

Career Support for Everyone or Just for the High-Potential Employees? The Influence of the Exclusive Tm Approach on Career Developmental Tools

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Abstract

Having integrated Talent Management (TM) and career literatures, we examine the influence of the degree of exclusiveness of the TM approach upon the adoption of career developmental tools. A quantitative study was carried out with 104 firms that integrate the top 300 Mercado ranking in Argentina. Results revealed the exclusive TM approach as the one offering the highest investment in developmental career tools; thus, contributing to the career sustainability of all employees. The intermediate exclusive TM approach was found as the prevalent one, evidencing the influence of the Latin American cultural background. Avenues for further research are suggested. This article is one of the first one to study the relationship between the TM approach and the adoption of career developmental tools, evidencing the way exclusive TM firms deal with the tensions of differentiating some employees and, at the same time, offering career sustainability initiatives to all the workforce.

Keywords: Organizational Career Tools; Exclusive Talent Management; Career Conversations; Personal Development Plans; Latin America.

INTRODUCTION

The unpredictability and dynamism of current career environments demand workers to be self-directed, value-driven, and flexible (Hirschi & Koen, 2021), and to carry their career management responsibility (Spurk *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, since organizations are the context in which career development takes place, firms are still responsible for managing employees' careers (Guan *et al.*, 2014). Hence, contemporary OCM, understood as a co-creating effort between individuals and organizations, was proposed to be beneficial to firm effectiveness by supporting individuals' career management activities (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2019).

OCM entails a corporate investment in employees' human capital (DeVos & Cambré, 2017) to ensure the organization meets its current and future talent needs to reach the strategic goals. At the same time, OCM practices offer employees organizational support to develop their careers and satisfy personal aspirations. Developmental tools, as part of the OCM practices, aim at assisting and enabling employees in their

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individual career development (DeVos & Cambré, 2017). They include career planning workshops, career conversations between supervisor and employee, self-assessment instruments, and personal development plans. In this way, the organization contributes to examine the alignment of work with the employee's strengths, interests and values, which is one of the attributes of sustainable careers (Valcour, 2015).

Exclusive TM organizations are claimed to be more focused on organizational than individual needs (Thunissen, 2016). They consider a subset of employees or jobs as creating disproportionate value (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2013) and offer those talented employees long-term career perspectives and career advancement. Of note that organizations may show different degrees of TM exclusiveness or the extent to which resources are allocated in an unequal manner among employees based on their relative contributions (DeBoeck *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, we wonder, in line with Dries *et al.*, (2021), about the organizational support through the developmental OCM tools to the individual career management of all employees.

Even though DeVos & Cambre (2017) examined the relationship between the aforementioned practices and performance; to our knowledge, no prior studies have explored the relationship between these practices and the exclusive TM approach. Then, we will explore, quantitatively, the influence of the degree of exclusiveness of the TM approach upon the adoption of developmental OCM tools. We deem this aim relevant since today's workforce -talents or non-talents-expects their employers to support their careers and provide opportunities even beyond the boundaries of the workplace (Fugate *et al.*, 2021), and the alignment process between individual career orientations and organizational efforts is crucial (Valcour, 2015).

Then, having combined insights from career and TM literatures (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; DeVos & Cambre, 2017; Donald *et al.*, 2024), this article contributes to the TM literature by extending our understanding of the implications of the degrees of exclusiveness of the TM approaches on the deployment of OCM developmental practices and, consequently, on the careers' sustainability. In this way, it answers the call of Dries *et al.*, (2021) regarding career support for all the workforce or just a few employees. Additionally, it adds to the knowledge of TM and OCM in the context of a developing country, such as Argentina (Pereira *et al.*, 2022).

In practical terms, these results can guide TM managers' reflections about the implementation of the developmental OCM practices in line with the existing TM approach. Besides, given that some employees prefer a self-management approach to deal with the uncertain organizational context (Hall *et al.*, 2018), our findings may help individuals to identify the type of company that may support their own career development.

The article is organized as follows. First, we present the analytical framework underlying the investigation. This is followed by the research method adopted. Next, we share the key findings and their discussion.

