The Psychological Contract of Talented Employees: The Case of Core and Support Staff in Oman’s Oil and Gas Sector

by

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Aflah Zaher Al Shaqsi, September 2017
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I would like to thank the PGR Administration Team and Karen Short for their services and administrative advice concerning our PhD journey. I also extend my thanks to my fellow PhD colleagues and Nasser Al Bimani for sharing their knowledge and time on understanding and improving our research projects.
This doctoral thesis focuses on understanding how talented employees’ psychological contract was formed and changed over the period of their employment. Organisations in the oil and gas sector rely heavily on cutting-edge technologies and human capital to optimise oil production. Hence, they are keen to attract and retain talented employees in order to sustain value creation and meet their organisational goals through the immediate and potential contribution of these talented employees. The psychological contract, on the other hand, reflects the quality of the employment relationship between the talented employees and their employer. It has a number of implications on employees’ attitudes and behaviour including job satisfaction, turnover, and performance. Thirty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted with talented employees across the Exploration and Production Organisations and their subsidiaries in Oman. Data was thematically analysed using a modified version of the traditional thematic analysis. Three overarching themes were discovered as most relevant and important.

The findings suggest that the formation of the psychological contract is influenced by Talented Employees’ Value Proposition and Identification Mechanism. The findings also suggest that talented employees reciprocate organisations’ learning and development initiatives with loyalty and discretionary performance, which could substantially improve business performance. However, the findings also indicate that talented employees do not necessarily leave or stay with perceptions of psychological contract breach and fulfilment. These talent deals are dynamic and change over the course of their career according to the quality of reciprocation from their employer. Moreover, the deals of talented employees are also influenced by contextual factors, such as oil prices and social pressure, employer brands, and the identities of said employees. Talented employees were found to pay particular attention to their future employability prospects and hence turned to their employer for challenging and rewarding tasks and projects. These aspects were at the forefront of what formed and influenced the state of their psychological contract. Future research could be conducted on different contexts and sample groups in order to further understand the nature of reciprocity and mutuality with the psychological contract. Similarly, future research could benefit from the findings of this thesis in terms of designing surveys for a large sample size in order to understand the correlation between employer brand, talented employees’ identity, and the dynamics of their psychological contract.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX | TITLES | PAGE
--- | --- | ---
1 | TITLE OF THE THESIS | I
2 | DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY | II
3 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENT | III
4 | ABSTRACT | v
5 | TABLE OF CONTENTS | v
6 | LIST OF TABLES | ix
7 | LIST OF FIGURES | ix

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION | 2
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH | 3
1.2.1 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT | 4
1.2.2 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT | 5
1.2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT INTERACTION | 6
1.3 RESEARCH GAP | 8
1.4 RESEARCH CONTEXT | 9
1.5 THE RESEARCH RATIONALE | 15
1.6 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS | 16
1.7 THE ANTICIPATED RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS | 17
1.8 THE RESEARCH PROCESS | 17
1.9 THESIS OUTLINE | 19
1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY | 20

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW-THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY AND TALENT MANAGEMENT; ATTEMPTING TO UNDERSTAND TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

2.1 INTRODUCTION | 23
2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT-ORIGINS, CRITIQUE, AND FUTURE PROSPECT | 25
2.2.1 THE ESSENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY | 25
2.2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY ORIGIN | 26
2.2.3 THE EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY | 31
2.2.4 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY | 34
2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT-FORMATION, ATTRIBUTES, CONSEQUENCES | 36
2.3.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION | 40
2.3.2 ATTRIBUTES THAT DISTINGUISH PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT | 43
2.3.3 RESPONSES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT VIOLATION | 45
2.3.4 SUSTAINING HEALTHY PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS | 48
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORKFORCE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT; CHALLENGES OVER DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING THEM</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT; THE PERCEIVED SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGE</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>SUMMARY OF THE MAIN GAPS IN THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.1</td>
<td>THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY REVIEWED LITERATURE ON THIS RESEARCH</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.2</td>
<td>THE IMPLICATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEWED ON RELATING TALENT MANAGEMENT WITH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY IN THIS RESEARCH</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.3</td>
<td>TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT AS DEFINED FOR THIS RESEARCH</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.4</td>
<td>PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT PERSPECTIVE FOR THIS RESEARCH</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>RESEARCH FOCUS</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>ELABORATING ON THE INTENDED RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY: INTERPRETIVISM</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1.1</td>
<td>JUSTIFICATION FOR ADOPTING AN INTERPRETIVIST PHILOSOPHY</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE INDUCTIVE IN NATURE</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3</td>
<td>RESEARCH STRATEGY: INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3.1</td>
<td>CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE WITH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3.2</td>
<td>APPLICATION OF CIT IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4</td>
<td>TIME HORIZONS: CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5</td>
<td>PROCEDURE FOR SAMPLING (UNIT OF ANALYSIS)</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5.1</td>
<td>INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR TALENTED EMPLOYEES</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5.2</td>
<td>PROCESS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>ROBUSTNESS OF RESEARCH METHOD</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1</td>
<td>CREDIBILITY</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>DEPENDABILITY</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3</td>
<td>TRANSFERABILITY</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4</td>
<td>GATE KEEPERS, ACCESS, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - TALEDNTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>MODIFIED THEMATIC ANALYSIS</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1</td>
<td>STAGE 1: FAMILIARISATION</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2</td>
<td>STAGE 2: GENERATING INITIAL CODES AND SEARCHING FOR INITIAL THEMES</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.3</td>
<td>STAGES 3: REVIEWING THEMES AND DEFINING FINAL THEMES</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.4</td>
<td>STAGE 4: FINE-TUNED THEMES:</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>REPORTING THE THEME “TALEDNTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION”</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1</td>
<td>TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION - EMPLOYER BRAND</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.1</td>
<td>CORPORATE AND BRAND IMAGE AND SOCIAL PRESSURE</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.2</td>
<td>COMPETITIVE PACKAGES AND BENEFITS</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.3</td>
<td>DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.4</td>
<td>SOPHISTICATED AND RIGOROUS SYSTEMS</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.5</td>
<td>CULTURE AND WORK STRUCTURE</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.6</td>
<td>LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT-CHALLENGING TASKS AND PROJECTS</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.7</td>
<td>REWARDING AND RICH EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2</td>
<td>TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION - TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES' IDENTITY</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.1</td>
<td>TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES ARE VISIONARY AND KNOW WHAT THEY WANT</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.2</td>
<td>TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES TAKE INITIATIVE</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.3</td>
<td>TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES HAVE 'PRIDE' AND PERCEIVED SELF SIGNIFICANCE</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.4</td>
<td>TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES ARE MATURE AND HOLD IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3</td>
<td>INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS - WAR FOR TALENT</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS FROM THEM ONE</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE TALENT DEAL AND DYNAMICS OF TALLEDNTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>THE TALENT DEAL</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>THE TALENT DEAL- TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND IMPLICATIONS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>THE TALENT DEAL- THE ROLE OF PROMISES, EXPECTATIONS, AND OBLIGATIONS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>TALENT DEAL- EMERGENT TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1</td>
<td>PC-FULFILLMENT</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2</td>
<td>PC-BREACH</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3</td>
<td>PC-VIOLATION</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4</td>
<td>MITIGATING PC BREACH AND PC VIOLATION</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>DISCUSSION OF THEME TWO AND THEME THREE</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

| 6.1 | INTRODUCTION | 202 |
| 6.2 | REVIEW OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS | 202 |
| 6.2.1 | THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION AND ENHANCED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK | 205 |
| 6.2.2 | PRACTICAL IMPLICATION | 209 |
| 6.3 | LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 210 |
| 6.4 | CHAPTER SUMMARY | 212 |

**REFERENCE**

**APPENDICES**

214

240
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEX</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 2.1</td>
<td>A SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES FACING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 2.2</td>
<td>PROMISES’ IN THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP THAT CREATE OBLIGATIONS</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 3.1</td>
<td>SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN FOR THIS THESIS</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 3.2</td>
<td>COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO RESEARCH PHILOSOPHIES</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 3.3</td>
<td>DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 3.4</td>
<td>SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS AND PROFILE</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 3.5</td>
<td>THE PROCESS OF RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS AND FIELD WORK</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 4.1</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIAL THEMES</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 4.2</td>
<td>THE DEVELOPMENT OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ VALUE PROPOSITION THEME</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 4.3</td>
<td>THE DEVELOPMENT OF TALENT DEAL THEME</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 4.4</td>
<td>THE DEVELOPED OF DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEME</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE 6.1</td>
<td>SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEX</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.1</td>
<td>THE AMALGAMATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT LITERATURE AND TALENT MANAGEMENT LITERATURE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.2</td>
<td>GAS PLANT IN OMAN</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.3</td>
<td>REFINERY PLANT IN OMAN</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 1.4</td>
<td>THE RESEARCH PROCESS</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.1</td>
<td>TYPES OF CONTRACTS</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.2</td>
<td>RANGE OF EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT VIOLATION</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 2.3</td>
<td>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.1</td>
<td>RESEARCH ONION</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.2</td>
<td>THE TIME TEMPLATE</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 3.3</td>
<td>STEPS IN CONDUCTING THEMATIC ANALYSIS</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.1</td>
<td>THE INITIAL THEMATIC MAPS</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.1</td>
<td>THE INITIAL THEMATIC MAP (CONTINUATION)</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.2</td>
<td>THE DEVELOPED THEMATIC MAP - TALENTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.3</td>
<td>THE DEVELOPED THEMATIC MAP - THE TALENT DEAL</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.4</td>
<td>DEVELOPED THEMATIC MAP 4: DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 4.5</td>
<td>FINALISED THEMATIC MAP</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 6.1</td>
<td>FINALIZED THEMATIC MAP</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 6.2</td>
<td>ENHANCED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE 6.3</td>
<td>STUDY FOCUS</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1</td>
<td>THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2</td>
<td>TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.3</td>
<td>PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT INTERACTION</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>RESEARCH GAP</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>RESEARCH CONTEXT</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>THE RESEARCH RATIONALE</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>THE ANTICIPATED RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>THE RESEARCH PROCESS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>THESIS OUTLINE</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research has been undertaken in order to make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge in human resource management literature. The research is primarily focused on the social exchange and organisational careers theories where there is more than a monetary exchange between two parties (Blau, 1986; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996). These theories are highly concerned with the deals individuals - usually employers - initiate with their employees in exchange of valuable outcome(s), which form the reciprocity of the relationship between the parties involved (Blau, 1986; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Rousseau, 1995).

It is argued that the two parties involved in a contract share a common interest for performance (Rousseau, 1989; Crossman, 2007). Employers seek performance in the form of innovative solutions, differential contribution, and sustained competitive edge which can be made possible through their employees. Employees, on the other hand, usually have a psychological need and passion to place knowledge into the work context and solve complex problems, which is delivered within the employment context between the parties (Crossman, 2008; Storey, 2001; Bratton and Gold, 2003). While a contract is usually a legal bind between the parties involved, administered by organisational representatives, a psychological contract also exists between them. This is in the form of perceptual beliefs and inferred promises mutually held by each party on their obligations, and therefore, expectations as part of delivering the deal (Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Guest, 2004).

Work requirements have been changing over the past few decades and while organisations initially focused on the physical ability of workers in lifting, assembling, and/or building, the focus has been increasingly shifting to employees’ ability to think, plan, or make decisions (Rousseau, 1995; Jackson et al., 2003; Guest, 2004). As changes in the environment have become less predictable, high-paced especially as a result of the technological breakthrough, globalization, free markets, and diversified consumer needs, organisations are challenged to decide on the appropriate human capital required to become effective in realizing their objectives, thus, establishing and sustaining a competitive advantage (Jackson et al., 2003; CIPD, 2006; Guest, 2004; Storey, 2001).

Such human capital includes talent which according to CIPD (2006) features a complex mixture of knowledge, skills and cognitive abilities that employees possess and deploy in
their work context. It furthermore includes their potential, values, and work preferences. Such talent is essential in creating organisational capabilities which is defined by Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2001) and cited by Jackson et al., (2003, p. 9) as an ‘organisation’s ability to integrate and deploy its resources to achieve a desired goal’. It is suggested that talent’s impact and contribution to an organisation’s performance when properly managed is substantial, thus, organisations compete to acquire and retain relevant talents (Michaels et al., 2001; CIPD, 2006; Collings and Mellahi, 2009).

It is therefore imperative that academicians explore different literature streams in order to critically analyse relevant research work, theories surrounding talented employees’ psychological contract i.e.: the literature on psychological contract theory and relevant literature on talent and talent management, in order to subsequently identify research gap(s). Equally, an empirical research study is pivotal in order to understand the dynamics of talented employees’ psychological contracts formation, its content, and consequences relating to its fulfilment, breach, and violation as proposed interact in a real life context. This is anticipated to yield a substantial contribution both theoretically and practically. Thus, this PhD research is twofold. Firstly, it is focused on exploring the literature on the psychological contract and talent and the talent management theories targeted at understanding the value and role of talented employees’ with an emphasis on understanding how psychological contracts between the employees and their employer(s) are formed and evolve over the course of their career, in addition to understanding the implications of the changing state and health of the psychological contract on the employment relationship. Secondly, this thesis is reinforced by conducting an empirical study in a specific context in order to explore the realities of the social actors i.e. talented employees and the dynamics of their psychological contracts and its subsequent implications on the employment relationship. The context of the empirical study is Oman’s oil and gas sector, which has been argued to represent the strategically most important sector for the country’s economy.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

The research primarily aims to understand the nature of talented employees’ psychological contract. This aim includes identifying the contents of talented employees’ psychological contract and its dynamics and implication on talented employees
employment relationship. This is achieved through an amalgamation of two unique streams of the literature: the first is the employment relationship stream denoted by the psychological contract theory, while the second is the talent and talent management (TM) stream. This is illustrated in Figure 1.1 below. This stream addresses the relevant theoretical debate on the management and retention of such workforce for a differential organisational edge (Michaels et al., 2001; Makela, et al., 2010; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, et al., 2012). The psychological contract theory is considered to be a meta-theory that has been utilised in different disciplines to explain how people behave and react in different contexts. These include organisational behaviour, psychology, and sociology (see Chapter 2 for a comprehensive discussion on the psychological contract theory). The psychological contract theory can be defined from an HRM perspective and according to organisational psychologists as the perception and/or belief of mutual obligations held by two parties, namely the employer and the employee(s) that go beyond the legal employment contract (Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). Hence, this research is anticipated to contribute by demonstrating the dynamics and implications of talented employees’ psychological contracts on their subsequent attitudes and behaviour towards their employer. This doctoral thesis would therefore explain the contents of talented employees’ psychological contracts and the response these talented employees take as their state of psychological contract shifts (see Section 3.9) for justifications.

FIGURE 1.1 THE AMALGAMATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT LITERATURE AND TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT LITERATURE.

1.2.1 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

The psychological contract can be defined as beliefs or perceived promise(s) between two parties on their mutual obligations and expectations forming the social exchange relationship in their employment setting (Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). The psychological contract, as argued in the literature, has critical implications on the employment relationship and is to be carefully managed in order to ensure a healthy
employment relationship between parties (Rousseau, 1995; 2004; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994).

As employees negotiate ‘deals’ for their careers in an effort to meet their changing needs, the psychological contract becomes dynamic as the nature of the perceived obligation and anticipated expectations between parties changes over time (Inkson and King, 2011; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Guest, 2004). Researchers have been arguing that the psychological contract is constituted by three main constructs that reflect its state once the reciprocal promises and obligations between the parties are perceived to have been formed. These are fairness of the exchange relationship; ‘delivery of the deal’/met expectations, and trust between the parties among others (Guest and Conway, 1997; Martin et al., 1999; Pate et al., 2000; Guest, 2004).

1.2.2 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

The literature on talent and talent management has long discussed the importance of specific competencies for the creation and sustainability of an organisational competitive advantage. Talent can be defined as the ‘sum of a person’s abilities- his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character, and drive. It also includes his or her ability to learn and grow’ (Michael et al., 2001, p. xii). Talent management, on the other hand, can be defined as ‘the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization’ (CIPD, 2007, p. xi). Given the demographic changes of the 21st century coupled with changes in values, expectations, and attitudes towards work, and the anticipated economic growth (Orr and McVerry, 2007; Michaels et al., 2001; CIPD, 2006), organisations would occasionally find themselves confronted by a limited supply of talent in the market, consequently, a phenomenon resulting in the so-called ‘war for talent’ (Michaels et al., 2001; CIPD, 2011; CIPD, 2009).

This has given rise to a number of issues surrounding the talent management process, including attraction, training and development, managing performance and rewards, and finally, succession planning and retention (CIPD, 2006; Makela, et al., 2010; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries et al., 2012). While there has been no consensus over how these talented employees are defined and identified, the aforementioned literature and many
other field related scholars and experts have stressed that the definition and identification is context-specific, which adds context-specific to the challenge of managing and retaining these employees (Coulson-Thomas, 2012; Tansley, 2011; Al Amri, 2016). The aforementioned definition of talent and talent management is among the most common and comprehensive ones. One of the many advantages and values realised by this PhD thesis is its attribution and response to conducting a context-specific research to untap the knowledge and meanings associated with talent and talent management. This does not only add to the existing context-specific knowledge in the area but also extends its parameters by incorporating the theory of the psychological contract that the very talented individuals experience over the course of their career. An area that has received minimum attention so far and is addressed as part of this PhD research study.

1.2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT INTERACTION

It has been argued in the literature that the psychological contract has a number of implications on the employment relationship between the employee and the employer. These include, but are not limited to commitment to a high and desired performance, intentions to stay/quit, willingness to utilise potential and share knowledge, and cultivating trust relations between employees and employers that each party delivers his/her part of the deal (Rousseau, 1989; Robinson, 1996; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Pate and Malone, 2000; Martin et al., 1999; Guest, 2004).

Nevertheless, as the psychological contract is based on mutual perceptions and beliefs that are promissory between the parties, and, therefore generate mutually perceived obligations, a mutual exchange relationship is formed between the employee and the employer (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1989, 2004). However, given the constant changes that occur on the macro-level and micro-level of the global and local markets - as discussed in the introduction - which impacts businesses and their strategic choices including the nature of work and work requirements (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Pate and Malone, 2000; Pate et al., 2000; Guest, 2004), these changes would consequently affect the type of offers and wants both parties would be willing to exchange and reciprocate (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Rousseau, 2004).

Therefore, the employment relationship and to the concern of this thesis the ‘psychological contract’ changes and becomes dynamic to accommodate such changes
(Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Rousseau, 2001; Guest, 2004; Rousseau, 2004). These market changes implications are in line with the argument that the ‘war for talent’ is cyclical and highly associated with the changes affecting work requirements and the nature of work (Michaels et al., 2001; CIPD, 2011; Schuler et al., 2011).

However, and interestingly, the literature also suggests that such changes make it difficult for employers to make and sometimes keep promises to their employees, which may reflect in the increased likelihood and frequency of employees perceiving that their employer(s) has not kept their promises, has not delivered as expected, or has not maintained their part of the deal (Pate and Malone, 2000; Guest, 2004; Rousseau, 2001, 2004; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994). This is referred to in the literature as signs of ‘breach in the psychological contract’, as employees perceive them, which has been regarded by Robinson and Rousseau (1994), Rousseau (2001) and Guest (2004) as the norm rather than as an exception given the need to change in order to become congruent with market trends and maintain competitiveness and survive (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Guest, 2004). However, when attempts by the parties to resolve the breach fail, employees experience a ‘violation of the psychological contract’ (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Pate and Malone, 2000; Rousseau, 2004) although, as argued by the literature, this might be the norm rather than the exception (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Guest, 2004).

As employers fail to meet their part of the ‘deal’ or are unable to deliver what has been promised, employees may become less likely to sustain a high and desired performance, may not reach their full potential at work, and may express intentions to leave and sabotage the work climate at its worst stake (Chao et al., 2011; Rousseau, 2004; Martin, 2006). This results in one or all of the following (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Chao et al., 2011; Rousseau, 2004; Martin, 2006):

- Employees express feelings of anger and resentment towards their employer as they feel betrayed.

- Employees are sabotaging the work place in cases where employees have a sense of ownership of a particular product or service.

- Employees uphold counter-productive behaviour before they eventually leave, which for the research context refers to a loss of talent.
These issues are inter-related with the literature on talent and talent management in the sense that organisations can be helpless when talents leave the organisations while they are still considered significant and a requirement to complement organisational capabilities. Moreover, organisations incur the costs spent to groom such talents from recruitment, development, to placing them amongst the high-impact performers (CIPD, 2006; Makela et al., 2010). Therefore, cross-linking the two streams of the literature is suggested to make a difference in organisations’ capacity to manage and retain their talents as well as allows talents to explore greater flexibility within organisations (Pate et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1999; Dries et al., 2012; Hoglund, 2012).

Thus, in order to effectively manage talented employees including - for the concern of this thesis - retaining them, it is imperative that this research is conducted in a specific context in order to effectively explicate on the nature of the psychological contract these talented employees form and exchange with their employer(s) (Hoglund, 2012; Rousseau, 2004). The psychological contract, as pointed above and further explained in Chapter 2, has behavioural and attitudinal implications on individual employees including intentions to stay/quit and turnover (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 2004; Guest, 2004).

Equally important, this research through the literature review and empirical study would identify the set of competencies that are critical in forming the construct of talent in the context of Oman’s oil and gas sector, consequently allowing this research through the empirical study to effectively identify and define those employees regarded as talented employees. Eventually, this PhD thesis would substantially contribute to understanding the nature and dynamics of the psychological contract between talents and their employer(s).

1.3 RESEARCH GAP

Scholars and practitioners in the field of psychological contract constantly state that knowledge is limited on how the psychological contract is formed and changes over time (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004; Vantilborgh et al., 2014). Others call for more research to unpack the currencies of exchange from the perspective of the employees involved in them (Conway and Briner, 2005; 2009; Al Dossari et al., 2015; Briner, 2016). They indicated that more research is required to investigate how the contents of the psychological contract are shaped and exchanged between the employees and their employer(s).
employers, thereby, influencing the state of the psychological contract these employees perceive towards their employers (Rousseau et al., 2015; Griep et al., 2016; Tomprou et al., 2015). On the other hand, scholars and practitioners within the field of talent and talent management call for more context-specific research in order to understand the identification process of talents and who is considered talented by their organisations (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tansley, 2011; Dries et al., 2012). They moreover call for more research that bridges talent management with other literature streams in order to understand how it interacts and affects business and organisational objectives (Sonnenberg et al., 2014; Sparrow et al., 2014; Bjorkman et al., 2013). This research links the two streams and responds to the calls for research by investigating the nature of talented employees’ psychological contract. It emphasises on understanding the content of ‘The Deal’ of talented employees’ psychological contract from their own work experiences through a qualitative research design that allows them to reflect on their personal employment relationships. Moreover, this research emphasises on understanding how these talented employees form their psychological contract and their responses when it changes over the period of their employment relationship.

This doctoral thesis, therefore, intends to investigate talented employees’ experiences and the meanings they attached to them as their psychological contract was formed and changed over the course of their careers (see the ‘Findings’ chapter and Sections 5.2.1, 5.2.2 from Chapter 5). Equally, this doctoral thesis will explore the deals talented employees hold with their employers as they reflect on how they have been reciprocated over the period of their employment (see Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.3). In addition, this doctoral thesis will address how talented employees perceive and respond to different states of the psychological contract (see Section 5.3).

1.4 RESEARCH CONTEXT

The context for the empirical investigation of this doctoral thesis is Oman’s oil and gas sector. The following section describes Oman and its oil and gas sector. It justifies and argues why this PhD thesis considers this sector as promising in extending the existing knowledge on talent and the psychological contract alike. Oman is located on the far eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula and lays next to the Indian Ocean on the east, neighbouring the United Arab Emirates and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from the west, and Yemen from the south. Its location is strategic to the political and economic activities of
the region and globally (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; IHS Global Inc. 2013). Oman’s total population by mid-year 2017 according to the Population Statistics Bulletin issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (2018) was around 4.6 million with a total area of 309500 Sq. Km (Morison Muscat, 2010).

The context of the research is Oman’s energy sector, more specifically oil and gas, as this sector is considered to be a strategically important one for the economy of the country (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; IHS Global Inc. 2013; IHS Global Inc., 2016). The discovery and export of oil in Oman in the late 60s has had a significant role in the economic developments that proceeded in the country. Albeit other sectors’ contribution to the national economy and GDP, the oil and gas sector is yet considered to be the main and most significant economic contributor (IHS Global Inc., 2013; Ministry of National Economy, 2010; Ministry of National Economy, 2012). Having realised the scarcity of such resource, the government has encouraged and facilitated the development of a variety of complementary sectors such as financial intermediation, wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, construction, real estate and business activities, education, health and social work, electricity and water, agriculture, and fisheries (National Center for Statistics and Information, 2010; National Center for Statistics and Information, 2012a; Ministry of National Economy, 2011; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; IHS Global Inc., 2013)

According to the Basic Statute of the State (1996), Katou et al. (2010), Moideenkutty et al. (2011), the Sultanate of Oman is one of the countries in which religion and values such as family and social cohesion within communities are considered important. The study conducted by Moideenkutty et al. (2011) considers Oman to share similar cultures with the Arab countries studied by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005). These include being high on power distance and certainty avoidance but low on individualism. Hence, these cultural and value orientations could have implications on career choices among nationals and the talents within them. In other words, they may be less likely to choose a career where they work in remote areas on a shift basis between home and work for two or more weeks. Such work arrangements are symbolic to field jobs within the oil and gas sector (OPAL, 2011; Dickey et al., 2011; IHS Global Inc., 2013). During such periods, employees are away from their community and family surroundings. Therefore, it is likely that a considerable number of national talents may not aspire to sustain their careers within such disciplines that are field-based, while others may find them suitable to guarantee greater financial
An issue that instigates a curiosity on the extent to which the oil and gas sector is considered attractive to national talents. This, as argued by Herriot and Pemberton (1996), Rousseau (1995), Inkson and King (2011), may give rise to 'negotiating career deals', or to the interest of this thesis, understanding the 'talent deal' which talented employees negotiate and exchange with their employer(s). This equally influences talent attraction and retention for the oil and gas sector. This interesting aspect of Oman’s context and cultural implications forms a distinctive line of inquiry, which is consistently highlighted and addressed along the main research questions, thus becoming an exclusive theme of this doctoral thesis. However, the primary focus of this doctoral thesis is untapping the theoretical underpinnings of the psychological contract formation and the dynamics of talented employees.

The oil and gas sector (Figure 1.2 Gas Plant in Oman) relies on technologies and innovative techniques in order to optimise production and consumption (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; IHS Global Inc. 2013). Oman in particular is considered one of the countries that requires sophisticated technologies and techniques for crude oil and gas production and consumption as the reserves are usually difficult to extract due to the geological nature of the land (Rocky), the amount of water and other substances that may hinder the desired extraction of crude oil, and the thickness of the crude oil that needs further refinement (Business Monitor International, 2012; IHS Global Inc. 2013).

FIGURE 1.2: GAS PLANT IN OMAN

Consequently, the exploration and production (E&P) of oil and gas (Figure 1.3 below is a photo of a refinery plant in Oman) are both costly and require enhanced oil recovery (EOR) techniques (Business Monitor International, 2012; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; IHS Global Inc. 2013). Therefore, the government, oil and gas E&P organisations,
and upstream companies usually invest substantially in order to acquire the latest technologies. In addition, along with the government investments, Oil and Gas E&P organisations are planning to make investments in millions of R.O towards research, the training and development of the workforce, developing fields, and the acquisition of cutting-edge technologies in order to ensure that production is increased and optimised in the near future (Business Monitor International, 2012; IHS Global Inc., 2013; SQU, 2013).

FIGURE 1.3 REFINERY PLANT IN OMAN

Hence, not only acquiring the necessary technological advancement is essential to ensuring improved production and revenue, and therefore, profits within the oil and gas sector (SQU, 2013; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; IHS Global Inc., 2013). This is both interesting and crucial to the research on hand with respect to the type of skills and workforce competencies that are considered core to the success of the businesses. Similarly, it reveals that oil and gas like any other sector in Oman is obliged to abide by the state laws and regulations (Oil and Gas Law, 2011) when it comes to recruiting and employing non-nationals, which may be considered a constraint.

On the other hand, Oman’s government urges organisations and businesses to develop and recruit nationals in order to meet their short-term and long-term competency requirements (Labour Law, 2003). While the government allows businesses to recruit non-Omani talented individuals in order to meet their immediate needs under specific criteria (Oil and Gas Law Article, 2011), this creates a quid pro quo situation between recruiting non-Omanis and developing nationals in order to manage regulatory tensions
while sustaining business performance, which makes this research and context interesting. The author, therefore, postulates that by critically analysing the debate held within the talent and talent management literature on how to effectively manage talented employees for differential performance, the analysis of the research context, and critically analysing the literature on psychological contract theory, this research would exert a considerable impact both theoretically and potentially for practitioners on how talented employees form their psychological contract and how it changes over the course of their career.

