

**Failure experiences of Talent Management in South Korea: the empirical evidences
from comparing Resource-Based View and Institutional theory**

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The 79th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management. August 9-13, 2019, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

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Abstract

It is frequently argued that Talent Management (TM) has been derived from Western, mainly the U.S. and there are gaps between westernised TM format and contexts of non-western countries when they adopt TM. The gaps were analysed through comparing Resource-Based View and Institutional theory. This paper conducted 55 semi-structured interviews as qualitative approach from South Korean and non-South Korean employees who were working for local and foreign companies in South Korea to explore how TM was experienced by firms and individuals in South Korea as one of non-Western countries. RBV based Western format TM assumptions failed to apply to talent and non-talent' experiences and seek economic efficiency consideration in South Korea. The reasons of failure experiences were explained by institutional theory and South Korea's collective organisational culture and historical HRM background where the country could successfully shift from the poor country to developed country (so-called, the Miracle on the Han River) through labour-intensive government-led industries. TM was introduced during 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, throughout this bumpy contextual condition, TM should have been tasted a bitter and sweet experiences. This paper results revealed how the TM concepts and practices have been influenced by conflicted to their traditional HRM philosophies.

Key words: Talent Management, South Korea, Institutional theory, Resource-Based View, Asian Financial Crisis

1. Introduction

In academic field, classic business and management related theories were from western philosophies (K. E. Meyer, 2006) and the data and assumptions were mainly formulated from developed companies in developed countries to underpin the theories (Hernandez & Guillén, 2018) although there is no doubt that Asia is currently the most influential attractive continent in the global economy (P. Budhwar & Debrah, 2009; Cooke & Kim, 2018). OECD predicts stronger growth in Asian economies from the emergence of the digitalisation which is a major factor driving economic growth, emerging Asia will grow at around 6.5 percent over 2018 and 2019, whereas OECD expects that the US growth is 2.5 percent in 2018 and dropping to 2.1 percent in 2019 (OECD, 2017, 2018).

Thus, the questions were raised by scholars whether the classic paradigm and theories with classic variables in the last decade which developed in mature and developed economies (M. Wright, Filatotchev, Hoskisson, & Peng, 2005) can fit to Emerging market multinational enterprises (EMNEs) which the home country institutional environments are related to lack of intangible assets, political risk, peculiar ownership and organisational structures (García-Canal & Guillén, 2008; Guillén & García-Canal, 2009), but these EMNEs have powerfully grown much faster than other Western counterparts in the past. Buckley et al. (2010) empirically compared EMNEs and Developing countries MNEs (DMNEs) to understand how much classic paradigms need to modify the classic theories' assumptions. Similarly, Ramamurti and Hillemann (2018) bring four concepts to explain why Chinese firms are progressed internationally in distinctive ways; CMNEs' infant stage, global context for internationalisation, government-created advantages and leapfrogging advantage as a late-mover. Hernandez and Guillén (2018) also proposed the research whether a new paradigm is required in business and management field, such as 'how firms develop dynamic capabilities that enable adaptation to a variety of markets and opportunities' (p.30) to observe development of human resources in emerging markets through comparing data from pre-internationalisation period with the switched views of institutional theory from understanding of the institutional consequences (North, 1990; Scott, 2001) to the processes of institutionalisation (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Powell, White, Koput, & Owen-Smith, 2005).

In particular, K. E. Meyer (2006) argued that testing the application of Anglo-American models and theories in Asia region cannot fully explain locally interesting phenomenon and issues, thus developing new theories can be suitable. Given highlighting the notion of context, Meyer (2006) provided three types of knowledges; *context-free* which indicates universally applicable (Cheng, 1994), *context-bounded* which it is applicable in one context but not in another context, and *context-specific* knowledge which it is not known whether this knowledge is transferable although it is applied in a certain context. In regard to the role of HRM function in Asia, P. Budhwar and Debrah (2009); (P. S. Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2016) also claimed the limitations of the traditional management models applicability in Asian countries, and they expected the emergency of a hybrid HRM practices which stands in the middle of traditional Asian characteristics and Western models.

Therefore, in this paper, the fundamental assumptions of Talent Management (hereafter, TM) is examined in South Korean (hereafter, Korea) context as one of emerging countries in Asia to understand the applicability of Western management and theories to the non-Western context. The article is structured as follows: the next section discusses the theoretical underpinnings of TM and established country-specific TM studies. A series of research questions is introduced through a discussion of RBV based TM assumptions from the Western based TM practices and models and its limited application in traditional South Korean context. Qualitative approach to collect and analyse data is explored which followed by a discussion and conclusion. A series of implications for practitioners and scholars, study limitations, and possible direction for further researches are presented.