Finally, we offer the conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TM Approaches

The exclusive and inclusive ones are conceived as two ends of a continuum. On one extreme, the TM definition and processes are exclusive. It encompasses ‘the activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization’s sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization (Collings & Mellahi, 2009, p.304). Under this approach, talents high performers and high potentials- are assumed to be rare, hard to find, difficult to replace, and add a disproportionate amount of value to the organization in comparison with average employees (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Therefore, firms should adopt workforce differentiation through the implementation of specific TM processes and practices: attraction, identification, development, retention, and deployment (Silzer & Dowell, 2010; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014). Nevertheless, prior literature has highlighted some negative aspects of the exclusive TM approach. These include concerns for ethical issues (Swales, 2013), the potential detrimental impact on those not identified as ‘talented’ (Meyers *et al.*, 2015), and the lack of a pluralist approach, encouraging a clearer focus on the employee and the environment instead of concentrating uniquely on the organization (Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013).

On the other extreme of this continuum, according to the inclusive approach, all employees have certain talents which can have a strategic impact on organizational performance (Sparrow *et al.*, 2014). This can be accomplished by matching employees to a position in which their talent is best realized (Cappelli & Keller, 2014), and providing them with learning opportunities (Nijs *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, organizations invest in all employees according to their talents by providing them with opportunities for personal development (Swales *et al.*, 2014) and equal access to career opportunities (Dries & Kase, 2023).

Finally, the hybrid TM approach acknowledges both exclusive and inclusive definitions of talent. It is characterized by slightly higher human resource investments in key employees and strong investments in the development of talent throughout the organization. The consideration of the entire workforce as talent -focus of the developmental activities in line with the inclusive approach- and the identification of key and pivotal positions to fill them with high-potential, high-performance employees - congruent with the exclusive approach - are run simultaneously (King & Vaiman, 2019; Meyers *et al.*, 2020).

TM Strategy and Practices

A TM strategy is defined as a range or a specific configuration of policies and practices in the TM system. In this study, we will center on the extent of TM practices, meaning the number and/or variety of TM practices needed to fully support the organizations’ strategy (Tarique & Schuler, 2015).

Even exclusive TM practices were widely described and examined empirically (Bonneton *et al.*, 2022), there is neither exhaustive list of exclusive TM practices nor consensus about the set of practices associated with a specific approach. Thus, relying upon the TM processes offered by Silzer & Dowell (2010), we consolidated the TM practices in line with the exclusive approach and processes (Table 1).

Table 1. Exclusive Practices According to the TM Literature

TM process	Practices	Authors
Staffing	Selective hiring/Use of talent inventories for selection/Graduate and trainee programmes. Brand reputation among key employee segments	Stahl <i>et al.</i> , (2012); Sparrow <i>et al.</i> , (2014); McCracken <i>et al.</i> , (2016)
Identification	Activities to find talent among current employees	Meyers <i>et al.</i> , (2013)
	Key roles - Pivotal positions grounded in the idea of workforce differentiation	Huselid & Becker (2011); Collings <i>et al.</i> , (2019)
	Potential: Exclusive TM focuses solely on key employees, primarily the top performing 10%, containing the high performers and high potentials	Gallardo-Gallardo <i>et al.</i> , (2013); Ulrich & Smallwood (2012)
	Performance for Talent Review purposes. Under the exclusive TM approach, high performers are those employees whose capabilities and achievements are exceptional compared to other workers.	Silzer & Dowell (2010); Nijs <i>et al.</i> , (2014)
	Talent reviews aim to identify those that rank at the top who will be part of the talent pools. Succession management.	Stahl <i>et al.</i> , (2012); Sparrow <i>et al.</i> , (2014)
	When companies adopt exclusive TM, they separate a pool of employees from the rest. Talent pools are grounded in the idea of workforce differentiation.	Huselid & Becker (2011); Collings <i>et al.</i> , (2019)
	Formal communication of talent status	Björkman <i>et al.</i> , (2013); Sumelius <i>et al.</i> , (2020)
Development	Investing disproportionately in employees who are expected to generate disproportionate returns for the company is the essence of workforce differentiation. Learning, training and development further advances the skills of all those pre-identified as high-potentials/performers. More career mentoring as compared to peers will serve as an indicator for one’s relative career potential	DeVos <i>et al.</i> , (2008); Van Vianen <i>et al.</i> , (2018)
	Individual development plans linked to succession planning process.	Stahl <i>et al.</i> , (2012); Collings and Mellahi (2009)

	Development exclusive programs where admission is through nomination. High-profile ones tailored to the elite group.	
Retention	Targeted activities to prevent high potential/high performer employees' turnover.	Ortlieb and Sieben (2012); Narayanan <i>et al.</i> , (2018)

