

Linking Perceived Talent Management Practices to Employees' Psychological Contract: A Mediation-Based Systematic Literature Review

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63163/jpehss.v4i1.1429>

Abstract

This paper configures the issue into perceived talent management practices; in the context of employees' psychological contract fulfilment: a systematic literature review with a mediation centered approach. This is a review for two realities that are coming together. Talent management has become a crucial part of an organization's competitiveness in evolving labour markets, first of all. Secondly, employees are judging employers by the implicit promises they make in regard to development, fairness, recognition and employability, and not just by the contract alone. Since the literature is scattered among the studies of talent management, psychological contract, cross-cultural management or employee retention, it seems that a systematic literature review is suitable as it will minimize ad hoc literature selection and make the steps of the theoretical integration more transparent, as this approach was used in other studies. The paper follows a systematic review design following management-review logic and the principles of PRISMA reporting, and management concepts prior to the formal screening window (2001–2025) were only considered if they were foundational works. A contextual anchor paper is the doctoral thesis of Qazi (2021) particularly relevant for the mediation results pertaining to individualism--collectivism and for evidence from the banking sector in Pakistan. According to the results, there was a positive relationship between perceived talent management and psychological contract fulfilment; there was a mediation effect of combined individualism-collectivism and collectivism (but not individualism); and individualists had higher mean psychological contract fulfilment than collectivists. The review concludes that perceived talent management practices are insignificant as standalone HR practices, but are more significant as signals of employee value. Perceived career growth, psychological empowerment, justice/fairness perceptions, and organizational talent labels-congruence with employee's self-perceptions are the strongest recurrent mediating mechanisms in literature. A new idea put forth here is that cultural self-construal should occasionally be theorized as a translator or boundary condition of mediation instead of simply as a mediator. The aim of this paper is therefore to propose a serial mediation agenda between talent signals, employee meaning-making and psychological contract fulfilment.

Key words: perceived talent management, psychological contract, systematic literature review, mediation, individualism – collectivism, employee perceptions, talent philosophy, banking sector

Introduction

Increasingly, talent management is no longer a narrow “war for talent” discussion, but a much larger one about the process of attracting, identifying, developing, rewarding, and retaining

workers who have skills that are important to their organization's long-term performance. The point of this topic has been heightened because of the fast pacing of abilities changes, technological change, and shifting work expectations by employers. As the Future of Jobs Report 2025 indicates that employers are preparing for significant changes in the nature of work by 2030, Deloitte's 2024 Global Human Capital Trends reveals that skill gaps are one of the top constraints to business transformation, and leadership perception and workforce reality are divergent in boundary-less work systems. But in these circumstances, perceptions of talent practices are more significant than formal talent policies. 3 Although in the scholarly literature it is generally accepted that talent management is an organized method of identifying key roles and establishing talent pools with a view of sustaining competitive advantage, there is theoretical contentions on the meaning of “talent” and whether it is rare and exclusive or broad and inclusive (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014). Subsequent, correlational findings support that managers' underlying philosophies of talent guide the perception of the systems being exclusive, inclusive, and highly differentiated between segments of the workforce (Meyers et al., 2020). Such debates can't be just semantic. In essence, they define who will get development, who will feel appreciated, and who will believe that they are getting their due from the employer in exchange for their efforts. 4 The psychological contract is a reflection of that exchange relationship and represents employees' beliefs regarding the mutual obligations they have with their employer. Employee interpretation has been a prominent part of psychological contract studies and the most recent studies of antecedents reveal that leadership, HR practices, and personality are among the most researched influencers of psychological contract formation. That is, talent practices are not simply administrative activities; they're among the HR practices in which employees make assumptions about what the organization values, promises, and are likely to provide. 5 The linkage between talent management and psychological contract is now starting to receive explicit attention but there is evidence that is not consolidated. However, they also discovered that the more potent the talent management practices, the more positive the psychological-contract fulfilment level, but this was diluted if the talent assignment by the organisation and the employee's self-perception of his or her ability were contradictory. Later on, Mousa et al. demonstrated qualitatively that when the talent management practices were inclusive, developmental and responsive to the future challenges, this led to employees' psychological contract in family-owned hotels. Based on a systematic conceptual review, Sandeepanie et al. found that there are certain theories which are especially helpful in bringing talent management in relation to employee psychological contract, namely signaling theory and social exchange theory. 6 The topic serves as valuable anchor of South Asian, banking and mediation focus. Data in that study of scheduled banks in Sindh (Pakistan) were collected from a sample of 276 manager and 552 highly potential employees. The thesis revealed that perceived talent management positively related with employer psychological contract fulfilment, both as a combined individualism—collectivism and as a stand-alone collectivism (but not as stand-alone individualism). In the same thesis, individualist employees were found to have an average higher level of psychological contract fulfilment than collectivist employees. Thus, mediation is not only the central empirical point for the present paper but it is the central analytical issue. [2] This paper thus has four contributions. It creates a literature synthesis systematically, rather than narratively; it posits mediation as the central mechanism in the theory building process; it views the uploaded thesis as an embedded source and context for the literature; and it proposes a new mechanism whereby the results of perceived talent management practices act as a psychological-contract signaling bundle whose effects are mediated through employee meaning-making processes before leading to fulfilment, commitment, retention, or disengagement. This reframing still maintains the user's topic, but it makes it more specific for a very specific literature-review paper [7].

