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When does being in a talent pool reap benefits? The moderating role of narcissism

Abstract

Although talent pools are utilised by human resource development (HRD) practitioners to develop employees for future roles, their effectiveness is not guaranteed as individual differences may not be accounted for. To further understand why some individuals benefit more from talent development programs than others, this study examines whether the positive effects of being in a talent pool on commitment and extra-role performance are mediated by organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE), and to what extent these mediation paths are moderated by narcissism. Using a naturally occurring talent development initiative, 100 employees (N = 50 talent pool, N = 50 non-talent pool) in a UK bank were surveyed. An online questionnaire measured narcissism, OBSE, affective commitment, and extra-role performance. The results of the path analysis showed: a) talent pool employees had higher levels of OBSE, b) OBSE mediated the relationships between talent pool membership and outcomes, and c) narcissism weakened the relationship between talent pool membership and OBSE, such that it reduced the effect of the mediation pathways. Overall the findings suggest the need for differentiated talent strategies in organisations, particularly for those high in narcissism, and provides further avenues to examine the dark triad of personality traits in the field of HRD.

Keywords: talent development, narcissism, organisation-based self-esteem, commitment

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Introduction

The use of organisational ‘talent pools’ as a HRD practice has increased over recent decades; these are groups of high potential employees seen as valuable resources to help achieve future organisational goals (Jooss, Burbach, and Ruël 2019; Shet 2020; Yarnall 2011). Although recruiting high potential employees is important in talent management, talent pools focus on developing existing employees as part of a talent retention strategy (Mäkelä, Björkman, and Ehrnrooth 2010), whereby line managers are often utilised to help identify and select individuals into the talent pool (Golik, Blanco, and Czikk 2018). Retaining and motivating talented employees to perform to a higher standard is a key driver for organisational success with researchers claiming that all round business efficiency is derived from financial investment in talent management, such as talent pools (Al Ariss, Cascio, and Paauwe 2014). However, there is little established understanding of what the core psychological processes are that underpin these effects (De Boeck, Meyers, and Dries 2018; Dries 2013). As HRD practitioners and scholars are increasingly required to demonstrate evidence that their strategies have positive impact and benefit (Gubbins et al. 2018; Ross et al. 2019), it is important that research is able to shed light on the mechanisms and conditions through which talent pools are most effective. HRD is not usually actively involved in the business planning process which is a real issue for talent development practices as these should be better aligned with business planning and as such developing employees to execute and meet business objectives (Torraco and Lundgren 2020).

Although there is evidence to generally show that talent strategies and development programs have positive outcomes (e.g., Bethke-Langenegger, Mahler, and Staffelbach 2011; Björkman et al. 2013; Carter and Youssef-Morgan 2019), there are a number of scholars and practitioners who have questioned their effectiveness (e.g., Downs and Swailes 2013; Dries

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2013; Jooss et al. 2019). Importantly employee perceptions and experiences of talent development practices are likely to influence outcomes (Asplund 2019; de Boeck, Meyers, and Dries 2018; Sumelius, Smale, and Yamao 2019), and as such the impact and effectiveness of talent programs are likely to vary significantly between those participating in them. Despite the growing interest in, as well as criticism of, talent pools, there has been little research into the individual differences that make some employees more successful in talent pipelines than others. HRD has been criticized for its focus on generational differences, which often have little or no impact on business performance (Torraco and Lundgren 2020). A broader view of individual differences may be helpful.

To help address this gap, this study develops and tests a moderated mediation model where a psychological mechanism that helps explain how being in a talent pool is related to positive employee outcomes is examined, and an individual level boundary condition that influences the effectiveness of this psychological process is identified. First, we draw upon the literature on organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE) to explain how talent pools increases OBSE by verifying and enhancing a positive representation of one's self within the workplace, which in turn triggers a self-consistency process that facilitates commitment and extra-role behaviour (Bowling et al. 2010; Dries et al. 2014; Pierce and Gardner 2004). This is important because understanding such processes enables HRD practitioners to design talent programmes that better and more accurately contribute to organisational effectiveness and ROI objectives (Ross et al. 2019). Second, we draw upon the literature on the 'dark' triad (Hirschfeld and Scotter 2019; LeBreton, Shiverdecker, and Grimaldi 2018), to explain how narcissism may impact upon the psychological processes through which talent pools influence individual outcomes. As narcissistic individuals already have a heightened sense of self-esteem and may not utilise opportunities for feedback and personal growth (Fatfoufa 2019; Gardner and Pierce 2011; Kausel et al. 2015), it is less likely that OBSE is as relevant

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to explaining how being in a talent pool may relate to positive outcomes for these particular individuals. It is important to consider which personality traits may hinder traditional talent development processes, in order to identify how best to be inclusive and support a wider range of individuals in their careers (Dries 2013).