Source: Silzer & Dowell (2010)

The most widely adopted definition (Zhao *et al.*, 2022) describes it as the various organizational policies and practices to improve the career effectiveness of their employees (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000). OCM includes a wide range of programs and interventions that focus on matching individual and organizational career needs. They are expected to contribute to business objectives while giving individuals the opportunity to fulfil their personal goals, improving their career success (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019). In practice, firms tend to use combinations of OCM practices; however, there is no consensus on an accepted typology of OCM practices (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000; DeVos *et al.*, 2008; Zhao *et al.*, 2022). In line with our research objectives, we will focus on the developmental OCM tools.

They refer to practices aimed at assisting and enabling employees in their individual career development: career planning workshops, career conversations between supervisor and employee, self-assessment instruments, and personal development plans (DeVos & Cambré 2017).

They involve the process of contextual understanding of work nature and employees' career goals to make individuals capable enough to better understand and evaluate their skills and make career decisions (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000) and set goals through discussion with other people (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019).

These dialogues intend to facilitate the agreement about the development plan, aligning employee and organization's goals (Borgen *et al.*, 2013). Line managers play a key role since they stimulate their reports to think about their career ambitions (Canaj *et al.*, 2021). In fact, these conversations may result in organizational benefits (attraction and retention) as well as in employee career development benefits (greater realignment of expectations and activities of both parties).

The self-assessment data employees' experiences, values, interests, skills, and motivations- constitutes an input for identifying appropriate employees' careers options (Harrington, 2007). These instruments enable employees to further develop themselves and to navigate their careers within and beyond their current firm (Segers & Inceoglu, 2012).

Through these documents the individual identifies the necessary competencies for a sustained development (Kuazaqui, 2016). These plans should be prepared by the employee, confirmed by the line manager, and used as a basis for conversations to provide them with feedback to stimulate reflection, and serve as a decision-making tool (Beusaert *et al.*, 2011).

These developmental OCM tools support the individual career management process and contribute to the progress of sustainable

careers. Sustainable career theory adds the perspective of ‘sustainability’ to the already mentioned contemporary career (Donald *et al.*, 2024). And its indicators are health physical and mental; happiness in terms of career satisfaction, and productivity -equated with employability (De Vos *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the developmental OCM tools may contribute to the sustainable career outcome happiness through the career fit of personal and organisational goals. Besides, for employers, sustainable career benefits embrace retention rates, sustainable performance and, hence, prosperity in the longer term (DeVos & Van der Heijden, 2017).

Considering the aforementioned information as well as the fact that each TM approach will shape the design of the TM system (Moeller & Liesch, 2023) and, in turn, this approach will influence upon the TM/career practices adopted (Bolander *et al.*, 2017; McDonnell *et al.*, 2023; Meyers *et al.*, 2020), we propose: H₁: The implementation of a specific TM approach will influence on the adoption of the developmental OCM tools addressed to all employees.

The exclusive TM firms face paradoxical tensions. On the one hand, it was previously mentioned that the exclusive TM approach focuses in an élite subset of employees considered as “talented” and they are further developed to take up key strategic roles (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Its basic premise is that an organization incurs unnecessary huge costs if it invests equally in all employees since they differ in their value and uniqueness (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Consequently, due to workforce differentiation, most of the employees “non-talented ones” are disadvantaged regarding the distribution of resources and developmental possibilities (Bevort & Stjerne, 2020). On the other hand, organizations are critical players in career sustainability (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, exclusive TM firms may be committed to sustainable careers (in our case, by adopting career developmental tools) since their pillars map onto four core objectives of TM: maximum return on investment by aligning individuals to where they add the most value; continuous updating of organizational competencies through ongoing learning and development; stability via adaptability; and organizational commitment and retention (Valcour, 2015). Then, we suggest: H_{1a}: The implementation of an exclusive TM approach, differentiated TM architecture- will influence positively on the number and variety of the developmental OCM tools addressed to all employees.

As to the less exclusive TM firms, such as the hybrid ones, the organization is also a key player in career sustainability (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2020) and talent identification is inclusive (O’Connor *et al.*, 2025). These firms consider the entire workforce as talent investing strongly in their development and with slightly higher investments in key employees. The performance review and PDPs processes for all staff evidence the ‘everyone has talent’ premise (Campbell & Hirsch, 2013), and no potential identification tools are needed. Thus, since companies running more talent identification processes (performance management and potential identification) make use of a higher number of development tools (Golik & Blanco, 2014), we propose: H_{1b}: A lower degree of exclusiveness-less

differentiated TM architecture will influence negatively on the number and variety of the developmental OCM tools addressed to all employees.