Review of Literature

There are two central questions that have led to the evolution of the talent management literature: who are the talented and what should be different for them? The first two, Collings and Mellahi's strategic perspective, highlighted key roles and the distinction of human-capital architecture; and the latter, Gallardo-Gallardo et al., demonstrated that the definition of talent is not fixed in the world of work. Meyers and van Woerkom furthered the discussion by separating out exclusive and inclusive assumptions and by illustrating that talent can be seen as stable and developable as well as exclusive or inclusive, resulting in four different philosophies of talent, each with practical implications. Subsequent empirical research by Meyers et al. has supported the ideas that these philosophies have an impact on the HR managers' consequence of their organization's talent definition and level of workforce differentiation. In the small organisation inclusive philosophies seem more likely, in the other organisational context the exclusive assumptions are still strong. [4] In this topic, however, it doesn't stop there when it comes to formal organisational philosophy. The other half is seen as talent management. The real key to talent architecture is that it is not what employees experience, it's what they think, feel, believe happens because of it, and the connection to work and employability! This thesis defined perceived talent management by nine clusters of practices: talent management strategy, talent review process, staffing, talent acquisition, workforce planning, training and development, performance management, financial rewards, and retention of talent. This operationalization is helpful as it conceptualizes PTM as a collection of practices as opposed to just another HR label. [2] The best way to understand why PTM is important is in the light of psychological contract theory. Psychological contract is an employee's beliefs in terms of obligations and exchange with the employer.

Antecedents research conducted today indicates that these contracts are influenced by individual/organisational/societal factors with leadership, HR practices and personality being among the most researched factors. Psychological contract breach and fulfilment have also been associated with attitudinal and behavioural outcomes in a recent review of reviews, although methodological limitations and methodological incongruence mean that sometimes the conclusions that can be drawn should be tentative. The explanatory value and the measurement variability of this psychological contract makes this psychological contract particularly apt for systematic synthesis. [5] Most convincing explanation of the contact point between PTM and psychological contract is social exchange theory and signaling theory. This idea of social exchange indicates that if workers feel the organization has invested in them in some worthwhile way, they will respond with behavior that demonstrates their commitment, engagement, and a desire to stay. Signaling theory extends to say that HR practices carry latent messages regarding expectations, future opportunities and employee value. Both theories are clearly mentioned in Sandeepanie et al. as the principal linkage between talent management and employee psychological contract, and Festing's generational talent-management approach gives an explanation of talent retention regarding the psychological-contract and social-exchange. [8] What do the facts tell about direct effects? There are three strands, which stand out. Firstly, talent-management practices can have a positive impact on commitment and employee outcomes. Aljbour et al., who interviewed the employees of financial and service firms in Jordan, concluded that the direct relationship between the use of talent management practices and the employee commitment was significant. Second, there is a qualitative dimension of psychological-contract fulfilment through talent practices, such as those found in Egyptian family-owned hotels, which are experienced as development oriented, inclusive and future oriented. Third, the direct link can become a little fuzzy when the employee's perception of the talent position is inconsistent with the organization's perceived talent position, as reported by Sonnenberg et al. (2014) in their large multi-organization study. Thus, direct effects do exist but are incomplete until the employees' interpretation process is modeled. 9 That's why mediation is the nub of the subject. Recent empirical research shows that there are a number of