2. Literature Review

TM concept has evolved by a North American paradigm and research tradition (Vaiman & Collings, 2015), since a group of McKinsey consultants generated the terminology ‘war for talent’ in 1998 (D.G. Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Gallardo-Gallardo, Dries, & González-Cruz, 2013), TM has come into the spotlight by practitioners and academic scholars (Chuai, Preece, & Iles, 2008) with the fundamental belief that talented employees are essential to achieve organisational excellence (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). However, the absence of a rigorous, sound, grounded, underpin theory was

being criticised and irritating TM academics because it considered hindering the development of TM positioning in the academic field (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2015; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Reilly, 2008). Hence, TM researchers have strived to entail an interdisciplinary approach and the results of TM meta-analysis studies demonstrated employed a wide range of theoretical frameworks such as human capital (Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; J. G. Harris, Craig, & Light, 2011; Paul. R. Sparrow, 2009), social capital (Lehmann, 2009), psychological contract (Höglund, 2012), social exchange and dependency theory (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale, & Sumelius, 2013; Wang-Cowham, 2011), institutional theory (Tatoglu, Glaister, & Demirbag, 2016), brand equity and signalling theory (Wallace, Lings, & Cameron, 2012), in particular Resource-Based View (RBV) (Bhatnagar, 2007; Garavan, 2012) was most framed theory to investigate the relationship between TM and competitive advantage (McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi, & Schuler, 2017).

Despite several empirical TM studies (Bhatnagar, 2007; Glaister, Karacay, Demirbag, & Tatoglu, 2017) showed that TM and talented people are competitive advantages and strategically significant to firm's performance to justify the borrowing the RBV and TM legitimacy (Garavan, 2012; Paul R Sparrow & Makram, 2015; P. M. Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001), the assumptions of RBV are insufficient to explain why and how TM model in non-US countries often fails to implement effectively, as institutionalists mattered (Field, 1981; Zucker, 1987). For example, Sidani and Al Ariss (2014)'s empirical research found that TM process in the Arab Gulf region was symbolic comparing it in Western context which was not congruent with established TM literature. The beliefs of RBV are rooted in a view of organisations as stable (Bowman & Hird, 2014), however TM can be a radical change rather than stable because it can be incompatible with their traditional employment systems in non-western context (Kang & Yanadori, 2011).

Institutional Changes to Market-driven HRM in Korea

All of TM strategies were unfamiliar to most Korean firms (C Rowley & Bae, 2014), local firms were not ready to digest TM which was premature to adopt it. TM was introduced by the external factor, 1997 Asian Financial Crisis in Korea. By June 1997, foreign debt by Korean banks had reached 24% of the gross national product and the average debt-equity ratio of the 30 largest conglomerates (*'Chaebol'*

in Korean) was almost 400%, comparing the U.S. firms was 70% (Heo, Jeon, Kim, & Kim, 2008, p. 17). In accordance with this high rates of short-term loans and international debt, the government had to take the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to bail it out from default (Heo et al., 2008).

Since the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the government continued to play a strong role (Tung et al., 2013) in politics and economics to reform corporate and labour (Heo et al., 2008), and to shift from the *government-led development to market-oriented paradigm*. Korean HRM faced dramatic changes (Froese et al., 2008) along with the requested IMF bailout packages including dismissals, redundancies, wage freezes and performance-based HR system (Bae & Rowley, 2001). The private companies was not able to lay off workers until the IMF strongly adjured the administration to legalise layoffs to make the labour market more flexible (i.e. short-term contract, contingent workers) and liberalise to meet the value of neoliberalism and globalisation but it led to high rate of unemployment, irregular workers, labour-management disputes and labour strikes (Heo et al., 2008, Kim and Bae, 2017) because it was viewed a fundamental change by employees (Kang & Yanadori, 2011).

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm is about how some firms are able to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, and as a result they are able to keep earning superior profits compared to rival firms (Barney, 1991; Teece et al., 1997; Sparrow et al., 2014) through owning and deploying valuable and unique resources (Scott-Jackson, 2009). The characteristics of firm's idiosyncratic assets are rare, non-substitutable and valuable (Scott-Jackson, 2009; Hinterhuber, 2013) are similar with metaphors in TM emphasise talent 'rarity' and 'conflicts' over sourcing it, in terms of War for talent (Iles, 2013) additionally, the activities of acquiring and maintaining resources in the RBV are consistent with functional TM activities. In a similar token, Dries (2013) also defined talent as the human capital in an organisation that is both valuable and unique (p.276) through the RBV theory from a human capital view on talented individuals, therefore acquiring, developing and maintaining distinctive resources including talented individuals are competitive advantages in the competitive market because competitors are difficult to imitate (Garavan, 2012).

In RBV at individual level, managerial decisions about selecting and accumulating resources to lead to supernormal profits and firm variation (Barney, 1991) are based on economically rational choices within the constraints of limited information, cognitive biases and causal ambiguity (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Ginsberg, 1994; Lippman & Rumelt, 1982; Oliver, 1997; Peteraf, 1993; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990). However the rational choices from RBV cannot embrace the social context of resource selection in shaping organisations' actions but institutional theory included the impacts of institutional contexts and factors (e.g., rules, norms, beliefs) related resource decisions to the potential for firms profits (Oliver, 1997). Rather, institutional theories are interested in how organisational structures and processes become institutionalised over time thus the institutionalised activities are not explained by rational choice frameworks (J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1987).

Assumption 1. Performance

TM research has focused on *outcomes* (Dutttagupta, 2005) including TM results (Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013) and strategic TM (Stahl et al., 2012; Tansley et al., 2007), the achievement of strategic company goals (Silzer & Dowell, 2010) and the relationship between TM and performance (David G. Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2018) are emphasised. These studies tend to see TM with resource-based view (RBV) (Bhatnagar, 2007; Bowman & Hird, 2014; Garavan, 2012; Höglund, 2012). Many TM empirical studies demonstrated that TM is positively related to performance in several countries' data. For instance, Chadee and Raman (2012) investigated sixty-eight offshore TM service providers in India and they confirmed the positive association between TM and firm performance, and also TM positively increased organisational level innovation because of talented employees' innovative knowledge spreading.