Overall, our study contributes to HRD research on talent development by examining the role of narcissism, as a ‘dark’ personality trait, in influencing success in talent pools. In doing so, we contribute to the talent development literature in two main ways; first we study how talent pools can lead to preferential work outcomes via OBSE as an important psychological process underpinning talent programs, secondly, we highlight potential boundary effects deriving from narcissism. By understanding these processes, we provide more precise recommendations for talent development practice based on the individual employee and their personality and suggest areas for future HRD research that can advance our understanding of when and how talent pools are most effective. The current research modifies existing theories on talent development by incorporating knowledge about narcissism and the ‘dark’ side of personality, thereby testing and advancing theory of when and how talent development works (Seo, Noh and Ardichvili 2019).

What is talent and why do organisations utilise talent pools?

Talent has been a term used for many years and definitions amongst academics are often divided (Dries 2013). However, most definitions generally agree that talented individuals harness skills and qualities believed to be valuable, rare and hard to imitate (Cappelli 2008). Given the idea of ‘talent’ being both high value and unique, there is an increasing importance being placed on retaining talented employees and so a human capital perspective to talent is often adopted, implying that employees are evaluated on their potential to contribute towards key organisational objectives (Afshari and Nasab 2020; Al Ariss et al. 2014; Dries 2013; Jooss et al. 2019). Consequently, when labelled as talented, employees are seen as high

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potentials, suggesting that senior management believe them to possess the skills and capabilities to develop into future leaders and accomplish higher-level functions within the organisation (Dries et al. 2014, Mäkelä et al. 2010). To identify and develop high potentials, organisations often create talent pools whereby they offer developmental opportunities to make ‘talented’ employees more competitive in the labour market (Cappelli 2008). However, there is a lack of research that have a primary focus on talent development (Garavan, Carbery, and Rock 2012).

When companies are successful in managing talent via dedicated talent pools and programs, they are seeking to benefit from the economic rewards that arise from maximising employees’ potential (Al Ariss et al. 2014). Talent pools that offer the learner an opportunity to develop both their technical and general competence, such as interpersonal skills, allows the learner to be prepared for the ever-changing work environment and contributes to the self-confidence and self-esteem of the individual (Garavan et al. 2012). Moreover, individuals that are part of an effective talent pool feel more committed to their organisation and feel that their organisation is more committed to their development, thus employees with high talent ratings tend to exert more discretionary effort at work as they feel obliged to do so (Asplund 2019; Björkman et al. 2013; Chami-Malaeb and Garavan 2013; Mensah, Bawole, and Wedchayanon 2016). Practitioners have identified an enduring competitive advantage of a 7% decrease in staff turnover and an increase in work performance of between 19-120%, depending on job complexity (Heinen and O’Neill 2004). In addition, developmental simulative activities often experienced in talent pools allow individuals to contribute towards higher-value projects (Ingham 2006), and enable them to become more proactive and flexible to work demands (Mensah 2015). Broadly speaking, a social exchange and human capital perspective has been adopted by many of these studies (Afsahri and Nasab 2020; Al Ariss et al. 2014; Cham-Malaeb and Garavan 2013; Dries 2013). This perspective proposes that a

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talent pool is not only instrumental in harnessing the unique knowledge, skills, and abilities of 'talented' individuals to create competitive advantage (Cappelli 2008), but also operates within a psychological contract framework whereby talent pools activate the reciprocal exchange of socio-emotional resources. This exchange focuses on the logic that by giving the employee focused opportunities for career development and advancement, the employer expects to receive commitment, performance enhancement, and leadership potential from the employee in the long term (Festing and Schafer 2014; Höglund 2012). Recent research has also found that effective talent management practices significantly contribute to an agile learning environment, through increased organisational learning capability and intellectual capital (Afshari and Nasab 2020), a key differentiator in competitive economic times.

The mediating role of organisation based self esteem

Although there is evidence showing the direct impact talent pools have on organisationally desirable outcomes, there is a need to better understand the psychological process through which these programs enact their influence. We argue that organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE) may provide an explanation regarding how talent pools influence employee outcomes.

OBSE is defined as the extent to which employees believe they are competent to satisfy organisational needs, it is often seen as a mediator between the workplace context and employee outcomes (Bowling et al. 2010; Pierce and Gardner 2004). OBSE is built from past accomplishments and failures within the organisation and connotes a self-belief that the individual is responsible and important in the organisation (Pierce et al. 1989). According to self-verification and self-consistency theory (Korman 1970), individuals prefer others to see them how they see themselves and as such OBSE provides psychological coherency between a positive self-concept and one's perceived external representation at work, and is

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particularly facilitated by signals from significant others within the work context, such as managers (Gardner and Pierce 2013; Liu, Hui et al. 2013).