The Ministry of Oil and Gas has initiated an In-Country Value (ICV) programme in 2013 for the oil and gas sector. The ICV is defined as ‘the total spend retained in country that benefits business development, contributes to human capability development, and stimulates productivity in Oman’s economy’ (Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2014b). The ICV programme has moreover formulated a blueprint strategy, which includes as part of the strategy, a local workforce development program (Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2014d, 2014e). The HR managers’ sub-committee analysed the status of the Omani workforce in the sector against current and future requirements including the Omanisation ratios (Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2014d). Interestingly, they reported high demands for engineers and technicians by 2020, while some of the positions currently have low Omanisation ratios with the exception of well engineers, mechanical technicians, and electrical technicians (Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2014d; 2014). Hence, this may indicate that there is a war for talent and perhaps these careers are not aspiring or the sector/organisations are not attractive and could not retain their employees, especially the ones that are considered core to the business, such as engineers and technicians. Hence, once again, this is placing an increased pressure on organisations from all sectors to recruit national talents, who may be of limited supply in the market (Oil and Gas Law, 2011; Harry, 2007; IHS Global Inc., 2013; Ministry Oil and Gas, 2014), while those who may be good may not be easily retained due to organisations within every sector competing to varying degrees in order to attract national talents so as to meet Omanisation regulations to comply with labour law (Labour Law, 2003) while meeting the expertise needed and the competency requirements for the success of the business (HIS Inc., 2013; Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2014, 2014b, 2014c).

With regard to the competencies required by the oil and gas sector, this research argues that they pertain to petroleum and information & communications technology equivalent
disciplines (Orr and McVerry, 2007; Dickey et al., 2011; Dhiman and Mohanty, 2010). These types of competencies underpin business performance in the oil and gas sector, are key triggers of the differential contribution (Orr and McVerry, 2007; Dickey et al., 2011; Dhiman and Mohanty, 2010) and are therefore considered 'intra-sectorial competencies' or 'core to the business'. The report of Orr and McVerry (2007) attempted to address a number of issues that are very interesting on the challenges impacting oil and gas companies globally and within the western hemisphere to find and retain talented employees and 'experienced candidates'. They report the expected talent gaps that are likely to prevail in the coming decade 'currently 2010-2020' with respect to the available positions. In this respect, they reported, petroleum engineers, geoscientists, and plant operation engineers suffer the greatest shortages while finance managers and marketers experience shortages as well.

Moreover, it is argued that engineering disciplines in general, whether civil, electronics, etc. and general information & communications technology disciplines such as IT, database specialists, information security, etc., and, business-related disciplines such as accountants, HR specialists, marketing specialists, etc. are critical to ensuring that overall business functions operate smoothly whether within the oil and gas sector or other sectors (Orr and McVerry, 2007; Dickey et al., 2011; Doh et al., 2011; Flood et al., 2001; Hoglund, 2012). These competencies are argued - in this research - to complement the intra-sectorial competencies within the oil and gas sector and are therefore important for the survival of the business. They are referred to - as argued in this research - as 'inter-sectorial competencies' or 'the support' and can become significantly crucial if businesses experience shortages due to the spillover to other sectors, which may be perceived by the employees as attractive and/or promising (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Martin et al., 1999; Martin, 2006; Dickey et al., 2011). Hence, the researcher utilised this information from the literature to devise a definition that could be helpful in identifying talented employees during field work.

Therefore, businesses within the oil and gas sector and especially the exploration and production organisations would be part of the inter-sectorial competition - for those talents who have the potential of joining different sectors - as well as the most important intra-sectorial competition as discussed shortly. Inter-sectorial competition refers to competition between different economic sectors while the intra-sectorial competition refers to competition within similar economic sectors for the talented employees who
possess the competencies highly valued by the organisations within the sector. It is logical to conclude, at least partially, given the aforementioned evidence and discussion on the nature of Oman’s oil and gas sector that there could a war for talent both on the core and support level talents within the country’s oil and gas sector. This will influence the quality of the psychological contract the talented employees form and exchange with their employer as would be argued and investigated in the following chapters. The next section will discuss the research rationale, which underpins the significance of this doctoral thesis.

1.5 RESEARCH RATIONALE

There are quite a few seminal works (Robinson, 1996; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Pate and Malone, 2000; Rousseau, 2004; Guest, 2004) that have covered the implications of the psychological contract on various organisational and individual outcomes. Similarly, the psychological contract has been widely considered as a mediating and moderating factor between organisational and HR policies and practices and outcomes (Guest, 2004; Chao et al., 2011; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Martin et al., 1999; Pate et al., 2000), such as the intention to remain, willingness to share knowledge, and organisational citizenship behaviour. Moreover, there have been decent attempts within the literature to explain how the psychological contract interacts with certain work arrangements including part-time and temporary work systems (Guest, 2004b; Rousseau, 2001b). However, similar research is scarce on the oil and gas sector and for the Middle East and Oman in particular (research context), where the institutional and cultural aspects vary and have implications on the values and beliefs of individuals (Katou et al., 2010; Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006; Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014), HR practices and policies (Moideenkutty et al., 2011; Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006), and consequently, the building blocks of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995, 2001). On the other hand, the bodies of literature on Oman with respect to HRM policies and practices are dearth (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006) while the existing ones have not made attempts to unpack the realities of the psychological contract nor the most recent practices under talent management (Conway and Briner, 2009; Scullion and Collings, 2011). An exception to this are the few studies conducted very recently including the ones conducted by Hoglund (2012), Bjorkman et al. (2013), Sonnenberg et al. (2014).
Hence, to the knowledge of the researcher, there has been a dearth in research work that has explicitly looked at the potential of cross-linking the psychological contract and talent management streams in order to counter the problems associated with the attraction and retention of highly skilled workforce in organisations (Scullion and Collings, 2011; Schuler et al., 2011; McDonell and Collings, 2011). More importantly as the works of Herriot et al. (1997), Dabos and Rousseau (2004), Conway and Briner (2005, 2009) state, there is little known to date in terms of how psychological contracts are formed, what constitutes the psychological contract (content) as perceived by the individuals in the contract themselves, and the extent to which the contents are reciprocated and mutual. Moreover, there is a dearth of research work that attempted to understand the dynamics of striking specific ‘deals’, as part of the psychological contract.

1.6 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The lack of knowledge on how talented employees perceive their psychological contract is evident from the aforementioned discussion. Similarly, the investigation on the relationship between the streams of talent and talent management with the psychological contract remains under-researched and limited. These sought to test the correlation between the two streams and overlooked the need to understand the nature of the psychological contract that is perceived by the talented employees. Therefore this research aims to address this area pertaining to talented employees’ psychological contract and contribute to the existing knowledge of the streams.

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

Research Aim
To explore the nature of the psychological contract of talented employees and understand how they respond to what they perceive as psychological contract fulfilment, breach or violation.

Research Questions
1- How do talented employees form their psychological contracts?
2- What constitutes talented employees’ psychological contracts?
3- How do these talented employees’ respond when they perceive their psychological contract is fulfilled, breached or violated?
1.7 THE ANTICIPATED RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The originality of this research is in the way it relates the streams of psychological contract and talent and talent management by attempting to explore the nature of the psychological contract of talented employees’ through an interpretive approach. This is considered innovative compared to what has been published and already known with respect to talented employees’ as well as the psychological contract. This contribution will be realised by conducting a field work that attempts to inductively explore talented employees’ psychological contract in the unique context of Oman’s oil and gas sector. As stated in the previous sections, the relationship between the two streams remains poorly researched, especially using the interpretive exploratory approach, which to the knowledge of the researcher has not been yet conducted. This will extend the knowledge in the literature by explaining the process of psychological contract formation from the perspective of talented employees. In addition, it will explain the dynamics associated with the perceptions of psychological contracts fulfilment, psychological contract breach, and psychological contract violation, as experienced by the talented employees over the course of their employment relationship. Similarly, the other anticipated contributions include gaining deeper insights into the realities of Oman’s oil and gas context and how it influences talented employees’ psychological contract.

1.8 RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process provides a mind map of how the research was conducted from the very early stage of choosing the topic and deciding on the research aim(s) and questions all through to the designing of research methods, strategies, and data collection tools. Similarly, the suggested method analyses, description of research findings, and recommendations for future research are all highlighted using the research process.

Following the inception of the work, the first stage was the exploration and critical review of the literature on the psychological contract and the literature on talent and talent management. The remaining stages are illustrated in the figure below. It is important to note that this research process is iterative in nature as continuous refinement and improvement on the stages, specifically the propositions suggested and the discussions, occurred during the research period (Saunders et al., 2012).
FIGURE 1.4: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The Research Idea: Psychological Contract, Talent Management

Ch. 2 Literature Review: Psychological Contract
Ch. 1 Research Context: Oman and Oil & Gas Sector
Ch. 3 Literature Review: Talent and Talent Management

The relationship between the psychological contract theory and Talent

Research Aim: To explore the nature of the psychological contract of talented employees and understand how they respond to what they perceive as psychological contract fulfilment, breach, or violation

Research questions:

What constitutes talented employees’ psychological contracts? And;

How do these talented employees’ respond when they perceive their psychological contract to be breached, violated, or fulfilled?

Designing the Research Methodology:

Approach: Qualitative Inductive
Method: Semi-Structured Face-to-Face Interviews using the Critical Incidents Technique
Time Horizon: Cross-Sectional
Sample size of 34
Method of Data Analysis: Modified Thematic Analysis

Data collection, analysis, and interpretation

Re-evaluation of research questions

Discussion and further refinement

Conclusion, limitations, and recommendations for further research
1.9 THESIS OUTLINE:

Chapter 1: Research Overview

The aim of this chapter is to provide the general picture of the research while highlighting the main streams of the literature. It moreover discusses the gaps in literature and contribution. The chapter describes the research context, the research rationale and research process for the thesis.

Chapter 2: The Psychological Contract Theory and Talent Management; Attempting to Understand Talented Employees' Psychological Contract

This chapter addresses the core of the research and the area for inquiry i.e. the psychological contract. It discusses the main arguments in the field and current achievements. It furthermore highlights the gaps and areas for future contribution. The chapter also discusses the variation and discrepancies surrounding the notion of talent and talent management and how it compares to knowledge workers. It addresses a number of definitions and challenges associated with the identification mechanism for talent and talent management. The chapter also discusses the different approaches to talent management and why managing talent is a concern for organisations. The chapter reveals the gap and limitations associated with capturing and reflecting the psychological contract from the perspective of the employees, as perceived by the employees’ in the contract themselves. This substantiates the need to untap and understand the nature of the psychological contract of talented employees from the perspective of the talented employees involved in the contract. Hence, the chapter also discusses the recently established link between the two streams of the literature and how this thesis could make a valuable contribution through the nature of the investigation adopted to answer the research questions. The chapter interestingly suggests a theoretical model that encapsulates the main investigation areas.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology and methods of enquiry. It analyses the philosophical orientation of the researcher and how the research objectives are best achieved through an interpretivist perspective. It discusses the research design and criteria for inclusion and exclusion in sampling. The chapter moreover discusses how data will be analysed using the modified thematic analysis. The chapter also discusses ethical
issues, access, and states some of themes and questions that could be utilised in the enquiry process.

**Chapter 4: Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion (Talented Employees’ Value Proposition)**

This chapter begins with detailing the actual data analysis stages following a modified thematic analysis. The analysis also incorporate examples from the actual coded transcripts and developments made in the data analysed along the stages until the phase of reporting themes. The chapter then describes the first overarching theme and the corresponding findings. It also discusses them in light of the reviewed literature and contribution made. This theme responds to the first research question and discusses its relation to the existing and newly established knowledge with respect to how talented employees form their psychological contract.

**Chapter 5: The Talent Deal and Dynamics of Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract - Findings and Discussion**

This chapter describes the second and third overarching themes and their corresponding findings. It also discusses them in light of the reviewed literature and contribution made. These themes respond to the second and third research questions and discuss its relation to the existing and newly established knowledge with reference to what constitutes talented employees’ psychological contract and its dynamics as it shifts from one state to the other.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research**

This chapter reiterates the main research questions and findings. It re-emphasises the contribution made and discusses some limitations of this research study and suggests directions for future research.

**1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The chapter has been structured into eight sections. Section 1.2 provided an overview of the research with an emphasis on how the psychological contract theory has been critically associated with strengthening the employment relationship. Moreover, recent arguments within the talent and talent management literature and the potential interplay
between the two streams has been further discussed in order to illustrate the potential for maximising talent retention. Section 1.3 argues the gaps and Section 1.4 the main contribution. The context is described in Section 1.5 and the research rationale is argued under Section 1.6 followed by the Research Aim and Question at 1.7 and a description of the research process at 1.8. The chapter concludes with Section 1.9 by outlining the chapters in this thesis.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW- THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEOREY AND TALENT MANAGEMENT: ATTEMPTING TO UNDERSTAND TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION 23
2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT-ORIGINS, CRITIQUE, AND FUTURE PROSPECT 25
  2.2.1 THE ESSENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY 25
  2.2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY ORIGIN 26
  2.2.3 THE EVOLUTION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY 31
  2.2.4 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY 34
2.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT-FORMATION, ATTRIBUTES, CONSEQUENCES 36
  2.3.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION 40
  2.3.2 ATTRIBUTES THAT DISTINGUISH PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT 43
  2.3.3 RESPONSES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT VIOLATION 45
  2.3.4 SUSTAINING HEALTHY PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS 48
2.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORKFORCE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE 52
2.5 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT; CHALLENGES OVER DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING THEM 53
2.6 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT; THE PERCEIVED SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGE 55
2.7 EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT 58
2.8 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN GAPS IN THE LITERATURE 62
  2.8.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY REVIEWED LITERATURE ON THIS RESEARCH 62
  2.8.2 THE IMPLICATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEWED ON RELATING TALENT MANAGEMENT WITH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY IN THIS RESEARCH 66
  2.8.3 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT AS DEFINED FOR THIS RESEARCH 68
  2.8.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT PERSPECTIVE FOR THIS RESEARCH 72
2.9 RESEARCH FOCUS 73
2.10 ELABORATING ON THE INTENDED RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS 75
2.11 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK 77
2.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY 78
2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter represents itself as one the important chapters of the thesis. It is divided into two main sections. The first section covers the literature on the psychological contract while the second discusses the literature on talent management with a focus on talent definition and identification. Subsequently, the chapter brings together the two sections and discusses the nature of the relationship and investigation that will be adopted in this doctoral thesis. The first part on the psychological contract theory focuses and unpacks the literature on its origins, significance to HRM and organisational behaviour, and the arguments on antecedents, contents, and consequences of the psychological contract. Importantly, the chapter highlights some of the critical aspects around the theory itself drawing from a body of debating literature that predates to its origins until recent decades. Similarly, the empirical findings of key research and frameworks on the theories are discussed and analysed along the gaps in the literature in order to formulate the basis for this doctoral thesis.

Following the critical review of the literature on the psychological contract theory, this chapter addresses a number of arguments concerning the literature and empirical work in talent and talent management. It closely examines the debate on the challenges and arguments over its significance, definition, and talent identification mechanism. The chapter also pays close attention to the retention and how organisations perceive it, and, how MNC manage talent and talented employees. The chapter then draws from the arguments discussed within each stream and highlights some interesting insights on how the psychological contract theory could be utilised to aid the employment relationship between organisations and talented employees. Hence, the chapter critically demonstrates how the literature to-date has explored the nature of the psychological contract with reference to talented employees as part of the relationship between the two streams. The chapter consequently highlights the dearth of research that covered such a relationship and how this doctoral thesis will uniquely and substantially contribute to the theory of the psychological contract and talent and talent management literature by first, exploring the nature of talented employees' psychological contract from the perspective of the talented employees themselves. Secondly, by explaining the dynamics of talented employees' psychological contract and how they react to perceptions of psychological contract violation, breach, or fulfilment.
The chapter begins by discussing the first element, i.e. the psychological contract by critically reviewing the historical perspective of the psychological contract theory and the most prominent debate and achievements up until the past decade. The chapter is then dedicated to the discussion and analysis of the theory. For example, it refers to psychological contract formation, attributes, and consequences. Then it attempts to discuss the types of psychological contracts in light of the employment relationship. This is followed by a summary of the most prominent findings of the literature reviewed, and an empirical analysis conducted in the field. The last part of this section highlights the main gaps in the literature and how this thesis aims to contribute to the existing knowledge. Consequently, investigating the relationship between the two streams of the literature ‘psychological contract’ and ‘talent and talent management’ is argued to bring a valuable contribution.

The second part of the chapter is dedicated to unpacking the literature on talent management. It begins by discussing the significance of having unique workforce for organisational competitiveness. This is followed by a discussion over the challenges in defining and identifying talent and talent management. The chapter then discusses both sections and critically assesses research that has looked at the relationship between the psychological contract and talent and talent management. By so doing, the section highlights the main gaps in the literature and the implications of this available literature on this doctoral thesis. This is followed by how the researcher defines talent and talent management for this research. The chapter then defines the psychological contract for this research followed by a section on the research focus. This will clearly elaborate on how this doctoral thesis proposes to address the gaps and the proposed approach to investigate the main problems associated with understanding the psychological contract of talented employees. This introduces the main philosophical stance and method to be adopted to answer the research questions, which would be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. This is followed by a statement of the main intended contribution of this research. The chapter then presents the research’s aim and questions on the basis of the gaps and potential contribution that evolved following the critical review of the literature in this chapter.
2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT- ORIGINS, CRITIQUE, AND FUTURE PROSPECT

2.2.1 THE ESSENCE OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY

Over the passage of time and history, as the literature suggests, the psychological contract has been defined by a number of prominent scholars in the fields of both human resource management and work psychology. For instance, McLean Parkes et al. (1998, p. 698) define the psychological contract as ‘the idiosyncratic set of reciprocal expectations held by employees concerning their obligations (what they will do for their employer) and their entitlements (what they expect to receive in return)’. They refer to the perceptions individuals make as their reality as they see it. They argue that in order to better understand and predict how employees behave, the psychological contract should be analysed within specific contexts for each type of employment arrangement, whether traditional or contingent (McLean Parkes et al., 1998).

Rousseau (1995, p.10), defines it as ‘individual beliefs, shaped by the organisation, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organisation’ or ‘agent of that organisation’. Herriot (2001, p. 38), on the other hand, defines it as ‘the perception of the two parties, employee and employer, of what their mutual obligations are towards each other’. The last definition of the psychological contract compared to the others, explicitly refers to a two-way exchange relation between the employee and the employer. The previous ones while connoting a similar relation, focused more on employees being a receptive and initiator part in the contract based on their experience with the organisation/employer.

Recent literature discussed the striking fact of concurrence on studies conducted over the past few years, and how they were aligned with the main arguments and predictions of the psychological contract theory (Conway and Briner, 2009). These included studies conducted on different occupational groups and national contexts. See also Martin et al. (1999), Flood et al. (2001), and Chao et al. (2011) for more examples. Notable and perhaps intriguing is the argument of Conway and Briner (2009) on how some scholars sought to understand and explain the psychological contract differently, which may lack fundamental consistency.

This is in line with the observations made by Crossman (2007), who critically analysed the literature on the psychological contract. He revealed the inconsistency and variability on how the theory has been defined and conceptualised over the course of history. One of
the most prominent observations is on the role of observers, i.e. researchers, when exploring and/or assessing other individuals’ psychological contract. As the contract is based on the assumptions made by individuals on the employment relationship with their organisation, an observer has to rely on his/her assumptions of the assumptions made by the individuals and their organisations (Crossman, 2007). Hence, this alludes to the problem associated with the psychological contract theory as it could be of limited benefits in explaining psychological contract fulfilment or breach in the case of other individuals. Therefore, it is worth looking at the origin of the psychological contract and some of the important turning points for the theory and its implications in the next section.

2.2.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY ORIGIN

Many observers including Roehling (1997), Cullinane and Dundon (2006), Conway and Briner (2005), and recently Rousseau et al. (2015) have attempted to critically analyse the conceptualisation and developments of the psychological contract over the elapsed period. Through their work, the term ‘psychological contract’ is suggested to have been firstly coined in 1962 by Levinson et al. (1962) through their extensive analysis of how 874 employees on the utility plant viewed their work and formed obligatory expectation (Roehling, 1997). Conway and Briner (2009, p. 74) in their critically reviewed article quote the definition of the psychological contract developed by Levinson et al. (1962) as

‘a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be even dimly aware but which nonetheless govern their relationship to each other . . . The psychological or unwritten contract is a product of mutual expectations. These have two characteristics: (a) they are largely implicit and unspoken, and (b) they frequently antedate the relationship of person and company.’

Levinson et al. (1962) argued that expectations and psychological needs are the driving forces for reciprocity between the employee and the employer. On the other hand, Schein (1965) made some important observations on the psychological contract that has informed and contributed to a number of subsequent empirical works during the past era, i.e. before Rousseau’s (1989) seminal work cited by Conway and Briner (2009). In his work, Schein (1965) advocated and argued that the psychological contract is necessarily an implicit one and that that there has to be a matching mechanism between employees’
expectations and what is on offer from the employer for it to be fulfilled. While Schein (1980) agreed with Levinson et al. (1962) on the importance of ‘needs, social learning, traditions and norms, and other unspecified sources’ on forming and sustaining the subjective and unconscious psychological contract between parties (Conway and Briner, 2009, p. 75), he emphasised two mechanisms that were likely to gauge outcomes. The first one is ‘matching’, in which the employee and employer evaluate their ‘mutual’ expectations and any discrepancies, and secondly, the extent to which the exchange leads to need satisfaction (Conway and Briner, 2009, p. 75). This inspired Kotter (1973) to conduct empirical work in this regard, which is considered to be one of the very few works during that period to have attempted to empirically look into the mutual agreement of both parties in a contract.

In addition, Schein (1965, 1970, 1980) as reported by Conway and Briner (2009) has informed the more recent work of Dabos and Rousseau (2004) on the mutuality and reciprocity concepts of the psychological contract. They made claims that the processes of mutuality and reciprocity are not clearly understood, and more research is required in this regard. Moreover, their research was a quantitative one, a concern that this doctoral thesis reconsiders when pointing to the gaps and potential areas for contribution under the research focus section and in the methodology chapter. Schein (1965, 1970, 1980) focused on the organisation aspect of the psychological contract. He made similar assumptions on expectations to the ones suggested in Theory X/Theory Y. This included, organisational cultures that are likely to be promoted depending on the way line managers view their employees, which consequently affects how the administrative activities around employees are shaped (Conway and Briner, 2009). The work of Schein (1965, 1970, 1980) according to Conway and Briner (2009) also had implications on the work conducted by Guest and Conway (2002) on the employer’s perspective of the psychological contract, which has not received sufficient research attention and can be a relatively interesting perspective for future work but will not be explored as part of this thesis for consistency and cohesiveness purposes in association with the research question to be met.

Apart from Levinson et al. (1962) and Schein (1965, 1970, 1980), Argyris (1960) used the term ‘psychological work contract’ in his effort to describe an ‘implicit understanding between group of employees and their foreman’ in a US factory who appeared to share similar norms with their supervisor (Roehling, 1997, p. 207; Conway and Briner, 2009).
He believed that an unspoken agreement between the employee and employer was attributed to employees’ predispositions and culture, i.e. the formation process. Similarly, he was able to identify a pattern of exchange relationship between both parties in order to satisfy needs which create a consistent behaviour (Roehling, 1997; Conway and Briner, 2009). Such an exchange pattern could be in the form of increment or overtime pay for longer hours spent at work, tenure in return of a promotion, or loyalty in return of job security. Furthermore, arguments suggest that a number of other texts and research work that have not directly cited the psychological contract shared similar ideas and have indirectly influenced the work during ‘the pre-Rousseau period’ as they put it (Conway and Briner, 2005). These include - but are not limited to - the contributions-inducements model of March and Simon (1958), the philosophical text of Cabot (1933) on exploring tacit and explicit agreements, and the seminal work of Menninger (1958) in his attempt to understand the explicit and implicit contract between a psychotherapist and their patient, which transformed his later work (Menninger and Holzman, 1973) in which they used the term psychological contract (Conway and Briner, 2009, p. 74).

It is important to note nonetheless, that the past era or ‘the pre-Rousseau period’ of the psychological contract compared to the most recent and period following Rousseau’s (1989) seminal work is considered limited in terms of the number of research studies and contributions to the subject, especially with reference to empirical work on the psychological contract. Consequently, few efforts have been made to explicate and re-evaluate the psychological contract theory (Roehling, 1997; Conway and Briner, 2005; Cullinane and Dundon, 2006; Conway and Briner, 2009). Accordingly, this could be attributed to a number of reasons, starting from the imprecise conceptualisation of the psychological contract, which has been considered as a point of controversy even during recent decades, see Table 2.1 below, despite having a comparatively greater development of the concept in recent decades (Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Guest and Conway; 2002, Rousseau, 2001, 2005). This is evident in arguments over the simplification and interchangeable use of the term ‘beliefs’ in the psychological contract, which has been confused for expectations, obligations, needs, and promises (Arnold, 1997; Guest, 1998; Meckler et al., 2003; Conway and Briner, 2005; Conway and Briner, 2009).
## TABLE 2.1: A SUMMARY OF THE CHALLENGES FACING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What beliefs make up the psychological contract?</td>
<td>Do psychological contracts consist of promises, obligations, or expectations? How do these terms differ and interrelate?</td>
<td>Arnold, 1996; Guest, 1998; Conway and Briner, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Should open and explicit promises still be referred to as psychological contract beliefs? Are they insufficiently psychological and more akin to a legal contract?</td>
<td>Guest, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary research focuses on behavioural contracts and therefore neglects the psychological underpinnings of the psychological contracts of early research (most notably Levinson et al., 1962)</td>
<td>Meckler, Drake and Levinson, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The perceptions-of-behaviour approach neglects the vital role of psychological needs and psychological contract beliefs are formulated partly unconsciously.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does implicit mean and what role do inferences and interpretation play in terms of generating implicit promises? For example, what is the status of the expectations that arise from the inferences employees make from implicit promises?</td>
<td>Conway and Briner, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange</td>
<td>What are the specific links between employee obligations and employer obligations that form the exchange?</td>
<td>Conway and Briner, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>Do psychological contracts require a strong (i.e. covering the existence, terms, and linkages between terms) or weak (i.e. that a contract exists, even if its terms are not known) form of agreement?</td>
<td>Arnold, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the agreement is to be understood as subjective, is it still appropriate to refer to the psychological contract as a contract, which by legal definition requires the outward appearance of the agreement?</td>
<td>Guest, 1998; Cullinane and Dundon, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing most other types of contracts (e.g. legal contracts) is quite difficult and requires the consent of both parties: how is consent achieved when changing the psychological contract?</td>
<td>Cullinane and Dundon, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of contracts</td>
<td>The lists of dimensions (e.g. stability, scope, tangibility, focus, and time frame) are intuitive rather than theoretical. Furthermore, they are largely descriptive rather than evaluative or construed as part of the theory linking the psychological contract to outcomes.</td>
<td>Guest, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit negotiation</td>
<td>How are implicit psychological contracts negotiated?</td>
<td>Arnold, 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can we understand psychological contracts as an unfolding process?</td>
<td>Conway and Briner, 2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When do psychological contracts begin?</td>
<td>Guest, 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are organisations shaped by factors predating and external to the organisation?</td>
<td>Conway and Briner, 2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Given that in most organisations there will be multiple contract makers sending mixed messages and the organisation’s prerogative is to do what it likes with its employees - how and why do employees perceive and interpret promises in the first place?</td>
<td>Cullinane and Dundon, 2006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can organisations have psychological contracts? If not (because of the problems associated with anthropomorphising organisations), who is the other party to an employee’s psychological contract?</td>
<td>Guest, 1998; Conway and Briner, 2005; Cullinane and Dundon, 2006</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do employees cognitively represent the organisation as the other party to the contract? Do employees anthropomorphise the organisation and, if so, how?</td>
<td>Conway and Briner, 2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from (Conway and Briner, 2009, pp. 109-111)

Similarly, the period between 1960-1990 was well known for advances in cognitive theory such as goal-setting and a more general decline in the popularity of the notion of ‘needs’ and unconscious processes (Conway and Briner, 2009, p. 77). In addition, the matching mechanism utilised back then to gauge outcomes for psychological contract fulfilment or breach was downplayed by the more developed and explored theories, such as the met expectations and need-satisfaction theories during this period (Conway and Briner, 2009).

Hence, the number of research works focusing on the employment relationship conducted in that era is considerably low compared to the era following the seminal work of Denise Rousseau in 1989 and subsequent years 1995, 1998, etc. In a similar vein, the observations made by Conway and Briner (2009) on the differences of how the psychological contract had been referred to - implicit/explicit, needs/expectations/promises, and perceptions/expectations - over the course of history and its relevant use and development sets interesting insights on the origin of the topic and the extent to which it is very subjective to the participants as well as to the observers as pointed by Crossman (2007). Important to note, observers can only make references according to how the individuals in the contract themselves describe their contract, otherwise their feedback and comments would be uncertain. The implications from these
differences and the critiques that shall follow over the most recent works on the psychological contract and how this research is expected to contribute to the field are addressed in the respective sections below.

2.2.3 THE EVOLUTION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY

Apparently and significantly, Rousseau (1989) has had the greatest influence on subsequent research that adopted her conceptualisation of the psychological contract (Roehling, 1997; Conway and Briner, 2009). The pillars of her conceptualisation were based on the belief that a promise was made by one party, usually the employer, which created the perceived obligation for reciprocating an exchange between the employee and the employer (Rousseau, 1989).