Bethke-Langenegger, Mahler, and Staffelbach (2011) investigated the effects of diverse TM strategies on organisational performance from 138 Swiss companies. They categorised performance into three; financial (e.g., firm profit, market values), organisational (e.g., sustainable corporate culture, employer branding, customer satisfaction), and individual outcomes (e.g., performance motivation, job satisfaction, commitment and trust). As a result, they found that TM is a young concept in Swiss, and talent development strategy was positively linked to all three types of outcomes, and TM strategy of

succession planning had a positive impact on company profit and individual outcomes. Thunnissen (2016) carried out longitudinal interviews regarding intended TM purposes and actual TM practices in five Dutch publicly funded universities. Their purposes of TM practices were succession plan and hiring talent, most of the universities had a well-documented and formalised TM policies with activities; selection, recruitment, development, performance and promotion. Thunnissen (2016) come back to the interviewees 4 years later and asked whether the universities achieved their intended TM objectives, as a result, the participants answered positively such as the replacement of retiring professors and the open job vacancies were successfully met.

This positive TM outcome has been interpreted that TM investments increase firm performances by providing the RBV tenets in literature (Barney and Wright, 1998). As TM legitimacy (Tansley et al., 2013), talented people are a source of long-lived competitive advantages (Scullion et al., 2010) to meet revenue, sales goals and forced innovations whereas, poor-developed TM or the lack of it has a negative impact on firm's performance (Lattner 2007). In this sense, some TM scholars defined the aim of TM as achieving firm's performance such as Latukha and Selivanovskikh (2016) opine that TM is to 'promote the goals of the company' and McDonnell et al. (2017) mention 'sustainable organisational performance' as an ultimate TM goal.

However, RBV is rooted in a view of organisations as stable (Bowman & Hird, 2014) which means TM can be effective when the newly adopted legitimised practices are not compatible with internal routines (J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977) otherwise it will be a symbolic gesture (Westphal & Zajac, 2001). In other words, RBV based TM cannot explain whether TM brings firm's performance when the organisation faces unstable, relatively distance and ambiguous new paradigms to be replaced. By similar token, David G. Collings et al. (2018) discussed whether the relationship between TM and firm's performance is universal or contingent, in regard to this debate, David G. Collings et al. (2018) support the latter perspective that firm's strategy influences the link between TM and firm's performance.

In South Korea, the institutional environment and organisations were unstable when Western standard TM has been introduced as a new model to the domestic markets after 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. South Korea industries experienced significant transformation and conflict which were influenced in

varying ways as Thornton, Jones, and Kury (2005) observed, there were resistance which stemmed from the sequencing of historical events (Sewell, 1996) to maintain the existing belief (namely, stability) in South Korea. Firms in South Korea adopted one governance structure over another (Powell, 1990). Thus, this study offers the following research question:

Research question 1. Can TM practices bring firm, employee and talent performance as RBV assumed in South Korea as one of Asian, non-Western countries?

Assumption 2-1. Fairness and equal treatment

When TM arrived at Korea, *market-driven HRM* was not a Korea's traditional model, but '*people-focused approach*'. As the historical economic background, Korean firms have learned to achieve productivity through people (Korten, 1984).

Korea was poorer than many sub-Saharan African countries with poor natural resources and few landed in 1950s and 1960s (Ranis, 1995), after 35-year period of Japanese colonial rule (which Korean were forced to work for Japanese factories, fight as soldiers for Japan to the front during the Wartime) (Dodge, 2016; King, 1975) and the Korean War (1950-53) between North and South (T. Kim, Kwon, Lee, & Yi, 2011). However, only labour was in surplus during 1950s and 1960s as Appendix 1 indicates, therefore the government invested human capital as a long-term development plan to overcome their extreme poverty (Waterson, 1965) which led increased primary education enrolment rates and reduced illiterate. Korean are the world's hardest workers (H.-C. Lee, 1998), the cheap and unskilled but efficient and literate labour force was an extremely important source to drive labour-intensive and export-oriented development (Ranis, 1995; Rodrik, 1995; Tung, Paik, & Bae, 2013) as Samsung started its career in labour-intensive industries (e.g., Samsung started the *Cheil Sugar Company* in 1953) (Amsden & Hikino, 1994). South Korean industry could achieve a rapid growth through the broader collective capital as organisation's distinctive assets and one of the ways to practical labour economics (Lin, 2006), rather than relying on identified small number of star individuals, classification of employees or their possessed skills to make a big impact on organisations. Collective ideas and norms are habitualised in the society and these shaped TM in South Korea.

Different skill levels were not asked by companies in the industrial structure, accordingly, the wage gap between the real wages of industrial skilled and unskilled workers in Korea was relatively modest during this time (Ranis, 1995). Compensation was also based on seniority to determine basic salary and annual increase ('*Ho-bong*' in Korean) under the lifetime employment (E. Lee & Kim, 2006). It means that Korean HRM was based on 'egalitarianism'² which is the opposite notion of workforce 'segmentation' (Chuai et al., 2008).