mediators that connect TM activities to employee outcomes. In the case of commitment and intention to leave, Aljbour et al. demonstrate that the relationship between TM-practice usage and perceived career growth mediate that relationship. Menezes et al. prove that psychological empowerment is a mediator between a talent management and employee retention. Differential talent systems were also proposed as having a mediating effect on employee reactions via the lens of organizational justice aspects of earlier research on talent management. These studies collectively indicate that talent practices do not tend to drive results mechanically, but through employee cognitions – surrounding growth, control, fairness, recognition, and future security. 9 There's culture as well. The qualitative comparison carried out by Du and Vantilborgh between the content of the psychological contracts of Belgian and Chinese employees highlights that cultural values influence the content of psychological contracts, and not only after they are fulfilled or breached. They found that the levels of individualism and collectivism in a specific nation as well as within a company's different regions affect what they perceive as duty in the job, autonomy, compromise, hierarchy, group harmony and security are all relevant. Leveling this argument down to the context of the Pakistan banks, Qazi has proposed that those who are not in the same organizational environment can still have different interpretation of talent management due to their cultural orientation. Interestingly, her findings indicate that collectivism and combined individualism–collectivism mediated the PTM–PC relationships but not individualism alone. What is important in this discovery is that it suggests that culture acts not only as a far removed and distant demographic background but also as an interpretive pathway.

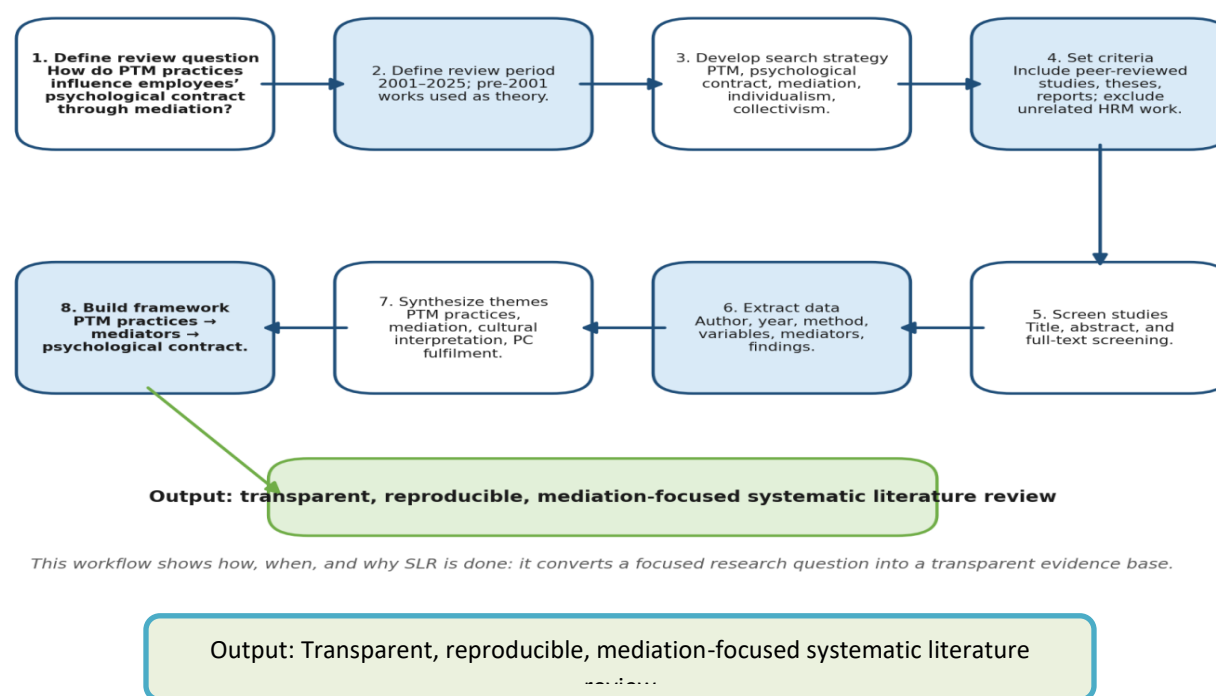
Interpretation:

This figure connects the PTM practices and psychological contract of the employees through the mediation of mechanisms. It reveals that PTM practices simultaneously act as cues, which are interpreted by the employees in terms of cultural orientation, career growth, empowerment, justice, and congruence, prior to the development of psychological contract fulfilment or breach. Interpretation: The literature suggests that PTM practices should be thought of as 'signals' that need to be interpreted by employees for them to impact on the psychological contract. The strongest mediators that recurrently emerge in the evidence are career growth, justice/fairness, and empowerment, and situational translators like cultural self-construal and talent-perception congruence mediate the decoding of signals. This framework thus shifts the field away from the notion of simply “TM improves outcomes” and toward a mediation-based perspective of “how” and “for whom” PTM is important. [9]

Research Methodology

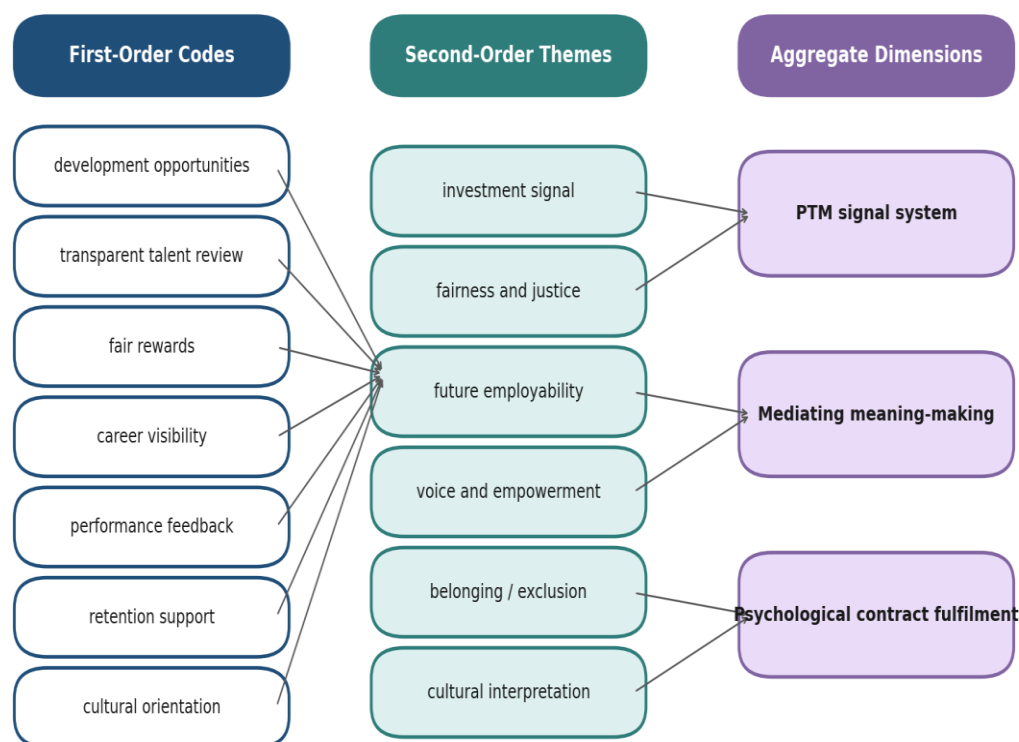
The major research design of this paper is the systematic literature review. Data from the references and literature search indicate that the topic is important both theoretically and methodologically, as it is interdisciplinary in nature and is studied in HRM, in organizational behavior, in psychological contract studies, in cross-cultural Management and employee-retention studies. Traditional narrative reviews in management were deemed to be lacking in rigor, transparency and reproducibility by Tranfield et al. and subsequently by Snyder, who argued that literature reviews are more relevant when knowledge is increasing rapidly and is polarized. PRISMA 2020, originally designed for intervention reviews, and subsequently adapted for all types of synthesis, is the preeminent reporting framework used to detail the rationale for conducting a review, how studies were identified, and how they were synthesized [7]. The review will therefore focus on how, when and why SLR is done in response to the user's request. How: set the question(s) at the outset, define inclusion/exclusion criteria, conduct systematic search, record selection, retrieve similar evidence, and produce a clear synthesis of evidence. When to use: When the purpose is to answer a focused explanatory question, providing a reproducible evidence trail, instead of providing a selective essay. Why: Systematic review reduces hidden bias, maps a fragmented field and can be more cumulative and generate theory than isolated studies or unsystematic summaries. These are the very reasons why management researchers have suggested protocol-based