Those who are members of a talent pool are more likely, than those who are not, to experience OBSE because being in talent program signals to them that their organisation cares about their future and is supportive of their career development needs which therefore fulfils a relational psychological contract (Dries et al. 2014). By signalling that the individual is being valued and supported by the organisation, being part of a talent pool verifies and enhances the positive representation of the individual's unique personal attributes and competencies within the work context, thereby increasing OBSE (Liu, Lee et al. 2013). Given that OBSE acts as a motivational personal resource that facilitates healthy productive working (Xanthopoulou et al. 2009), OBSE can be viewed as an important psychological process through which talent development practices are translated into positive outcomes. Importantly, those with high OBSE will want to maintain their positive self-perceptions and as such will be more committed to the organisation and its endeavours, and engage in extra-role performance behaviours, that reinforce their belief that they fit well within the organisation and are worthwhile, important individuals to the organisation (Bowling et al. 2010). Previous studies have found that OBSE is a key mediating process through which individualised developmental practices, perceived organisational support, and relational psychological contract perceptions are related to employee outcomes such as commitment and extra-role behaviour (Arshadi and Hayavi 2013; Gardner et al. 2015; Hughes and Palmer 2007; Liu, Hui et al. 2013; Liu, Lee et al. 2013).

Hypothesis 1a: The relationship between talent pool membership and affective organisational commitment will be mediated by an individual's OBSE.

Hypothesis 1b: The relationship between talent pool membership and extra-role behaviour will be mediated by an individual's OBSE.

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The moderating role of narcissism

Research has often focused upon the positive nature of personality traits in facilitating HRD practices and processes as they tend to emphasise human strengths and qualities (Lundgren, Poell, and Kroon 2019; Luthans 2012). Of the well-known 'Big 5' traits of personality, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and extraversion are possibly the most consistently linked with emergent and effective leadership (Ensari, Riggio, Christian, and Carlsaw 2011) as well as to key indicators of task and extra-role performance (Chiaburu et al. 2011). Therefore, the role of positive personality traits have been useful in identifying and understanding talented individuals. However, instances of counter-productive work behaviours such as theft has required researchers to also concentrate on the darker side of personality (Ahmetoglu et al. 2016; Forsyth, Banks, and McDaniel 2012). This darker side of personality can be explained through traits such as machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy; collectively known as the dark triad (Hirschfeld and Scotter 2018). Although these traits are often perceived to be negative, narcissism in particular may have some positive self-enhancing functions, such as career advancement and altruistic behaviour (Hart, Tortoriello, and Richardson 2019; Hirschfeld and Scotter 2018; LeBreton, Shiverdecker, and Grimaldi 2018); suggesting further research into the trait is required.

Narcissistic individuals regard themselves as superior to others and have higher levels of self-confidence, self-focus and self-enhancement (Campbell, Rudich, and Sedkides 2002; Hirschfeld and Scotter 2018; LeBreton et al. 2018). Whilst pathological narcissism is a clinical disorder, healthy levels of the trait in the workplace can result in beneficial outcome such as increased engagement and enjoyment of work (Andreassen et al. 2012). Although past research has tended to describe narcissism as a form of excessive self-esteem, with the terms high self-esteem and narcissism being used interchangeably, recent research has established that although the concepts are correlated, they are conceptually different and

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should be treated as distinct constructs (Brummelman, Thomaes and Sedikides 2016; Campbell et al. 2002; Gardner and Pierce 2011). The mask model, suggesting that positive self-perceptions of narcissists mask deep feelings of inadequacy, has dominated empirical research conducted on the relationship between narcissism and self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill and Besser 2013), which indicates that narcissistic individuals' may be reluctant to accept feedback from external stimuli when building their self-esteem. Therefore, attempts by the organisation to build self-esteem in 'talented' individuals may be influenced by the employee's narcissism level (Campbell et al. 2002).

Considering this, it can be suggested that, as an external stimulus, talent pools may not increase the self-esteem of those higher in narcissism more than those that display lower levels of the trait. On the other hand, those labelled as talented that are lower in the trait may use the opportunities in the talent pool to build their levels of self-esteem. As those high in narcissism tend to display naturally elevated levels of OBSE (Campbell et al. 2002; Gardner and Pierce 2011), the increased efforts that narcissists exert when they are in a talent pool may therefore be due to the program aligning with their sense of self-importance and providing the power and competition that they value (Ahmetoglu et al. 2016; Fatfoufa 2019; Roberts et al. 2013). Thus, being labelled as talented on one hand will be a positive experience for narcissists as it affirms their inflated sense of superiority and worth. However, being part of a talent development program often involves listening and acting upon potentially challenging and ego-threatening feedback as well as advice that aims to facilitate learning, performance enhancement, and attachment to the organisation (Al Alriss et al. 2014; Cappelli 2008; Chami-Malaeb and Garavan 2013; Jooss et al. 2019; Mensah 2015). Given that narcissists may dismiss advice from others and are more easily prone to aggression when their ego is threatened (Bushman and Baumeister 1998; Kausel et al. 2015), they may not engage well with these types of activities and so the intended benefits to self-development

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and growth may not be realised for those high in narcissism. Instead narcissists may engage in talent development activities in order to showcase their uniqueness or specific assets rather than to genuinely learn and develop (Fatfouta 2019). Therefore, it is likely that narcissists within a talent pool will not experience increases in their organisation-based self-esteem and as such their membership of being in a talent pool will not be indirectly related to levels of commitment and extra-role behaviour via organisation-based self-esteem.