Ledford and Kochanski (2004) asserted that segmentation is a fundamental factor in TM. Typically the top 20% of employees are considered core talent (Beardwell, 2017). For top talent, assured high employment security, extensive training and development programmes were designed (Tung et al., 2013) as well as a housing subsidy, an education subsidy for family and guaranteed high salary (Kim and Han, 2014). In contrast, the irregular workers did not have a guarantee of working hours nor benefits (Heo et al., 2008). There was a clear segmentation between top talent and ordinary employees and this exclusive HRM system led to declining loyalty of employees to a single employer (Bae et al., 2011) and increasingly employees may work for a large number of employers over a working life (Kim and Scullion, 2011). L. Harris and Foster (2010) warned of this tension between TM and an embedded ethos of equality, diversity and fairness which are the cornerstones of healthy organisations (Bloom & Michel, 2002).

The term *isolating mechanisms* in RBV mean stopping rival firms from acquiring or replicating a desired bundle of resources (Rumelt, 1984). On the contrary, 'institutional' *isolating mechanisms* denote resource mobility barriers as a function of firms' unwillingness to acquire and duplicate a competitive advantage (Oliver, 1997). Valuable resources are rejected to be acquired and deployed by firms because they fail to fit with existing cultural belief system or political norms (ibid). In other words, non-talent in South Korea may reject to response the pressure to abandon the traditional institutionalised practices and shift to a new market-oriented TM practices (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

² Egalitarianism: the belief that all people are equal and should have the same rights and opportunities, and to actions that are based on this belief (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 2009)

This research offers the following research question based on the above discussion to know actors' experiences which entails tensions between inclusive and exclusive ways.

Research questions 2. How talent and non-talent interpret 'fairness' in South Korea which is a collective society?

Assumption 2-2. Being labelled as 'talent'

Institutionalised HRM structures or practices have to be weakened, transformed, and replaced with new beliefs for organisation's conformity to legitimacy (Sherer & Lee, 2002). RBV premises the individual's rational choices, accordingly individualisation, competing and differentiating with others are inevitable in TM system (Pfeffer, 2001). However, the cultural norms of collectivism in Korea focus more on 'We'-group harmony values (Hofstede, 1984; C. H. Kim & Scullion, 2011) and maximising firm's profits beyond the individual interest (Kim and Scullion, 2011, Kim and Gray, 2008). Person belongs, harmony rather than speaking one's mind is the key value, work is done through the strength of relationships (Fisher-Yoshida & Geller, 2008). In fact, collaborated team work can also bring a positive impact. Employees are more likely to spend time doing things for organisations (e.g. engaging in extra-role behaviour or working cooperatively), and less time doing things benefiting the individual (e.g. social loafing, self-promotion, or unwillingness to cooperate) when individuals believe that their efforts are an integral part of a collective (Leana & Van Buren, 1999; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007).

In contrast, RBV based TM predicts that talented employees will be get paid more and differentiated treatment with other employees within the organisation (McDonnell et al., 2017). Bae et al. (2011) asserted that Korean firms made a distinction between core and peripheral employees and paid more attention to high performers after Asian Financial Crisis (p. 717).

However, employees are committed to reward stability from institutional theory perspective (Chris Rowley & Benson, 2000) so reject the new TM ideas because employees fail to fit with traditional HRM beliefs and perceive it as socially unjustifiable (Oliver, 1997). Consequently, it is doubted whether the meaning of being talent can be equal where still a lack of internal consensus on TM's economic rationality and resists to decouple are existed. Therefore, examining the experiences of talent in Korea

context will be meaningful and it leads this following research question: That is, new actions have to be locally accepted once they are constructed but TM in local firms can be challenged in this local validation (Johnson, Dowd, & Ridgeway, 2006).

Research questions 3. What is the meaning of being labelled as ‘talent’ in South Korea which is a collective society?

3. Data and Method

It is suggested that the inclusion of multiple empirical data for the exploratory study is appropriate to increase the richness and robustness of the research and to support the plausibility of the result (C. H. Kim & Scullion, 2011, p. 512). This research conducted 55 semi-structured in-depth interviews from 30 firms between August and December 2015. Korean and non-Korean interviewees from CEO, executive, HR, manager and junior level staff were participated to triangulate and validate the findings. In the first interviewing, total 39 South Korean interviewees from 21 private firms in 5 industries; Healthcare, Beverage, Chemical, Manufacturing, and Service. 17 participants were from foreign and 22 participants were from local firms. The second interview was targeted to foreigners who were working at private companies in South Korea, total 15 foreign employees were interviewed from 13 firms (in detail, 8 local and 5 foreign firms) which focused on questions pertaining to the experienced TM in Korea from their previous working experiences in out of Korea. All were tape-recorded and transcribed by the researcher to build familiarity (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) as transcribing involves transforming from an oral language to a written language with own set of rules (Kvale, 2008). Figure1 and 2 show the participants’ characteristics based on data collection equivalence (Hult et al., 2008). The interviews were conducted in the respondent’s preferred language either Korean or English which enable to gain yielded valuable data (Mäkelä, Björkman, & Ehrnrooth, 2010). Considering multi-level respondents’ participations, three types of interview questions were guided such as questions for HR practitioners, executives (including CEO level), and general employees. The interviews included questions such as “How would you describe about Talent Management in your organisation?” and “What factors do

influence on effective TM system?” meetings, telephones, emails and SNSs were followed up to verify the analysis and update the information.