reviewing. [7] The review also helps to explain when SLR is not the best option. A full SLR is not appropriate with the guidance from the review method, when the field is still too fledgling to establish stable inclusion criteria, when the reviewer wants to generate concept maps of a general nature, or when the reviewer wants to provoke theory instead of a complete synthesis. However, if such is the case, a scoping, integrative or conceptual review may be more appropriate. For the current paper, however, the questions at stake are more focused: What is the relationship between perceived TMPs and employees' psychological contract and what is the most parsimonious mediation that can be used to explain this relationship? The topic is therefore better suited to SLR than an exploratory scoping review, but where appropriate, broad contextual insights are maintained. [11]

Figure 2. Step-by-Step SLR Process Used in the Paper



The formal review period shall be the period 2001 – 2025. This span of time encapsulates the current “talent management” era as well as the most recent full publication year when the narrative was written. Pre-2001 classical publications were included only from a theoretical lens to frame the concepts, and not as part of the formal screening window particularly psychological contract theory publications. This distinction is important because this way the review remains as up to date as possible without losing the theoretical background. The evidence base was identified by structured search of openly retrievable academic evidence, evidence in publisher records, indexed abstracts, methodological guidelines and backward snowballing using the uploaded doctoral thesis. Combinations of search terms included "talent management" or "perceived talent management" and one of the terms: "psychological contract," "employee perception," "fulfilment," "breach," "mediation," "career growth," "psychological empowerment," "organizational justice," "individualism collectivism," and "retention. Studies were selected when they explicitly focused on TM/PTM, psychological-contract content/fulfilment/breach, or on mediating mechanisms between TM and employee-level outcomes. Empirical and good conceptual studies were all kept because there is a certain theory-building aspect to the field. Only practitioner reports were included if they determined contemporary labor market relevance.

Figure 5. Qualitative Thematic Model Derived from Literature and Thesis Data



Qualitative logic: PTM practices are coded into employee interpretations, which become mediating pathways explaining psychological contract outcomes.