METHOD

Data were collected by means of an online survey which was sent to TM directors and managers of top 300 Mercado ranking organizations in Argentina and some of them also were part of the MercoTalento ranking 2019, from July 2019 to February 2020. Given that we were interested in firms with several talent management procedures in place, the latter ranking was also considered. The initial sample started with the top 300 firms and finally 104 agreed to participate (Table 2).

Respondents and non-respondent companies were compared in size terms and no significant differences were found. Standard practices regarding the maintenance of the anonymity of the participant firms and the confidentiality of the information were used (Merriam, 1998). Participants signed a letter of consent, and they were assigned a code to protect both privacy and confidentiality.

Table 2. Sample Characteristics

Capital Origin			Size (Number of Employees) (*)		
Multinational	52	50%	SMEs up to 500	37	36%
Domestic	52	50%	Big firms- more than 500	67	64%
			Activity		
			Manufacturing	49	47.4%
			Services	55	52.6%

Note: (*) firms were categorized according to AFIP (2021) criteria

The survey was designed to reflect the exclusive TM practices offered by the literature as already shown in the theoretical section and in Table I. Later, those exclusive practices were presented to a panel of experts (three practitioners and two TM scholars) to obtain their agreement on their content. Based on their review, some of the items were included and some were deleted, and the final survey contained 12 practices. See Table III. Internal consistency was tested using the Kuder-Richardson formula 20 (KR-20) as all items employed a dichotomous response. The values were adequate (KR=0.70) given conventional thresholds (Kline, 2013).

Table 2. Exclusive TM Practices

	TM Practices
Staffing	Intern - Graduate programmes
Identification	Formal potential definition
	Formal potential identification process
	Identification tools in place
	Performance for Talent Review purposes
	Talent Review process
	Key roles
Development	Formal communication of talent status
	Mentoring as a development tool (targeted to some employees, high potentials)
	Talent pool activities
Retention	Loyalty activities for High Potentials + Loyalty per talented person
	Differentiated policies for High Potentials

We recoded the data for each of these practices into a dummy variable indicating whether the practice was used or not (0 = no; 1 = yes).

Following DeVos & Cambré (2017), respondents were asked to indicate from a list of four career management practices (career planning workshop, self-assessment tools, career conversations, and PDPs) whether they were addressed to all employees or not. We recoded the data into a dummy variable (0 = no; 1 = yes). Internal consistency was tested using the Kuder-Richardson formula 20 (KR-20). The values were adequate (KR=0.73) given conventional thresholds (Kline, 2013).

In line with prior studies (DeVos and Dries, 2013; Meyers *et al.*, 2020), we conducted cluster analysis, as an exploratory data analysis technique, using STATA 14 MP to segment companies according to their different degrees of exclusiveness number and type of exclusive practices. The hierarchical cluster analysis was adopted, following Ward's method. This clustering created a tree-like visualization and the number of clusters was calculated based on the grading trees (dendrogram) and agglomeration schedule (Yim & Ramdeen, 2015). Next, the presence in percentages of the exclusive practices as binary variables was identified to study the type of practices within each cluster. Lastly, to test our hypotheses, multinomial logistic regression was used to examine each of the career developmental practices in different clusters, since the multinomial logit model allows for the determination of choice probabilities for multiple categories (Wooldridge, 2019). The cluster with the fewer number of exclusive practices was considered as the reference one.

RESULTS

Findings are shown in the following categories: results of hierarchical cluster analysis; support and developmental practices present in each cluster; and outcomes of the multinomial logistic regression analysis.

The hierarchical cluster analysis helped to group data based on their characteristics and revealed three substantial clusters. See Figure 1.