The transcripts of interviewing voice recordings, handwritten notes for those who did not agree to record, exchanged emails and received answer sheets from interview questions were analysed using Thematic analysis though manually, using Nvivo version 11, and Cognitive mapping. The primary data were coded sentence by sentence to discover themes from the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Thematic analysis which is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data and it assists to reflect reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the sentence by sentence coding (C. H. Kim & Scullion, 2011) and conceptually ordered displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 127) were manually undertaken. Free-Mind software was finally utilised to confirm validity and reliability of conducted cognitive mapping analysis, and reduce researcher bias (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014) as there is an increasing academic inquiry to adopt the validity and reliability process of qualitative.

Figure 1. Interviewee profile

Sectors		Nationalities	
Healthcare	13	Korean	39
Beverage	6	Non-Korean	16
Chemical	6		
Manufacturing	19		
Service	11		
Types of company		Gender	
Foreign	23	Male	47
Local	32	Female	8

Figure 2. Interviewee characteristics

<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Foreign/Local firm</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Company type</u>	<u>Korean/Non-Korean</u>
H1-F	F	Executive	Healthcare	
H2-F	F	Executive	Healthcare	
H3-F	F	HR manager	Healthcare	
H4-F	F	Assistant Manager	Healthcare	
H5-F	F	President	Healthcare	
H6-F	F	Middle Manager	Healthcare	
H7-F	F	Director	Healthcare	
H8-F	F	HR Manager	Healthcare	
H9-F	F	Middle Manager	Healthcare	
H10	L	Director of HR	Healthcare	
H11	L	Assistant HR Manager	Healthcare	
H12-F-NK	F	Head of HR	Healthcare	Hong Kong
H13-F-NK	F	Head of HR	Healthcare	Japan
M1	L	Middle Manager	Manufacturing	
M2	L	Manager	Manufacturing	
M3	L	Head of HR	Manufacturing	
M4	L	Manager	Manufacturing	
M5	L	Manager	Manufacturing	
M6	L	Head of HR	Manufacturing	
M7	L	Senior Manager	Manufacturing	
M8	L	Manager	Manufacturing	
M9	L	Vice President	Manufacturing	
M10	L	Middle Manager	Manufacturing	
M11	L	Middle Manager	Manufacturing	
M12-F	F	HR Middle Manager	Manufacturing	
M13-F	F	Senior Manager	Manufacturing	
M14-F-NK	F	Director	Manufacturing	German
M15-NK	L	Assistant Manager	Manufacturing	India

M16-NK	L	Senior Manager	Manufacturing	Japan
M17-NK	L	Manager	Manufacturing	Cote d'Ivoire
M18-NK	L	Assistant Manager	Manufacturing	Uzbekistan
M19-NK	L	Senior Manager	Manufacturing	USA
C1-F	F	Senior Manager	Chemical	
C2	L	Manager	Chemical	
C3	L	Middle Manager	Chemical	
C4	L	Middle Manager	Chemical	
C5	L	Assistant Manager	Chemical	
C6--NK	L	Manager	Chemical	India
S1	L	Executive	Service	
S2	L	Middle Manager	Service	
S3	L	Manager	Service	
S4	L	Assistant Manager	Service	
S5-F	F	Executive	Service	
S6-F--NK	F	Director	Service	USA
S7-NK	L	Senior Manager	Service	USA
S8-NK	L	Senior Manager	service	USA
S9-NK	L	Vice President	service	USA
S10-NK	L	Vice President	service	USA
S11-NK	L	Senior Manager	service	Canada
B1	L	Assistant Manager	Beverage	
B2-F	F	Head of HR	Beverage	
B3-F	F	Manager	Beverage	
B4-F	F	Head of Marketing	Beverage	
B5-F	F	Assistant Manager	Beverage	
B6-F-NK	F	Head of Finance	Beverage	India

4. Findings

4.1. TM and Perceptual Performance

TM was mainly adopted to retain talent and grow successors namely succession planning from both local and foreign companies. In a R&D sector of small and middle sized companies particularly TM is indispensable installation to keep talent in the competitive labour market as one local HR manager in software industry demonstrated that *“in a middle sized firm, losing ONE talent has a massive impact on business...so owner and executives always pay attention to talents”* (M6). Consistent with the RBV perspectives, interviewees optimistically viewed that the western standard exclusive TM is necessary to be adopted in firms in South Korea, both local and foreign firms acknowledged acquiring, developing and maintaining talented individuals are competitive advantages in the competitive market when TM necessity was asked,

“The outcomes of projects which talented individuals are leading would be different from only general employees are involved without leading by talent” (M4).

It indicates that TM was initiated with the understanding of RBV.

However, interviewees observed the ineffective TM outcomes with side effects when participants were asked how they experienced in regard to the relationship between performance and talented individuals. It is generally assumed that TM promotes the goals of the company talented individuals are considered as a key source of competitive advantage. This preconception was not proved in the Korean context. Put it differently, TM failed the given mission when it could not bring firm's performance. Large sized local firm concluded from the perspective of investment for talent development,

“There wasn't tangible profits although we spent average almost 98 million WON [\$ 91,000] 's additional benefits (including yearly salary) to executive-level's talent, and 45 million WON [\$ 42,000] 's to junior-level's talent” (M1).

Another case for talent acquisition also shared failure that a hired talent couldn't add values to cultivate a new market according to two heads of HR departments from local and foreign firms who directly involved TM programme from launching to dissolution shared failure experiences.

