being recorded?

**Consent to Quote from Interview**

I may wish to quote from this interview either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. A made-up name will be used in order to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

Do you agree to allow me to quote from this interview?

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