Hypothesis 2: Narcissism will moderate the relationship between talent pool membership and OBSE such the positive relationship between talent pool membership and OBSE is weaker for employees high in narcissism than those low in narcissism.

Hypothesis 3a: The indirect relationship between talent pool membership and affective organisational commitment via OBSE will be moderated by narcissism, such that the indirect relationship will be weaker for employees high in narcissism.

Hypothesis 3b: The indirect relationship between talent pool membership and extra-role behaviour via OBSE will be moderated by narcissism, such that the indirect relationship will be weaker for employees high in narcissism.

Method

Research context

The research has utilised participants employed at a U.K. based bank that has consented to take part, providing that they are granted anonymity. As part of their commitment to develop employees, the bank utilises regional talent pools for high performing individuals. Banks are looking for ways to improve efficiency and offer more to customers, especially in light of the fourth industrial revolution, to do this they need to upskill their employees and invest in those

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that will help them achieve their strategic aims (Bank Governance Leadership Network 2018; McGuire, Dusoye, Garavan, and Alhejji 2018). Given this call for change in the banking industry and the researcher having an opportunity in this field, the banking sector was selected as the research context. Banking is also an industry that those early in their career expect to receive training and development from; laying the foundation for a successful career (Deloitte 2015), this makes it an interesting sector to research when looking into talent practices. Learning about talent development within the banking sector in the UK represents a “typical” instrumental case (Stake 1995) where the phenomenon of talent development can be studied and generalised across other industries that are also strategically implement talent development programmes, such as in the management consultancy, legal, and IT sectors. The Local Chief Executive Officer (LCEO) is responsible for the decision on who joins the talent pool, and this is based on organisational strategy, objectives and nominations by line managers. Following this, the LCEO has a discussion with the prospective talent pool candidates regarding their interest in becoming a part of the talent program. If after this process, the individual is deemed as someone who would benefit from the talent pool, they are enrolled onto a formally recognised talent program that aims to develop their skill set in line with organisational objectives and strategy.

The talent pool has quarterly meetings with the LCEO, where they are presented with developmental assistance such as practice interviews, championing roles and arranging community events; all of which are believed to utilise and further their potential. The talent pool provides the opportunity to develop organisationally desired skills in a group of employees to increase performance across all levels and functions. The activities and opportunities presented in the program aim to develop proficiency and confidence in tasks that individual’s may not regularly encounter in their role. When future leadership roles become available in the organisation, the talent pool ensures that experienced and trained

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employees are readily available. The talent pool selection process is made transparent to all employees and so those participating in the talent pool would likely know who each other are whereas those not participating in the talent pool may have some awareness of who may be.

Participants

Two groups of participants were recruited from the bank branch for the research; a ‘talent’ group and a ‘non-talent’ group. All bank branch employees were informed about the study via an all branch communication, and were asked to voluntarily sign up. A total of 50 individuals out of the 72 currently in the talent pool were recruited along with 50 of the 104 people across the branch that were not in the talent pool. A total of 50 in each group were selected to maintain an equal ratio of talent and non-talent employees. A researcher personally met with the participants to gain informed consent before sending them an email with their unique ID and link to the online survey. Although participants knew that the study was examining their experiences of development opportunities and of working at the Bank, they were not told that talent and non-talent employees were being explicitly compared until they were debriefed after the survey was completed. There were 48 males and 51 females whose ages ranged from 19 to 56 years old with a mean age of 30.99 (SD = 6.61), one participant responded ‘prefer not to say’ for gender. For ease of analysis, ethnicity was simplified to two categories; ‘White British’, with 29 participants and ‘BAME’, with 71 participants. The BAME category represented a variety of ethnicities, with the most prevalent being Asian Indian (n = 32) and Black Caribbean (n = 14). The modal category for organisational tenure across all participants was 2-4 years.

Measures

Talent pool membership

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A dichotomous variable was created for talent pool membership of the bank branch employees whereby those in the talent pool were coded as 1 and those not in the talent pool were coded as 0.