Rousseau (1989, 1995) has been referring to beliefs that construct the psychological contract - in her definition of the psychological contract - as the interpretations employees make of the explicit and implicit promises. These promises, as will be subsequently discussed, take an explicit form when delivered by the employer or agents in a written and/or spoken communication means. Employees tend to make further interpretations to promises and this affects their actions and behaviour when aligning their performance and attitudes accordingly. Promises are implicitly perceived through the attitudes and behaviour which the employer or agents in the organisation consistently repeat including structural and administrative signals (Rousseau, 1995, 2001; Conway and Briner, 2009). These are discussed in more detail in Section 2.3.

The conceptualisation of the psychological contract through the work of Rousseau in 1989 has enabled the ‘consciously accessible beliefs’ to become clearly amendable for empirical work, specifically, the questionnaire survey, which was not easily captured by previous conceptualisation because the psychological contract was deemed as an unconscious experience (Argyris, 1960; Levinson et al., 1962; Meckler et al., 2003; Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2008; Sherman and Morley, 2015). This conscious realisation by parties on their subjective belief of a promissory relation was also associated with psychological contract violation. Individuals consciously realised that their perceived obligations were undelivered or unmet, which made it equally interesting and amendable for empirical research (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Herriot et al., 1997; Turnley and Feldman, 1998; Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003).
Moreover, Rousseau in her seminal work in 1989 including the later redefinition by Morrison and Robinson (1997), has been able to clearly distinguish the outcomes associated with the violation of the psychological contract, of unmet expectations and inequity (Rousseau, 1995, 2004). Psychological contract violation creates deep and long-lasting emotional reactions (Rousseau, 1989; Morrison and Robinson, 1997), which have a long-lasting negative association with trust and a positive association with cynicism towards current and future employers (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003), whereas unmet expectations and inequity although may result in turnover, dissatisfaction, and reduced performance (Adams, 1965) could be addressed (Rousseau, 1989).

In addition, expectancy and equity theories may include expectations that are non-contractual in their nature as explained by Rousseau (1989, p. 127) with regard to the expectancy theory:

‘using the terms of an expectancy model, only those P →O contingencies that are established a priori are contractual (e.g., when a commitment is made to follow performance with a particular reward). It might also be argued that rewards given on a random basis or in some way inconsistently are less likely to be perceived as contractual than rewards that regularly follow performance’.

Similarly observed by Rousseau (1989, p. 127) with respect to the equity theory:

‘Employees who believe they should have more responsibility (or less) or make more money than their next-door neighbour have expectations, but not necessarily a psychological contract. Reciprocal expectations involved in a contract imply that one party believes his or her actions are bound to those of another. An individual might feel dissatisfied with pay and yet need not believe that the employer has an obligation to give a raise.’

In making a comparison between psychological contract violation and these two seemingly similar theories Rousseau (1989, p. 127) adds:

‘Inequity can be remedied; contract violation, which causes mistrust, cannot be so easily repaired. An individual paid less than market rates might feel inequitably treated; one who was promised a raise for hard work and fails to get it is likely to feel wronged.’

Hence, the aforementioned quotations distinguish the psychological contract according to Rousseau (1989). It is, therefore, embedded within the expectations and obligations
that are contractual ‘promissory’ in their nature. Consequently, it results in deeper affective implications when violated compared to those expectancy and equity theories. Moreover, Rousseau (1989) believed that the psychological contract is necessarily reciprocal between the parties, unlike the more generic expectations that are discussed in the expectancy theory and equity theory, which may go beyond that which has been reciprocated and/or contractual i.e. promised. These could include individual employees setting - for personal reasons - higher performance targets and deciding to become champions in their teams while their organisations have not aspired to such ideals or set up particular rewards for such achievements.

Although, in her early works Rousseau does not clearly distinguish between a breach and a violation, Morrison and Robinson’s (1997) seminal work on understanding how employees respond when their promises are not met suggested that a violation occurs and is intensified when promises are constantly made but not met or kept i.e. ‘breached’, especially when employees perceive that their employer could have avoided the breach. This distinction between breach and violation has been widely accepted later in the research and has been embraced in subsequent literature and empirical work on the consequences of psychological contract breach and violation (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003; Sparrow and Cooper, 2003; Rousseau, 2004; Martin, 2006). In a similar vein and in line with the claims of Conway and Briner (2009), it is clear that Rousseau’s conceptualisation of the psychological contract is subjective and individually perceived. This meant that employees and employers need not necessarily agree on the contract for it to exist, that forming the contract is in the eye of the beholder, and it depends on assumptions made on promises. This is in contrast with her predecessors (Schein 1965 and Levinson et al., 1962) in the field, who believed that for a psychological contract to exist, an agreement about reciprocal promise was highly important (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2008; Conway and Briner, 2009).

This was aligned with and supported by Rousseau’s (1989, 1995) argument that organisations cannot themselves establish a psychological contract as this would lead to ‘anthropomorphizing organizations and bring with it a range of problems’ including ‘identifying how an organization could hold a set of subjective beliefs’ (Conway and Briner, 2009, p. 79; Rousseau, 1989, p. 126). Organisations provide the context for the social exchange and psychological contract but cannot themselves perceive, their managers and agents on the other hand, create personal psychological contracts with
employees and respond accordingly (Rousseau et al., 2015). This is reflected in the context of this doctoral research and is considered one of the most important aspects that distinguishes the psychological contract from other constructs as noted above.

**2.2.4 CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY**

Having addressed the basis for the evolution of the psychological contract theory in the previous section, this section correspondingly unpacks critiques and arguments on the theory and its adaptation by prominent scholars. Consequently, it provides the basis for this research perspective and suggests potential contribution.

The literature made account of the critique work conducted by Arnold (1996), Guest (1998), Meckler et al. (2003), Conway and Briner (2005), Cullinane and Dundon (2006) and similarly observed and argued by Crossman (2007) regarding the psychological contract. Their critiques included ‘definitional ambiguity, concept redundancy, inadequate explanatory power, the use of tired and inappropriate methodologies, and the lack of practical application’ (Conway and Briner, 2009, pp. 72-73) as Table 2.1 above illustrates. Nevertheless, none of the critiques (Arnold, 1996; Guest, 1998; Conway and Briner, 2005; Cullinane and Dundon, 2006; Meckler et al., 2003) suggested abandoning the theory, its research, or its implications rather these critiques were brought as insights for further developing the field as supported by the work of Conway and Briner (2005, 2009) and Rousseau et al. (2015). Furthermore, a number of scholars claimed that a number of problems have been associated with the conceptualisation of the psychological contract by Rousseau (1989), Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993), and Rousseau (1995). These include what actually constitutes the ‘belief’. Hence, many researchers revealed their reservations and discontentment with Rousseau’s 1989 conceptualisation. This included the arguments by Meckler et al. (2003) and the subsequent elaboration and exchange by Rousseau (2003). In this regard as well, there have been earlier arguments by Arnold (1996) as well as the noted exchanged debate with Guest (1998) who referred to an analytical ambiguity and nightmare if the black box is to be unlocked and to a range of similar arguments formulated by Coyle-Shapiro et al. (2008). Meckler et al., (2003) on the other hand, brought back and focused on an implicit nature of the psychological contract. This was considered but also argued by Rousseau (2003) to necessarily include an explicit form of the psychological contract claiming that there is no need for an
agreement between the parties for the psychological contract to take place. **This is one of the catalysts this doctoral thesis argues for, as it attempts to unfold talented employees’ psychological contract and therefore, investigates how it is formed and changes over a period of time for a respective talented employee. This is a recurring statement that is reiterated later in the thesis by the end of this chapter as well as in the methodology throughout the analysis, discussion, and conclusion of this thesis.**

In addition, there are challenges on the extent to which an exchange agreement or mutuality is achieved between parties which became questionable. This is so because since the inception of the psychological contract in 1960/1962 to the very recent years, there has been a pattern of consistency among scholars that the psychological contract entails an exchange agreement and some form of mutuality between the parties (Conway and Briner, 2009; Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2005). However, Conway and Briner (2009) argue that such agreements and their compliance with the contractual nature of the psychological contract should be carefully pursued when conducting an empirical study as they further suggest:

> ‘Strong forms of agreement are conceptually incompatible with the implicit nature of psychological contracts, whereas weak forms of agreement are incompatible with the contractual nature of the psychological contract’ (p. 83).

Similarly, Conway and Briner (2005) review and critique the psychological contract pointing to a similar ambiguity. All of these tensions and arguments were surrounding the confusion of the construct of the psychological contract as Rousseau (1989) advocated. It was not clear as to what exactly entails and forms the psychological contract; is it only promises or does it also include obligations, expectations, and/or needs? These are summarised in Table 2.1. **The researcher makes a similar call to Conway and Briner (2009) that more attention in future research should be focused on identifying the concrete elements of what constitutes the belief in the psychological contract.**

**Furthermore, information and knowledge on the extent to which employees’ share as part of their psychological contract with their line managers reflects the organisation’s objectives especially in the Arab context (GCC) and Oman remain poorly researched.** That is the extent to which line managers send cues and signals that are reflective of an organisation’s objectives rather than a personal objective. Although, there has been some research into the employers’ (line managers, etc.) perspective of the psychological contract (Herriot and Pemberton, 1997; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 1998; Guest and
Conway, 2002b) with employees and their top managers, more is to be learnt on the consistency of, at least, the explicit promises that form psychological contracts among employees and their line manager compared to those among line managers and their top management. Therefore, this research as part of its objectives strives to understand the nature and implications of the psychological contract talented employees share with their employers. These employers could be primary and/or secondary contract-makers to the researcher, with whom talented employees form the psychological contract. These discussions and their implication on this research are elaborated towards the end of this chapter.

The next section critically argues and addresses the key elements and attributes of the psychological contract based on the developments in the literature. This assists the understanding of the psychological contract construct and how it has been utilised in different empirical studies.

2.3. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT-FORMATION, ATTRIBUTES, CONSEQUENCES

The psychological contract has been utilised within HRM and Organisational Behaviour literature to provide meanings and antecedents for a number of attitudinal and behaviour outcomes including the Organisational Citizenship Behaviour, intentions to stay/quit, and high performance to count a few (Guest and Conway, 1997; Rousseau, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Guest and Conway, 2002b; Clinton and Guest, 2013; Alfes et al., 2013). It has also been the centre of discussion on a more strategic level following researchers that attempted to evaluate its impact on the organisational change strategy (Pate et al., 2000a, 2000b) and the extent to which environmental changes that impact organisational strategic choice result in PC breach and violation (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pate et al., 2000a; Clinton and Guest, 2013). Equally, Herriot and Pemberton (1996), Guest (2004), and Rousseau (2001) suggested that deals made in the employment relationship change over time and are affected by the organisational context, which includes the environment and characteristics of the workplace. According to Rousseau (1995, p. 34) ‘external messages and social cues’ together with the ‘individual’s internal interpretations, predispositions, and construction’ are the main factors that form the psychological contract. While organisations and the society play a greater role in sending external messages and forming or reinforcing the social cue, individuals usually rely on their
cognitive bias (Chaudhry et al., 2011) and career motives (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996) when reinforcing how the psychological contract is eventually formed between the parties (Rousseau, 1995; Sparrow and Cooper, 2003).

Cognitive bias is associated with individuals’ likelihood to interpret situations according to how it best fits their capacity and promotes their status in any given relationship rather than how it may contradict or downplay their ego or achievements (Rousseau, 1995). This is likely to affect how they perceive the cues and messages sent and therefore the extent to which they perceive or believe a promise has been made. Similarly, their career motives entail how individuals are likely to respond to a social cue and message in their interpretation of what is in it for them in the career/organisation and what they have to provide in return (Rousseau, 1995; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Rousseau, 2001; Inkson and King, 2010). Crossman (2007) refers to the works of Riley (1991), Turban and Keon (1993), Jackson et al. (1989), and Greenhaus et al. (1978) among others, on the tendency of employees and employers to make assumptions regarding their expectations in order to construe a reality where limited information is available for each party on the other. These assumptions were influenced by a number of job-type characteristics, organisational features, and the environment (Sauzo et al., 2011). Subsequently, employees usually assume large organisations as being bureaucratic, with many levels, and formal and impersonal relationships as the norm of interaction with superiors through supervisors and line managers.

On the other hand, small organisations are usually assumed to allow for a more personal relationship with superiors and intrinsic involvement through ‘participation in decision making and goal-setting’ (Crossman, 2007, p. 64). Similarly, jobs that are technical in nature tend to be better articulated and outputs specified with a greater degree of precision compared to jobs that are service- oriented. Service-oriented jobs, on the other hand, are usually gauged subjectively via quality of service and ‘behavioural inputs such as timekeeping, appearance and norms conformity’ (Crossman, 2007, p. 65). The assumptions employees make on organisations influence their psychological contract and consequently their behaviour (Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau, 2001). Where assumptions between employees and their organisation are neither mutual nor consistent, evidence suggests that conflicts arise and breaches of the contract take place which has reverse implications on performance and behaviour (Guest and Conway, 1997; Guest, 2004; Clinton and Guest, 2014).
Similarly, as part of the building blocks of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995, 2001), it is inevitable that explicit terms of the employment contract would be subject to individuals’ interpretations, which consequently, contributes to the implicit and inferred understanding of the terms shaping the psychological contracts (Crossman, 2007; Chaudhry et al., 2011). This is further fuelled and refined through the decisions, interactions, and behaviour that parties adopt and experience during the employment period. Hence, these arguments confirm that the psychological contract is unlike other types of contract whether economic, legal, or implied. It is an ambiguous one, imprecise and shrouded in uncertainty. This makes it altogether interesting, as trying to deal with such uncertainty allows for greater assumptions. Nevertheless, by following the arguments regarding the building blocks of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995, 2001), causes and consequences (Guest and Conway, 1997; Guest, 2004) and implications on performance and parties’ intentions to sustain or withdraw from the employment relationship (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Rousseau, 2004), there are four types of contracts that are widely comparative and similar to the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). Addressing them is important in order to understand how talented employees engage in the psychological contract and the underlying reasons for violation. These include psychological, normative, implied, and social reasons. They are best illustrated by Rousseau (1995) in the quadrant Figure 2.1 below.
According to Rousseau (1995), normative contracts are common among employees identifying themselves as part of a group. Moreover, as the figure above suggests, they have common beliefs about the deals in the contract. Implied contracts, on the other hand, are unlike psychological contracts in that they are understood by outsiders of the contract where these outsiders as the figure suggests can assess their health as part of the norms and code of conduct known for a particular contract/practice. When this implied contract is shared amongst a group, it is likely to reflect a norm that communities adhere to as part of a belief that such acts are part of the way things are done within that social context. Both the psychological and normative contracts reside within the individuals and groups sharing the contracts hence it is very difficult for outsiders to gauge their state without involving the parties to contracts themselves. On the other hand, the implied and social contracts because parties outside the contract can make sense and understand them, their state are easily gauged compared to the psychological and normative contracts.

In conducting the field study, this thesis shall elaborate on the dynamics of the psychological contracts talented employees experience with their employers over the
course of their career. Consequently, the psychological contract theory that resides within and at the individual level would be explored and hopefully explained in greater depth to understand its implication on employees' attitude and behaviour but mostly on how it is formed and changes over the course of their employment.

The seminal work of Anderson and Schalk (1998) as reported by Sparrow and Cooper (2003) on how the psychological contract is likely to have evolved lists a number of generic differences between traditional and the more contemporary forms of psychological contract. These changes are deemed essential in order to respond to the dynamics occurring in the global environment and changes in the socioeconomic and demographic features. These are equally important as this research context is unique and has received minimum attention as discussed in Chapter 1. As changes in the environment became less predictable and have been constantly occurring at a high pace (Johnson and Scholes, 2002; Guest, 2004), particularly recently with the increased technological breakthrough, globalisation, free markets, and diversified consumer needs, organisations need to form and be able to carefully manage the cues and signals including the promises they make to their employees, as these create and influence the psychological contracts of their employees (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Guest and Conway, 2002; Rousseau, 2004; Guest, 2008).

It can be argued, as will be discussed from Section 2.6 onwards of this chapter, that talented employees (Michaels et al., 2001; CIPD, 2006) and the more progressive HRM approaches organisations adopt (Guest and Conway, 1997; Guest, 2008) to manage the new sociodemographic features of the workforce (Rousseau, 1995; Guest, 2004; CIPD, 2006) are likely to reflect a unique psychological contract, which needs to be unpacked and understood from the perspective of talented employees and especially if the context of Oman's oil and gas sector is still an underresearched one. This thesis could be an interesting study that attempts to explore the nature of the psychological contract from the perspective of a unique workforce in a unique sector.

2.3.1. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION

Promises can be either in the form of warranties or communication of future intent. According to Rousseau (1995), warranties in employment relationships refer to facts on the nature of the job and its conditions. Warranties are widely used in providing services and selling products (customer service) as a form of ensuring the durability and quality
standards of a service/product. Because warranties are usually clearly stated before acquiring products/services or prior to employment becoming legal, they are thus less ambiguous and can become a strong source of fulfilment if expectations are met (Rousseau, 1995). In contrast, promises of future intent can become very ambiguous as it usually relies on the receiver beliefs rather than what the maker intends. Hence, such promises become the catalyst for forming a psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995).

This is because promises can turn into a contract as the parties involved give in to it by accepting and believing what each party is obliged to do in order to fulfil their part and because it creates a situation where one party, usually the ‘employee’, becomes vulnerable as s/he relies upon the employer (Rousseau, 1995). It is therefore, as Rousseau (1995) argues, the need to reduce reliance loss, which is embedded within the promise of future intent that is the most significant. Mutuality means that ‘each party benefits, obtains some capacity to predict what the other will do, and is enabled to improve his or her ability to yield desired results’ (Rousseau, 1995, p. 86). However, it is essential to understand who makes contracts and how contracts are made. Rousseau (1995) argues that there are mainly two contract makers towards forming the psychological contract. They are categorised into principals, i.e. the organisations themselves or individuals who own and run businesses, while the second category includes agents, i.e. those individuals who act on behalf of another or represent the organisation (Rousseau, 1995). It is worth noting that with respect to the psychological contract, ‘any person who conveys some form of future commitment to another person is potentially a contract maker’ (Rousseau, 1995, p. 60). This includes organisations/employers/owners as the ‘principal contract maker’ with employees and may include recruiters, line managers, and co-workers, managers, mentors, or top management, as the ‘agents’ who are integrated and empowered by the organisation. These may form psychological contracts with employees as the ‘agents’ contract makers’ on the other end (Rousseau, 1995).

Interestingly, there is a range of contracts that may span between agents and principals as there are potentially several agents (recruiters, line managers, managers, co-workers) communicating with the employees on behalf of the principal organisation (Rousseau, 1995). These agents tend to filter the messages from their superiors to the employees and therefore act as strong contract makers with a high potential possibility of violation for several reasons (Rousseau, 1995). The most prevalent of all is the likelihood that their superiors may be changed due to downsizing, promotion, rotation, or fired while the new
authority may usually share or impose a different work agenda and priorities, which may be inconsistent with their predecessors.

Secondly, and as a result of agents’ filtering, the messages delivered by these agents may be inconsistent with what the organisation intends or stands for (Rousseau, 1995; Coyle-Shapiro, 2001). Third, there is always the risk of confusion associated with agents contracting in ‘terms of whether the agent is contracting for him- or herself or the organisation’ (p. 62). In such circumstances, managers and co-workers can play a dual role in making contracts (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996, 1997; Coyle-Shapiro, 2001). Hence, violation could easily occur as the second party (employee) is unaware of such intents and perceives breaches in contracts as mere violations such as the case with MBA graduates in Robinson and Rousseau (1994) for which contract violation is considered a norm rather than an exception (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995).

Hence, it is essential to understand how promises are made and what are the beliefs and perceptions on the obligations each party usually holds on the other as a result. Promises usually arise from interaction with contract makers, whether agents or principals, by observing their behaviour, and through structural signals i.e. human resources and an organisation’s practices and documentations including performance appraisal and rewards, mission statements and other organisational documents and practices (Rousseau, 1995).

Table 2.2 divides the promises into two inter-related sources. More specifically, employees view structural signals, such as HRD initiatives, performance appraisals and reviews, and bonus plans as forms of contracts (Rousseau, 1995; Guest, 2004; Pate et al., 2000b). Therefore, they are likely to behave as cued and act towards fulfilling their part of the deal.
2.3.2 ATTRIBUTES THAT DISTINGUISH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

It can be argued that the psychological contract unlike the implied or formal contract is subjective, between two individuals, and emanates from beliefs by – usually - the employee that his/her employer would provide an agreed return for what they offer.
within the working context. Hence, it derives from promises made either explicitly or implicitly that form the mutually perceived obligation between the employee and the employer in reciprocal fashion (Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Sparrow and Cooper, 2003; Robinson, 1996).

Rousseau (1989) and Robinson (1996) strongly argue that such obligations must be distinguished from expectations, which are usually formed through formal and/or implied contracts. More comprehensively and according to Rousseau (1989), the psychological contract is different from the expectancy theory, equity theory, and motivational models because it is firstly based on promise and belief rather than expectations (see Section 2.2.3). Robinson (1996) in this regard, states that expectations represent a ‘general belief held by employees on what they expect to find in their job and organisation’ (Robinson, 1996, p. 575). Such expectations are not necessarily the result of a promise made by the employer, whereas expectations arising from the psychological contract are the beliefs employees hold because they perceive that their employer has made a promise whether explicitly or implicitly to provide them with a return for what they shall offer (Robinson, 1996).

Given the distinguishing nature of how the psychological contract emerges as discussed above, it could be understood why, as Rousseau (1989) suggested, violating it generates a deeper emotional response compared to the expectations associated with the motivational theories. Moreover, Rousseau (1989, 1995) and Robinson (1996), Pate and Malone (2000) and Pugh et al. (2003) discussed how feelings of hatred, betrayal, resentment, anger, and loss of trust towards the employer reflect this deep emotional response to a psychological contract violation. Such feelings are very difficult to repair or may take exceptionally longer to fade away before they could be repaired (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003; Rousseau, 2004). Whereas when expectations are not met, there are feelings of disappointment and an attempt to perceive that the second party might have formed the wrong assumption or expectation, and hence, the damage to the relation is reduced and better restored than violations occurring on psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1989; Robinson, 1996). These outcomes were consistent with the empirical work of Robinson and Rousseau (1994), Rousseau, (1990), Pate and Malone (2000), Pugh et al. (2003) and Chao et al. (2011).

It is important to note here that in addition to the features and differences between expectations and psychological contracts, Martin (2006) reports further features that
distinguish the psychological contract from other forms of contracts as suggested by Sparrow and Cooper (2003). He highlighted that the psychological contract is subjective, unique and idiosyncratic in nature and this results in a number of implications including being in the ‘eye of the beholder’ as well as only being interpreted by the individuals involved for the individuals involved in the specific relation (Rousseau, 1989; Crossman, 2007; Conway and Briner, 2009). Hence, each individual is likely to form a distinctive psychological contract with their employer (Martin, 2006).

Unlike the employment relationship in its general form, which may include formal and legal contracts, the psychological contract goes beyond such contracts by embracing specific mutual agreements between the parties, which forms the reciprocity between the two parties. Nevertheless, such specific mutual agreements ‘arise from beliefs and perceptions of obligations that, in the case of employees, are what they believe they are entitled to as a consequence of perceived promise, either explicit or implicit, made by the employer’ (Martin, 2006, p. 73; Rousseau, 1989; Robinson, 1996). Since individuals act upon their subjective perception and beliefs of what has been promised, the consequences of such perceptions usually become a reality, which individuals react upon, rather than a mere perception (Martin, 2006; Crossman, 2007; Conway and Briner, 2009).

2.3.3 RESPONSES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT VIOLATIONS

The work conducted by Turnley and Feldman (1998) on how employees respond when their psychological contract is violated is considered another seminal and highly recognised study contributing to furthering the understanding of the theory of the psychological contract. These responses are formed around four main themes or strategies that employees adopt as a response to violation including loyalty or silence, exit, neglect, and exercise voice (Rousseau, 1995; Sparrow and Cooper, 2003). Similarly, Turnley and Feldman (1998) categorise these responses into passive and active (Rousseau, 1995). Hence, a quadrant of responses is developed, such as the one illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.
FIGURE 2.2: RANGE OF EMPLOYEE RESPONSES TO PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT VIOLATIONS


According to Rousseau (1995) employees are more likely to exit - ‘a voluntary termination of the relationship’ (p. 135) - the employment relationship when their psychological contract is transactional. Equally, organisations opt to terminate the employment relationship following a violation when the costs (recruitment, development, replacement, etc.) associated with that employee are low and both parties to some extent believe that an easy replacement is available whereby the employee can join other organisations and the organisation can attract other workers. Hence, the relationship is usually brief. Also, employees are more likely to exit if their peers exit or generally employees in that particular organisation’s tend to exit when they experience violation.
(Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995). In other words, an exit strategy is the norm which connotes a failure in the attempts undertaken to remedy the violation.

The second response strategy is ‘voice’ and is usually used by the employees as an attempt to reduce the damage or loss as well as a means to restore trust. It is usually associated with acts of grievance or as a means to express dissatisfaction with a decision and may well extend to ‘whistle blowing’ (Rousseau, 1995). ‘Voice’ can be in the form of talking and negotiating with superiors, posing threats about departure if a change or a remedy is not materialised, and behavioural changes including a decline in performance level (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Guest, 2004; Rousseau, 2004).

The act of voice, as Rousseau (1995) stated, can also result in an exit if parties fail to reach an agreement on the dispute (Rousseau, 2004). This strategy is usually adopted when there is more to a relationship than monitory gains where trust relations exist between employees and there is a positive relationship between them. Importantly, there has to be a belief that ‘voice’ could influence and make a change where employees are familiar with voice channels and constitutes a norm within the organisation (Rousseau, 1995; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996).

Within the psychological contract context, as Rousseau (1995) explained, when there are no channels for employees to voice their concerns or complain, it is likely that employees would resolve to a ‘silence’ strategy. Similarly, in instances where opportunities are very limited and risky, employees have no choice of leaving, and so revert to being silent and loyal until circumstances change (Rousseau, 1995). Hence, such a strategy similar to ‘voice’ tends to prolong the employment relationship. Last but not least, and perhaps the most destructive form of response to violation is ‘negligence’ whereby employees do no longer seem to care about their employer’s or the organisations’ well-being (Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau, 2004; Chao et al., 2011).

Negligence is usually associated with perceived injustice or unfairness that went untreated or not even justified resulting in a deep emotional response and behaviour including interpersonal aggression, vandalism, and theft to count a few (Rousseau, 1995; Pate and Malone, 2000; Chao et al., 2011; Clinton and Guest, 2013). Such behaviour erodes the employment relationship and is a clear sign that the organisation has a ‘history of conflict, mistrust and violation with no voice channels’ (Rousseau, 1995, p. 138), as such destruction and neglect is demonstrated by other employees within the organisation.
Similarly, as commented by Rousseau (1995, p. 112) ‘if contract terms are in the eyes of the beholder, then violation will be as well’. Moreover, Rousseau (1995) states that psychological contract violations are most likely to occur when there is a ‘history of conflict and low trust in the relationship, social distance exists between the parties such that one does not understand the perspective of the other, and one party places little value in the relationship among others’ (p. 133).

On the other hand, certain factors including ‘strong relationships, frequent interactions, and sacrifice and investments to bind parties to each’ (p. 133) reduce the experiences of psychological contract breach and violation. It may prove worthwhile to hold onto the responses framework of Turnely and Feldman (1998) as this thesis attempts to determine how talented employees are likely to respond to changes in their psychological contract.

### 2.3.4 SUSTAINING HEALTHY PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS

In order to fully understand and appreciate talented employees’ reaction to different states of psychological contract, it is essential to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of what the literature on healthy psychological contracts has so far suggested in this respect.

For a contract to be violated, a promise has to be made and/or perceived. Contract violation refers to discrepancies between a relied-upon outcome and/or an actual outcome where the actual outcome is lower or undermines the promised or the relied-upon outcome. An array of promises/perceived obligations usually revolve around any HR policies and practices including training and development, promotion, job security, career paths, etc. Similarly, as discussed, these could be formed from the action/inaction of contract makers (Rousseau, 1995). This formation would include a relied upon outcome which if not met/delivered would result in psychological contract breach or violation.

Guest (2004) argues that delivery of the deal, fairness, and trust are elements that gauge the health of the psychological contract and the extent to which employees-employers’ reciprocal relationship is met and the manner in which it has been conducted shall change how are they perceived, which ultimately affects the overall state of PC health (Guest and Conway, 1997; Guest, 2008). The empirical work conducted by Conway and Guest (1997),
Martin et al. (1999), Pate et al. (2000a, 2000b) has attempted to unpack the aspects that trigger a change in the state of PC, the underlying causes, and consequences of what would be regarded as a breach and/or violation of the PC (Guest and Conway, 1997). Moreover, their work and others (Alfes et al., 2012; Robinson, 1996; Clinton and Guest, 2013; Pate and Malone, 2000) have focused on the impact of such breach on the quality of trust between employees and employers, and, in particular on how employees perceived their senior executives/line managers (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pate et al., 2007).

Pate and Malone’s (2000) empirical work on the outcomes of psychological contract breach and violation refer to the model of contract violation set by Morrison and Robinson (1997), which describes two important aspects that lead to the violation of the psychological contract including the perception that employers are inconsistent and/or do not keep their promises to employees referred to as perceptions of reneging on promises and incongruent expectations between the employee(s) and employer that lead to wrong perceptions between parties on promises and what was actually delivered. The significance of such a breach if left unattended according to research on psychological contracts (Martin, 2006; Pate and Malone, 2000; Rousseau, 1995) usually result in psychological contract violations, which represent an emotional and affective feeling that is negative and destructive to the relation between the parties resulting in diminished trust in the employer, senior management and line managers (Robinson, 1996; Guest, 2004).