Interpretation:

This number sets the formal review period for this one to 2001-2025. The underlying studies before 2001 are only mentioned for the theory, and the studies which are conducted on the basis of mediation, employee perception and psychological contract fulfilment are emphasized in the studies conducted within more recent dates (2020-2025). Articles purely on technical HR related analytics without an element of employee-perception, those examining employer branding without a psychological-contract or employee-perception pathway, those without any known basis of evidence, and those with the same discussion on the concept but no new contribution were

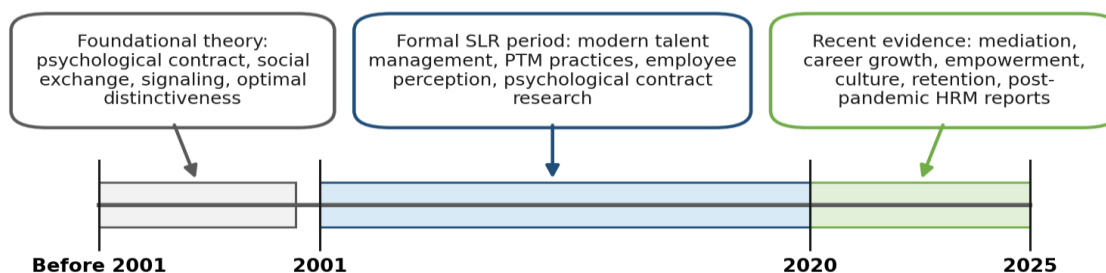
excluded. In this paper, a thematic synthesis rather than meta-analysis was used as there were significant differences between the measurement approaches, industries, national contexts and outcomes in the literature included. This is also aligned with the guidance for reviews, which cautions against over-tying different constructs together into a single group and against pooling constructs that may be conceptually non-equivalent, or heterogeneous, too early in the review. For transparency purposes, a 7th methodological note is required.

It is systematic in the sense of its protocol, eligibility logic, and thematic synthesis, and a de facto example of a de facto partial proprietary-database census, rather than a full proprietary-database census or statistical meta-analysis. It should thus not be interpreted as an assertion that every study indexed in all databases has been exhaustively retrieved, but rather as a tight management SLR type synthesis that seeks to further theory and structure a future empirical agenda. While not a debilitating restriction in the value of the theory of the review, it does certainly mark its boundaries.

Interpretation:

This figure depicts the entire logic of SLR screening; identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. It illustrates the process for collecting the records from different databases and eliminating duplicates and irrelevant studies and the process of qualitative synthesis and mediation-based analysis of the remaining studies.

Figure 3. Time Period and Evidence Structure of the Review



Rationale: the 2001–2025 window captures the modern talent-management era, while older theories support conceptual definitions.

Collection and analysis of data

The evidence reviewed coalesced into 4 clusters. The first 'cluster' of studies are talent-philosophy and workforce-differentiation studies, which describe whether a system is exclusive or inclusive and how this translates into downstream practices. The second group of studies is in the realm of psychological-contract research, particularly recent work concerning antecedents, fulfillment and breach. The third group concerns mediation studies that show how TM drives employee commitment, intention to remain/leave or retention via career growth, empowerment or justice perceptions. The fourth group of research consists of cross-cultural and contextual studies such as the uploaded Pakistani banking thesis to explain how equivalent HR signals can yield varying interpretations by employees. [12] The qualitative analysis followed by coding the first order practice terms, then second order interpretive themes were clustered, and then themes from the second-order categories were connected to psychological-contract dimensions. The use of first-order practice terms was very consistent throughout the literature, talent strategy, review, staffing, acquisition, planning, development, performance management, rewards, and retention. But the results did not adhere uniformly to all practices. Training, development, performance conversations, recognition and clear advancement practices seemed to be the most consistent factors related to positive employee interpretation, as they relate to growth, value and future employment opportunities. However, only the talent-labelling practices were fragile or