Narcissism

The NPI-16 (Ames, Rose, and Anderson 2006) was used to assess an individual's level of narcissism. This scale consists of 16-items, derived from the original 40-item NPI scale by Raskin and Terry (1988). Participants are usually provided with 16 pairs of items, a narcissistic and non-narcissistic statement, and are asked to select the one that they feel best describes them. For the current research, the scale has been adapted to a 5 point semantic differential scale rather than a binary bipolar scale to reduce the variation caused by changes in measurement between scales. Using an alternative rating system to the binary system has been found to be justifiable for the NPI measure (e.g., Miller et al. 2018). An example item includes '1 - I am much like everybody else – 5- I am an extraordinary person'; with higher scores given to greater agreement towards the narcissism statement. The 5 points had anchor statements such as 1 – most like the left-hand statement, 2, - somewhat more like the left-hand statement, 3 – neutral/no preference, 4 – somewhat more like the right-hand statement, 5 – most like the right-hand statement. To reduce item response biases, the narcissist statement for each of the 16 pairings was allocated randomly to the right or left-hand side of the scale (all items were scored to reflect the same scoring of 1 – low narcissism, to 5 – high narcissism). The inter-item reliability was high ($\alpha = .95$).

OBSE

Pierce et al.'s (1989) 10-item scale was used to measure OBSE, e.g., 'I count around here', and adopted a 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree Likert scale. The inter-item reliability was high ($\alpha = .92$).

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Affective organisational commitment

Allen and Meyer's (1990) six-item affective commitment scale utilising a 1- strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree Likert format was used to capture affective organisational commitment, e.g., 'This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me'. The inter-item reliability was high ($\alpha = .93$).

Extra-role behaviour

Griffin, Neal, and Parker's (2007) three-item individual task proactivity scale, e.g., 'I come up with ideas to improve the way in which my core tasks are done', were used to capture extra-role performance behaviour, and adopted a 1 – very little to 5 – a great deal Likert format. The inter-item reliability was high ($\alpha = .89$).

Control variables:

To control for confounding variables, demographic characteristics including age, gender, tenure and ethnicity were tested to identify whether the talent and non-talent groups significantly differed on any of these variables. The tests revealed that only ethnicity produced a significant result $\chi^2(1) = 3.93, p < .05$. The analysis outlined that 80% of the non-talent group were BAME, whilst only 62% of the talent group were BAME. Consequently, ethnicity was controlled for when running analyses.

To verify that the four self-reported variables (narcissism, OBSE, commitment, extra-role behaviour) were distinct, CFAs were performed. The four factor model was an adequate fit of the data: $\chi^2(554) = 855.32, p < .001$; χ^2 / df ratio = 1.54; RMSEA = .07, CFI = .88, SRMR = .07; and was a better fit than alternative models (see Table 1). Although we note that the CFI is a little below the usually accepted threshold of .90, the majority of the fit indices are within plausible thresholds.

Analytical Strategy

Path analysis was conducted with Mplus version 8 (Muthén and Muthén, 2017). Standardised outputs as well as indirect effect, moderation, and moderated mediation testing using bias-corrected bootstrapping protocols with 5,000 samples were utilised within the Mplus coding syntax. To further probe the interactions, simple slope tests were conducted, and the interactions were plotted graphically (Preacher, Curran, and Bauer 2006). Although not shown in Figure 1

Table 1 about here

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlations between the study variables. Overall the direct relationships were indicative of study hypotheses.

Table 2 about here

Tests of Hypotheses

The hypothesised moderated mediation model demonstrated an adequate fit of the data: $\chi^2(7) = 15.11, p < .05; \chi^2/df$ ratio = 2.16, RMSEA = .11, CFI = .96, SRMR = .04. We also checked whether the model would be a better fit if the direct paths between talent pool membership to the commitment and extra-role behaviour outcomes were included. The fit of the model was not a better fit ($\Delta\chi^2 = 3.14, p = .21$): $\chi^2(5) = 11.96, p < .05; \chi^2/df$ ratio = 2.39, RMSEA = .12, CFI = .96, SRMR = .04; and the direct pathways linking talent pool

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membership with the outcomes were not statistically significant. Additionally, we also checked whether including the direct paths from narcissism to these outcomes would improve model fit. We found that the fit was not significantly better ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1.76, p = .41$): $\chi^2 (5) = 13.35, p < .05$; χ^2 /df ratio = 2.67, RMSEA = .13, CFI = .96, SRMR = .05; and the direct pathways linking narcissism with the outcomes were not statistically significant. For both models, the mediation and moderated mediation effects were similar to those in the hypothesised model. Lastly, to further strengthen the robustness of our analysis, we tested an alternative moderated mediation model where commitment and extra-role behaviour were the mediators and OBSE was the dependent variable. This model was a significantly poorer fit of the data than the hypothesised model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 31.25, p < .001$): $\chi^2 (5) = 46.36, p < .001$; χ^2 /df ratio = 9.27, RMSEA = .29, CFI = .79, SRMR = .08. Given the findings from these additional structural models, we present the results of the hypothesised model as per Figure 1.