The empirical findings of the research, (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003), also suggest that employees become more cynical towards their current employer and might become less likely to perceive the existence of good employers in the future (Eilam-Shamir and Yaakobi, 2014; Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003). Their research and others (Pate et al., 2000a; Martin et al., 1999; Robinson, 1996) sought to treat trust interchangeably to refer to the extent employees believed that their employers’ and/organisations have been fair in their conduct and are consequently trustworthy (Pate et al., 2007; Clinton and Guest, 2013) and how much this reflects in their intention to stay and OCB on the one hand, and the likelihood that a positive PC state reflects an increased trust between employees and employers and consequently yields to sustained employment relationships characterised by high performance (Pate et al., 2000a; Martin et al., 1999; Robinson, 1996).
On the other hand, it has been noted through their empirical work and others (Clinton and Guest, 2013; Alfes et al., 2012; Guest, 2004; Pate et al., 2007; Rousseau, 2001; Eilam-Shamir and Yaakobi, 2014) that while a number of changing factors including changing markets, the raise of work-life balance requirements, and increased flexibility and fragmented work patterns affect the traditional employment relationship making it difficult for the employer to make and sometimes keep promises, not surprisingly, perceptions on exchanged fairness have been and are most likely (Clinton and Guest, 2013) to be significant to sustaining a healthy psychological contract and managing the intensity through which a violation engenders serious negative emotional outcomes, such as hatred, feelings of betrayal, and cynicism (Rousseau, 1995; Pate and Malone, 2000). Clinton and Guest (2013) argued that as trust becomes deluded, the confidence of employees in a future equitable exchange by the employer deteriorates significantly leading to the violation of the PC and a subsequent increase in turnover.

On a different note, although their work (Clinton and Guest, 2013) has not explicitly pointed to the important role of the 'delivery of the deal' in sustaining healthy PC and trust relations, nevertheless, Martin et al., (1999) and Pate et al., (2000b), through their empirical work and the arguments of Guest (2004), strongly suggest that a reciprocal exchange is important for sustaining the health of the psychological contract. Hence, implying that the state of the PC is influenced by the extent to which what had been promised is delivered in a fairly manner which in turn grants employees trust through their belief and perception that their employer(s) is taking into consideration their interests and are doing the best for them as found by Pate et al. (2000b), Pate and Malone (2000), Martin et al. (1999) and argued by Herriot and Pemberton (1996) and Guest (2004).

Rousseau (2001) discussed the importance of mutuality, schemas, and promises as building blocks necessary to forming psychological contracts, at least positive ones! Her research (Rousseau, 2001, p. 542) refers to the varying degrees through which employees perceive changes in the information, contradictory information, or instability to be considered as a breach in their PC and consequently reduce the levels of trust. Among the factors her research points to, the experience of the employee in the employment relationship i.e. years of boundaryless careers, type of employment relationship i.e. private or government, and the balances of power between employees and their employers, these are similar to the arguments presented by Herriot and Pemberton.
(1996) with regard to the implication of power balance and communication quality the parties have on the negotiation process.

Rousseau (1995), Guest and Conway (1997) and Guest (2004) build on the seminal work of Greenberg (1990) on ‘organisational justice’ and argue that distributive justice is important in maintaining and sustaining the health of the psychological contract as it promotes perception of fairness in terms of fair allocation of tasks and rewards. Procedural justice, on the other hand, is argued to have even greater implications on the perceptions of fairness as it refers to the fact that the decision-making processes taken in allocating tasks, rewards, and resolving disputes are fairly conducted between employees across the organisation and especially amongst those within similar units and teams (Rousseau, 1995; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996).

The empirical studies conducted in recent years (Chen, 2010; Ghosh et al., 2014; Silva and Caetano, 2014; Choi et al., 2014) assert the significance of organisational justice on employees’ psychological contract and involvement. Ghosh et al. (2014), Silva and Caetano (2014), and Choi et al. (2014) refer to the pivotal work of Bies and Mogan (1986) on interactional justice and define it as ‘the quality of interpersonal processes and treatment of individuals... as well as the extent to which the reasons behind the outcome are explained’ (Ghosh et al., 2014, p. 632). It includes ‘treating an employee with dignity, courtesy, honesty, and respect’ (Silva and Caetano, 2014, p. 25). Chen (2010) explains how psychological contracts, especially the relational ones, deteriorate with the negative perceptions of interactional justice. Together with the work of Choi et al. (2014) they proclaim that interactional justice has and could influence employees’ psychological contract as well as organisational outcomes. Hence, there is a need to understand how talented employees perceive their psychological contract and the underlying reasons for its shift from one state to the other. Hence, it is relevant to take the aspects affecting the health of PC into consideration in order to determine how talented employees perceive them and react. It is rather peculiar and speculative and calls for an empirical examination in the real life context to find their implications i.e. ‘trust, delivery of the deal, and fairness’ on the dynamics of talented employees' psychological contract. The next section marks the start of the discussion of the talent management literature and begins with the discussion on workforce and the quality that is driven by them.
2.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORKFORCE FOR THE ORGANISATIONAL COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The following sections will discuss the necessity of organisations’ supporting systems in realising the contribution which key employees, widely referred to in the literature as talents, stars, and knowledge workers, have on organisations’ success and competitive advantage.

Over the course of the last decade, organisations have been increasingly keen to attract and deploy the talents or employees who are capable of utilising their knowledge in achieving organisational goals competitively. However, there is a wide disparity in the ways in which these organisations define and identify these employees and the term talent management (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Dries et al., 2012; Makela et al., 2010; Rothwell, 2011; Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011; Coulson-Thomas, 2012; Levenson, 2012; Tansley, 2011). Moreover, there is a need as recognised by academics and practitioners within the literature to conduct in-depth and context-specific research in order to determine the behaviour patterns of this workforce and the implications of certain HR practices on their performance and retention (Dickey et al., 2011; Doh et al., 2011; Orr and McVerry, 2007; Dries et al., 2012; Makela et al., 2010; Rothwell, 2011; Tansley, 2011).

Jackson et al. (2003) argue that having appropriate human capital or talent as he puts it is not sufficient in sustaining organisations’ competitive advantage. Organisations need to have the whole crew around and functioning (each within their expertise) in order for the talent value to endure and prevail leading to an organisation’s competitive advantage. That is, integrating talent with complementary resources to create organisational capabilities. This is widely supported by academics and practitioners including Kase et al. (2009), Iles et al. (2001), Storey (2001), Martin (2006), CIPD (2003), Collings and Mellahi (2009), Centre for Performance-Led HR (2011), Makela et al. (2010) and Rothwell (2011). Even Coulson-Thomas (2007) and his recent publication Coulson-Thomas (2012) discusses the drawbacks of organisations altering and adopting practices and cultures to meet a specific requirement for a relatively scarce and expensive workforce ‘talent’, yet he highlights the role and contribution of talents to organisations’ competitive advantage when properly managed with resources and practices being well integrated to meet their work needs and organisations’ goal.
However, in their argument, Jackson et al. (2003) refer to a particular set of employee ‘talents or stars’ who they perceive as employees ‘possessing key skills, making use of their tacit and explicit knowledge, and having appropriate attitudes’ that results in high performance when deployed in appropriate contexts allowing organisations to create competitive advantage that makes them market leaders. The same arguments were discussed by McDonnel and Collings (2011). They stress the need for organisations to be able to identify talent requirements and set a well-integrated process to ensure that organisations optimise the talents they either buy or create internally. This, as they argue is gauged on how successful organisations are in identifying the competence, commitment, and contribution of talented employees.

The term knowledge-based resources (Martin, 2006; Jackson et al., 2003; CIPD, 2002; Boddy, 2005; Sparrow and Cooper, 2003; Iles et al., 2001; Kase et al., 2009) has been used extensively in literature to refer to the skills, abilities, and learning capacity that employees gain from experience and formal training. It includes ‘all the intellectual abilities and knowledge possessed by employees, as well as their capacity to learn and acquire more knowledge, thus, it includes what employees have mastered as well as their potential for adapting and acquiring new information’ (Jackson et al., 2003). Hence, employees with knowledge and intellectual capacity are referred to by many research studies (Jackson et al., 2003; Michaels et al., 2001; Hoglund, 2012; Tansley, 2011; Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011; Coulson-Thomas, 2012) as talents and stars and vice-versa in which their expertise and knowledge form an essential part of their ‘talent’.

2.5 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES OVER DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING THEM

Michaels et al. (2001, p. xii) are considered pioneers with their corresponding seminal work on the ‘war for talent’. They defined talent in a general sense and refer to it as the sum of a person’s abilities - his or her intrinsic gifts, skills, knowledge, experience, intelligence, judgment, attitude, character, and drive. It also includes his or her ability to learn and grow.

In addition, Michaels et al. (2001) argue that defining managerial talent can be challenging as it is context-specific ‘there is no universal definition’. As reported by Makela et al. (2009) ‘talent management’ focuses on the specified pool of employees who ‘rank at top
in terms of capabilities and performance’ (Stahl et al., 2007); they are considered potential leaders either at present or at some point in the future. Moreover, when Rothwell (2012) describes the importance of having a different workforce planning strategy to address the talent needs in the short-term, he refers to talent pool as ‘all people who are considered promotable to the next level up on the organization chart regardless of department’, while the term talent management as he suggests has been variously defined as the ‘process of attracting the best people, developing the best people, and retaining the best people’ (Rothwell, 2008).

Furthermore, Hoglund (2012) claimed that there is a serious lack of consensus in the literature as to what the term talent means, what is it to be managed and how. His research has come about with the following findings from an in-depth interview with 17 top HR personnel in Nordic MNC. Their feedback on the dimensions that constitute the talent management definition for their MNC included: ‘high performance, high capabilities and skills, proactive initiative taking, and active support of organisational strategy, values and leadership behaviours.’

Dries et al. (2012) argued that talent management is a ‘strategic imperative’ and draws on the work of Lepak and Snell (1999) in defining talent management as ‘the differential management of employees based on their relative potential to contribute to the competitive advantage of their organizations’ they point to the likely events that organisations focus on high performers with high leadership potential as well as the ones with a rare set of technical skills and the ones identified as ‘high potentials’. Although Coulson-Thomas (2012) does not explicitly define talent/talent management, he refers to the challenges and expenses organisations may incur in recruiting stars, highly talented employees and high fliers. These were related to the need of setting work systems, contexts, and practices that would allow organisations to harness their contribution.

Schuler et al. (2011) refer to talented individuals as ‘valuable contributors, including high level executives, those with high managerial potential, and those with rare technical skills’. Their research discussed the need for talented knowledge workers especially in developing economies, and while, recently there has been a surplus of these talented knowledge workers in the developed world, they argue, that research shows there shall be a shortage as the economy recovers.
Collin’s English Dictionary defines talent as an ‘innate ability, aptitude, or faculty, especially when unspecified; above average ability’ (Centre for Performance-led HR, 2011). ‘Employees with unique skill sets - skills that are rare and much sought after by competing organisations. They are hard to find and therefore difficult to replace and add a disproportionate amount of value to the organisation compared to other employees’ (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011). Talent management is defined by the CIPD as ‘involving a systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of those individuals who through their potential have a positive immediate or long term impact on organisational performance’ (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011).

Last but not least, Tansley (2011) has been conducting an in-depth literature research on talent and talent management definitions and meanings for organisations and cultures alike. The findings claim that there is no consensus among organisations and within the literature to what exactly the terms refer to - this is similar to the arguments addressed above - and this may have a diminishing impact on the robustness of the theories and practices tested and suggested. However, Tansley (2011) was able to establish an understanding and found some common grounds to what is often meant and applied when the terms talent or talent management are applied across different cultures and organisations as ‘organisational talent refers to those who are identified as having potential to reach high levels of achievements with consistent high performance.’

It can be concluded from the above analysis that the term ‘talent’ is associated with individuals who are well-educated, demonstrate high potential to learn and grow within the organisation settings, and are motivated to develop key expertise in specific discipline, able to cope, learn, and excel in ambiguous situations. They utilise their knowledge and skills towards solving complex problems and adapt desired attitudes.

2.6 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT: THE PERCEIVED SIGNIFICANCE AND CHALLENGE

There have been varying concerns on the implications of organisations paying special attention to what they refer to as the ‘A type’ of employees or ‘Stars’ (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011). These implications may result in a diminishing impact on the organisations’ overall performance in the longer run. This view towards talented people
according to the Centre for Performance-Led HR (2011) is referring to talent management as a key personal theme where there is a certain type of employee with certain characteristics that makes them very special compared to their peers. Moreover, these employees’ input adds value to organisations’ strategic objectives and can improve the quality of the overall organisation (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011; Schuler et al., 2011).

This view has been grasped and improved by some organisations as they thought of talent management with regard to key positions as opposed to key personnel where positions are being identified as critically influencing the organisational strategy and its ability to deliver the product and compete in the market, hence, these positions are classified as A and Schlumberger as compared to other companies adopting such a trend (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011). This also implies that careful attention is paid to getting the suitable personnel to fit such posts. In doing so, and although being highly questioned, most of these organisations opt for the potential/performance matrix in recruiting and selecting employees referred to as ‘talents’ (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011).

Having mentioned the impact of talented individuals on organisational strategic goals attainment, there is a body of literature that discusses another aspect of talent management. This is referred to as the strategic importance of talent management or the relation between talent management and strategy (Schuler et al., 2011; Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011). The literature widely discusses strategic talent management, global talent management, managing talent for multinational corporations MNs, etc. (Coulson-Thomas, 2012; Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011; Schuler et al., 2011; Dries et al., 2012). The core significance here is the necessity of aligning talent management initiatives with the organisational strategy and vice-versa. Hence, as the Centre for Performance-Led HR, (2011), Schuler et al. (2011), Sparrow et al. (2011) and Scullion and Collings (2011) indicate, this is a ‘key strategic theme’ of talent management. This allows organisational strategies to be pulled towards talent management initiatives and requirements rather than solely relying on pushing the management of talent to fit the direction of the organisational strategy.

Consequently, HR policies and practices with regard to talent management - where ‘talent management’ is considered an independent discipline in an organisation or an emerging discipline within HR - has to change and become a rather dynamic means through which appropriate changes are addressed effectively and talent is managed efficiently and
supporting activities are introduced including senior and line managers training to lead their talented employees, in addition, to becoming involved in their development and reward strategy (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011; Schuler et al., 2011, 2011b). Other important changes include the development of recruitment and selection systems, talent acquisition, development and retention, and risk management. This notion is noted by the Centre for Performance-Led HR (2011) to be a ‘key practices approach’ as a theme that focuses on HR policies and practices. These themes as argued by the Centre for Performance-Led HR (2011) are similar to the arguments discussed by Pfeffer (2001) and Coulson-Thomas (2012) in which they argued that it is not only about people ‘focusing on high performers only’ but other aspects of the organisation including systems and culture being equally important and should thus be integrated and organised in a supporting manner.

On an organisational level, CIPD (2006) has been trying to determine talent management. Is it an inclusive or exclusive to elite individuals and groups who are considered high flyers through demonstrating high levels of potential or performance to become future leaders and move to higher levels in the organisation?

This exclusive mode of talent management aims at focusing on a particular segment within an organisation rather than on including all employees across the organisation. The latter refers to the inclusive mode of talent management. Hence, under the exclusive talent management mode, the following question that needs to be answered is ‘what makes an exceptional manager’, and according to Delbridge et al. (2006, p. 141) as cited by the CIPD (2006) they are the ones who can make a strategic difference. The challenge is with being fair with the selection which could trigger perceptions of either psychological contract breach or violation by those who are not selected on the one hand, and perceptions of psychological fulfilment or over fulfilment by those selected on the other.

Whereas arguments that favour the more inclusive talent management mode as addressed by Chris Bones cited in Warren (2006, p. 25) and cited by the CIPD (2006) state that it is necessary to opt for an inclusive talent management mode because ‘an inclusive talent management strategy is a competitive necessity’. The inclusive mode possesses some challenges as organisations need to identify not only those employees who demonstrate the potential to become future managers but also those who are ‘technical experts, professional staff, and knowledge workers.’
Caplan (2011) acknowledges a shift from merely a strategy that organisations design and implement to deal with talent shortages and winning new talent to a comprehensive strategy where organisations change their ‘way of thinking and a way of doing things that aligns individual development with the needs and objectives of the organization’ (Caplan, 2011, p.1). Caplan (2011) is one of many who suggested that one of the most effective ways to deal with talent shortages is for organisations to develop and retain their employees (Taylor, 2010; Kim et al., 2014). This as she proposes is different from the seminal work of Michaels et al. (2001) and subsequent works who stress that attracting and retaining talent is the primary concern for organisations. While all these functions i.e. attraction, recruitment, deployment, and retention are obviously significant and form an integral part of ‘talent management’, organisations sought to debate and argue on whether an inclusive or an exclusive approach to talent management is best whether it is everyone in the organisation or a specific group or individuals who are core i.e. professionals or technical experts as discussed above by others (Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014).

The discussion by Caplan (2011) alludes to problems associated with the exclusive approach to talent management which advocates a significant few. This is so as she argues because of the speed of change and uncertainty, which means that what appears insignificant today may become paramount tomorrow and what organisations focus on today may become less important or have no significance tomorrow. Hence, advocating an inclusive approach.

2.7 EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

The following section critically addresses the literature that attempted to link the two streams. This includes how Hoglund (2012), Bjorkman et al. (2013) and Sonnenberg et al. (2014) among others perceived the relationship between psychological contract and talent and talent management. Hence, the research conducted by Hoglund (2012) is divided into two stages as he initially carried an exploratory pre-study when interviewing 17 Heads of HR in Nordic MNCs and came about with the categorisation that identifies and distinguishes talents within these MNC. He then attempted to conduct a web survey
to a sample of 2259 professionals and managers with a very weak response rate 5.6%, 126 respondents for reasons he stated in his research to address the key issues that were related to employees' perceived perception on inducements which their organisation provided them through Skill-Enhancing HR categorised as 'talent inducements', and the extent that these result in the perceived obligation of employees to perform and develop desired attitudes categorised as 'obligations to develop skills' (please see the research for more details).

Hoglund (2012) framed the nature of reciprocity between the two perceptions 'inducement and obligation' as forming the psychological contract which is influenced by the HR Practices referred to as skill-enhancing HR. This skill-enhancing HR equally influenced individual performance and desired attitudes referred to as human capital which, as he argued, organisations develop and utilise in achieving their goals. In his conceptual framework, Hoglund (2012) suggests that inducements and obligations i.e. psychological contract serve as mediating the impact of skill-enhancing HR and human capital. This is once more similar to the literature on knowledge workers and psychological contract discussed by Martin et al. (1999); Pate et al. (2000b), Flood et al. (2001), O'Neill and Adya (2007). These research studies argue that retaining and motivating knowledge workers is significant for organisations' competitive advantage.

This also reveals the gap within the talent management literature in establishing suitable definitions for talents in specific contexts. The study of Hoglund (2012) is considered one of the very few studies that attempted to utilise the psychological contact in conjunction with talent literature. However, the prospect of psychological contract theory considered by Hoglund (2012) is different than the one this research adapts as this research considers promissory expectations that form obligations rather than the skill enhancing-inducement model. Also, the focus and scope of this research is different as it aims to understand the contents of the psychological contract rather than merely testing the correlation between the psychological contract as adopted by Hoglund (2012) and talented employees' learning and development initiatives. Hence, there is relatively greater potential for contribution by cross linking the two streams and looking at areas within both streams that require more attention (Conway and Briner, 2009; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tansley, 2011).

Another study conducted in this regard is the one conducted by Bjorkman et al. (2013). They examined the impact of employees in 11 Nordic MNE being identified as talent and
how this identification by the management has had implications on a number of variables including ‘acceptance of increasing performance demand, commitment to building competencies, and turnover intentions’ (Bjorkman et al., 2013, pp. 201-207). Their study was based on the social exchange theory by focusing on the psychological contract employees share with their employer as part of identification in the talent pool by dividing employees into 3 categories: employees who have been identified compared to those who have not been identified and those not knowing whether or not they have been identified as talent.

Interestingly, their study found a support to the assumptions made with regard to all variables with the exception of the turnover intent. This variable was as well different between the first group and the other two which supports the assumptions made in this research. This is evidence that when talented employees realised that they have been identified as talent they create a distinguished psychological contract compared to others and this influences their performance and retention among other factors. However, the study conducted by Bjorkman et al. (2013) was merely quantitative and falls encounters a number of challenges as argued in Section 2.8. Similarly and more importantly, the study attempted to make pre-assumptions of what constitutes the contents of the psychological contract instead of explicating them from the employees themselves. This constitutes a great risk falloff encountering the problems of assumptions on what constitute the psychological contract of two parties from a third party’s observation as Crossman (2007), Conway and Briner (2009) and Martin (2006) addressed and explained in Sections 2.2.4 and 2.3. Hence, this research is different in that it attempts to explore the content of talented employees’ psychological contract in a specific context. Also, this research attempts to understand how talented employees respond to perceptions of breach, violation, or fulfilment of their own psychological contract.

The study conducted by Sonnenberg et al. (2014) is yet another attempt that related the stream of talent and talent management with the psychological contract. It is equally interesting but with similar issues with the work done by Bjorkman et al. (2013). In contrast, Sonnenberg et al. (2014) used the psychological contract fulfilment variable as perceived obligations between the parties to measure perceived violation or fulfilment on the employer’s part. This is in one way similar to what this research intends on finding i.e. understanding how talented employees respond to perceptions of breach, violation, or fulfilment of their own psychological contract, however, the use of pre-defined contents
and consequences as Bjorkman et al. (2013) did together with quantitative methods raises the same concerns discussed above of whether the data reflects the actual psychological contract as talented employees perceive them or they reflect the reality as perceived by the researcher. Their study (Sonnenberg et al., 2014) reveals the significance of communicating corporate and top management decisions on talent pool inclusion for employees. The incongruence of employees’ perception of whether they are considered talented or not, was found to have negative implications on talent management practices. This is once more interesting and serves as additional evidence on the implications of identifying employees as talented and how this identification informs the special psychological contract these employees form and exchange with their employer. Similarly, and although, such research that has empirically drawn a correlation between talent management practices and the psychological contract is very limited, they nevertheless, reveal how talented employees’ psychological contract influences talent management practices and vice-versa. It furthermore attempts to explain how such a psychological contract results in a number of attitudinal and behavioural outcomes including but not limited to satisfaction, commitment, and performance.

Hence, while the studies of Hoglund (2012), Bjorkman et al. (2013), Sonnenberg et al. (2014) among others could be considered as a good start on linking the two streams-albeit in a form of testing the relationship between them rather than exploring the nature of the relationship between them- there are interesting gaps with attempts to capture the content of the psychological contract as perceived by the talented employees themselves and its implication as this research suggested. It is evident, therefore, that the relationship between talent and talent management literature and the psychological contract remains underresearched and contributes to understanding the dynamics of such a relationship through this PhD thesis. The uniqueness of this thesis, nevertheless, resides in the ‘interpretivist’ philosophical perspective of the researcher (explained in the next chapter). This allows the researcher to explore talented employees’ psychological contract and the meanings and experiences these talented employees’ reflect when they perceive it has been breached, violated, or fulfilled.

Moreover, in contrast, the volume of research that attempts to address the psychological contract of talented employees in a particular sector or industry compared to knowledge management and knowledge workers is relatively low and therefore considered to move in the initial growth stage of its life cycle (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries et al., 2012;
This is mainly due to the subjective nature to which talented employees have been defined and identified creating a wide discrepancy among practitioners and scholars alike on defining and identifying talented employees, in addition to, the arguments that surround organisations’ exclusion and inclusion approaches to talent management. This suggests a great potential for future research and the need to conduct an industry specific research that would contribute to the overall body of literature in identifying talent attributes, talent-oriented disciplines, and key HR practices within specific contexts (Hoglund, 2012; Tansley, 2011; Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011; Coulson-Thomas, 2012; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dickey et al., 2011; Doh et al., 2011; Orr and McVerry, 2007). Moreover, and although there were insufficient details to the sources and details of the research conducted by Orr and McVerry (2007), their report attempted to address a number of issues that are very interesting on the challenges impacting oil and gas companies globally and within the western hemisphere to find and retain 'experienced candidates'. They report the expected talent gaps that are likely to prevail in the coming decade ‘currently' with respect to positions. At the top, they reported, petroleum engineers, geoscientists, and plant operation engineers to incur the greatest shortages while finance managers and marketers experience shortages as well.

2.8 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN GAPS IN THE LITERATURE:

2.8.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY REVIEWED LITERATURE ON THIS RESEARCH

Following the critical review of the relevant literature and the points discussed, a number of important conclusions regarding future research into the psychological contract are summarised and highlighted. These primarily include the discrepancies that have been widely associated with the contents of the psychological contract due to a. how the psychological contract is defined and b. what construes of 'belief' as evidenced through the works of Rousseau (1990), Guzzo et al. (1994), Herriot et al. (1997), Millward and Hopkins (1998) Rousseau, (2000) need to be further investigated and explicated. Moreover, the extent to which these contents are empirically contractual has been questionable as the tools used including the ‘critical incident approach (Herriot et al., 1997), psychological contract inventory (Rousseau, 2000c), and policy capturing’ do not necessarily capture an exchange which links both parties' input (Conway and Briner, 2009). Hence, this may pose challenges to the quantitative approach used for identifying
the contents as it tends to independently list items which the parties are likely perceive as promissory without validating an exchange between parties (Conway and Briner, 2009). This explains how survey methods, as Conway and Briner (2009, p. 94) frequently argue, mostly if at all capture explicit promises:

‘Survey methods typically gather information about promises in general and do not typically request participants to make distinctions between explicit and implicit promises. We have to assume that questionnaires are to a very large extent accessing consciously accessible and therefore largely explicit promises. There is also little understanding about how agents behave when communicating implicit promises’.

Hence, the above quote points to the need to consider whether pre-defining and generalising the contents of the psychological contract and adopting a quantitative method for future empirical work is feasible to answering the research questions. With regard to the aim and objectives of this research, which is more exploratory, the quantitative approach is very unlikely to provide rich and in-depth information about the experiences of those employees considered talented. Hence, arriving at the most appropriate qualitative method for capturing talented employees’ experiences, which forms their psychological contract is deemed a more suitable approach (Herriot et al., 1997). This is due to the focus this research places on explicating how and what forms the psychological contract adopt the definition and distinctions advocated by Rousseau (1989 and 1995) of expectations being contractual and reciprocal obligations on both parties for fulfilling these expectations. Also, it included the negotiation process advocated by Herriot and Pemberton (1995). Nevertheless, this is further argued and justified in the methodology chapter.

From the suggestions formulated by Conway and Briner (2009), it is worth noting that in order to minimise the problems associated with capturing contractual contents, prospective researchers should ground their definition of the psychological contract ‘beliefs’ on specific ‘promises, obligations, commitments, etc.’ and attempt to capture the contents which are contractual i.e. forming an exchanged relationship. This according to Conway and Briner (2009) is clear from the approach of Millward and Hopkins (1998) in capturing exchange by using the psychological contract scale. Similarly, there is much empirical work that attempted to capture the implicit nature of psychological contracts which requires more research attention. Hence, and in a similar vein, researchers may consider giving in to the arguments presented by Meckler et al. (2003), in which they
insist that not all psychological contracts are consciously formed but rather they are unconsciously formed as ‘employees experience, engage in, and reflect upon events’ (Conway and Briner, 2009, p. 89).

However, the researcher argues that conscious promises could and are constantly established whether implicitly or explicitly, and therefore, exploring how they are formed could be feasible given the appropriateness of the methods and tools used. Whereas, on the other hand, individuals could indeed formulate unconscious expectations (Meckler et al., 2003) as a result of unlimited reasons including age, well-being, market situation, life and work-experience, education levels, relationships, standard of living, contemplation and personal reflection, and so on; these remain at large expectations and only form contractual contracts i.e. psychological contracts if they are consciously perceived to have been communicated within the employment relationship either explicitly or implicitly (Rousseau, 1989, 1995, 2001, 2003). However, they could influence the way promises are perceived to have been made (Rousseau, 1989, 1995). Hence, by adopting a promissory nature of psychological contract that could be implicitly and explicitly formed, there are better chances of realising the contents of the individual psychological contracts qualitatively as well as quantitatively as this tool according to Conway and Briner (2009, pp. 88-89) is only valid if the conscious notion of promises is adopted.

Second, the contents of the psychological contracts are highly influenced by the context of the study. Conway and Briner (2009, pp. 89-93) found that factors outside organisations such as ‘pre-employment work related experience, exposure to the experience of work via family and friends, schools, and previous violations’ influence employees’ expectations from prospective employers and their contributions, trust, and perceptions (Martin et al., 1999; Pate et al., 2000; Pate and Malone, 2000; Rousseau, 2003; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). Similarly, organisational and employment factors, such as communications from line managers and messages and cues from HRM policies and practices, as Conway and Briner (2009) report on the findings of Grant (1999), Guest and Conway (2000), Conway and Monks (2008), which coincide with Rousseau (1995) and Dabos and Rousseau’s (2004) explanation on contract makers, influence on the contents of the psychological contract. In addition, the works of Guest (2004) and Conway and Briner (2009) through the findings of Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002c); Conway and Briner (2002b) explored how different types of employment contracts create the psychological contracts that govern them. Their findings have contributed to the distinctions between transactional
and relational contracts according to the types of employment contracts they are associated with. Similarly, another important factor in creating and shaping the contents of the psychological contract is pertaining to individual ideologies (Bunderson, 2001; Thompson and Bunderson, 2003) and ‘social interaction and comparison among co-workers’ as Conway and Briner (2009, p. 91) report from the work of Ho et al. (2006). Hence, these aspects influencing the content of the psychological contract need to be understood from the perspective of the participants then filtered and aligned to have a theoretical grip and methodological choice of this research.