According to [B2-F], although they hired regularly 'A players' from a MBA course in Ivy-League USA universities for 5 years as a succession plan with great attention, as a conclusion, the brought performance by hired talent was not influential similar with non-talent. Indeed, most of hired top talent left the company soon. Interviewees continued that "*Definitely, the company doesn't do this type of recruiting...they **stopped** it [between] 2011 and 2013*" (B2-F). It means that the company could not give the pivotal roles to all hired talent so the talent who were not allocated to the core right positions were leaving the company, mismatching linked back to lower transaction costs and led to less economic value.

Not only the foreign MNC's subsidiary, further evidences were added by domestic firms which also experienced a failure of mismatching. One local healthcare company conducted M&A and hired massive skilful talented engineers from outside to expand their local market share "*initially, the company had 180 R&D engineers but now we have only 70 people*" (H10), as the reason of 'lay off' one-third hired employees, "*overinvestment in hiring R&D talent comparing sales scale, spent almost 7~8 billion Won (in exchange rate: almost \$7 million) on human capital but the market and profit didn't get enlarged as we expected*" (H10). That is, the company was just blindly copying what others were doing without strategical business plans and it implies that the organisations' capacities to match between supply and demand of talented individuals were limited so this imbalance resulted in restructuring and layoffs.

The causing of failure was "*mismatching*" (B2-F, H10). TM literature suggested 'not all roles require A players' (McDonnell et al., 2017). In case of [B2-F], too many 'A stars' were hired compare to their small size of business capacity "*in the war, we need more soldiers than a captain, we couldn't afford to grant significant roles and responsibilities to 'all' 20~30 talent in a 200-workforce branch which over 10% of entire employed workforce number. At the end, 80~90% of hired talent were leaving*" (B2-F).

Second, in terms of talent visibility and hoarding, the improper use of TM to achieve certain personal or organisational interests was experienced as **side-effects**. Concerning talent hoarding, managers in the functional departments can perceive the “effective” TM to be against their own interest, thus they hide their best talent rather than bring them to the attention of the key decision-makers, although the talent are underutilised. This intergroup conflict “*gap between departments, selfish and compete with other groups*” (M1) has been shown in a local large sized company which they actively started an exclusive TM including differentiating salary based on performance-based evaluation in 2005. One HR interviewee from a foreign firm shared the difficulty to handle with this intergroup conflict.

“a team leader [told a lie] to hold talent because a talented team member had to leave the team [in terms of rotation] if HR acknowledged this person is a talent, had a reverse effect. From the view of company, [the company] has to rotate a good employee to revive a dead business but from a view of ace, the team doesn’t release the ace so keep asking us to be rotated officially. But on the team side, the work is always urgent now and the team needs the ace” (H8-F).

Employees took advantage of TM to gain their interests rather than considering firms’ entire performance, some employees only want to be allocated core KPIs by a team leader which are easy to be categorised as high-performers and avoid to get peripheral KPIs to achieve set team target goals.

“Some people abuses TM, they focused only very highlighted and visible tasks [by the company which a boss pays attention] because they know these tasks are assessed not by a machine but by a boss so they try to take advantage of this” (B4-F).

Talent who haven’t loyalty and commitment behaved unethically, talent gone off to work elsewhere after getting expensive trainings. Companies failed to secure continuous commitment from talent, “*Talented employees are contacted by competitors as much as they show their performance in the company after receiving expensive development programmes, we did all the work and somebody else got the credit, so-called -One sows and another reaps-*” (H10). Also, according to [M6], “*spotlighted few talent were leaving their company together and then they were founding their own start-up firm in*

the same industry with ex-company” which is unethical behaviour to unite, co-found and against their former company.

Organisations in Korea failed to achieve the goal of TM which could not bring performance, rather intergroup conflicts and unethical talented people’s behaviours were experienced. Interviewees commented that these negative TM consequences resulted in companies’ unwilling to bring the concept and practices of TM in their workplaces,

“TM was a hot boom for some time but now the boom dies down because of promoted an atmosphere of disharmony, and the low cost efficiency, high overall costs but low quality performance” (M12-F).

“Because it reached at a saturation point [it is enough to recruit talented people], no more, it was a hot boom for some time so 000 [company name] hired a lot of talented people at that time...but the efficacy of bring TM wasn’t dramatic” (M11).

The firms did not want to take an uncertainty. In other words, it was not convinced whether the western philosophy’s talent management can bring better environments which the unsureness leads negative willingness.

4.2. Different interpretations of ‘fairness’

Talent were suffered from the conflicted meaning of ‘unfair’ and the norms of fairness (Festinger, 1954) between talented individuals and companies’ views, because of the different cultural perspectives between Western and Korea.

A talented foreigner from the USA supplemented about the rationale of ‘fairness’:

*“the **input** of each employees cannot be same, because having skill-set of each employees are obviously different, again, if the company pays same amount of salary despite the **output** of each one is different, then it is ‘unfair’ vice versa” (S8-NK:USA)*

Similarly, a medical specialist from a healthcare foreign firm complained *“After talent review, there were nothing...There were no extra benefits although I were called talent” (H6-F). [H6-F]* who is a

medical specialist was complaining about her payments, she considered that she is eligible for getting extra benefits because she is talent and her roles are relatively important for the company's business because this healthcare company's products cannot be distributed to clients without her clinical test and permission as she holds the authority and certificate by Korean Food and Drugs Administration.