First, the relationship between talent pool membership and OBSE was positive and significant ($B = .48, 95\% \text{ CI} = .29 \text{ to } .66$), and the relationship between OBSE and the outcomes of affective organisational commitment ($B = .61, 95\% \text{ CI} = .48 \text{ to } .73$) and extra-role performance behaviour ($B = .59, 95\% \text{ CI} = .45 \text{ to } .71$) were also positive and significant. To verify the mediation pathways and to test Hypotheses 1a and 1b, we conducted indirect effect analyses. These showed that the indirect pathway linking talent pool membership with commitment via OBSE was 0.32 (95% CI = .19 to .47), and the indirect pathway linking talent pool membership with extra-role behaviour via OBSE was 0.31 (95% CI = .17 to .46). These results therefore provide support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Second, the interaction between talent pool membership and narcissism on OBSE was significant and negative ($B = -.16, 95\% \text{ CI} = -.32 \text{ to } -.01$). It is worth also noting that alongside the positive relationship between talent pool membership and OBSE as detailed above, there was also a significant positive relationship between narcissism and OBSE ($B =$

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.38, 95% CI = .16 to .60), thus indicating both main effects as well as the interaction are influencing OBSE. Simple slope tests reveal that the positive relationship between talent pool membership and OBSE was significant for those low in narcissism (est. = .53, 95% CI = .39 to .68) but not for those high in narcissism (est. = .20, 95% CI = -.09 to .47). The difference in the simple slopes was significant (est. = -.34, 95% CI = -.68 to -.01). Overall, these tests support Hypothesis 2. This interaction is plotted graphically in Figure 2 and shows that those low in narcissism who are not part of the talent pool have much lower levels of OBSE than others not part of the talent pool who are high in narcissism, whereas those low in narcissism who are part of the talent pool have similar (high) levels of OBSE to those high in narcissism who are also part of the talent pool.

To test Hypotheses 3a and 3b, further moderated mediation calculations were undertaken that showed the indirect relationship between talent pool membership and the outcomes of affective organisational commitment and extra-role performance behaviour via OBSE were significant for those low in narcissism (commitment: est. = .47, 95% CI = .32 to .65; extra-role behaviour: est. = .45, 95% CI = .29 to .62) but not those high in narcissism (commitment: est. = .17, 95% CI = -.08 to .42; extra-role behaviour: est. = .16, 95% CI = -.08 to .41). Therefore, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were also supported.

Figure 1 about here

Figure 2 about here

Discussion and Conclusions

To summarise, our study provided overall support for the proposed model; it was found that the relationship between talent pool membership and employee outcomes (commitment and

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extra-role behaviour) was mediated by OBSE and that this mediation pathway was moderated by narcissism, such that this pathway is weaker for those high in narcissism.

The findings of this study align with previous research that demonstrates the positive effect that an effective talent pool has on an individual's level of commitment and performance (Chami-Malaeb and Garavan 2013; Mensah et al. 2016). Furthermore, by showing how OBSE mediates the relationships between talent pool membership and commitment/extra-role behaviour, we provide support for self-verification and self-consistency theory (Korman 1970). More specifically, the resources and opportunities provided in a talent pool heighten and translate OBSE in ways that verify and maintain the positive status as a 'talented' member of the organisation, i.e. a highly committed and high-performance individual (Bowling et al. 2010; Gardner et al. 2015; Liu, Lee et al. 2013). Therefore, we provide further understanding of the psychological mechanisms through which talent identification can influence the individual (Björkman et al. 2013; Dries 2013).

To contribute to the growing interest that organisational research has had with the dark triad of personality traits (LeBreton et al. 2018), we provide insight into a dark trait as a potential variable that affects how talent development can benefit the individual employee. The results suggest that the positive effects of being in a talent pool on commitment and performance via OBSE may only occur for those low, but not high, in narcissism. As shown, the findings of the current study support the notion that talent pools increase the self-esteem of those lower in narcissism more than those that display higher levels of the trait. Drawing upon the mask model (Zeigler-Hill and Besser 2013) and the way in which narcissism functions when in challenging feedback/personal growth situations (Bushman and Baumeister 1998; Kausel et al. 2015), this may be because when those high in narcissism engage in talent development activities to showcase their perceived uniqueness and to affirm their own sense of superiority amongst their peers, rather than wanting to directly engage

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with challenging feedback and opportunities to develop their skillset (Fatfoutta 2019).

Therefore, the psychological mechanism through which being in a talent pool enhances the performance and commitment of narcissists is not likely to be OBSE.