Third, Conway and Briner (2009) discuss a number of studies which suggest that psychological contract breach may result because of inadequate provision of HRM policies and practices (Grant, 1999; Guest and Conway, 1997, 2004), quality of relationships at work (Takleab et al., 2005; Dulac et al., 2008), individual ideological and personality traits differences (Edwards et al., 2003; Raja et al., 2004), social comparison whether in terms of self-reference or with regard to reference with others (O’Neill et al., 2007), and finally employees’ perception of whether their employers deliberately result in breach or as a result of misunderstanding (Morrison and Robinson, 1997).

Fourth, Conway and Briner (2009) advocate the use of a more inductive approach in researching the psychological contract as part of the social exchange theory that Blau (1964) presented, but also in order to align it with the cognitive nature of the contract as suggested by Rousseau (2001), in that the schema allows individuals to predict to a certain extent what and when the return for contribution would take place (Rousseau, 2003; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). This is reasonable, given the extensive quantitative methods used in psychological contract research and as Conway and Briner (2009) suggest, applying similar methods is likely to replicate and produce similar results. Hence, the focus should be on methods that shall allow future research to explain how the exchange is reciprocated and how factors within and beyond the organisation influence the contents of the psychological contract (Rousseau; 2003; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004; Conway and Briner, 2009; Eilam-Shamir and Yaakobi, 2014). More information on the methodology and methods is discussed in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

Nevertheless, the outcomes of psychological contract breach and violation as a result of the extensive research conducted in the area have more or else become predictable (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003; Conway and Briner, 2009; Clinton and Guest, 2013). However, the extent to which they are accurate is influenced by the context of the study.
and the methods used in collecting and analysing data (Conway and Briner, 2009). This research is comparatively distinct in its context that brings with it a number of interesting social and institutional features that could be argued to have wider implications on how psychological contracts are formed and what constitutes their content. This adds to the need of conducting context-specific studies that can contribute to exploring the contents of the psychological contract (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). It also contributes to the rigour of the methodology as it attempts to explicate and qualitatively understand how contracts are explicitly and hopefully implicitly formed and become obligatory. The extent to which explicit beliefs are mutually exchanged between parties and the implications on the employment relationship is as also interesting (Rousseau, 2003; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). This research is associated with a particular group of employees who could be contextually labelled as ‘talents’. However, it is only possible to be conclusive with regard to the conceptual model or theoretical framework and the methodological choice of the research following the discussion on the related gaps and implications from the talent management literature and its relation to the psychological contract in particular in the next sub-section.

2.8.2 THE IMPLICATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEWED ON RELATING TALENT MANAGEMENT WITH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEORY IN THIS RESEARCH

Lately, there have been several studies that have attempted to relate the two streams of psychological contract theory and talent management. This section argues the implications of what has been researched and discussed so far in the literature with inferences to the respective sections and chapters.

The attempt to test this relationship as the previous section discussed, collectively, strengthens the argument that the psychological contract has implications on the number of attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of talented employees. As the aforementioned studies have shown together with the ones discussed in Sections 2.5-2.7 psychological contract theory has been utilised to assess the correlation between organisational practices and outcomes for different types of employees including knowledge workers, engineers, accountants (Martin et al., 1999; Pate et al., 2000b; Flood et al., 2001; O’Donohue et al., 2007) and to show its different forms as employees move with years of
experience from newcomers, juniors, to becoming senior employees (Rousseau and Robinson, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; O’ Neill and Adya, 2006; Rousseau, 2000c) as we all on talent and talent management practices as discussed above. Importantly, these studies were usually concerned with the outcomes associated with the state of the psychological contract including high performance, job satisfaction, knowledge share, knowledge transfer, innovation, organisational citizenship behaviour, intentions to stay/quit to name a few. However, most of these research studies if not all were highly quantitative and centralised the theory of the psychological contract as either mediating or moderating variables between organisational strategic choices or organisational practices and policies and organisational and individual related outcomes.

This research shifts the attention to an area that has not received sufficient empirical evidence within the psychological contract stream and certainly less when talented employees are associated; ‘to understand the meanings the talented employees in the context attach to when they describe and discuss their psychological contract as they perceived it and its implications on their behaviour and attitude’ (Conway and Briner (2009); Morley and Sherman (2015); Rousseau et al., (2015); Tomprou et al., (2015); Sparrow et al., (2014).

In addition to the arguments discussed above with reference to the empirical work on the talent and talent management link with the psychological contract, it is important to note that there has been no consensus, up to date, as to what and to whom the word talent or the term talent management refers exactly (Tansley (2011); Centre for Performance-Led HR, (2011); Coulson-Thomas (2012); Makela et al., (2010); Collings and Mellahi (2009); Dries et al., (2012); Dries (2013) however, they all agreed that it is very context-specific with some general features being common. Most of them if not all had urged the need for further research into this area and the careful attention decision-makers and top managers should take in identifying their talented employees and the practices that are required to harness their contribution.

These discussions allude to two predominant issues surrounding talent and talent management with regard to this research; namely, ‘shortage’ and ‘labelling’. It is this competition towards managing talented employees including attracting and retaining them that has given rise to the talent and talent management literature and received great attention from researchers and practitioners within HRM in the late 20th century and early 21st century to date (CIPD, 2006; Tansley, 2011; Michaels et al., 2001). While a
number of theoretical debates were developed and formulated on how best to manage these talented employees (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Makela et al., 2010; Dries et al., 2012), striking facts represented themselves along the period. These include but are not limited to the fact that the scarcity of employees who are considered talented in the global arena posits a threat in meeting the growing demands of local and global employers due to demographic changes coupled with changes in the interests and values of the emerging workforce (Michaels et al., 2001; CIPD, 2006; CIPD, 2007; Tansley, 2011). In addition, the discrepancy among researchers and practitioners on how talented employees are defined and identified (Coulson-Thomas, 2012; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tansley, 2011) understates the effectiveness of the policies and initiatives designed to manage these talented employees.

These two prominent aspects ‘shortages and labelling’ seemed to form the basis for the notion ‘war for talent’ (Michaels et al., 2001) that has predominantly been the subject of debate among scholars (CIPD, 2011; Coulson-Thomas, 2012). Consequently, two important outcomes could be concluded from reviewing the literature on talent and talent management. Firstly, where there is a ‘war for talent’ there appears to be a shortage of a particular set of competencies that employers consider most significant for the survival and competitiveness of their organisation(s). Secondly, given the differences on how talented employees are defined and identified, it appears that each sector and industry is interested in a particular set of competencies more than others. Similarly, there are certain soft skills and competencies that may overlap between different sectors and industries such as those pertaining to accountancy and information and communication technology (ICT). These two issues ‘labelling and shortages’ are therefore highly contextual (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Tansley, 2011; Makela et al., 2010; Dries et al., 2012; Coulson-Thomas, 2012) and require further research. The next section therefore provides the definition of talent and talent management.

2.8.3 TALENT AND TALENT MANAGEMENT AS DEFINED FOR THIS RESEARCH

This section discusses how the term talent and talent management is used by the researcher, which feeds into the relationship this research aims to explore and understand.
The aforementioned discussion clearly reveals that a relationship between psychological contract theory and talent and talent management exists, yet nevertheless, remains poorly researched. Hence, it could be concluded that this area requires more attention and more research should be aimed at understanding the various relationships between the two streams (Sonnenberg et al., 2014; Sparrow et al., 2014; Al Amri et al., 2016; Vantilborgh et al., 2014). This is so, because PC has been used recently in the talent and talent management stream to gauge their turnover among other variables. This points to their significance in organisations and the practices aimed at managing them and retaining them as well as reveals how the psychological contract is important for retention among other outcomes as discussed by Hoglund (2012), Bjorkman et al. (2013), Sonnenberg et al. (2014).

Hence, this research needs to initially define how the term talent and talent management is used so that the research findings reflect the experiences and psychological contract of these employees (Conway and Briner, 2005; 2009; Rousseau et al., 2015). Similarly, this will explain the meanings these talented employees reflect when they perceive that their PC has been breached, violated, or fulfilled. These aspects of talented employees’ psychological contract are the ones missing and have not yet received enough attention (Briner, 2016; Al Shaqsi et al., 2016). Hence, exploring talented employees’ psychological contract will theoretically contribute to the understanding of psychological contract meanings and implications as perceived by the talented employees. In addition, it will provide indications of talented employees’ willingness to stay or quit from their organisations depending on the state of their psychological contract. This will consequently strengthen organisational competitiveness and differential performance that are highly related to having talented employees and appropriate practices for managing them (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Minibeva and Collings, 2013).

The researcher defines talented employees for this research as

Those who form part of the intra-sectorial competition within the oil and gas sector in Oman such as, reservoir engineers, geoscientists, petro physics, production technologists, and those who work in the core business. It also includes those who form the inter-sectorial competition between the oil and gas sector and other sectors in Oman. They are those who work in crucial supporting roles, few examples include, talent management managers, process control engineers, programmers, chief accountants, and others who are considered to work in key supporting roles. Primarily, talented employees are those who
exhibit high performance and make a difference to the organisation's success through their immediate contribution or through demonstrating the potential to do so. They reflect leadership qualities and are well educated. They are also technically knowledgeable, experts in their fields, and difficult to replace.

In devising the above definition, the researcher referred to the one brought forward by the CIPD (2007) and Schuler et al. (2011) as talent (talented employees) includes ‘those who can make the greatest difference to organisational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest level of potential’ (CIPD, 2007, p.xi), they are ‘those with managerial potential and those with rare technical skills’ (Schuler et al., 2011). With regard, to talent management, on the other hand, the researcher once more prefers the definition brought forward by CIPD (2007) as ‘the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement/retention and deployment of those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization’ (p. xi). The CIPD definition has a number of merits for which reason it has been considered among the widely dispersed definitions available in the literature (see Section 3.3 in Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion). Moreover, the researcher adapts the exclusive approach to talent and talent management whereby the members of the talent pool and those who are talented are carefully selected by the organisation unlike the inclusive nature of talent which assumes that all employees are talented (see Section 3.5 in Chapter 3 for more details).

The CIPD is a chartered institution that is highly involved in the fields of consultancy and adopts a practitioner's orientation that aims to reduce the gaps between theory and practice. Given that the context of the research is Oman's oil and gas, this sector is widely known for utilising and adopting such orientation towards their policies and practices. In addition, the CIPD definition has been empirically aided where real-life contexts as well as prominent MNC have been involved in their studies as their subjects and participants, although their work is not without a critic. The CIPD however, does not claim but rather acknowledges the problems associated with generalisability for different contexts and the fact that contexts are influenced by the cultures and national laws and regulations which in return affects how talented employees are defined and identified (CIPD, 2006, 2007).

Oman's oil and gas sector enjoys a number of unique features and characteristics; hence, it is reasonable that the researcher used the CIPD definition of talent in devising a more relevant one for this research. Equally important is that a researcher maintained an open
mind and attempted to initially consult organisational representatives on how they define and identify talent as this is even more appropriate for this research and confirms that talented employees are identified within the organisations and are aware of this identification, making their psychological contract more interesting to explore. This is the reason why only when there is no definition and understanding of the terms by the organisational representatives, the researcher will discuss his definition to identify the employees who are considered talented in that specific organisation. Because there has been no consensus within the literature on how talent is defined and identified (Coulson-Thomas, 2012; Tansley, 2011; Makela et al., 2010; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries et al., 2012), attracting, deploying, and for most retaining talented employees has been a constant challenge for businesses especially the ones that rely on their knowledge and expertise (Flood et al., 2001; CIPD, 2007; Coulson-Thomas, 2012). These empirical studies reveal a common pattern on how talented employees are categorised and identified in organisations. The patterns include being professional, holding technical or managerial posts as suggested by the recent work of Kim et al. (2014), well-educated, knowledgeable and experts in their field or have the potential of becoming one (Centre for Performance-Led HR, 2011), and are difficult to replace, and may require longer than usual for replacements to mould and arrive at the desired competencies; hence the reasons why they are considered critical for organisations.

Nevertheless, in conducting the field work and in order to make a genuine contribution, it is imperative that the construct of talent and what makes a talented employee is explored from the perspective of the employer. This entails being open-minded to the inclusivity approach to the talent pool which may be the practice in some of the organisations. This is, nevertheless, significant if their psychological contract is to be understood. The rationale in doing so lays in the risk of capturing the psychological contract of employees other than talented ones or those who do not identify themselves as talented. Hence, the researcher attempts to initially consult organisational representatives on how they define and identify talent and talented employees See Section 3.3.5 from Chapter 3 for more details.
2.8.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT PERSPECTIVE FOR THIS RESEARCH

This section addresses the features of the psychological contract that is to be explored and investigated. This is important given the different features that have been debated and argued with reference to the psychological contract.

To recap, the definition of the psychological contract as the researcher adopts is the one that is embedded within expectations and obligations that are contractual ‘promissory’ in their nature. Consequently, it results in deeper affective implications when violated compared to those expectancy and equity theories. Whereas, on the other hand, individuals could indeed form unconscious expectations (Meckler et al., 2003) as a result of unlimited reasons including age, well-being, market situation, life and work-experience, education levels, relationships, standard of living, contemplation and personal reflection, and so on; these remain at large expectations and only form contractual contracts i.e. psychological contracts if they are consciously perceived to have been communicated within the employment relationship either explicitly or implicitly (Rousseau, 1989, 1995, 2001, 2003).

This research therefore adopts the notion of psychological contract as the sum of perceptions and beliefs on promises that form expectations on the part of the talented employees for an obligation towards the employer in the form of social exchange. This psychological contract is nevertheless in the eye of the beholder, i.e. each respective talented employee forms a distinct psychological contract. Hence, the research is unilateral and concerned with the psychological contract of the talented employees and not the employer or organisational representatives. The contents that influence the state of the psychological contract i.e. met-expectations ‘delivery of the deal’, fairness, and trust in the employer (Guest and Conway, 1997; Guest, 2004) are one of means that could assist in explicating talented employees’ psychological contract and its changing state. However, as this research is exploratory in nature, the researcher would carefully raise questions and maintain as much as possible a neutral stance on what talented employees perceive their psychological contract to constitute and affect its state.
2.9 RESEARCH FOCUS

This research is not looking at a specific cause or antecedent of the psychological contract as previous research (Conway and Briner, 2009) might have suggested, nor does it intend to examine the strength of the correlation between the causes, contents, consequences of psychological contract breach or fulfilment as this has also received greater research attention (Conway and Briner, 2009) and it is less likely that doing so will produce overarching or surprising findings. Rather, the researcher intends to explore the nature of talented employees’ psychological contract, how it is formed, and the way in which they respond in case they perceive a breach has occurred or there has been a violation or fulfilment of their psychological contract. By doing so, the researcher posits that using qualitative methods for explicating in-depth information and meanings of the participants is likely to provide answers to the research questions/objectives.

Therefore, this research in its field work attempts to understand the nature of the psychological contract of the talented employees for each talented employee as the contents depends on talented employees’ experiences and how they perceived promises to have been made. Simultaneously, the research in its field work attempts to understand how talented employees responded when they perceived their psychological contract to be breached, violated, or fulfilled. Moreover, the implications of the psychological contract on talented employees has not been adequately demonstrated in the literature due to a limited exploratory scope that has attempted to capture and understand the meanings and experiences of talented employees with the psychological contract. Moreover, and more importantly, there is no comprehensive account of what talented employees perceive their psychological contract to be in specific contexts i.e. its content, and, consequently how these talented employees react to perceptions of breach, violation, or fulfilment of their psychological contract is less known.

This research therefore, responds to the call of Dabos and Rousseau (2004), Conway and Briner (2005), Conway and Briner (2009) to look at the psychological contract content as well as the call by Collings and Mellahi (2009), Tansley (2011), Dries et al. (2012), Dries (2013) into looking carefully at how talented employees are defined and identified in a particular context. More so, this research, similar to Hoglund (2012), Bjorkman et al. (2013), Sonnenberg et al. (2014) advocates that psychological contract theory is related and should be studied in relation to talent and talent management in greater depth and breadth to advance both streams. Hence, it equally responds to the comment made by
Dries (2013) on the significance of utilising psychology literature such as the psychological contract to advance the field of talent management.

This research argues that employees who are identified as talented by their organisations include those who perceive themselves to be talented form a distinguished psychological contract (Bjorkman et al., 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2014). An employee realising that s/he has been included in the talent pool would usually create an exchange relation as a result (Makela et al., 2010; Sonnenberg et al., 2014). This could be in the form of perceived promises, expectations, and/or beliefs that a promise has been made. Similarly, the state of this psychological contract would play a role in these employees’ willingness to stay or quit among others such as motivation, performance, and satisfaction (Clinton and Guest, 2013; Guest, 2004). Although there are is limited research that has looked into this relationship between talented employees and their psychological contract (Hoglund, 2012; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2014), exploring the contents of talented employees’ psychological contract remains an unattended area. Therefore, this research aims to explore the nature of the psychological contract of the talented employees and understand how employees respond to what they perceive as a psychological contract breach, violation, or fulfilment.

Rousseau and Schalk (2000) point to the dearth of psychological research across nations as there is little known as to how mutuality and voluntariness is achieved in different national contexts as well as employment sectors. Similarly, the extent to which promises are negotiated and exchanged between parties across nations varies and requires further research that takes into consideration the cultural and institutional characteristics of the particular sector and nation (Rousseau and Schalk, 2000). Consequently, given the significance of the oil and gas sector for Oman’s economy (see Chapter 1), its association with intra/inter-sectorial competencies (Dickey et al., 2011; Orr and McVerry, 2007), and the potential challenges businesses in the oil and gas sector may face in retaining these talents (Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2014b; HIS Global Inc., 2013), it is crucial that this research is conducted on the context of Oman’s oil and gas sector. The next section outlines the aim and objectives of the research and the research questions. This is in response to the knowledge gap in the literature and how the relationship between the psychological contract and talent and talent management is perceived by the researcher in response to the arguments and existing knowledge in the literature.
2.10 ELABORATING ON THE INTENDED RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following the aforementioned discussion on literature gaps and the approach sought in relating psychological contract theory with the literature on talent management, this section elaborates on the intended research contribution following the brief in Chapter 1. The contribution likely to be generated from this doctoral research is threefold: theoretical, methodological and practical. Firstly, theoretically, this doctoral thesis would explain how talented employees form their psychological contract and the meaning they attach to its currencies and content. This will entail the constituents of the psychological contract as perceived by the talented employees. This will be achieved through an inductive qualitative methodology that intends to unpack the realities of the daily lives of a group of employees within Oman’s oil and gas sector and the constructs that they associate when they refer to a belief and perception that a promise has been made to them whether implicitly or explicitly. This marks another important contribution that this doctoral thesis intends to bring as the medium of exchange and specifically how talented employees come to terms with the fact that what that they have been promised whether explicitly or implicitly has not been sufficiently addressed nor clearly understood. This research would provide another milestone on the knowledge on the psychological contract formation mechanism.

Moreover, this doctoral thesis would also explain the reactions of talented employees to the dynamics of the psychological contract and how this influences their behaviour and attitude. Specifically, this doctoral thesis looks at reactions on all experiences of psychological contract whether they are experiences of psychological contract fulfilment, which has been rarely studied and reported, or experiences of psychological contract breach and psychological contract violation which have been quantitatively tested but not fully understood as a social experience as it unfolds and its short and long term implications on talented employees’ work attitudes and behaviour and the employment relationship. The empirical investigation conducted in this doctoral thesis is designed so that these experiences are captured and comprehensively explained by the talented employees using critical incident techniques. Another important contribution this thesis would potentially bring is its methods sections where there will be a detailed account and explanation of the data collection process and transparent data analysis stages and tools used in order to ensure a robust qualitative data collection and analysis that could
be easily followed and potentially carried out in different studies intending to understand a phenomenon and how it unfolds in a real life situation then carefully and clearly collect and analyse its relevant data. Finally, the findings of this doctoral thesis are argued to generate practical implications on how employers could attract, manage, and retain their most valuable assets: their people and the talented ones in particular. This is through the information that is likely to be generated on experiences and implications of different states of psychological contract experienced by the talented employees. Hence, employers and employees alike could benefit by creating a positive and rewarding employment relationship where talented employees deliver value and quality results while meeting their career aspirations. Similarly, they could benefit by avoiding and alleviating conflicts which create a poor employment relationship quality wherein talented employees abstain from utilising their potential and talents and quit to join a competitor.

In light of the above sections on the gaps and limitations of the existing literature, and the intended contribution of this research, the resulting research aim and questions are therefore:

**RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS**

**Research Aim**

To explore the nature of the psychological contract of talented employees and understand how they respond to what they perceive as psychological contract fulfilment, breach or violation.

**Research Questions**

1. How do talented employees form their psychological contracts?
2. What constitutes talented employees’ psychological contracts?
3. How do these talented employees’ respond when they perceive their psychological contract is fulfilled, breached or violated?

These questions would address the research gaps discussed above and would essentially contribute to both streams of psychological contract and talent management. The next section discusses the conceptual framework of the thesis highlighting the main arguments and areas of investigation for this doctoral thesis.
2.11 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Under this section, the researcher conceptualises the doctoral thesis by highlighting its most important elements which reflect the main literature streams, gaps, and areas to be investigated in order to arrive at the intended contribution. This conceptual framework is reiterated and enriched through the main research findings and is modified to accommodate the main research findings in the conclusion chapter.

FIGURE 2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework draws on the main pillars of the research denoted by the three central items, the literature on psychological contract, talented employees, and their attitudes and behaviour. Through the literature review, it is evident that there is a need to distinguish between the type of employees who are considered talented and for this research they are the core and support staff which would be the sample of the study and through their experiences, narrations, and accounts this doctoral thesis would be able to untap and explain how the psychological contract of this particular group of talented employees is formed and what contents these talented employees exchange or expect to exchange with their employers. Similarly, the stories and accounts of these employees over the course of their career would explain and generate substantial information on the dynamics of the psychological contract and its implications on talented employees’
behaviour and attitudes including but not limited to what the literature already suggests in terms of their willingness to stay/quit, their differential performance and the value they bring or withhold. These are denoted in the conceptual framework by the white boxes which are connected to the main research pillars. They as well influenced by the context of Oman’s oil and gas sector as discussed in Chapter 1. It is important to note that this conceptual framework is only applicable for this research, as it corresponds to the specific research questions and context of this doctoral thesis.

2.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the origins of the psychological contract theory and addressed the debate on its contents and formations that are likely to constitute a controversy as the psychological contract is in the ‘eye of the beholder’. The chapter also critically addressed the definitions on psychological contract and how Rousseau's (1989) and other subsequent works have nurtured the field and contributed to many of the empirical works along with Guest and Conway (1997) and Herriot and Pemberton (1996). The chapter discussed how research has dealt with issues on psychological contracts up until this point, including how it is formed, sustained, breached, and the consequences of this on outcomes. The chapter also describes the implications of the literature for this research through which some gaps could be potentially addressed if the right research aim, objectives and design are formulated. The chapter furthermore highlighted how a few research studies mainly post 2010 have sought to relate the psychological contract with talent and talent management literature. This was found to be a new evolving area but has received little attention among scholars. Moreover, the positivist approach on how the studies were conducted in this regard was evidently dominant leaving the realities as construed by talented employees on their psychological contract intact. The chapter, therefore, clearly states how this research shifts the nature of inquiry to an interpretive one that solely pays attention to the talented employees’ meanings and experiences with regards to their psychological contract.

Hence, the chapter discussed the implications of previous research and how this research is different in how it attempts to relate the two streams and contribute to the theory and existing knowledge. Consequently, the chapter discussed how this research defines talented employees and explains the perspectives on the psychological contract before addressing the nature of the relationship sought between the streams for this research. The chapter concludes with the main research gaps followed by the research questions
and explains the conceptual framework of this doctoral thesis. The next chapter will extensively discuss this research methodology and the research design that is suitable and aligned with the nature of inquiry. Moreover, it explains the process involved in analysing data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY: INTERPRETIVISM</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1.1</td>
<td>JUSTIFICATION FOR ADOPTING AN INTERPRETIVIST PHILOSOPHY</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE INDUCTIVE IN NATURE</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3</td>
<td>RESEARCH STRATEGY: INTERVIEWS</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3.1</td>
<td>CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE WITH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3.2</td>
<td>APPLICATION OF CIT IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.4</td>
<td>TIME HORIZONS: CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5</td>
<td>PROCEDURE FOR SAMPLING (UNIT OF ANALYSIS)</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5.1</td>
<td>INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR TALENTED EMPLOYEES</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.5.2</td>
<td>PROCESS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>ROBUSTNESS OF RESEARCH METHOD</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1</td>
<td>CREDIBILITY</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2</td>
<td>DEPENDABILITY</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3</td>
<td>TRANSFERABILITY</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.4</td>
<td>GATE KEEPERS, ACCESS, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1 INTRODUCTION
This chapter discusses the research design that underpins the research aim and questions. Consequently, through reviewing the literature on research methods, it justifies the research design and methods of enquiry most suitable for answering the research questions. The chapter begins by reiterating the research aim and questions to remind the reader of how it relates to the overall research design and its sub-section. The main research design for this study follows the Saunders et al. (2012) research onion. Hence, the chapters’ sections are divided and elaborated, accordingly. The chapter describes the researcher's philosophical stance and its implications on the approach and strategy for data collection. This is followed by the sampling procedure used and a detailed description of the sample size and profile. The methods used in data collection and data analysis methods are also described in considerable detail. The chapter then explains how the quality has been maintained throughout the data collection, analysis and reporting of findings, which is considered one of the strengths of this qualitative doctoral thesis. The next section recaps the research aim and objectives.

3.2 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS
Research Aim
To explore the nature of the psychological contract of talented employees and understand how they respond to what they perceive as psychological contract fulfilment, breach or violation.

Research Questions
4- How do talented employees form their psychological contracts?
5- What constitutes talented employees’ psychological contracts?
6- How do these talented employees’ respond when they perceive their psychological contract is fulfilled, breached or violated?

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN
The research design is a set of stages that aim to link the main research arguments together with the right philosophical position and link the research questions to the data collected (Punch, 2013). It is important to mention that the research design stages in social research are debatable and that there is no single way to classify the research design (see, for example,
Crotty, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Bryman and Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2012). The term ‘research design’ is used to refer to a combination of philosophy, approach, methodological choice, strategy used, choice of methods, time horizon and techniques and procedures for data collection and analysis similar to that advocated by Saunders et al. (2007) and Saunders et al. (2015).

Other researchers, such as Crotty (1998), Sarantakos (1998) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005), as cited by Sobaih (2010, p. 3-2 – p. 3-10), define research design differently. Crotty (1998) stated that research design can be classified into theoretical approach and practical approach. He described the theoretical approach as including the epistemology and theoretical perspective, which is equivalent to the research philosophy that this research adopts. The practical approach, as Crotty (1998) describes, includes the methodology (i.e. research strategy for this research) and the methods (i.e. data collection techniques and analysis employed in this research). Conversely, Sarantakos (1998) divided social research design into research paradigm, methodology and methods stages only, while Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that social research design involves 5 stages. It starts with deciding on the field of inquiry (i.e. the choice between qualitative and quantitative). Only the researcher should then decide on the research paradigm, followed by methodology, data collection methods and finally, data analysis methods.

This research utilises the research onion suggested by Saunders et al. (2012, p. 160), as their arguments provide the logic behind the link between the research questions and research philosophy, together with the researcher’s perspective on the research philosophy.
The research onion (Figure 6.1 above) links the components of research design. It represents how the outer layer of the onion, chosen by researchers, governs the choices of the inner layers (Saunders et al., 2015). This allows researchers to make an informed decision on the most appropriate choice of each layer once the philosophical underpinning of the study is known. Hence, this increases the compatibility of the research design. The sections below will discuss what suits this study based on the remaining layers; i.e. research philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time horizon, and techniques and procedures. This is summarised in Table 3.1.
### TABLE 3.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN FOR THIS THESIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of the research methodology</th>
<th>Corresponding item in the research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Philosophy</td>
<td>Interpretivist</td>
</tr>
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<td>Research Approach</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Choice</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Mono-method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Inquiry</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Strategy</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Horizon</td>
<td>Cross-sectional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and Ethics</td>
<td>University Ethics Regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to oil and gas organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of enquiry and data analysis</td>
<td>Methods for collecting data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main: semi-structured interviews with critical incident technique</td>
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<td>Secondary: open-ended questions prior to the interview</td>
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<td>Sampling procedure</td>
<td>Non-probability purposive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methods for data analysis</td>
<td>Modified thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit of analysis</td>
<td>Talented employees</td>
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<td>Quality of the research findings</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
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<td>Transferability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thick and rich description</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed by the researcher

### 3.3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY: INTERPRETIVISM

As stated by Easterby-Smith et al. (2008), Grix (2010), Bryman and Bell (2011), Quinlan (2011) and Saunders et al. (2012), it is important to count few that researchers understand and adapt a philosophical position (paradigm) that reflects their perspective regarding what construes the reality as they perceive it (ontology) and the nature of the acceptable knowledge that governs the disciplines and the research study (epistemology).