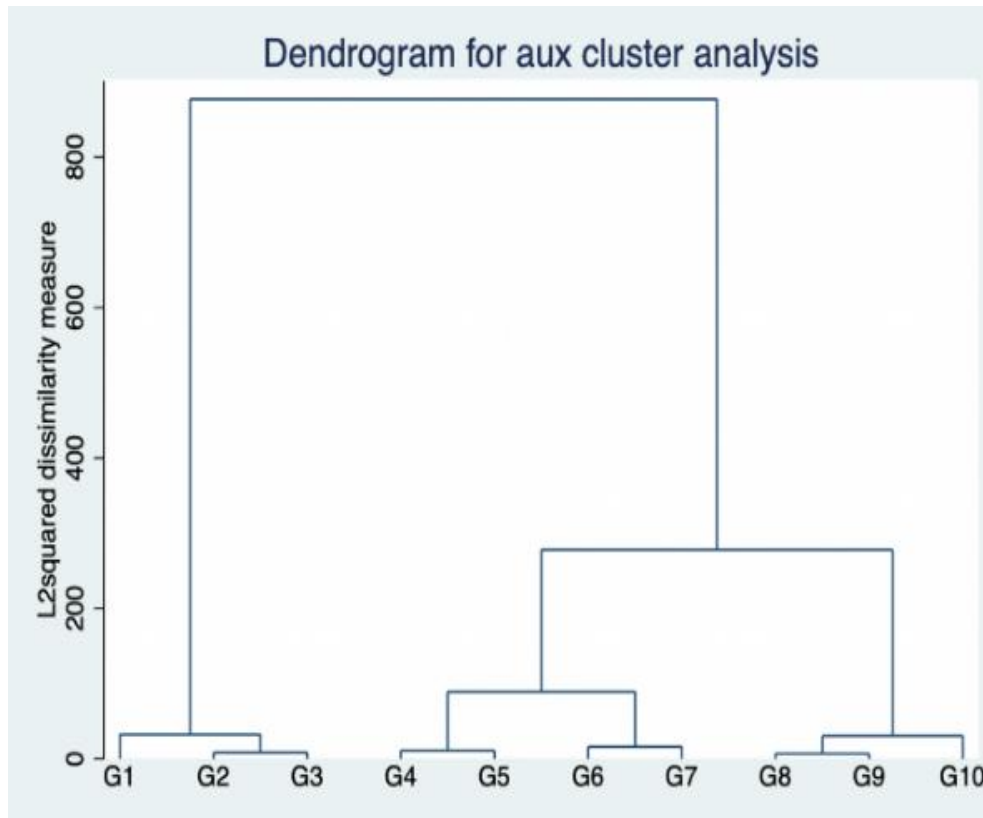


Figure 1. Cluster Analysis

As to the clusters, results are presented in terms of their degree of exclusiveness, taking into account the number of exclusive TM practices per cluster (Tarique & Schuler, 2015).

In the case of cluster 3 (firms with 8 to 11 exclusive practices; N = 28), it may comprise companies implementing an exclusive TM approach which are mostly multinational (64%) and big (more than 500 employees) (67.9%). In turn, cluster 2 (4 to 7 exclusive practices; N = 56) represents the intermediate implementation of a differentiated architecture, and it is composed mainly of big (76.8%) and domestic (58.2%) firms. Finally, cluster 1 (firms with 0 to 3 practices; N = 20) may embody a less exclusive TM philosophy since firms exhibit a limited implementation of a differentiated architecture. 62.5% of the sample firms are SMEs, employing less than 500 workers, and most of them are domestic (68.8%).

Following Tarique & Schuler (2015), not only was it relevant to identify the clusters according to the number of exclusive TM practices but also to examine the type of practices involved in each of them (See Table 4).

Table 4. Presence of TM Practices per Cluster (in Percentages)

	Formal Potential Definition	Formal Potential Identification	Identification Tools	Talent Review Process	Formal Communication Status	Differentiated Policies HiPos	Performance for T. Review	Staffing	Mentoring as Development Tool	Key roles	Talent Pool activities	HiPos Retention Management
Cluster 1	5.0%	5.0%	61.1%	20.0%	15.0%	26.3%	12.5%	35.0%	30.0%	15.0%	10.0%	35.0%
Cluster 2	60.7%	64.3%	86.5%	52.7%	28.6%	38.5%	22.0%	40.0%	55.4%	42.9%	44.6%	60.7%
Cluster 3	92.9%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	75.0%	57.1%	36.0%	66.7%	78.6%	92.9%	96.4%	64.3%

Note:

Cluster -0 to 3 exclusive practices

Cluster 2-4 to 7 exclusive practices

Cluster 3-8 to 11 exclusive practices

As observed in Table 4, in cluster 3 exclusive approach, the key roles, the formal potential definition, the formal identification process, the identification tools, and the talent review process, constitute differentiation practices that are run in more than 90% of the firms. Cluster 2 -intermediate implementation of a differentiated architecture- shows that the identification process (86.5% of firms), the formal potential definition (64.3%) and the potential identification process (60.7%) are tools with a strong presence, while a limited number of firms implement a formal communication process of the talent status (28.6%). Lastly, cluster 1 -less exclusive approach and weak differentiation-, a few firms declare no differentiation practices (inclusive ones) while 5% of them manage a formal potential identification process or rely upon a formal potential definition.