In summary, our study contributes to the talent development literature by a) clarifying how self-verification and self-consistency processes explain the role of OBSE as a mediator in the relationship between talent pool membership and individual level outcomes; and b) explaining when the above processes are mostly likely to operate – in this case for those that are not high in narcissism. Thus, we advance the understanding of both *when* and *how* talent pools are most effective for an individual, which can be used to refine and modify talent development frameworks and programs.

Limitations and areas for future research

This study should be considered alongside the following limitations. Firstly, the mediators, moderator, and dependent variables were all captured using self-report scales at one point in time and so this could be vulnerable to bias, especially given the sensitive nature of variables such as narcissism. Future research should therefore capture more objective or other-rated measures, particularly for the dependent variables. Secondly, the study was conducted in one specific organisational setting, which was useful to capitalise on a naturally occurring talent development program. However, it may restrict the generalisability of the findings, and so future efforts could attempt to replicate the study across a larger sample across a range of organisations, and sectors, to understand how robust our findings are. In particular, the sample in this study was relatively small and context of city bank branches in the UK reflects an ethnically diverse, young workforce and therefore this may not apply across other industries and workforces. Whilst the banking industry is viewed as one that offers developmental opportunities, it would be interesting to understand the impact of talent management practices in other sectors such as Information Technology. This is not only

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because technology is a key area for HRD to understand how to develop talent rapidly (Torraco and Lundgren 2020) but also to recognise the importance industrial context has on psychological phenomena (Johns 2006). Although we would anticipate that our conceptual model would still hold across many industries, there will be certain nuances in career expectations, motives, and attitudes that would need to be accounted for alongside personality traits, for example public service motivation in the public sector (Ritz, Brewer and Neumann 2016). Third, it would of interest to further probe individual differences in more depth. For example, more work is needed to establish whether narcissistic individuals are more likely to be selected into talent pools in the first place, and as there is a link between leaders and Psychopathy (Westerlaken and Woods 2013) as well as ‘light’ traits, such as openness to experience (Ensari et al. 2011), it would be interesting to understand how a broader collection of dark and light traits links to success in a talent pool in terms of future leadership development/effectiveness. Moreover, it may be that narcissistic individuals have a qualitatively different experience of talent development practices compared to those lower in the trait. Future research adopting a qualitative approach can help understand the meaning that talent pool individuals attribute to their experiences in the group and how this then helps construct their view of their career and the organisation. Although challenging to undertake, there would be opportunities to conduct novel and interesting research designs, for example a longitudinal case study approach following talent development participants during and after a naturally occurring talent development programme. A recent example within the HRD literature would be Anderson, Gifford, and Wildman’s (2020) mixed methods evaluation of a MOOC within the healthcare sector.

Practical implications

Our study underscores how talent development programs can be used to facilitate commitment and performance through building an employee’s sense of self-esteem and value

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in the organisation. Therefore, these programs should consider how to design specific components that focus on increasing self-esteem, such as the inclusion of mentoring and feedback. By focusing not only on technical skills and knowledge, but also on strengths and psychological resources (Carter and Youssef-Morgan 2019; Luthans 2012), talent development programs have the opportunity to foster positive employee outcomes by connecting the individual's sense of personal worth and value to the wider organisation and its success. The positive work outcomes arising from effective talent pools will ensure that the investment into them is worthwhile for the business.

Moreover, it is important for managers to understand that personality factors such as narcissism can impact the relative benefit or success of a talent development initiative on the individual employee. This is underscored by the fact that many HRD practitioners utilise personality testing within their practice, and some are welcoming the inclusion of 'darker' traits within such testing (Lundgren et al. 2019). It can be argued that if narcissistic individuals are using talent programs to simply showcase their skills, and not develop, it may not be beneficial to include them in these, yet broadly speaking, the destructive or maladaptive parts of narcissism may be tempered by effective leadership/talent development programs (Fatfouta 2019). We argue that whilst tailored programs are important and should be advocated, HRD practitioners should be cognisant that in itself labelling narcissists as talented and putting them in such programs, will not in itself lead to beneficial outcomes – rather more thought as to how narcissists perceive and interact with others and their environment is needed when tailoring such programs. For example, recent work suggests that highly narcissistic individuals can behave in more prosocial ways when their overall sense of self-esteem is heightened (Hart et al. 2019). Therefore, this underscores the need for a differentiated talent management strategy that focuses on providing a more individualised approach to shaping individuals deemed as talented within the organisation. Not only should

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individualised talent approaches consider traits such as Narcissism, other dark (such as psychopathy) and light (such as openness to experience) traits should be included to gain a holistic view of the individual which will enhance their development.