Based on Saunders et al.’s (2012) ‘research onion’, the next paragraphs will elaborate on the two opposing philosophical assumptions that have been widely adopted in researching talent...
and talent management and psychological contract. This is not to disregard or undermine other philosophies, nor state that they were not adopted in similar research. The widely adopted and argued philosophical positions include positivism and interpretivism, which differ in terms of their ontology, epistemology and axiology perspective. They also contrast in what they regard as the most suitable methods for collecting and analysing data and how the quality of the research data is gauged (Saunders et al., 2015; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2011; Grix, 2010).

Positivism, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2008, p. 57), provides “the best way of investigating human and social behaviour originated as a reaction to metaphysical speculation”. In contrast, Bryman and Bell (2011:16-18) state that interpretivism is a contrasting epistemology compared to positivism in that it “requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action”. Merriam (2009) elaborates on the philosophical stance of an interpretivist, suggesting that “reality is socially constructed and that there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not find knowledge, they construct it” (p. 9). Table 3.2 summarises the difference between the two philosophies and reflects how the interpretivist philosophy and its dimensions are congruent with the approach the researcher adopts in order to answer the research questions.

### TABLE 3.2 COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO RESEARCH PHILOSOPHIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Dimension</th>
<th>How the dimension translates</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Interpretivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>View of the world and the nature of reality of being</td>
<td>External, objective and independent from social actors</td>
<td>Socially constructed, subjective and dependent on social actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>What constitutes acceptable knowledge</td>
<td>Only observable phenomena can provide credible data or facts. Focus on causality and law-like generalisations, reducing phenomena to simplest elements</td>
<td>Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus upon the details of situation, a reality behind these details, subjective meanings motivating actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axiology</td>
<td>Involvement of researcher</td>
<td>Researcher is independent from the study</td>
<td>Researcher is part of what is observed and sometimes even actively collaborates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View of the role of values in research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research is taken in a value-free way, the researcher is independent of the data and maintains an objective stance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research is value-bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective: hence, researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is observed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective, often quantitative, facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective interpretations of meanings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is knowledge developed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing phenomena to simple elements representing general laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking on board and total view of phenomena to detect explanations beyond the current knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data collection techniques most often used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically deduction, highly structured, large samples measurement, quantitative methods for analysing data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically inductive, small samples, in-depth investigation, qualitative methods for collecting data and analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted and developed from Al-Sabi (2011), citing Blumberg et al. (2005:21) and Saunders et al. (2015, p. 14).

The next section further justifies, with evidence from the literature, why an interpretivist philosophy is appropriate to achieve the aim of this study.

3.3.1.1 JUSTIFICATION FOR ADOPTING AN INTERPRETIVIST PHILOSOPHY

The literature on social exchange theory and psychological contract provides the basis for investigating the currency of exchange, as Thompson and Bunderson, (2003) defined: namely; economic, socio-emotional and ideological. Hence, by way of explicating the nature of exchange currency perceived by talented employees, the content of the psychological contract of that particular employee could be captured (Millward and Corpley, 2003; Freese and Schalk, 2008).

Hence, the ability to explicate individualised and socially-construed reality for talented employees, in terms of what they perceive as obligations and entitlements, entails the use of an interpretivist philosophy. Furthermore, while this research benefits from the existing and seminal literature on what is speculated in terms of causes, contents and consequences of the
psychological contract, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, there remain significant gaps and questions posed by prominent scholars and practitioners in both streams of the literature: i.e. psychological contract and talent & talent management (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004; Conway and Briner, 2005; Conway and Briner, 2009).

These include but are not limited to the approach most research work adopts by applying pre-defined and convenient but rather biased factors to symbolise the content of the psychological contract and its changing state, such as that in the works of Rousseau and Robinson (1994); Rousseau (1995); Robinson (1996); Guest and Conway (1997); Guest (2004b); Pate et al. (2000), even when they assert that psychological contract is in the eye of the beholder and is idiosyncratic to individuals. This was also addressed in the work of Conway and Briner (2005; 2009), in which they claim that questionnaire surveys were extensively used to capture the contents of the psychological contracts but failed to identify the contents as they are perceived by the participants, and how participants responded when they perceived it had been fulfilled, breached, or violated. In addition, Conway and Briner (2005; 2009) stated that what is captured through questionnaire surveys is not necessarily contractual, which could be problematic as a psychological contract essentially comprises perceptions or beliefs that promises have been made from one party to another (See Sections 2.8 from Chapter 2).

Consequently, the mechanism involved in formation and change in a psychological contract is not captured, alluding to the fact that most of the content of psychological contracts captured through questionnaire surveys are explicit, if at all. They are captured leaving very limited knowledge on implicit forms of psychological contract formation and dynamics, as well as the associated contents. Hence, a proper method for collecting and capturing this information is essential to bring about this knowledge. The research design adopted for this doctoral thesis allows such information to be explicated and learned as explained in the below paragraphs and sections.

Although these studies have not given attention to individual participants' psychological contracts, they have had number of merits, nevertheless, that could be argued to substantiate in terms of understanding and development of the antecedents and consequences of psychological contracts as a process. This is testing different variables and investigating their correlations in a linear fashion in a positivist way to find out how f(which is an expression
used as a greeting or actors on micro-sociological levels, organisational levels and the extra-organisational levels interact with the process (see Chapter 2, sections 2.3 and 2.4). By way of addressing some of these, the researcher points to the extensive empirical work that has attempted (and to a large extent has been successful) to validate the mediating and moderating implications of psychological contracts on behavioural and attitudinal outcomes, as discussed in Chapter 2 Section 2.3. Collectively, the studies may form a significant basis for the generalisability of the findings, especially with regard to the relations between specific antecedents and consequences of psychological contract in different contexts. However, they provide little, if any, contemporary “…insights into the deeper levels of experiences and environment…” of talented employees (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014, p. 328).

By way of a philosophical view and its relevant epistemological, ontological and axiological perspectives, this has resulted in widespread positivism that relied heavily on experiment and survey strategies for collecting and analysing data in a law-like tradition (Pate, 2006; Pate and Scullion, 2010. See Chapter 2). Most of the studies relied on collecting and analysing data deductively in a highly objective fashion and checking for correlation through moderation and mediation analyses. The general assumptions in these studies were that a sufficient body of knowledge existed and that it was more significant to test rather than attempt to learn the meanings and understand the view of the subjects in perspective research studies. Hence, the findings of these researches, as Conway and Briner (2009) argue, could have reach a point of saturation and future research adopting similar philosophical perspective and methodological approaches is likely to produce little, if any, surprising findings in the area.

Therefore, it is likely that by adopting a quantitative questionnaire survey, some questions (such as “Can you recall incidents when you felt that you were treated fairly and how did you respond to them?” or “Have any of the below incidents occurred and how did you react towards them?”) are limited as participants cannot freely and/or passionately describe their experiences. Hence, similar questions could be considered intrusive and consequently left unanswered. Where a list of alternative answers is provided, respondents are likely to choose the option ‘other/prefer not disclose/does not apply’ (Saunders et al., 2012; Alvesson and Ashcraft, 2012). By way of contrast, addressing similar questions but using appropriate qualitative methods of inquiry (qualitative approach), such challenges could be overcome if
the researcher could establish appropriate rapport and trust relations with the participants allowing a successful exchange of information (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

Hence, it is imperative that an interpretivist philosophy that is subjective to the reality and knowledge, as revealed by social actors, is adopted. Similarly, as discussed further under ‘Research Design’, this study must adopt a qualitative methodology and needs to be inductive so that the reality relevant to the perceived promises and the currencies of exchange (economics, emotional, ideological) as a result, between the employee and their employer from the talented employees’ perspective, is explicated and understood.

3.3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE INDUCTIVE IN NATURE

This section discusses the extent to which this research is inductive and exploratory, although much of this argument is addressed in conjunction with the methods of data collection and analysis sections. This section begins by describing the qualitative nature of this research and how it fits quite well with the previous sections. In doing so, the section describes the inductive logic of reasoning and exploratory nature of inquiry that are aligned with qualitative research.

Flick (2007: 2) cites Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) to discuss the common understanding of qualitative research in that researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” Hence, from this study’s aims and objectives and the above discussion, it is evident that this research is qualitative. The researcher is highly interested in understanding the experiences of talented employees and the meaning they attach to the organisations’ psychological contract. In a similar vein, Patton (2002: 41) explains how real-life events, interventions and phenomena constantly change with time and are dynamic, while those studied in experimental settings are broken down to measurable and controlled settings. Thus, results are controlled to a greater degree but do not mirror the reality of everyday experiences and dynamics. Hence, they would not necessarily provide accurate answers and/or solutions to the enquiry.

In contrast, a qualitative enquiry has minimal control over the settings of the day-to-day experience but are rich and comprehensive, allowing the researcher to observe and record
what seems to be normal and that which could be controversial or observe how patterns of behaviour and reactions change. Thus, the results could mirror the reality and provide meaningful insights to the enquiry. This research utilises special interview techniques in order to understand the rich and comprehensive meanings that talented employees attach to their perceptions of psychological contract and how the state changes in time and is mirrored by their responses with perceptions of fulfilment, breach, or violation of the contract.

Hence, these statements consensually correspond with the research aims and objectives and the necessity of adopting a qualitative research rather than a quantitative approach. Table 3.3 summarises some of the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research. In its last column, it also shows how this qualitative research adopts qualitative research features.

**TABLE 3.3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative research</th>
<th>Qualitative research</th>
<th>This Qualitative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generates data that allows numerical analysis</strong></td>
<td>Describes phenomena in context</td>
<td>Describes psychological contract for talented employees in oil and gas companies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uses statistical calculations</strong></td>
<td>Interprets processes or meanings</td>
<td>Interprets meanings and accounts of talented employees with respect to their perceived psychological contract and the responses to its state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uses statistical software and pre-tested scale</strong></td>
<td>Uses theoretically-based concepts</td>
<td>Uses perception and beliefs concerning promises instead of general expectations and/or equity-related theories to understand the psychological contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeks explanation and correlations</strong></td>
<td>Seeks understanding</td>
<td>What it means for talented employees to perceive that their psychological contract is breached, violated or fulfilled. Hence, what constitutes it from the first place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A question that may arise is the extent to which this research is inductive in its approach and exploratory in nature. To answer this question, it is necessary to reiterate the focus of the research. As the research aim and questions clearly indicate, this is an exploratory study that attempts to understand a) how talented employees form their psychological contract, b) what constitutes the psychological contract of talented employees and b) how they respond when they perceive their psychological contract is fulfilled, breached or violated. Such questions entail understanding the subjective meaning and interpretation of the talented employees’ psychological contract and how they consequently respond.

Such information is best explored through an inductive approach. In an inductive approach, a researcher tends to collect data of phenomena of interest and use this information to generate theory or contribute substantial knowledge to already existing theory (Saunders et al., 2012). This is also called a bottom-up approach, whereby the research moves from the general (i.e. the experiences and meaning in a context) to the specific or abstract (i.e. theory, conceptual framework or substantial knowledge) (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012). For this research, the enquiry moves from the general, which refers to the experiences and meanings of talented employees in the oil and gas sector in Oman in terms of their psychological contract. The specific, on the other hand, refers to the outcome of the research in contributing to the conceptual knowledge and theory of psychological contract based on talented employees’ experiences. Merriam (2009: 70) argues that “qualitative research is inductive, leading to interpretive or analytical constructs, even to theory.” Consequently, this study asserts the inductive approach of this qualitative interpretivist research. The researcher constructed the research objectives and anticipated contribution in light of the gaps in the knowledge within the streams of psychological contract and talent and talent management. (See section 2.9 and 2.10 from Chapter 2 and Section 1.7 from Chapter 1).

Moreover, while inductive approaches usually result in establishing conceptual frameworks, this research attempts to make “a richer theoretical... and conceptual contribution... than already exists in the literature” (Saunders et al., 2012; Ridder et al., 2012). In line with the discussion of how qualitative research is exploratory, Patton (2002: 55-56) states that “qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery and inductive
logic”. Hence, it can be concluded that this research is qualitative adopting an interpretivist philosophy yet is exploratory in its nature of inquiry that aims to inductively collect and describe data reflecting the participants’ meanings and understanding. The researcher is intending to adopt a mono-method qualitative research design (Saunders et al., 2012) in which the strategy is mainly interview. This is elaborated in the following section.

3.3.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY: INTERVIEWS
This section discusses the main research strategy. It argues that interview is most appropriate for answering research question compared to other strategies. The section also discusses how open-ended questions could be used to improve the interview flow and enrich discussion. It allowed for richer and better insights in reference to talented employees’ stories and accounts, as it assisted their recalling capacity of critical incidents and improved the exchange and interview rapport.

The main study was conducted using an interview strategy. Interview is “a process whereby a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 87, citing the work of DeMarrias, 2004, p. 55). Hence, the researcher argues that interviews are the most suitable strategy, as conducting observations may result in the researcher making inferences of psychological contracts without necessarily capturing the talented employees’ psychological contract. This is because a psychological contract is subjective, idiosyncratic and shrouded in uncertainty (Crossman, 2007; Rousseau, 1995), which can only be understood from the accounts and description of the individuals concerned and the meanings and explanations they provide regarding these accounts and experiences.

Interviews are divided into open-ended, semi-structured, and highly structured (Saunders et al., 2012). An open-ended interview has no specific direction regarding how the enquiry unfolds and has no questions set a priori. While interviews are divided into three categories depending on the level of structure, this research uses the semi-structured type of interviews, incorporating the ‘Critical Incident Technique’ (CIT). A detailed explanation on the nature of CIT and its use in data collection is discussed in Section 6.8.
In contrast, Merriam (2009: 90-91) explains that less structured formats are also known as semi-structured interviews.

“Assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways... the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time... this allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”

This is the type of interview the researcher designed in conjunction with Critical Incident Technique (CIT). This clearly indicates the iterative process of how the questions progress back and forth depending on the situation and how the enquiry unfolds (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Chell, 2004). Hence, it is important that a researcher maintains an open mind and flexibility during the enquiry and the analysis, as discussed later. This is crucial to be able to make sense of the themes that emerge from data (Braun and Clark, 2006), as well as guide the inquiry (Braun and Clark, 2006; Chell, 2004)

Merriam (2009, 90) clearly points to how using a highly structured interview (also known as a standardised interview) can jeopardise the study’s ability to answer the questions or solve the research problems, especially in a qualitative study. In that way, the study could eventually be deemed as not meeting its purpose. This is because “rigidly adhering to predetermined questions may not allow you to access participants’ perspectives and understandings of the world.” This access is the primary attribute that distinguishes any qualitative research.

In addition to the interviews, the researcher designed open-ended questions (See appendix 5) that are generic and intended to be provided to the participants prior to the study in order to help them recollect their experiences. This will assist significantly during the CIT. This research is considered a mono-method that is centralised on interview strategy for collecting data.
3.3.3.1 CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE WITH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

This section discusses the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and how it can be powerful in understanding talented employees’ experiences and meanings that correspond to their psychological contract. CIT is a technique devised by Flanagan (1954), whereby participants recall incidents their consequences to the participants. CIT is defined as:

’a qualitative interview procedure, which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, process or issues), identified by the respondent, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The objective is to gain an understanding of the incident from the prospective of the individual, taking into account cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements’ (Chell, 2004: 48)

It therefore fits well with the researcher’s interpretivist philosophy and the exploratory nature of this qualitative study. Moreover, it has been widely adapted over the last two decades and was utilised in the psychological contract field by Herriot et al. (1997) in their seminal work. Since then, a number of other researchers in the field (Chell and Pittaway, 1998, 2007; Nadin and Williams, 2011; Parzefall and Coyle-Shapiro, 2010) have attempted to utilise it with the aim of explicating the nature of phenomena from the eyes of the social actors in order to understand the meaning of their behaviour. Thus, CIT can be an effective technique to gain access to rich data that provides explanations for behaviour and events (Chell, 1998).

These advantages fit this research’s aim and questions, thereby rendering it a powerful method by which to gain insights to talented employees’ experiences and accounts. However, the disadvantage associated with CIT, as noted by Chell, (2004) and Conway and Briner (2009) is its complete reliance on participants’ retrospective accounts. Nevertheless, this is mitigated by adding the element of ‘criticality’ to the accounts and allows for a full story to be recalled based on that critical incident. This means that questions are designed to capture participants’ accounts of incidents, what these incidents meant to them and their consequences regarding participants’ behaviour and attitudes. These could encompass participants’ feelings, experiences and meanings that reflect their psychological contract (See Appendix 6 on Interview Guide for the flagged CIT questions).
3.3.3.2 APPLICATION OF CIT IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY

It is essential for researchers considering applying CIT to be backed with a theoretical understanding, or literature knowledge, of the problem prior to undergoing or conducting the field study (Merriam, 2009; Chell, 2004). This assists investigation and facilitates enriching the conversation by using suitable probes emanating from the literature and theory on the subject. However, the researcher is aware that some participants may deny that any incidents occurred (Chell, 2004). In such circumstances, the researcher asked these participants to think of a series of events that have occurred during their past x number of years (Chell, 2004). These were registered on a sheet or have been drawn on a double-headed arrow line with a time frame entailing when these events occurred as prescribed by the participant. This allowed the participants more chances of recalling certain incidents and events along the time frame and what they meant for them, as well as how it has affected them. The sketch in Figure 4.2 is a template the researcher used in interviews to assist participants in recalling incidents.

FIGURE 3.2 THE TIME TEMPLATE

![Figure 3.2 The Time Template](source: Researcher (2015) based on the description of Chell (1998; 2004))

The double-arrowed line in Figure 4.2 represents the timeline of participants’ employment period, while the red boxes represent critical incidents that occurred throughout their employment, as identified and discussed by each participant. The above sketch is an exemplary model and depending on participants’ experience and cooperation during the interview, there may be more red boxes or fewer indicating incidents. Equally, the span of years may start before or after 2010. This sketch was drawn on an A4 page by participants during the interview. It has allowed respondents to mirror their experiences and how an
incident has affected their psychological contract and subsequent behaviour (see Appendix 9 for examples of participants’ timescale and incidents marked).

3.3.4 TIME HORIZONS: CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

This research is a cross-sectional study that aims at capturing and understanding the overall experiences of the talented employees and how they have influenced their subsequent actions in the past until the time of the interview, which was conducted between March and April 2016. Although, the literature argues that conducting longitudinal study could generate better insights into how the changing state of psychological contract influences changes in employees’ behaviour and attitude, the field nevertheless still demands that more qualitative research is conducted in order to understand how psychological contract is formed, developed and changed over a period of time, which is captured by conducting a cross-sectional study, despite its limitations. Furthermore, by incorporating CIT, the researcher has enabled richer and wider experiences to be recalled and discussed by the participants via the time scale, which participants appreciated as a tool to assist them in reviewing their experiences and how their employment relationship evolved from their early careers to today. In addition, given the timeframe to complete this research and the rich and comprehensive information generated through the data collection period, it was evident that the cross-sectional study was sufficient and comprehensive enough to answer the research questions and yield emerging and interesting findings for the development and future of research in this area in relation to talented employees in specific and other groups of employees in more general and different studies. This serves both as a limitation of this research but also as a recommendation for future research. This will be discussed in the relevant sections throughout the thesis (see chapter 7).

3.3.5 PROCEDURE FOR SAMPLING (UNIT OF ANALYSIS)

This section discusses in detail how the unit of analysis will be decided for this research. This is followed by the criteria for selecting samples to take part in this study, following the arguments in Sections 2.4 and 2.8 in Chapter 2.
The researcher used a non-probability purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009) as the research is focused on exploring and understanding the experiences of a particular group of employees referred to as talented employees. This group of employees should be identified by the organisation and then short selected according to the criteria suggested below. In using non-probability purposive sampling, the literature as (Saunders et al., 2012; Saunders, 2012) citing the work of Guest et al., (2006) indicate a sample size of 12 to be sufficient if the participants are relatively homogenous. Another way to realise that sample size is appropriate is when saturation is achieved i.e. when no new data emerges from prospect interviews.

However, since talented employees have been selected with respect to each organisation in the context of the study, following the homogenous purposive sampling guideline seems appropriate as they are likely to be identified and defined by the organisation within a specified criterion set by each of the organisation after having met the sampling criteria the researcher have set. The unit of analysis is therefore the talented employees’ in these organisations and not the organisations.

3.3.5.1 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR TALENTED EMPLOYEES

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for individual participants labelled by the organisations as ‘talented employees’ is especially useful for shortlisting the many talented employees who were identified by their organisation as potentially suitable for inclusion in the study. Similarly, the criteria allowed for flexibility and consistency in choosing from those identified talented employees who were fit for the enquiry. Following the arguments in the literature on how talented employees have been identified and given the contextual nature of the research, the inclusion criteria included those who have at least completed a bachelor degree or equivalent in an engineering (i.e. petroleum, chemical, or relatively similar) discipline. Sectors such as Geology, Physics, and Mathematics, and even Accounting, Finance and Human Resources are important but the priority is given to Engineering and Technical degree holders compared to social science or business degree holders, as suggested by most HR, Talent and Resourcing Managers (Orr and McVerry, 2007; OPAL, 2011; Dickey et al., 2011; IHS Global Inc., 2013; CIPD, 2006). Similarly, the selected candidate must be working for, or supporting, the core disciplines; i.e. Reservoir Engineer, Perno-physicist, Application
Engineer, Chief Audit, Geologist, etc. In addition, these employees should perceive themselves as ‘significant’, either by ‘explicitly being informed by their employer or employer’s agent and/or through the policies and practices targeted exclusively to talented employees’.

Furthermore, the researcher preferred to interview those talented employees who have worked a minimum of 2 years in their current organisation. This is because employees who have worked for 2 years or more, as the literature argues with respect to psychological contract, have moved from the anticipatory/newcomer stage and “have learned the ropes” and “rules of the game” (O’Neill and Adya, 2006). They have intrusive reasons for staying or leaving their current employer, based on their observation and experience concerning how expectations/obligations are likely to be rewarded or exchanged with the potential types of rewards and entitlements as part of the social exchange. They have sufficiently longer tenure within the organisation, compared to newcomers and applicants who may not necessarily know what practices and behaviour are rewarded, against those which are not, and rely on their competency to find a deal that suits both parties (Rousseau, 2001; Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau, 2000). Hence, following the above criteria and justifications for inclusion and exclusion, the following table illustrates the details of selected sample characteristics for this research study.
Table 3.4  Sample Characteristics and Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Job Title at Time of Interview</th>
<th>Academic Qualification</th>
<th>Yrs. Of Experience</th>
<th>Previous Job Titles/Work Experiences</th>
<th>Total Number of Employer(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.  | TE01 | Female (F) | Support (S) | Geoscience Information Specialist | BSc Computer Engineering | 8 Years | 1. Well Data Analyst  
2. Production Analyst  
Geoscience Information Specialist | One |
| 2.  | TE02 | Male (M) | Core (C) | Senior Reservoir Engineer (SRE) | BSc Process and Chemical Engineering | 11 Years | 1. RE (Well & Reservoir Team)  
2. RE (Development Planning Team)  
3. RE (Study Centre)  
Senior Reservoir Engineer - Employer Two since 2013 | Two |
| 3.  | TE03 | F | C | Reservoir Engineer (RE) | BSc Petroleum Engineering | 8 Years | 1. Petro-Physicist - Employer One  
Reservoir Engineer Employer Two since 2014 | Two |
| 4.  | TE04 | F | C | RE | BSc Chemical and Process Engineering | 8 Years | 1. Reservoir Engineer (Team A)  
2. Reservoir Engineer (Team B)  
Reservoir Engineer (Team C) | One |
| 5.  | TE05 | F | S | Senior Programmer | BSc Computer Science | 8 Years | 1. Technical Support  
2. Programmer  
Senior Programmer | One |
| 6.  | TE06 | M | C | RE | BSc Petroleum Engineering | 8 Years | 1. Engineering Trainee (2 years - Field Rotation)  
Reservoir Engineer | One |
| 7.  | TE07 | M | C | Petro-Physicist (PP) | BSc Geology MSc Petroleum Engineering | 6 Years | 1. Petro-Physicist (Reservoir Management Team)  
2. Petro-Physicist (Gas Development Team)  
Petro-Physicist (Reservoir Characterisation Team) | One |
| 8.  | TE08 | M | C | Production Engineering | BSc Mechatronics | 5 Years | 1. Assistant Field Production Engineer [Field-based]  
Production Engineer | One |
| 9.  | TE09 | M | C | Petro-Physicist (PP) | BSc Geology | Years | 1. Lab Technician then Lab Supervisor (the same year) - Employer One  
2. Petro-Physicist - Employer Two | Five |
|No. | TE10 | M  | C  | Development Geologist | BSc Geology | 9 Years | 3. Geologist - Employer Three  
4. Geoscientist - Employer Four  
Petro-Physicist - Employer Five since 2012 |
|----|------|----|----|-----------------------|-------------|---------|----------------------------------|
|10  | TE11 | M  | C  | RE                    | BSc Petroleum Engineer | 7 Years | 1. Engineering Training Programme (ETP)  
2. RE (Reservoir Management Team)  
3. RE (Reservoir Characterisation Team)  
4. RE (Subsurface Technical Team)  
RE (Carbonate Team) |
|11  | TE12 | M  | C  | Senior Petro-Physicist (SPP) | BSc Physics | 14 Years | 1. Petro-Physicist (Team 1-Team 3)  
Senior Petro-Physicist - Employer 2 since 2008 |
|12  | TE13 | M  | C  | Exploration Project Geologist | BSc Geology | 10 Years | 1. Mud-Logger, then Well Site Geologist (same year) - Employer one  
2. Exploration Project Geologist - Employer Two since 2008  
3. Senior Operation Geologist  
4. Exploration Project Geologist |
|13  | TE14 | M  | C  | RE                    | BSc Petroleum and Natural Gas Engineer | 4 Years | 1. Petro-Physicist - Employer Two since 2012  
2. Reservoir Engineer (Team 2)  
Reservoir Characterisation Team (2015-2016) |
|14  | TE15 | F  | C  | Geophysicist          | BSc Geophysics | 6 Years | 1. Exploration Geo-physicist Reservoir Management Team (RMT)  
Development Geo-physicist |
|15  | TE16 | M  | C  | Petroleum Engineer    | BSc Petroleum Engineer | 2 Years | 1. Field Rotation  
Reservoir Engineer |
|16  | TE17 | M  | C  | Petroleum Engineer    | BSc Petroleum Engineer | 2 Years | 1. Field Rotation  
Reservoir Engineer |
| 17. | TE17 | M | C | Project Geologist | BSc Geology MSc Geology | 11 Years | 1. Summer Internship and one-year training - Employer one  
2. Operation Geologist - Employer one and two  
3. Reservoir Geologist (Cross-Posting) Development Geologist (3 teams, characterisation, northwest and south) | Two |
| 18. | TE18 | M | C | Production Geologist | BSc Earth Science | 8 Years | 1. Geologist - Two Companies Production Geologist - Two Employers - Employer Four since 2011 | Four |
| 19. | TE19 | M | C | Production Technologist | BSc Chemical and Process Engineer | 6 Years | 1. Operation Engineer  
2. Field Production Technologist - Production Department Production Technologist - Exploration and Development Department | One |
| 20. | TE20 | M | S | Automation and Real-Time Operation Coordinator | Diploma IT-Networking BSc IT-Networking | 13 Years | 1. IT Specialist - "Government"  
2. Technical Assistant (Learning) for Petroleum Engineering  
3. Technical Assistant (Resource Planning) for Petroleum Engineering  
4. Petroleum Engineer Automation and Real-Time Operation Coordinator - Employer Four since 2013 | Three |
| 21. | TE21 | M | S | Senior Project Engineer | BSc Mechanical Engineering MSc Building Services Engineer | 20+ Years | 1. Mechanical Engineer - Operation Maintenance - "Government"  
2. Mechanical Engineer - Projects - Government Senior Project Engineer - Three Employers - Employer Four since 2012 | Four |
| 22. | TE22 | M | C | Function Head 'Petro-Physicist' | BSc Physics MSc Petroleum Engineering | 14 Years | 1. Junior Petro-Physicist  
2. Petro-Physicist  
3. Senior Petro-Physicist Function Head Petro-Physicist - Employer Two since 2013 | Two |
| 23. | TE23 | M | C | Senior Reservoir Engineer | BSc Petroleum Engineering | 9 Years | 1. Junior Reservoir Engineer  
2. Reservoir Engineer Senior Reservoir Engineer - Employer Two since 2013 | Two |
<table>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th>MSc Reservoir Evaluation and Management</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>24. TE24</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Lead Process Control Engineer</td>
<td>BSc Process Control Engineer  MSc Process Control Engineer  PhD Process Control Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>1. Instrumentation Engineer  2. Process Control Engineer  Lead Process Control Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>25. TE25</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Senior Development Geologist</td>
<td>BSc Geology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>26. TE26</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Shipping and Logistics Management</td>
<td>BSc Operations Management MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>1. Inventory Control - Employer One  2. Senior Administrator - Government  3. Contract Administrator - Employer Two since 2007  Deputy Head of Department - Contracts Employer Three since 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>27. TE27</strong></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Head of Marketing Support Function</td>
<td>BSc Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>28. TE28</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Senior Assessment Consultant</td>
<td>BSc TESOL  MSc TESOL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>1. Member at Assessment Unit  2. Leader at Assessment Unit  3. Managing Scholarship Assessment - Employer Two since 2012  4. Human Capital Assessment  Senior Assessment Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>29. TE29</strong></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Chief Accountant ‘Corporate’</td>
<td>CAT MBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>TE30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Electrical Engineer</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BSc Instrumentation Engineer</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Graduate Engineering Programme Electrical Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>TE31</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BSc Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. HR Specialist HRM - Employer Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>TE32</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Talent Management and Recruitment Manager</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BSc Mechanical Engineering MSc Business Administrator CIPD</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>16 Years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Mechanical Engineer Instructor - Employer One</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Non-Technical Training Advisor - Employer Two since 2008</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Lead Training and Development Support</td>
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<td>4. Lead Performance Management and Staff Development</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Talent Management and Recruitment Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>TE33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Talent Management Manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BSc Information System CIPD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12 Years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Learning and Development Specialist</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Senior Specialist Talent Management Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>TE34</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Human Resources, Administration, and IT Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BSc Engineering MBA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15+ Years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Engineer - Employer One</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Learning and Development</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. HR Manager - Employer Two since 2010</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HR, Administration and IT Manager - Employer Three since 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from Table 3.4, there were 34 participants in this research study. The majority were core employees and twelve were working in support roles. This ratio is proportionate with the literature (Orr and McVerry, 2007; Dickey et al., 2011; CIPD, 2006). Moreover, most participants held higher qualifications or were pursuing further education during the time of the interview. They were all identified and labelled by their organisations as talented. Further to the above details on the sample, during the interview, it was learned that most of the participants have had either accelerated career progression or joined multiple employers during the span of their career and consequently held different positions. This was important, as it revealed talented employees’ tenure, the change of their psychological contract and the underlying reasons for these changes. Consequently, this information assisted the researcher’s understanding of the nature and dynamics of psychological contracts as part of this research.