Value neutrally, one HR who has ever worked for local and foreign firms shared her insight, "*about the 'fair', Korean has a peculiar cultural norm*" (B5-F) which Korean tend to perceive the meaning of 'fairness' as 'equity', and 'unfairness' as 'discrepancy' (Bloom & Michel, 2002).

[B5-F] agreed that there needs to be difference and not everything can be equal within the companies, and South Korean employees can hardly distinguish the notions of fairness and equal because the employees are embedded in collective society which the employees are trained to think gregariously and act together, rather than focusing on individual's differences which is regarded as less valuable factors. Consequently, 'fairness' was issued to internalise western exclusive TM in non-western country origin companies.

Two interviewees, who came from western countries highlighted that equal payment between talent and non-talent is actually 'unfair', because their input to handle the given work and outcome will be different with what non-talent can do, thus the value of wages should be different, that is 'fair'.

4.3. Being labelled as 'talent'

Relationships with others are quite important in collectivistic eastern cultures so individual who is labelled 'talent' felt isolated because majority of others removed talent from a social network in which they were embedded and majority were inter-dependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). One Korean-American who was hired as a S-level (the highest rank in this company) talent by the largest local company in Korea shared "*they had a stereotype about me, I felt something like...okay, I know you are on a roll...but you are not a real 000 [company name]-man, I wasn't able to intermix with them*" (S8-NK:USA), similarly, one Finance executive talent from local firm added "*here, if I turn up to common room, the others feel uncomfortable and disappeared*" (S1). This complicated aspects were asked to non-talent, general employees and they responded similarly, "*we didn't treated him [a talent] well,*

particularly, R&D engineers bullied him at the beginning when he joined” (C5) which HR had to protect talent to be maintained “the existing employees do make a fuss over a new talent-hiring...[we] protected them from other non-talent’s jealousy” (B2-F).

In the above section, talent couldn’t get on well with others because of their jealousy. However not only being isolated as the psychological side, but also talent’s capabilities and skills were extort from companies. Employees who are categorised into non-talented group tended to have a preconception that “In the performance-based bonus and promotion system, talent are favoured (H11). However, this assumption was not always right, talented employees could not receive even overtime pay in companies.

One young foreign talent from a small sized local firm commented:

“talent have more workload [than others because we are good at work], ridiculous deadlines to meet, and get blamed for not finding the time in their busy schedule to overlook other [non-talent]’s work, [without] kind of bonuses and reward for efforts...extra hours are not paid and the company doesn’t have a development programme” (M17-NK: Cote d’Ivoire).

This young talented individuals’ dissatisfaction can result in job stress and limited time spend with family play in the decision to leave an organisation (Deery, 2008; H.-D. Kim & Tung, 2013).

The influence of Confucian work ethic and the desire for economic success induced Korean employees to work very hard, however, claiming for overtime payment to the company is actually unusual habit among employees in the existing local companies’ organisational culture although it is a right in the government labour law,

“We have a computer system to claim overtime payment, employees can just input their overworking hours then automatically it is paid after their bosses clicked the button of ‘Confirm’ on the system, but employees don’t do it because they feel uncomfortable [to get an approval from their bosses]” (M1).

Talented foreign employees expected to be paid better however overtime allowance was not paid. Even, in foreign firms, claiming for overtime payment was not conducted among employees it was an invisible rule. Thus hired junior level talented foreigners felt stressed because the important tasks were given to

him urgently all the time but the companies' organisational cultures forced him not to claim any overtime payment.

Due to those observed talented employees' exhausting working life, Korean young generation does not want to be labelled as talent, a manager from a large-sized foreign firm explained that.

“Key talent! Of course, their salary is high and they can be on the fast-track scheme but their...high level group' life looks so tired. The young people of these days they do not try to be in a talented group they do not like the ruinous competition” (H9-F).

Talented workers' life was described as sacrifice of family life and work-life balance, and junior employees perceived that this kind of stressful life is not their favourite desirable life no matter how they can get a lot of money.

Regarding 'becoming talent', similarly one HR from local firm historically summarised that *“Long ago, delighted if the one was selected as a talent but now they are not happy although they are chosen as talent because around other employees are extremely jealous” (H10)*. Besides, another HR in a large local firm commented, *“If employees get a sense 'Aha! the lad is talent' in the department [through their gut feeling], then the talent was being an outcast” (M1)*. That is, talented individuals were isolated in the social group and the small and medium-sized local firms companies did not compensate to talent properly although they were assigned with lots of important work. Thus, being talent was not desired by employees particularly among the South Korean young generation because they observed talented employees' tired and demanded working life.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to shed light on how organisations and actors empirically experienced TM in Korean context. Institutional theory was compared to RBV, the first attempt in the TM field, to explain failure experiences of Korea which cannot be embraced by RBV assumptions. This empirical study relied on a unique sample of firms in Korea that had experienced after 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and been forced to adopt westernised TM (Kang & Yanadori, 2011) which is the first research to deal with

TM for Korea. Through the qualitative interviews, three key areas were examined: TM and outcomes, conflicts between talent and non-talent, and the meaning of being labelled talent in Korean context.