The presence of the different career developmental tools in each cluster is exhibited in Table 5.

Table 5. Presence of Developmental Tools per Cluster (in Percentages)

	Career workshops	Career conversations	Self-assessment	PDP
Cluster 1	6.7%	66.7%	6.7%	33.3%
Cluster 2	19.6%	84.3%	56%	70.6%
Cluster 3	60.7%	92.9%	75%	96.4%

Note:

Cluster 1- 0 to 3 exclusive practices

Cluster 2- 4 to 7 exclusive practices

Cluster 3 - 8 to 11 exclusive practices

In cluster 3 -exclusive firms- findings display a strong presence of all developmental career tools. Indeed, almost all firms run PDPs (96.4%) and career conversations (92.9%), while many firms rely upon self-assessment tools (75%) and career workshops (60.7%). Besides, in cluster 2, intermediate exclusive approach, the strong presence of career conversations (84.3%) is followed by formalized employee-line manager commitments (PDPs-70.6%). In turn, cluster 1, aligned with the least exclusive approach, career conversations are present in 66.7% of firms. Even if those conversations may enable the sharing of information about employees' interests and organizational needs, findings evidence a very limited presence of tools that allow the identification of employees' strengths like career workshops and self-assessment tools (6.7%).

Finally, the outcomes of the multinomial logistic regression are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Developmental OCM Practices and TM Approaches’ Clusters

Career Planning Workshop	Self-Assessment	Career Conversations	PDP Plans
Cluster 2 0.206 (0.163)	0.566*** (0.139)	0.186* (0.103)	0.271** (0.121)
Cluster 3 0.608*** (0.158)	0.711*** (0.103)	0.307*** (0.0725)	0.437*** (0.0778)

Note: seEform in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cluster 1- 0 to 3 exclusive practices

Cluster 2- 4 to 7 exclusive practices

Cluster 3 – 8 to 11 exclusive practices

As shown in Table 6, the four developmental practices are more likely to be present in cluster 3 (exclusive TM approach) than in cluster 1 (the least exclusive TM approach firms), and the relationship is significant (p<0.01). Thus, H1a is supported.

In turn, three out of four career developmental practices are also more likely to be present in cluster 2 firms (intermediate exclusive TM approach firms) than in cluster 1 (the least exclusive TM approach firms) but at lower significant levels than cluster 3. Then, H2b is confirmed.

DISCUSSION

This paper aimed to provide insights into the influence of the exclusive TM approach on the adoption of career developmental tools. Therefore, we will discuss the results regarding our hypotheses, and we will later dive into the contextual characteristics that help to explain the predominance of the intermediate exclusive cluster.

Findings confirm the influence of the TM approach on the OCM developmental tools, and they reveal that all supportive and developmental practices are more likely to be present in the exclusive TM approach cluster than in the least exclusive one. As TM practices are not just practices but also symbolic carriers of meaning (signaling theory) (DeBoeck *et al.*, 2018), we contend that the implementation of career developmental tools communicates that the organization cares about employees contributing to their sustainable careers. Nevertheless, these positive outcomes addressed to the whole workforce do not invalidate the exclusive TM objectives since through the information obtained from these tools, organizations may also embrace the individualization of career opportunities for talented employees, and consequently, increase their retention.

Then, although several authors posit that exclusive TM practices overlook most of the workforce, and it is considered a questionable approach due to its tendency to favor inequality and exclusion of the non-talented employees (Swales *et al.*, 2014), results confirm that the exclusive approach, through the extensive adoption of all developmental tools, generates potential positive outcomes not only for the company and its talented employees, but also for the whole workforce, contributing in this way to their sustainable careers (Valcour, 2015). Consequently, we

contend that in exclusive TM firms, the deployment of different career developmental tools may influence the career sustainability of all employees. The outputs of those practices support the individual career management process through the alignment of personal and organisational goals, happiness outcome-.