Most interviews were an hour long, with some slightly less than an hour and a few others taking more than an hour and half, based on the richness of each participants’ experience and how they perceived their psychological contract to have changed and evolved over the elapsed period of their career. All interviews were conducted in English with some interviewees expressing certain feelings and experiences in Arabic and the researcher translating the English meaning simultaneously to ensure exact reproduction. All interviews were audio-recorded digitally using ‘Sony high quality dictaphone’. More details concerning the process for recruiting participants are included in Section 3.3.5.2 below.

3.3.5.2 PROCESS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

This research has been reviewed by the University of Surrey Ethics Committee and received a Favourable Ethical Opinion. The researcher first communicated his intention to include an organisation in the study via a letter addressed to the gate keepers (See Appendix 8). Once the meeting was arranged, the researcher discussed the following points with each organisation’s gate keeper; i.e. Talent Manager or equivalent:

- Nature of the study
- Nature of the inquiry, including a request for accessing personal data if permission were granted by the respective participant and the organisation. Also, request for participants to answer open-ended questions
• Talent and Talent Management Policies and Practices
• Identifying talented employees within the respective organisation based on the research criteria
• Timeframe for conducting the fieldwork
• Confidentiality and ethical considerations of the study
• Whether there was a need to conduct a presentation clarifying the above points to shortlisted candidates and/or others (top management/line manager) within the organisation as part of a process to gain access.

The researcher contacted organisations listed in Appendix 1, meeting and gaining approval to proceed with interviewing the candidates from 4 organisations. Then, the researcher began recruiting participants by contacting the first 10 shortlisted candidates from each organisation, seeking their permission to take part in the study (See Appendix 7).

Once organisations shortlisted candidates, the researcher contacted them using the access ‘invitation letter’ in Appendix 7. Each participant is coded alpha-numerically as ‘Talented employee-01’ (TE01, TE02, ..., TE34). Not all shortlisted candidates expressed their interest in taking part in the research. Others were interested but apologised due to constraints, such as being in the field or on annual leave. Other participants also stated that they would participate in case the researcher required more personnel to take part but could not find any. One participant withdrew prior to the start of the interview because s/he was not aware that interviews would be audio-recorded and was not comfortable, and two cancelled due to medical reasons after giving initial consent to take part. Those candidates who expressed their willingness to take part in the study received a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Consent Form (CF) to sign prior to the start of the interviews (See Appendices 3, 4 and 5).

They also received a copy of the open-ended questions (O-E Qs) to attempt before the interview but not answering them did not affect their participation. However, if a participant and/or an organisation refuses to allow a recording of the interview, then participation becomes invalid, as this facet is essential for reporting findings and ensuring the robustness of data analysis. Participants were reminded that they must read the PIS, then read and sign the CF before opting to answer O-E Qs. All participants were reminded about their voluntary participation, their right to withdraw and the right to not answer any question without the
need to justify, and with no prejudice, nor consequence, to their career and their relationship to their employer (Saunders et al., 2012; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). They were also reminded about the anonymity of their personal identity and confidentiality of the information shared during the enquiry, according to the Data Protection Act of 1998, coinciding with the Oman the researcher Royal Decree (69/2008), which contains provisions relevant to Data Protection (Articles 43-49). This was also in line with the University of Surrey Ethical Principles and Procedures for Teaching and Research, dated November 2013, V2.0. P. 17-18.

The interview venue was based at the organisation’s premises, either in one of their meeting rooms or training rooms. A maximum of 3 interviews per day was scheduled, with breaks at the weekends, between March and April 2016. Most weeks included 6-10 interviews on alternative days, which was helpful in reviewing the audio tape, making notes, refining questions and adding new lines of enquiry. These aided in improving the quality of interviews throughout the data collection period and specifically by week 2 after the 8th interview (Saunders et al., 2012; Creswell, 2004; Silverman, 2015; Guest et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

### TABLE 3.5  THE PROCESS OF RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS AND FIELD WORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter to TM* of Selected Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with TM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shortlisting TE** by TM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conducting Presentation if needed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Letters to TE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending PIS and CF to TE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending O-E Qs to TE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranging venue with TM/TE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Talent Managers from Respective Organisations

**Talented Employees
3.4 ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA

This research adopts a modified version of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis framework. The steps in conducting a thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clark (2006) are illustrated in Figure 3.3, below.

FIGURE 3.3 STEPS IN CONDUCTING THEMATIC ANALYSIS

1. Familiarise with data: transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generate initial codes: coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Search for theme: collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Review themes: checking in the themes’ work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.
5. Define and refine themes: ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Report themes: the final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis back to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.”
It is important to note, as Braun and Clark (2006) state, that the steps are not fixed rules and the researchers may need to go back and forth during analysis. They explain that:

The process starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data – this may be during data collection. The endpoint is the reporting of the content and meaning of patterns (themes) in the data, where “themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs the investigators identify [sic] before, during, and after analysis” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000: 780) p.92.

The authors attest to the flexibility that is gained from using the process and how it fits a variety of philosophical views. Thematic analysis provides rich detail and in-depth insights to the gained data. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data...[it]... can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality.” (Braun and Clarke, p. 83-86). The way in which the method is adopted and utilised is therefore dependent on the research philosophy and research aims and objectives. Here, the aim is to unpack and unravel the surface of reality from the perspective of talented employees and their PC. Moreover, it is important to note that the themes created are those which prevailed and were discussed and echoed by the participants during the data collection. The steps used in this modified thematic analysis are discussed and explained below.

3.5 ROBUSTNESS OF RESEARCH METHOD

This section discusses the different parameters used to gauge qualitative research from the quantitative research. It then argues the different strategies that could be used to enhance the quality of data and the process involved in its collection. The researcher, therefore, states some of the strategies that are considered for this research and how they contribute to the robustness of the process for data collection and findings.

As noted by Merriam (2009), the terms that gauge the quality of a qualitative studies are different to scientific and quantitative studies. In addition, various scholars explain these differently (Saunders et al., 2012). It is important, therefore, to note that as this research is qualitative, the parameters that gauge the quality of the research have been widely accepted and argued to shift from that of the positivist prospect to those who subjectively elicit meanings from the social actors through appropriate methods of ‘interpretivist’ enquiry. These are cited by Saunders et al. (2012) from the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba
and Lincoln (1989, 2005) to replace dependability for reliability, credibility for internal validity and transferability for external validity, as one example. These criteria are discussed in more detail below.

3.5.1 CREDIBILITY

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings reflect the reality; i.e. the experiences of the participants. Hence, it concerns the interpretation of the data to reflect what the participant conveys instead what the researcher thinks it should convey. Others refer to this as ‘credible findings’: hence, the terms are used interchangeably in qualitative studies. Various techniques have been recommended by different scholars, such as triangulation, as Merriam (2009: 215-217), citing (Denzin, 1978), suggests. While improving the credibility, triangulation also ensures the study’s dependability (Merriam, 2009, p.216).

Triangulation, therefore, refers to the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators or multiple theories, although in this research there is no triangulation, per se, taking into consideration the time, access and budget constraints. There are, however, multiple sources of data, such as the findings from the CIT method and answers to open-ended questions. In addition, there is multiple use of theories by relating concepts of psychological contact with talent management, in a unique fashion, by taking an interpretivist approach.

Another strategy to improve credibility is the ‘member checks’ or ‘respondent validation’ (Merriam, 2009, p.217) citing (Maxwell, 2005, p.111) where the researcher asked one or more participants to review the transcription of their interview and assess whether it reflected what was meant. Although this process appears to be very useful, as shown in Crosby’s (2004) work, as cited in Merriam (2009), is nevertheless time consuming. This strategy, therefore, was used with some interviewees on later dates as the researcher shared portions of transcriptions and interpretations with them to ensure they corresponded with what they were trying to convey during the interview.

Yet another strategy to ensure credibility is saturation in the data shared by prospect participants; i.e. as future interviews begin to provide the same stories and events. For this research, saturation was achieved by the 30th interview and the researcher stopped by the 32nd interview. Repetition and a consistent pattern of stories occurred by the 26th interview.
Merriam (2009: 2019) cites Patton (2002) and further suggests that researchers should attempt to seek “variation in the understanding of the phenomena”; that is, researchers should “look for data that supports alternative explanations”. The researcher utilised the time-scale in order to assist participants to recall incidents and stories, then requested that they explain, in their own words, what each meant to them in terms of their psychological contract. Interestingly, on most occasions, the same experience appeared to have similar connotations for different participants, while those that were perceived differently were the result of past experiences with similar breaches or violation. Hence, the resilience and tolerance could be contrasted with counter-productive behaviour by others, although they apparently underwent a similar incident, such as not keeping a promise on promotion, unfair evaluation, and routine tasks.

Merriam (2009: 219) also recommends reflexivity as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the human instrument”, citing Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 183). Researchers therefore need to clarify their predisposition, assumptions and biases regarding the study. This has been discussed under Section 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 in Chapter 5. They are summarised in that the researcher assumes that PC is made of a belief that a promise has been made, it is conscious, and contractual in nature whether or not the other party agrees to the contract. Similarly, organisations that have communicated the status of talented employees to a particular worker have informed the PC of that employee; hence, these employees would establish a distinguished PC compared to other employees. Consequently, understanding what constitutes these employees’ PC is the focus of the study.

### 3.5.2 DEPENDABILITY

As Merriam (2009) explains, dependability, on the other hand, “is the extent to which research findings could be replicated”. Obviously, this is problematic as human behaviour is not static and an individual’s PC is dynamic and changes by time and by alterations in the context (Guest and Conway, 1997; Guest, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985), as cited by Merriam (2009), and Saunders et al (2012) suggest replacing the term ‘reliability’ to ‘dependability’ or ‘consistency’ for qualitative studies. Hence, “the question then is not whether the findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data
collected” (Merriam, 2009: 221). Moreover, Merriam (2009: 222) states that “if the findings of a study are consistent with the data presented, the study can be considered dependable.” Similar strategies to those discussed above are advocated to improve a study’s consistency and dependability, with triangulation considered the most common (Merriam, 2009). In addition, Merriam (2009), citing Lincoln and Guba (1985); Dey, 1993; Richards, 2005) adds an audit trial to the strategies researchers should adopt to improve their study’s dependability and consistency. This entails the researchers “describing in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry.” (Merriam, 2009: 223). The researcher used a systematic thematic analysis which is congruent with statement above and addressed in detail under Data Analysis Section (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Another suggestion is the use of log book or diary (Merriam, 2009; Conway and Briner, 2005), such as that found in (Wuellner, 2014). The researcher deigned a similar log book used to register feedback, comments and in which to make notes to improve subsequent interviews.

3.5.3 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability concerns the extent to which the findings of this study could be applied to other situation; “how generalisable are the results of this study” (Merriam, 2009, p.223). The issue of a small sample size strikes any reader here. However, as extensively discussed by scholars and authors of qualitative research, it is not empirical generalisability that qualitative study aims to achieve but rather theoretical. This is referred to by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and cited by Saunders et al. (2012) and Merriam (2009) as transferability. In supporting the qualitative transferability of findings, Merriam (2009: 224) cites Eisner (1991: 197), stating that “although the logic of random sampling is impeccable, it is also apparent that in our daily lives we do not randomly sample in order to generalise. Yet, we do, in fact, learn lessons ‘from life,’ from events that are about as far from random as they can be.”

The strategies recommended to enhance the possibility of this study's results transferring to other settings include the use of thick and rich description (Merriam, 2009, p. 227), such as those in data analysis Section (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, a balance between transcription and description is also important to maintain a good quality research as
advocated by Pratt (2009). Another strategy is maximum variation in the sample, referring to “purposefully seeking variation or diversity in a sample selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research” (Merriam, 2009: 227-229). In the study, the researcher has included talented employees, working for the core business as reservoir engineers and petro-physicists. In addition, the researcher included chief accountants, senior application support, exploration scientists and HR managers. Moreover, there were participants who worked for one employer and others with similar years of service but at different employers and sectors, but who have been working for the oil and gas sector for more than 2 years.

3.5.4 GATE KEEPERS, ACCESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This section discusses how the research maintained ethical practice throughout the research and specifically during the field work. It explains the need for access and how this is negotiated with gatekeepers. Saunders et al. (2012) discusses two types of access for academic research; ‘cognitive’ and ‘physical’. The physical access is required from the gatekeepers of the organisations denoted as PO, whereas the subsequent cognitive access would be granted from talented employees (denoted as TE, discussed above).

The access is no less important than the consideration of the ethical elements in this research. Among others, issues such as confidentiality of information and anonymity of identity are taken very seriously. It is important to note that this research posed no threat or danger to the health and wellbeing of participants, nor did it involve any clinical or medical experiment. Research participants were adults and were interviewed only following their consent to participate, in order to discover their experiences with their employer.

To build trust relations with participants, prior to the start of the interview, the researcher clearly reiterated the information on the participant’s sheet, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and information shared. In addition, the researcher asked sensitive questions towards the end of the interview, and observed any behaviour or tones that indicated stress or inconvenience. The researcher also tried to carefully select locations to avoid signalling any negative experiences as the participants may suggest (Saunders et al., 2012; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2011).
Participants were offered a summary of the research findings if they chose to receive it. The information recorded was downloaded to the researchers’ personal computer, with flash memory as a backup, and saved using encryption and according to the Data Protection Act (1998) and University Ethics Guidelines (2012). This ensures that the information is only accessible to the researcher and where necessary, could be transferred to the university to maintain the information when required (Data Protection, 1998; Ethical Guidelines, 2012). Apart from the assured confidentiality and anonymity in how the data is handled, transcribed, analysed and later described, it was crucial to maintain participants’ and organisations’ details confidential and anonymous, as the researcher progressed with interviewing subsequent participants, asking them about critical incidents throughout their employment history (Chell, 2004). This is because the identity of certain organisations and their corresponding practices arose consistently in the recounting of incidents or events. Therefore, the integrity of the research process became even more significant and the researcher had to pay extra attention to the code names in analysis, as well as protect the audio-taped, open-ended answers and audit trails.

3.6 Chapter Summary
The chapter presented the overall research methodology and how data has been analysed. It discussed the different epistemological and ontological assumptions and how the researcher and the research questions both complement these assumptions. Furthermore, the chapter provided justification for the research design and methods of inquiry, followed by a description of sample and data collection procedures. Similarly, the issues pertaining to inclusion and exclusion criteria, the explanation and critiques of methods of enquiries have been addressed. Importantly, the chapter also introduced the methods for data analysis by suggesting a modified thematic analysis that is explained in considerable detail in the next chapter, along with the actual empirical coding data. Finally, the chapter elaborated how quality and issues of access and ethical consideration were maintained throughout this research. The next chapter will explain the actual analysis process in significant detail. It will also describe the first overarching theme and how it answers the first research questions.
## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 'TALENTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>MODIFIED THEMATIC ANALYSIS</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1</td>
<td>STAGE 1: FAMILIARISATION</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2</td>
<td>STAGE 2: GENERATING INITIAL CODES AND SEARCHING FOR INITIAL THEMES</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.3</td>
<td>STAGES 3: REVIEWING THEMES AND DEFINING FINAL THEMES</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.4</td>
<td>STAGE 4: FINE-TUNED THEMES:</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>REPORTING THE THEME ‘TALENTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION”</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1</td>
<td>TALENTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION - EMPLOYER BRAND</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.1</td>
<td>CORPORATE AND BRAND IMAGE AND SOCIAL PRESSURE</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.2</td>
<td>COMPETITIVE PACKAGES AND BENEFITS</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.3</td>
<td>DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.4</td>
<td>SOPHISTICATED AND RIGOROUS SYSTEMS</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.5</td>
<td>CULTURE AND WORK STRUCTURE</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.6</td>
<td>LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT-CHALLENGING TASKS AND PROJECTS</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.7</td>
<td>REWARDING AND RICH EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2</td>
<td>TALENTED EMPLOYEES' VALUE PROPOSITION- TALENTED EMPLOYEES' IDENTITY</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.1</td>
<td>TALENTED EMPLOYEES ARE VISIONARY AND KNOW WHAT THEY WANT</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.2</td>
<td>TALENTED EMPLOYEES TAKE INITIATIVE</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.3</td>
<td>TALENTED EMPLOYEES HAVE 'PRIDE' AND PERCEIVED SELF SIGNIFICANCE</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2.4</td>
<td>TALENTED EMPLOYEES ARE MATURE AND HOLD IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3</td>
<td>INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS - WAR FOR TALENT</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS FROM THEM ONE</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Chapter, the researcher described the research design and how that has led to choose the proper paradigm, methodology and methods. Furthermore, the Chapter discussed in detail how this research data were analysed by following 'a modified' Braun and Clarke (2006) framework for thematic analysis. This Chapter describes and interprets the findings from one of the three overarching themes which answers the first research question. This theme is entitled 'Talented Employees Value Proposition'. It is important to note that this theme answers the first research question. The description and interpretation of the findings are supported by quotes and extracts from the interviews. Finally, this theme is presented and discussed against the backdrop of the literature, while its contribution is acknowledged and justified.

4.1 MODIFIED THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The researcher combined stages 2 and 3 of the Braun and Clarke (2006) framework for thematic analysis to create 'Generating Initial Codes & Searching for Initial Themes'; the same was also done for stages 4 and 5, giving rise to the 'Reviewing Themes & Defining Final Themes' stage. This was necessary as the method for data collection and elicitation involved the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Consequently, the answers to some of the questions and the accounts of participants were mostly in the form of stories. Thus, combining the stages ensured that a complete and a comprehensive story line was captured; this also allowed the researcher to fully understand the message and meaning each participant associated with every incident and event. Therefore, this combination means that the researcher only reports participants’ accounts in reference to one particular incident, so as the story is not used to refer to different ideas. Examples of these can be found in the quotes in sections 4.3 onwards.

In addition, particular attention must be paid to the nature of the research gap which was discovered by crosslinking two literature streams (a. Psychological Contract and b. Talent and Talent Management) (See Chapter 2), and the innovative method of inquiry, which incorporated the Critical Incident Technique. Indeed, these factors firstly ensured that participants were identified as talented by their employers following the criteria (see Section
3.3.5), and secondly, allowed participants to narrate and report critical incidents in the form of a story or shocking event that had implications for the state of their psychological contract. Without these two aspects, it would have been difficult to ensure that the findings represented talented employees rather than any employee. Similarly, it would have been difficult to distinguish between the implications associated with talented employees’ state of psychological contract and the implications associated with personal, organisational, or contextual factors which may or may not be related to talented employees’ psychological contracts, but do affect their tenure and satisfaction with the organisation. Hence, the accounts from the participants were uniquely coded to reflect, as much as possible, the meanings which participants intended to deliver. Some of these codes were synthesised with the literature, while others emerged as new codes affecting and/or informing talented employees’ psychological contract and their behaviour towards their employer. Hence, it was essential to combine the stages of thematic analysis in this form to ensure that the unique accounts and stories of each participant pertaining to their psychological contract were uniquely and separately coded; at the same time, it was important that those accounts which were similar across all participants were similarly coded, then later collided and grouped together. This confirms the suggestion of Braun and Clarke (2006) that there are no hard and fast rules for data analysis, but rather each research is unique.

In addition, themes were mostly data driven, although some main ideas from the literature were also utilised in identifying certain themes, as explained in the Sections below. This step was taken to ensure that the research questions are answered, and the objectives are met, especially the question on understanding how the state of psychological contract changes. The definitions of each state of the psychological contract are extrapolated from the literature then utilised to capture participants’ experiences and relevant stories. Hence, in essence, the data analysis is data driven, but also utilises the literature in some instances. Such instances are mainly related to the last initial theme, the last developed theme, and the fine-tuned theme entitled ‘dynamics of talented employees’ psychological contract’, as will be noted and discussed in the Sections below. Hence, the thematic analysis conducted essentially combined both the semantic and latent types. The analysis was semantic when it was data driven and involved coding unique events per participant and was latent when coding similar events under the same code and grouping them later across all participants. Similarly, data
analysis was a recursive process between and within the stages where I had to review and re-read initial codes and themes during the process of identifying initial themes, to developing them, fine-tuning them, and finally reporting them. The next chapter begins by describing and explaining the stages involved in data analysis for this doctoral thesis. It as well reports the actual coding data from the analysis process.

4.1.1 STAGE 1: FAMILIARISATION

Because the research context was a unique one with distinct institutional and cultural features i.e. Oman Oil and Gas sector, the researcher treated the data collected from all participants as one data set and analysed them together. However, the researcher acknowledged how the meanings associated with psychological contract and theoretical concepts were constructed and understood by each participant and their implications throughout the employment experience. This included new ideas such as employer reputation, perception of the self, market dynamics, and numerous others which are unique and surfaced during the inquiry.

It was important for the researcher to familiarise with the data collected. the researcher achieved this by manually transcribing the interviews, then reading and re-reading the transcripts until became confident with the data set. The researcher made notes of initial ideas about how talented employees formed their psychological contract and how their experience unfolded and influenced the state of their psychological contract. It was also beneficial to review my comments and ideas following the interviews. Some researchers argue that transcription and immersing oneself in the data is a ‘key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology’ (Bird, 2005: 227), and recognized as an interpretative act, where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical act of putting spoken sounds on paper (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999)” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, pp. 87-88). Accordingly, the researcher made sure to review and separately transcribe the audio-taped comments and those provided by some of the participants; these comments related to the overall research subject, the interview set-up, the use of a time scale, and any emerging ideas and interesting concepts from the corresponding interviews.

The researcher also employed an interview log-book which was used by interviewees (see Appendix 9 and Appendix 10 for examples of log-book and time-scale). The log-book allowed
CHAPTER SIX

the participants to comment on anything immediately after the interview. This was particularly beneficial with the initial 4-8 interviewees, who suggested that the time scale for eliciting critical incidents was very helpful, not only for the interview, but also for their own reflection on their career journeys. The process of immersion was vital in terms of me being able to get a sense of the breadth and depth of the content of my data, which formed the basis of my later analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following active listening and my repeated reading of the transcripts, I became familiar with the depth and breadth of the data. This was very beneficial, as it allowed me to actively search “for meanings, patterns” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 16), which was important for the next stages of the data analysis. This was a time-consuming and hectic process, although the researcher believes it “provided the bedrock for the rest of my analysis”, as noted by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 17). Each transcript was read several times to capture the essence of the data content.

The process of transcription and immersion was extended over the period spanning May-September 2016. It took me relatively longer to transcribe, as it was a verbatim transcription, and the researcher reported any observations of their body language and voice tone in relation to incidents. Transcription took between 8-16 hours per 1 hour of recorded tape time. In total, 34 interviews were conducted, most of which lasted approximately an hour (60 minutes), although some lasted more than 90 minutes and a few were 45-60 minutes long. An average of 7500 words resulted from a single interview, which equates to 15 pages/interview of single lines at font-size 12. On days when the researcher could fully focus and concentrate, was able to complete a transcription in two days, although four days were usually needed during that period as the researcher participated in three key conferences, one of which was local, while two required a number of days of travelling.

4.1.2 STAGE 2: GENERATING INITIAL CODES AND SEARCHING FOR INITIAL THEMES

Once the researcher was confident in my data, then the next phase of the process was started, which was led to generate initial codes. During this phase, the researcher decided to move from manual coding and analysis to the use of a computer software called MAXQDA 12. Ink to assist me in tackling an exhaustive data set comprising more than 100 pages, which was challenging to track and consolidate manually. A code is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for
a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). Simply put, a code is the foundation of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), while coding is a “process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to your research question” (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

This process began in November 2016, the researcher started by numbering the sentences in documents, using different highlighting colours in Microsoft Word for interesting words, comments, or phrases. Moreover, the researcher made comments in the margins of the pages. It is worth noting here that a separate document was created which was used to make comments and illustrations when participants referred to their team structures and made similar sketches or drawing on their time scale sheets or on their open-ended answers to stress and discuss a situation that was relevant to their incidents and the state of their psychological contract. the researcher systematically implemented these steps for the entire data set.

However, before the researcher employed the computer-aided software MAXQDA 12. Ink to assist in analysing the remaining interviews, by the eighth interview the researcher was able to identify a preliminary list of initial codes; within these codes, the researcher was also able to see a pattern, which then marked as initial themes and sub-themes by the end of this stage. These themes and sub-themes corresponded to the research questions and mark some of the emerging ideas which talented employees referred to and gave detailed accounts of when discussing what specifically influenced their employment relationship and psychological contract. This approach also revealed the amount of openness and my ability to deal with new and emerging ideas and tolerate ambiguity. This also corresponds well with Strauss’ (1987) contention that coding flexibly and with ease is a prerequisite for anyone wishing to become professional in qualitative research and data analysis. the researcher would like to stress that the process of identifying the codes and subsequently the patterns which form the themes and sub-themes was mostly data-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009). As well as maintaining an open mind to interesting ideas and accounts, the researcher was able to include in the initial themes emerging and interesting features that were interconnected with talented employees’ psychological contract; indeed, these features constituted interesting findings for the next stage of analysis discussion. Because the process of coding and deciding on themes is an inherently interpretative act,
"The aim of this section was to provide a transparent account of the thematic analysis process to give the reader sufficient information to fairly evaluate the findings of the research" (Smith, 2014, p. 103).

Therefore, using the MAXQDA 12. Ink software, enabled to organise the transcripts, codes, coded segments, and initial themes, while also viewing the relationships between these aspects as they emerge; this is a much clearer and more visual approach, as the software allows these parts of data analysis to be viewed on different browsers within the same window (See Appendix 11 for examples on coded transcript using MAXQDA). The researcher kept discovering and marking new codes, and by the 26th transcript my codes increased in number from around 106 codes to more than 350 codes, all of which were supported by their segments from the transcripts and were easily retrieved and reviewed using the MAXQDA 12. Ink tool. By the end of this stage, the final list of codes was around 400, as there were not many new revelations or ideas which had emerged or been identified after the 28th interview; the researcher concluded this stage with the 34th interview. During this stage, also visual representations used to help sort the different codes into themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These are called thematic maps, or “thematic networks” (Attride-Stirling, 2001), and then presented below to reveal the initial themes which were the product of this stage.

It is important to note here that the focus is not on the quantity or the frequency with which a code was discussed or mentioned in the data set, but rather on the meaning assigned to codes. Of particular interest are the codes under the sub-themes ‘integrity and sincerity’ and ‘The Shift from PC-Fulfillment to PC-B and PC-V’, as well as the sub-theme ‘Patriotism’. These codes have only a few segments from the transcripts compared to codes under the sub-themes ‘Visionary’, ‘Employer reputation’, and ‘Implicit Nature of PC’, and ‘PC-Fulfilment’; the latter sub-themes incorporated many codes and an abundance of coded segments. The codes with relatively fewer coded segments are not less important compared to those which have a higher number of coded segments from transcripts; instead, some were salient ones and were addressed in breadth by the interviewees. In some instances, they also appeared as a nagging or a serious event that the participant either dwelled upon or constantly referred to in relation to their psychological contract and employment relationship with their employer.
These are the initial themes and sub-themes as presented in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 with its related changes stages as presented in Table 4.1.