counterproductive when they were characterised by opacity, elitism, or incongruence. [9] Qazi's study conceptualised PTM in nine dimensions and linked the perceptions with the employer psychological contract obligations. The statistical results presented in the thesis showed that there was a negative relationship between PTM and employer PC ($r = .544$), and in the regression it was found that PTM was a significant predictor of PC ($\beta = .550$). The thesis also showed the PTM--PC relation was mediated by the combined individualism--collectivism variable, which reduced the coefficient of PTM and increased the explained variance, and that collectivism alone was a mediator for the PTM--PC relation, while individualism was not. Finally, individualists scored higher means for PC fulfilment (3.953) than did collectivists (3.646). This is not unique to the banking sector, but rather provides an empirical foundation to the overall review in a context sensitive manner. [2] What qualitative meaning do these patterns have? They argue that PTM is not felt as a package of HR. Staff read this aloud using a list of questions: Do I look seen? Are things fair to me? Will I grow here? Is the future really indicated? This aligns with the mediation by the perceived career growth (Aljbou et. al) and by psychological empowerment (Menezes et. al.) as well as older justice and incongruence-based explanations in talent-management studies. In all three variants, it is a meaning-making process of employees. Interpretation: This figure illustrates the qualitative component of the paper. First-order codes (development opportunity, transparency, fair return, employment prospects, empowerment, and belonging) are translated into themes of investment signal, fairness, employability, empowerment, belonging, and culture interpretation. The themes construct the composite dimensions of meaning-making, PTM signal system and psychological contract fulfilment.

Interpretation

Qualitative review suggests that mediation is more a principal-than a statistical afterthought of this literature. PTM practices become meaningful in the form of employee interpretations, which then go down specific pathways—growth, fairness, empowerment, congruence, and culture—to become psychological-contract fulfilment or breach. The diagram also illustrates why two employees might have different interpretations of the same formal talent system – it is not just about whether the system is, or isn't, in place – it is about what it is interpreted as. [9]

There is also a significant disparities in the literature. There is still a comparatively limited number of studies which explicitly focus on TM and psychological contract, when compared to the larger TM or broader PC literature. One downstream dimension where psychological contract may play a role in the mediation of TM effects is specifically identified, and employer-branding is proposed. Manchia et al.'s review of 217 psychological contract articles also indicates that HR practices have been one of the heavily researched antecedents of psychological contract perceptions, but that no article has solely focused on talent management as an antecedent bundle. It is precisely this difference which motivated the present paper and indicates that the subject of the thesis made available here is more useful than it might at first seem to be: it is never simply a recollection of old ideas, but a still underpopulated intersection. [8]

Discussion

The key finding of this review is that perceived TMT practices influence employee psychological contracts primarily through the mediation of their effects, rather than just determining their direct effects. It is there in direct pathway but, if not being unpacked, is analytically weak. Talent practices seen as being a true investment in development are more likely to be fulfilled in the employees' eyes. The contract becomes weaker when they feel the practices are furtive and akin to preferential treatment, status incongruence, or exclusion. This is why the mediation lens cannot simply be an optional fourth component, but rather the main theoretical issue of the field. [9] This distinction between Formal Talent systems and Perceived Talent systems is particularly important, based on this review. While many organizations may think they're investing in people, employees