First, one of key findings of this research is interviewees' shared experiences that talented employees failed to bring tangible company profits, McKinsey drove to identify a small number of individuals who could make a big impact on organisations as a source of competitive advantage (Marchington, Wilkinson, Donnelly, & Kynighou, 2016), classification of employees is one of the ways to practical labour economics (Lin, 2006). RBV also focuses on only star individuals or their possessed skills which represent the organisation's distinctive assets rather than the broader collective capital (Sparrow and Makram, 2015).

However, this research found that there were not supernormal perceptual performance in Korea although hired talent were rare and valuable (Barney, 1991). This was because of low capability of firms in Korea to practice TM as it was a newly introduced and unfamiliar institutional paradigm (C Rowley & Bae, 2014). According to RBV, firm's decision and behaviour are rational, optimised and economically justified (Oliver, 1997) however firms in Korea made mismatching decisions on deploying resources within organisations which can be explained by a trial and error process of institutional theory as institutions are dynamic entities and are subject to change (Florensa, 2004).

Second, leaders of departments and talented individuals prioritised maximising their interests towards risk beyond firm's profits through projecting gain and loss (Kahneman & Tversky, 2013). In other words, team leaders as well as talent used TM in their own self-interest so selfishness and unethical behaviours were observed in South Korea. Mellahi and Collings (2010) well described that the functional field may attempt to circumvent their most talented staff being identified as the bottom of organisation structure may perceive to gain little from doing. Transferring best subordinates to other places may not be in the best interest of the functional field (O'Donnell, 2000; Roth & O'donnell, 1996). This behaviour can be strategic economic motives however it can also be unethical and a side-effect of TM from the institutional theory's normative rationality and justification of resource choices (Oliver, 1997) which cannot be included in contextual performance components.

Third, the findings show that there was a lack of internal consensus in regard to fairness between talent and non-talent as differentiation workforce is a radical change by Korean employees. Employees often compare their compensation with referent others (Nosanchuk & Erickson, 1985), thus for non-talent in Korea they are relatively underpaid than comparators which wage discrepancy is ‘unfair’, however same wage and benefits with non-talent are ‘unfair’ from the talent’ view (Zenger, 1992) who perceive their valuable firm-specific know-how are distinctive and should be rewarded in monetary and non-monetary ways (Dierickx & Cool, 1989). It can be said that isolating mechanisms in institutional theory (Oliver, 1997; Rumelt, 1984) was more applied to non-talent rather than talent because of old legitimised practices (e.g., seniority-based payment, egalitarian HRM) may be less interested due to the fear of losing their stabilities and familiarities (Kang & Yanadori, 2011).

Finally, being labelled as talent was not a pleasant and glorious title in Korean workplace culture, because employees noticed that it was culminated in *being the envy of majority of non-talent, being isolated and out-grouped* at the end in a collective society. Inadequately, *a heavy workload* was only given to skilled talent without financial rewarding (e.g., no overtime payment) in a small sized Korean firm which was resulted in talent’s low satisfaction.

RBV based exclusive TM assumes to generate higher return of performance on investment majority of firms’ monetary and non-monetary resources to a few of talented employees (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Dries, 2013) through workforce differentiation (Becker, Huselid, & Beatty, 2009; Huselid & Becker, 2011). Accordingly, a selected small group of high performers are assumed to get exclusively preferential treatment in the company (Son, Park, Bae, & Ok, 2018). However, the findings demonstrated that Western format TM assumptions can fail to apply in South Korea as one of collective non-western contexts as TM is highly contextual (Thunnissen & Buttiens, 2017) from the fact that HR practices have to respond to changes in *context* (Cappelli, 2009, p. 179).

This study makes several valuable contributions: first, it contributes to the TM literature by comparing and extending institutional theory and RBV in the processes of institutional change. Firms in Korea responded to institutional pressures for legitimacy but failed for efficiency (Lounsbury, 2001; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Thus the application integration of multiple theoretical lenses was appropriate which

leads the findings to a more rigorous and a better understanding of TM. Second, there is still a strong body of US affiliated scholars in TM (McDonnell et al., 2017), this research is an initial attempt to explore TM empirically for Korea so contributes to expand the TM knowledge how TM is applied in non-US contexts.

6. Limitation and areas for further research

Limitations of this paper should be acknowledged. First, findings cannot be generalised (Mäkelä et al., 2010), the applicability of the findings to other contexts may not be identical (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003), transferring to other settings can be judged via thoughtful hypotheses rather than conclusions (Cronbach, 1975; Patton, 2002). Second, the participants' firm sizes were not specifically restricted thus data from small, middle and large sized firms are intermixed.

It is the hope that this research inspires other scholars to build on specific TM evidence from non-western countries in order to augment our knowledge of an important and under-researched topic. Quantitative approach between talent management and performance would be meaningful to postulate whether it is effective within the specific industries or restricted firm sized samples. If the result is positive, the concept of RBV in Korea can be revisited.

Appendix 1. Population by level of Education in Korea, 1944-85

(% of population)

Year	Higher Education	Secondary Education	Primary Education	Illiterate
1944	0.3%	1.7%	11.3%	86.7%
1960	2.6	17.5	36.2	43.7
1966	4.5	24.7	40.0	3.8
1970	5.6	31.8	39.2	23.4
1974	5.7	38.0	36.0	20.3
1985	7.4	48.7	32.3	11.6

(Source: Ranis (1995, p. 519))

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