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Table 1. Fit statistics for measurement models from self-reported variables (OBSE, narcissism, commitment, extra-role behaviour)

Measurement model	χ^2 (df)	$\Delta\chi^2$	χ^2/df ratio	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Four factor model	855.32 (554)***	127.64***	1.54	.07	.88	.07
Alternative three factor model	982.96 (557)***	179.68***	1.76	.09	.83	.09
Alternative two factor model	1162.64 (559)***	371.14***	2.08	.10	.76	.09
Alternative one factor model	1533.78 (560)***		2.74	.13	.62	.11

*p < .05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

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Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations between all variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	6
1. Ethnicity	-	-					
2. Talent vs non-talent	-	-	-.20*				
3. Narcissism	2.74	1.01	-.19	-.67***			
4. OBSE	3.99	0.77	-.19	.73***	.65***		
5. Affective organisational commitment	3.15	1.11	-.24*	.52***	.44***	.64***	
6. Extra-role performance behaviour	3.59	1.09	-.10	.52***	.46***	.59***	.53***

*p < .05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

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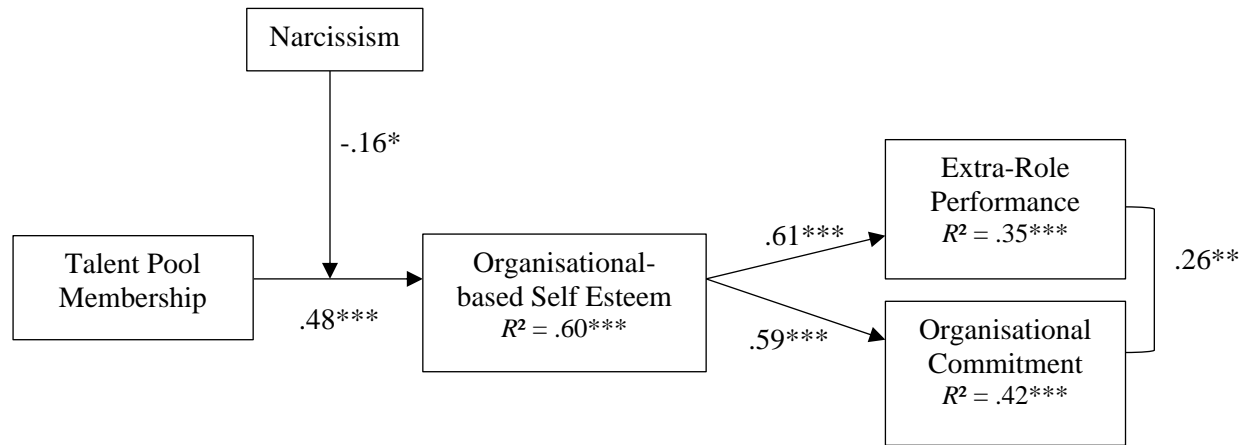


Figure 1. Hypothesised model and results of path analysis.

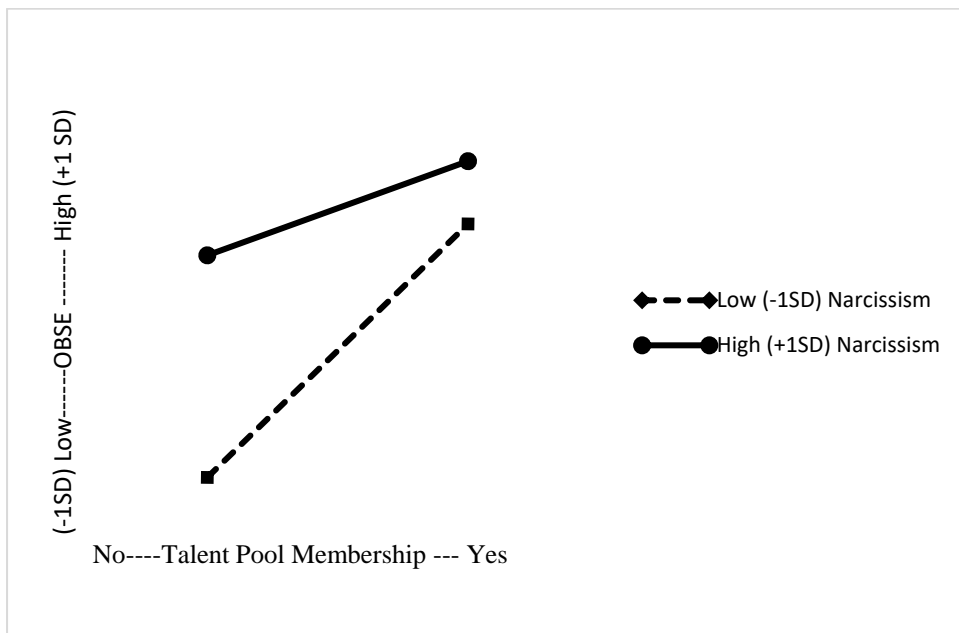


Figure 2. Graphical illustration of interaction between talent pool membership and narcissism on OBSE