take note of the same indicators across staffing, review, development, and rewards. When consistency across those signals is lacking, signals are incongruent, and/or signals are not communicated strongly, talent system can provide more suspicion than loyalty. Finally, Sonnenberg et al.'s findings regarding the incongruence between talent and perception are telling, as the benefit of TM practices on psychological-contract fulfilment decreases when there is a lack of alignment between organizational and employee perceptions of "who is talent." This discovery also contributes to the explanation of why exclusive systems are in practice, often full of hidden hazards. 6 According to the review the thesis uploaded must be read carefully. Based on the empirical findings, it can be inferred that mediation through collectivism as well as combined individualism-collectivism is supported by Qazi but not through individualism alone. Meanwhile, there was no difference in the average psychological-contract fulfilment between the individualists and the collectivists. These findings in total suggest that while collectivist values might make the communication of relational obligations and fairness cues more impactful, individualist values might be more in tune with differentiated or merit-based talent systems when these are clearly communicated. That does not imply, however, that culture determines outcomes in a determinate way. It is a way of saying that cultural self-construal influences the way that employees make sense of an organization's signals. [2] This is the main new idea in the paper. In the future, culture needs to be taken out of the background characteristics box and out of the straight mediator box. The serial and conditional mediation model is a stronger model: Sanitized pathways: PTM practices → perceived signal clarity, perceived fairness, perceived growth, which is mediated by cultural self-construal to varying degrees, which also influences the direction of the pathway, and psychological contract fulfilment. Career Growth, empowerment, and justice are proximal mediators and, as such, there is a translator, or boundary condition, which is cultural, and influences the actual coding of the signal itself. This proposition is more in line with the thesis' mixed evidence on individualism and collectivism, as well as the cross-cultural psychological-contract literature. [10] The discussion also has implications in the practice design of PTM. Organizations should not think that giving talent review board a try, creating a highpotential list or a special development track is enough to increase perceptions. The key is whether or not practices are clear, developmentally valid, and consistent with the contract with regard to work content, career, supervisory support, organizational rules, work-life practices, and rewards. Negative talent-perception incongruence is especially harmful to managers who use exclusive systems, since they must have strong communication and justice procedures. Even in places that have inclusive systems, there must be accompaniment with the logic of differentiation which can be understood by the employee as a fair and meaningful system, and not a vague or symbolic one. [12] The review suggests a consideration of employee signal system for implementing PTM in banking and other similar service industries in Pakistan. Talent strategy, review, staffing, development, performance management and rewards cannot be siloed HR processes. They should be clearly formulated and articulated as an exchange offer: "We are putting our money into this here, this is how value is created, this is how movement works in the career, and this is what you might expect from us. In particular, the banking information provided in the thesis indicates that psychological contract fulfilment is increased when employees perceive such coherency and will be different when presents of formal system are disaffirming or contradictory in between cultural orientations. [2] Methodologically, this discussion also satisfies the request of the user, whether to do and not to do SLR. For a topic, such as PTM and psychological contract, which is multi-theoretical, spread across multiple industries and frequently meanders through different mediators, SLR is more useful than a traditional narrative review for the purposes of defining the lines of the constructs and identifying accumulations of evidence. However, an SLR shouldn't act as a replacement for a contextual theory-building that is still needed to address heterogeneity. Thus the

proper order of such a field should be: firstly systematic synthesis; secondly, further mediation models with more clarity; thirdly longitudinal or multi-level tests. [7]

Conclusion

This paper thus systematically examined the literature on perceived talent management practices, and employees' psychological contract in a mediation perspective. There are three general conclusions that can be drawn from the evidence. The first reason to consider PTM is that employees read what organizations do in terms of talent as a sign of their intent, value, fairness, and future opportunities. Second, mediation is the field's main mechanism of explanation: career growth, empowerment, justice, and talent-perception congruence have been consistently found to explain the presence or absence of TM practices and positive outcomes for their employees. Third, the meaning given to those signals is in ways that are important culturally limited and thus warrants a more specific and distinct, and importantly, theoretically important role in models than it is afforded it typically. These results are extended in the uploaded thesis through a demonstration in a banking-sector context in the province of Sindh, Pakistan, of the positive role played by PTM in predicting employer psychological contract fulfilment, and the ability for collectivist orientation to mediate this effect more effectively than individualism alone. This indicates that organisations ought to look to PTM, and not “best practices” lists, as one integrated set of signals to their employees. The paper thus proposes a psychological-contract signaling bundle perspective where PTM operates via the proximal mediators and in a culturally filtered interpretation. The review also is also limited. It is systematic when it comes to protocol and making sense of the synthesis, but not a statistical meta-analysis, not a comprehensive all-database census. The literature is not entirely consistent, as there are still relatively few explicit studies on PTM–psychological contract relationships, many studies are cross-sectional studies, and the evidence from the culture is more suggestive than conclusive. The pattern has, however, been strong enough to suggest that mediation should be at the heart, rather than the periphery, of the PTM–psychological contract relationship in future research and practice.

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