Regarding career conversations (92.9%), they may achieve different goals depending upon the employee status (talented or not). As to the “talented ones”, career conversations may contribute to alert organizations about their perceived “talent emptiness” and “indeterminacy” (Tyskbo & Wikhamn, 2022). Furthermore, this tool may also contribute to the talent identification process, not only confirming career interests and expectations of the already signaled as talented but also by alerting about new candidates who are “under the radar”. In turn, as to the “non-talented” employees-, conversations allow them and their managers to build a communication channel about individual’s interests, career management and training options. Employees can’t explore growth opportunities that they can’t see. Then, this feedback informs them about the organizational career opportunities, their goal suitability and progress (Creed *et al.*, 2017), and it also offers opportunities for self-reflection.

Concerning the importance of PDPs (96.4%), it can be explained by its dual contribution. It adds to talented individuals’ careers, since managers are prompted to be coaches and developers of others as well as sounding boards for career plans (McDonald & Hite, 2005). And they constitute a signal that organizations care about employees to focus time on their future development (Hayashi, 2012).

As to career workshops (60.7%), through the contextual understanding of work nature and employees’ goals (career planning process), firms and individuals can reach an agreement on career alternatives (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000). And its relevance could be explained by the composition of the cluster: big and multinational (MNC) firms. These results mirror the literature that posits that big and MNCs follow usually an exclusive approach (Knoll & Sternad, 2021). In this way, career workshops may contribute to communicate openly to employees their varied organizational career possibilities since MNCs and big firms can offer more career paths (national and internationally) (Alvarado-Vargas *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, self-assessment tools (75%) provide information about experiences, values, interests, skills, and motivations that contribute to manage employees’ careers (Harrington, 2007). Organizational size affects the extent to which an organization can perform career management programs (Thite, 2001); then, we posit that big and MNCs firms may use the same tools and expertise addressed to high potentials towards the rest of the employees, contributing -in this way- to sustainable careers.

Findings reveal that three out of four career developmental practices are more likely to be present in cluster 2 firms (intermediate exclusive TM approach firms) than in cluster 1 (the least exclusive TM

approach firms). Indeed, in cluster 1, even when the presence of career conversations (66.7%) contributes to nurture the best in all employees, the subsequent formalization of this commitment between the organization and the individual through PDPs is lower (33.3%). And the use of career workshops and self-assessment tools is also limited (6.7% both). These results may be elucidated by the characteristics of the inclusive entrepreneurial self-managed typology (Bolander *et al.*, 2017) where the idea of the self-managed career is very strong. Then, the lack of formalized career practices is not seen as a disadvantage, which may be the case in our sample. An alternative explanation for these results may rely on to the composition of the sample, since most of the firms are SMEs (62%). We have already mentioned the negative influence of organizational size on career management programs, and in SMEs, the implementation of development programs for the whole workforce may not be widely applied due to the huge investments of time and money demanded (Meyers & Woerkom, 2014). Besides, the informality of SMEs (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017) may contribute to the lower formalization of career conversations through PDPs.

Furthermore, cluster 2, intermediate exclusive architecture, shows a lower presence of all developmental tools, revealing career workshops (19%) the most important reduction in comparison with the exclusive cluster (60.7%). Since career planning workshops connect the organizational context with employees' career goals (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000), and the sample is composed mainly of big (76.8%) and domestic (58.2%) firms, it can be assumed that the national culture contributes to explain these results. We hypothesize that the Argentine short-term cultural orientation (Hofstede Insights, 2024) may champion the prevalence of short-term OCM tools such as career conversations over long-term ones, such as career workshops (Baruch & Peiperl, 2000)

Moreover, cluster 2, representing the intermediate implementation of a differentiated exclusive architecture, was found as the predominant TM approach. Since firms reflect the culture of the societies where they were born (House *et al.*, 2004), this result may be interpreted by the characteristics of the sample. Hence, in a rather collectivistic country like Argentina (Hofstede Insights, 2024), where people subordinate their personal interests for the benefit of those of the group, the requirement to comply with most of the differentiation practices as part of the exclusive approach, may not be the best fit (Etoom, 2022). Then, an intermediate exclusive architecture may be found more suitable since it skirts the conflicting dilemma about whether some employees are more valuable than others.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that career conversations were found as the career tools with the strongest presence in all clusters. This result may be explained by its characteristics: it is a tool in hands of line managers (Beausaert *et al.*, 2011), readily available, demanding lower costs than the other developmental tools. Besides, the Argentine short-term cultural orientation (Hofstede Insights, 2024) enhances the use of short-term OCM tools. This outcome also evidences the transference of

the developmental career management process from the TM/HR function towards team leaders (Segers & Inceoglu, 2012) and through its relevance, it unveils that, regardless of the TM approach, companies adhere, to some extent, to the contemporary OCM concept.

In sum, our study offers a nuanced scenario about the role of organizations in career sustainability since it reveals that exclusive TM approach firms -through the career developmental tools- contribute more to the career sustainability of the whole workforce than the less exclusive ones. We argue that the aforementioned results can be explained through the paradox lens, meaning that we must find “hybrid” ways of living with the exclusiveness extremes, rather than trying to ignore the contradictions (Evans *et al.*, 2025). Indeed, the paradox theory provides insights into tensions in organizational settings by ‘exploring how organizations can attend to competing demands simultaneously’ (Smith & Lewis, 2011). In our case, those demands imply investing heavily to develop the careers of key people and, at the same time, supporting the career sustainability of the entire workforce through developmental career tools, enhancing organizational sustainability. Thus, even when the exclusive approach relies on workforce differentiation, and it is accused of elitist connotations (Swales *et al.*, 2014), it does favour the career sustainability of the entire workforce.

Having integrated insights from career and TM literatures, which remain largely disconnected in the human resource management field (Crowley-Henry *et al.*, 2019), this article enriches our understanding about the influence of the degrees of exclusiveness of the TM approaches on the deployment of OCM developmental practices and, consequently, on the individual career management processes. In so doing, we answer the call of Dries *et al.*, (2021) by identifying the type of firms that invest more on organizational career support to all employees. Finally, this research advances our knowledge of TM and OCM beyond the current geographic limits, exploring its relationship in the context of a developing country (Pereira *et al.*, 2022), in this case, Argentina.

While our findings offer several valuable contributions, we must point out some limitations. One is the lack of generalizability of our results since it only comprises companies that operate in Argentina, and each Macro TM system impacts on the strategic initiatives of the organizations operating in those environments (King & Vaiman, 2019). Besides, we relied on a single informant (TM manager) who answered questions on behalf of their company. To address the potential concerns over common method bias, in line with Wright *et al.* (2001) recommendations, we interviewed the most informed respondent.

As to future research, it would be interesting to keep on exploring additional variables to explain the limited presence of developmental OCM practices for the least exclusive TM approach. Another suggestion, following the inclusive entrepreneurial self-managed typology (Bolander *et al.*, 2017), is to study the decision makers’ point of view about whether the lack of formalized career practices constitutes a disadvantage or not. Finally, scholars could also examine PDPs in the exclusive TM approach

to explore -qualitatively- its implementation on talented and non-talented populations.

The organizational practical implications, results may trigger the TM managers' reflection about the relationship between the degree of exclusiveness of the TM approach and the developmental OCM practices in place. Moreover, career conversations and PDPs were found as the tools with higher presence, regardless of the TM approach and they are in hands of line managers, who are perceived by employees as partners in their career management process (Crawshaw & Game, 2015). Then, it would be desirable to strengthen the line managers' leadership skills who should be appraised on how they manage the career development tools. The individual practical implications, since some employees prefer a self-driven approach in response to the dynamic organizational environment (Hall *et al.*, 2018), findings may help them to identify the type of companies that may contribute more to their own career management goals, and at the same time, fulfill the career sustainability objectives.

CONCLUSION

This study relied upon the degrees of exclusiveness to face the complexity of organizations and its TM environments and overcome the simplified way of studying TM approaches in terms of binary distinctions. Results revealed the exclusive TM approach as the one offering the highest investment in developmental career tools and the intermediate exclusive TM approach was found as the prevalent one. Our findings, through the paradox lens, help to deepen the theoretical and practical knowledge of the ill-understood tensions that are inherently part of managing talent. In this vein, results evidence that the dilemma of heavily investing on some "talented" by adopting an exclusive approach which carries the risk of overlooking and marginalizing the majority of employees may not be such since exclusive TM organizations have found a way to deal with it. Actually, these firms offer organizational initiatives to meet the expectations of career progression of "talented" employees and, simultaneously, career developmental support tools for everyone.

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