FIGURE 4.1: THE INITIAL THEMATIC MAPS
CHAPTER SIX

State of Psychological Contract

Psychological Contract Fulfilment

Psychological Contract Breach to Psychological Contract Fulfilment

Overfulfilled Psychological Contract

Post Psychological Contract Violation

Psychological Contract Violation

Emergent Talented Employee’s Psychological Contract

Psychological Contract Breach to Psychological Breach/Violation

Pre and Early Employment

Psychological Contract Formation and Features

The Norm of Reciprocity

Mutuality

Implicit Nature of Psychological Contract

Implication of Talent Identification

Trust

Fairness

Quality of Relationship with Direct Manager

Competent

Supportive

Implications with Boss Change

Politics

Fairness

Respect and Considerate Treatment

Personality and Style

Keeping Promises

Decision Making

Politics

Organizational Justice

Support and Continuous Improvement

Discrimination

Managing and Keeping Promises

Trustworthiness

Politics

Quality of Governance and Relationship with Human Resources Agents

CHAPTER SIX

122
TABLE 4.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIAL THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>Description of the initial themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>'Building Blocks of Talented Employees' Psychological Contract'. This theme made it possible to group what I initially believed was the 'higher level of abstraction' and antecedents affecting the formation and management of psychological contract from the perspective of the talented employees, as labelled by the sub-themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>'Perceived Self Significance'. This made it possible to group the features and traits which were common among the participants and how they viewed themselves, their career, and their experiences with their employer. They related these to their perceptions of the different states of psychological contract they experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>'State of psychological contract' refers to the different states of psychological contract experienced by talented employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>'Psychological contract formation and features'. This initial theme included the different channels through which talented employees believed or perceived that they had an obligation towards their employer. As such, this theme presents the momentum of psychological contract formation from the perspective of talented employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>'Quality of Governance and relationship with Human Resource Agents'. This theme made it possible to group the aspects which influenced talented employees' psychological contract and their corresponding incidents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>'Quality of Relationship with Direct Manager'. By creating this theme, I was able to group the aspects which influenced talented employees' psychological contract and their corresponding incidents. Unlike point 5, this theme relates to the employees' direct manager, thus illustrating how invariably different contract makers vary in triggering and influencing the state of talented employees' psychological contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>'Sophistication of organisational policies and practices'. This theme made it possible to group the perceptions which talented employees associated with their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next Section will describe the review process used for the initial themes and the definitions of the final themes. Here, the initial themes are closely reviewed, with constant reference to the research questions and objectives. The purpose of this is to ensure that questions and objectives are satisfied, which will, in turn, mean that the main contribution of this doctoral research is realised.

4.1.3 STAGES 3: REVIEWING THEMES AND DEFINING FINAL THEMES

Picking up from the previous stage, this stage was a reiterative one, during which the researcher constantly moved back and forth between it and stage 2 of the analytic process. The main objective in this phase was to initiate a rigorous process of sorting the exhaustive list of identified codes and their initial themes and sub-themes into a greater picture and a portrait that would be meaningful and tell a convincing story to readers while also answering the research questions.

The researcher began by assessing the potential relationship between different codes, and combining codes into broader and overarching themes. The researcher repeatedly revised, amended, and refined them, until the researcher was confident that they reflected the significant themes which conceptualised the whole data set and met the study objectives; the researcher was also able to address new and emerging insights which were not anticipated.

The researcher addressed the findings in greater detail. Moreover, at this stage, the initial thematic map was revised and produced a developed version of map, which was more concise and revealed the amendments and coherence among the themes. Moreover, on the one hand, it revealed how they are interconnected and represent unique concepts when reading individually ‘internal homogeneity’, and how, on the other hand, they complement additional themes in storytelling, and yet they present diverse concepts when compared to
CHAPTER SIX

these other themes’ ‘external heterogeneity’ (Patton, 1990, p. 465). The outcome of this process also increases the validity of individual themes when mirrored with the whole data set (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990; Wullner, 2014).

The significance of this stage pertains to the scrutiny and critical review of the coded segments, which is carried out for two main reasons. The first of these reasons is cohesion, as the segments contribute to the development of a more concise yet comprehensive theme. Secondly, such a review ensures that the segments have sufficient substance to represent subsequent categories and themes. Consequently, during this stage, groups of coded segments were eventually allocated into different themes and others were broken down further and reorganised, before being assigned to other themes. Among the final themes are ‘Talented Employees’ Value Proposition’, ‘Dynamics of Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract’, 'The Talent Deal', and 'Employee-Employer Exchange Relationship'. As such, below the researcher first present the developed thematic map and highlight the main changes from the initial theme. Then the fine-tuned themes presented and described. The researcher used excerpts and quotes from the interviews to tell the story about the data and the meanings participants attached when they referred to their psychological contract. This corresponds to the final phase of thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 93) noted is about being able to 'tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis'. In a similar vein, Guest et al. (2012, p. 95) highlighted the importance of using verbatim quotes to strengthen the study’s arguments and the claims made by the researcher, as they are considered “the foundation upon which good qualitative data analysis is based” (2012, p. 95).

Developed Thematic Map:

As a result of the process of reviewing and renaming themes, the number of overarching themes was reduced from 8 initial themes, to 4 developed themes. These are described below.

Developed Theme 1: Building Block of Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract was renamed “Talented Employees’ Value Proposition”. This theme describes talented employees’ frame of reference, predisposition, higher level abstracts, and what they value in
their employment relationship. As revealed by the extracts and exemplary quotes (See sections 4.3.1.1 to 4.3.2.5), the sub-themes reflect how talented employees related these aspects to their current and retrospective psychological contract. Subsequently, sub-themes explain how the psychological contract was created, mitigated, changed, disrupted, restored, and violated. Before proceeding further, it is worth describing the analytic process which resulted in the new sub-themes. Following the stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), this process involved renaming, collating, and including sub-themes which emerged as a result of reviewing the initial thematic map and its coded segments. The below Figure 4.2 presents the developed thematic map and Table 4.2 illustrated the changes from the initial themes.

**FIGURE 4.2: DEVELOPED THEMATIC MAP - TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ VALUE PROPOSITION.**

**TABLE 4.2: THE DEVELOPMENT TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ VALUE PROPOSITION THEME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Talented Employees’ Value Proposition</th>
<th>Changes from Initial Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Employer Branding</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moved the sub-theme “Omanization- Labour Law” from Miscellaneous to be a code under the sub-theme “Market Status”, and renamed it “Market Status and Regulations” sub-theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Market Status and Regulations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developed Theme 2: The theme “Psychological Contract Formation and Features” was renamed “The Talent Deal”, as it describes the content of talented employees’ psychological contract. In other words, the quotes and extracts from the participants relate to ‘expectations and obligations’ which talented employees exchanged with their employers. This is assessed and explained in chapter five. However, at this point I would like to explain how the renaming of the sub-themes and the changes to the structure of the themes were derived in the reviewing process.
### TABLE 4.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF TALENT DEAL THEME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Talent Deal Theme</th>
<th>Changes from Initial Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The 5 New Sub Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-The Norm of Reciprocity</td>
<td>The sub-theme “Emergent Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract” was moved from the theme “State of Psychological Contract”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Mutuality</td>
<td>The sub-theme “Integrity and Sincerity” was moved to the theme “Talented Employees’ Value Proposition”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Implicit Nature of Psychological Contract</td>
<td>The sub-themes “Fairness” and “Trust” were moved to the theme “State of Psychological Contract”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Implication of Talent Identification</td>
<td>Finally, this theme was inter-related with the themes “Talented Employees’ Value Proposition” and the next explained theme, “Dynamics of Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract”. The former theme relates more like an antecedent to this theme, while the later theme corresponds to this theme and has implications for how the state of the psychological contract shifts depending on the extent to which participants felt that their deal was delivered. As such, the structure of the second developed thematic map looks like the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Pre and Early Employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 4.3: THE DEVELOPED THEMATIC MAP - THE TALENT DEAL**
Developed Theme 3: The Theme “State of Psychological Contract” was renamed “Dynamics of Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract”, as this theme title captures not only the state, but also the transition in the psychological contract. This is significant in two ways; firstly, it directly answers the research questions and meets the objectives of this study. Secondly, it corresponds to the gap in the literature, and specifically the need to understand how particular individuals’ psychological contract evolves over a period of time. Indeed, this allows prospective researchers to obtain a condensed insight into how psychological moves from that state are being fulfilled or are being breached or violated and vice-versa in the form of a cycle over the period of their employment and career.

This finding is one of the unique results of the present research. In addition to this, such a finding is tangled with a growing body of literature related to understanding the realities of talented employees. This is the only theme which was initiated in stage 2 of the data analysis and was not changed much in the review and fine-tuning stages. This revelation is related to the fact that sub-themes mostly reflect the critical incidents associated with each state and how the transition occurred. Moreover, the boundary between this theme and the initial as well as developed themes, is clear. This makes it possible for the theme to stand alone throughout the analysis phase, and also helps to report the findings in detail, as the next Section will explain in more detail. However, in an effort to make the theme concise during the review stage of renaming, collating, and merging the themes, the following amendments occurred:

**TABLE 4.4: THE DEVELOPMENT OF DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT THEME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynamics of Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract</th>
<th>Changes from Initial Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 5 New Sub Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Psychological Contract Fulfilment</td>
<td>The sub-theme “Emergent Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract” was moved to the theme “The Talent Deal”, as it reflects the content of the deal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Psychological Contract Breach</td>
<td>The sub-theme “Emergent Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract” was moved to the theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Psychological Contract Violation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“The Talent Deal”, as it reflects the content of the deal.

The sub-theme “Psychological Contract Breach to Psychological Contract Fulfilment” was merged with the sub-theme “Psychological Contract Fulfilment”.

Furthermore, it was possible to link the sub-themes for this theme and sequence them in a theoretical way that reveals the process which individuals undergo as part of their psychological contract evolution over the period of their employment. The final sub-themes of this developed theme can be illustrated as follows:

FIGURE 4.4: DEVELOPED THEMATIC MAP 4: DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT
4.1.4 STAGE 4: FINE-TUNED THEMES:

As part of the fine-tuning process, the developed themes from Figure 4.3 to Figure 4.4 were made even more concise. For example, theme one ‘Talented Employee Value Proposition’ the changes included merging the “Ideological Principles” sub-theme with the “Talented Employees’ Identity” sub-theme. Moreover, the two sub-themes of “Cultural Norms” and “Market Status and Regulations” were collated to form the sub-theme “Institutional Features and Cultural Characteristics” (See Appendix 12 for example of fine-tuned themes codes and quotes). The second theme ‘The Talent Deal’ was reduced to three sub-themes as described in Chapter five. The third theme ‘Employee and Employer Exchange Relationship’ was merged into themes ‘The Talent Deal’ and ‘Dynamics of Talented Employees Psychological Contract’. Finally, the fourth theme ‘Dynamics of Talented Employees Psychological Contract’ sub-themes were reduced to three main categories as will be elaborated in Chapter five. This was essential for cohesion and to maintain a logical and intuitive storyline while not denying the theme the intended and foreseen contribution during the developed phase.

Moreover, during this final stage of data analysis, the interaction between the developed themes mentioned above was reviewed and finalised. Figure 4.5 below illustrates the finalised thematic map and the relationship between the themes. This is explained and supported by compelling quotes and extracts from the interviews (Pratt, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2006) in the below Sections.
It is important to reiterate that, as well as maintaining an open mind to emerging findings and ideas from the data set, the researcher was equally conscious about the research objectives and questions. Consequently, these themes corresponded to the research objectives and answered the research questions. They also generated interesting and new findings from the data as a result of continuous improvement in the inquiry process with subsequent interviews. Not only did this reflect the openness to and tolerance of the ambiguity which was present in the new and emerging ideas suggested by participants. Indeed, this also served as evidence of the rigorous data analysis procedures applied by the researcher in identifying and filtering relevant and emerging findings. Such an ability to minimise bias in data collection and analysis is considered one of the strengths of this doctoral thesis.

As discussed under developed theme 3 above, the theme 'Dynamics of Talented Employees' Psychological Contract' is placed in the centre of the diagram of Figure 4.5, because all remaining themes relate to a particular state of psychological contract, either forming it,
triggering it, or symptomising the state of talented employees’ experience. Similarly, any changes that occur in terms of how each of the themes is perceived and maintained are likely to either influence and/or represent the state of talented employees’ psychological contract. As such, it connects other themes, each of which represents a particular state of talented employees’ psychological contract. In contrast, the remaining themes either represent a content – ‘The Talent Deal’ – or antecedent to formation – 'Talented Employees' Value Proposition Psychological contract’. These, as already noted from the literature, are elements of psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995; Conway and Briner, 2005). The next section reports the detailed findings under the "Talented Employee Value Proposition" theme, with examples and support from compelling quotes generated by the interviews. The Chapter will then discuss these examples while comparing them to the reviewed literature. This will be followed by a discussion of the present study’s contribution in this regard. The remaining themes will be described and discussed in the next Chapter.

4.2 REPORTING THE THEME “TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ VALUE PROPOSITION”

There are three key themes which resulted from the analysis of the data as emphasised in Chapter Four. To recap, the research objectives were to understand how talented employees form their psychological contract, understand what constitutes talented employees’ psychological contract, and establish how talented employees react to different states of the psychological contract. Hence, the first objective was to answer the following question:

➢ How do talented employees’ form their psychological contract?

The themes that correspond to this question are themes 1 and 2, namely “Talented Employees’ Value Proposition” and “The Talent Deal”. The former is described and discussed here, while the latter will be described and discussed in the next Chapter. The theme “Talented Employees’ Value Proposition” is defined here as the key elements which talented employees associate with and value highly in order to fulfil their career aspirations and enjoy a positive employment relationship with current and prospective employer(s) (Michael et al., 2001; CIPD, 2011; Sparrow et al., 2014; Author, 2017).
These value propositions inform talented employees' expectations of current and prospective employers. Thus, they influence their psychological contract formation, content and, subsequently, their reactions to the dynamics of the psychological contract.

In line with this definition and description of “Talented Employees’ Value Proposition”, below is an extract from the interview with participant TE31, which details their effort to establish a strong employee value proposition and the implications of this for improving their talented employees' tenure:

“We do not believe that we are the highest payer in the market but we believe we have built our 'employee value proposition' which is basically retaining and keeping our employees satisfied, which is basically why you are working for us? is it because of pay? is it because of flexibility? Is it because of learning development? Is it because of Exposure? What is it?”

Another participant, TE32, made a similar comment related to acquiring the best in the market:

"...our vision is to be the best at what we do, and if we want to be the best at what we do we need the best people to help us and reach our aspired vision to join our organisation... we grouped all [talented] employees into four groups; leaders, engineers and specialists, operators and technicians, and supporting functions... so basically, this grouping allows us in [Company y] to take care and focus on everybody and not just the leaders...”

Hence, it can be concluded that employers aim to attract the best in the market and retain them. Having a strong employee value proposition could make a difference, as noted by TE31 above. Similarly, having different talent pools for different disciplines allows organisations to better manage and meet the requirements and aspirations of their talented employees, as noted by TE32 above. Hence, the main sub-themes of this overarching theme (“Talented Employees’ Value Proposition”) are:

1. Employer Brand
2. Talented Employees Identity
3. Institutional Features and Cultural Characteristics

They are described in sufficient detail below in the following Sections.
4.2.1 TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ VALUE PROPOSITION - EMPLOYER BRAND

As part of their employer selection choices, talented employees referred to the reputation and image of certain employers in the market. I labelled this “Employer Brand” to connote the reputation and image of key employers in the oil and gas sector, and how this reputation influences talented employees’ tenure with their employers. Furthermore, this also informs their perceptions of the employment relationship with their current, retrospective, and prospective employers.

According to the literature, “Employer Brand” encapsulates what employers are uniquely known for and are famous for among the current and prospective employees (Michaels, 2001; Martin, 2006; Sparrow et al., 2014). I will address these aspects from the perspective of talented employees; indeed, this is one of the main contributions of the present study. The key reputation factors that influence certain employers, according to the talented employees, include their corporate and brand image, learning and development scheme, career advancement opportunities, sophisticated and rigorous systems, culture and work structure, rewarding and rich experience, and competitive packages and benefits. Their quotes and justification from the interviewees are stated below.

The findings below illustrate key issues which together represent the employer brand sub-theme. Here, the researcher presents a number of extracts from the interviews with the talented employees, which correspond to these key issues. There are seven key issues relating to employer branding; the first and main factor is corporate and brand image.

4.2.1.1 CORPORATE AND BRAND IMAGE AND SOCIAL PRESSURE

It was evident from the interviewees that corporate and brand image influenced the choices these employees made in selecting and remaining with their employers. This was further amplified by social pressure from their communities and regions. For instance, regarding their organisation’s GDP contribution, participant TE32 commented that:

“... we as an organisation we are small... [However] we contribute to Oman, about 10% of GDP comes from our organisation and from these employees.”
Below is a comment from another talented employee (TE27) at the same organisation, who discussed the reasons for joining them:

TE27: “...because from my times at SQU while doing my degree. My dream was to work in one of the oil and gas sector’s leading organisations as you know because everybody here says this is the source of our income in Oman, GDP, and everything. You know we are the higher contributor of Oman's GDP so my plan was oil and gas.”

This, and similar types of reputation, have had implications for talented employees’ selection of employer at one point in their employment, as noted by participants such as TE14:

TE14: “After graduation, I got an offer from [Company x] to work as a reservoir engineer. I worked for them for just two weeks, then I got another offer from [Company y] and I preferred [Company y] because of its reputation. I believe it’s better.”

Another participant (TE02) referred to reputation by stating:

“Well, I chose Company x because it is the most famous company in Oman and also they have a very good development programme which is rare in other companies...”

The employer’s brand can sometimes overspill into another sector, which could mean them winning the war of talent and depriving other sectors of such calibre. This possibility is evident when looking at the comments of participant TE30:

“... if I find similar environment, then yeah why not, I’ll come to think about [moving to different sector or company]. However, I doubt it to be honest, as I believe this environment exists only in the oil and gas sector and this [organisation] specifically.”

Participant TE30’s educational background allows him to join various sectors, but he still prefers to work in the oil and gas sector, as seen below:

Yes, it is possible [for me to work for different sectors and organisations such as], telecommunication or electrical companies, or distribution, transmission or even generation [energy and power generating] companies. But I prefer to work in the oil and gas sector and specifically for this [organisation].”

Moreover, this participant (TE05) commented on promotion and the implications of this when compared to her peers and friends:
“...I got my promotions almost every two years. It was reasonable for me and when I talked about these kinds of promotions with my family and friends, they are like; oh you are so lucky, we never see a promotion for like four years, so I felt I was in a good place where my efforts are appreciated and when you compare your situation with others, you know, you feel grateful.”

Similarly, this participant (TE03) linked reputation to image within a social group:

“.... [Company a] is a small company so it is not well known and here in Oman if you work at a small company, a lot of social thinking occurs, and you get questioned very frequently, what are you doing in this small company? This will eventually affect your behaviour and working attitude, which affected me a lot....”

This participant (TE28) took the comparison to another level by contrasting the public sector and their employer in the oil and gas sector:

“... You know, some people live in their comfort zone in the public sector, [they ask] why move to the private sector, my career would be at stake, and the job security etc.... yes they'll pay you well [private sector], but will strain you to death; this is not true. I was willing to go the extra mile, so yes, I was frustrated, but to me, it didn't work well for me [public sector] so I joined this organisation later on.”

All of these extracts illustrate how talented employees pay attention to corporate and brand image, which subsequently influences how they form their psychological contract with their employees in terms of their perceived expectations for working in these organisations. Hence, it can be argued that those organisations which establish strong corporate and brand image inspire talented employees, who subsequently create expectations they feel proud to pursue and meet through employment. The next Section will discuss the second key element which forms the employer brand sub theme.

4.2.1.2 COMPETITIVE PACKAGES AND BENEFITS

Another element which talented employees referred to regarding their employer of choice was the packages and benefits these employees offer and are known for. For example, below
participant TE32 discusses one of the methods used by their organisation to maintain their competitiveness in the war for talent:

“... every two years there’s a salary review, where we participate in the Hay salary review, and we always make sure that we’re in the 75% [of highly paying organisations], so we’re in the top 25% of organisations in Oman. So, we do have a salary review every two years, to make sure that we’re competitive to the market.”

Similar claims were made by certain participants when referring to selecting a prospective employer. For example, TE05 compared the entitlements from two organisations:

“But I had also another job offer from another organisation, and then I just compared my entitlements, and what I will be getting. I decided to go with [Company y instead of Company x].”

Similarly, in terms of the reasons why this talented employee (TE02) decided to move to another employer, there was no reference to a violation of their PC; instead, focus was on exposure and offer:

“During my assessment interview, I was asked by the HR representative, why are you moving from the company? I told [him] I don’t have any single [incident which upset me] from the company but ... I wanted to have another experience [with a different employer] in the sector and secondly I told them that I’m getting a better offer so I’m looking also for a better offer.”

This talented employee (TE14) specified what the offer of 'an opportunity to complete a masters degree' included; this was different between competing employers:

“I got the job offer from Company x in the beginning and then I got another offer from Company y which I felt was a better offer at the time. They promised to allow me to complete a masters. Another thing, okay the housing loan, which is the same.”

Similarly, talented employee TE02 stated more benefits which make a difference when it comes to selecting from competing employers:

“you see.... we need to consider what other benefits we are getting from Company y which are valuable for us.... for example, full medical coverage with good bonus...”
Hence, in addition to corporate brand and image, competitive packages and benefits make a difference when it comes to talented employees’ selection criteria and, subsequently, their expectations as well as how they eventually form their psychological contract.

4.2.1.3 DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Talented employees justified their choice of employers and expressed their intentions to stay with or leave certain employers depending on that employer’s development scheme reputation, including opportunities for training. Moreover, the talented employees also expressed their perceptions of their career progression. For example, participant TE32 explained that career progression with their talented employees is well planned and aligned with international standards:

“… when it comes to progression, our progression is linked to attaining some accreditation; so let’s say, for example, when HR graduates join [Company z] they’ll have to pursue a development scheme that has been accredited by CIPD. If you are an engineer, for example, your development scheme will be accredited by a well-known organisation like the Chartered Institute of Mechanical Engineering, the IMechE Institution of Mechanical Engineering, or the Institute of Chemical Engineering… So our competences benchmark is a worldwide benchmark.”

This was reiterated by another talented employee in relation to the employer’s reputation for developing employees:

“Well, I chose company x because it is the most famous company in Oman and also they have a very good development programme which is rare in other companies, so that’s why I decided to work with them so I can get as much as I can in terms of development…. Also, company x invests a lot in development and research… I cannot say it’s a promise, but there is a chance for me also to do a masters and PhD.”

Similarly, TE16 believed that the potential for development and exposure with one employer is better than that offered by others:

“… Within that time, I saw that development here [Company y] was not going well and there were issues with mentors… I was thinking [to] myself, should I return back to [Company x]?
They have solid development, they are well known in the development, and they develop fresh graduates very well.”

In terms of TE10, this company combined exposure horizontally and progression higher on the organisation ladder, which reveals the amount of sophistication that some talented employees engage with before deciding which employer to choose.

“My selection [of employer] was between two companies. The chance of growing in the two organisations you can see is different. I know in company x I’ll have a lot of experience, I’ll work in different places in Oman, and there are a lot of things to learn. So usually company x is like a college after one graduates from university; they can learn technically there and become experts after some years, but progression will be slower there.”

However, talented employee TE29 put forth a good example of how talented employees’ careers can be accelerated, and the amount of satisfaction this gives them:

“... in 2010... I was promoted at that time to a senior accountant, acting chief accountant, so if you see through my career, you’d see that it’s accelerated very fast, from starting 2008 as an assistant accountant, to becoming a senior accountant in 2010, and then an acting chief accountant. Following this, in 2012, I was promoted to chief accountant, I was in charge of the accounting department; three staff were reporting at that time to me, and I was reporting to the CEO.”

In light of the above, it is evident that having a clear and well-known career progression plan can increase the likelihood of talented employees becoming attracted to certain employers and forming a positive psychological contract with them.

4.2.1.4 SOPHISTICATED AND RIGOROUS SYSTEMS

Some participants associated their attraction and aspirations to work for prospective employers on their brand image for being rigour and sophisticated. This is with respect to smooth execution of decisions and overall procedures. Hence, talented employees described the perfect employer as a company with clear systems and policies for promotion, cross-posting opportunities, training and development, and further education. Moreover, they also described the simplicity and complexity of how these systems are executed and governed.
This had an impact on their resentment or motivation level towards an organisation. Below are some examples. One particular talented employee (TE02) lost trust and became frustrated with the chain of command within his team management:

“... my line manager told me I will push for your promotion if you stay but [at the time] I also have proposed to team leader and I was promised that I could do my Ph.D. He accepted, but told me that we needed to discuss it with the line manager; the line manager told me okay I will give you the green light, but we need to talk to what is called the function head who is responsible for training... [I told them] I have only a short period, and I need to reply to another employer telling them whether I will join them or not. I didn’t get any reply or feedback while I was waiting, so I left.”

Talented employee TE17, on the other hand, compared two organisations’ cultures and systems. The reference is to bureaucracy, even with aspects which they think are simple and could improve business performance.

“.... [Company x] has this system of bureaucracy. For example, there, if you want to throw an idea, you have to prepare for it so much, I mean, it takes you so long. Here you can just knock on the door of your boss, say you have an idea, throw it on the table, and from tomorrow [next day] you can execute that plan. So, it is more like a cowboy style. Yeah. And even like getting promoted at [Company x], it isn't easy...you have to make a presentation and they interview you. In [Company y] it is different. The line manager will decide whether you deserve a promotion or not. Yeah, it is good and bad; if you have a line manager who doesn’t appreciate what you are doing, you don’t have other weapons that make you promoted, or something like that. In [Company x], it is a panel of people that will decide.... whether you get the promotion or not.”

Talented employee TE06 referred to the transparency and clarity of the systems:

“...if I moved to another company I would go to a company which has a better development system, better career development system... I would go to a company with a clear system.”

This was similar to the view put forth by talented employee TE02, who stated that:

“To me Company x is more transparent in terms of how they reflect on the end of year performance, how they decide on merit increase for salaries, how they calculate for bones, and how they handle staff promotions and progressing. In Company y, it's not transparent at
all, so employees sometimes feel it is not fair because the information in this company is not transparent and usually imposed on them by the HR department.”

4.2.1.5 CULTURE AND WORK STRUCTURE

Another key element which talented employees described and saw as affecting their perceptions of the employers was their organisational culture and work structure. Participants constantly made references on their satisfaction and gratification with employers who have international and a mix of staff with different cultural background. Moreover, they enjoy a team culture, where there are no hierarchical boundaries between them and members from senior and top management. Also, culture and work structure that allows them the opportunity to participate in decision making, and a culture of being a task and result oriented. The work structure and profile of other related departments is clear. The below extracts are examples of different experiences which talented employees have had with their organisations. Talented employee TE32 stated that the organisational culture and policy embraced by their employer is their preferred one.

“Our organisation culture is really good, and you can approach anyone from the CEO downwards, at any time, there’s an open-door policy.”

In addition to this, TE02 talked about the opportunity to make decisions, which is reflected in organisational culture and work structure.

“… Company x is very huge compared to [my current employer]. Here there is a chance in terms of decision making but in Company x the decision making is difficult even for team leaders. So, they don’t give you full load for decision making; here it is totally different, this field [oil and gas concession area] is yours, it is your decision, and this is your responsibility.”

This is similar to the opinion put forth by TE30, who commented on the organisation and its people-centred orientation:

“… to be honest, comparing this [organisation's] work environment with other work environments, I think you'll not find similar, in my personal opinion. I mean, how the team work, how the managers act with the employees, and the rules, because this [organisation]
keeps the staff as its aim, the employees their aim, how to make them reach their maximum potential to work.”

In addition, talented employee TE10 described the multi-national orientation and the exposure this brought to the work environment:

“I started as an operation geologist [looking] after Rig operations so it was cool, the environment... was really cooperative, multi-tasking, and also multi-national company. There were lots of US employees here, so we had a multi-cultural environment, from the university to the working environment, so it was really great.”

And finally, talented employee TE10 also added a comment about the difference experienced when joining other organisations. It is clear that talented employees are more focused on tasks rather than time.

“... for example, I had a boss that stayed for less than a year; he left the company, and he gave me the opportunity to join him at the new company. I went there, but I didn't like even the look of the building, you know like people were putting stamps for attendance and wouldn’t leave without stamping 'finger prints'. But here, this company is like a task-oriented company; it is not time-oriented.”

4.2.1.6 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT-CHALLENGING TASKS AND PROJECTS

It was clear that talented employees cater very much to their future employability. They considered learning and development to be the main pillars which sustain this. This included on the job training, work assignments, and challenging tasks and projects. Similarly, it included off-the-job training and development opportunities such as courses, workshops, and further education opportunities. For talented employees, these were perceived as very important for developing their expertise, which in turn improves their future employability. For example, the talented employees talked about their organisation’s different development and exposure options through which other talented employees can improve their future employability:

“... in the mid-year review we also look at their [employees] competencies to assess their gaps, then we look at how to bridge their gaps, through training courses, on-job training,
secondment, or short-term assignment in other organisations or within the organisation in other departments so as to expose that person to the knowledge and skills required to fill those competence gaps.”

TE02 discussed his choices of employer by referring to job enlargement and enrichment opportunities:

“... I always compare employers by job description... in Company x I was working on unconventional injection techniques and projects [used in oil fields for production] which are not applied in Company y.... they only have conventional injection techniques.... So with Company x, the job description or the scope is very heavy and it is of a higher level.... [However], I do not want to lower myself by doing the same tasks along the years. So, Company y give me a chance to be a senior engineer which included looking after junior engineers.”

TE05, on the other hand, described the opportunity and support for further education while still on the job:

“And by the time I completed a year, I had already applied for master studies online. My employer supported me in that. And so, for the next three years, I was working on my master and working for the company.”

However, TE12 described the effects which not having a challenging project had on his intention and decision to quit and move to another employer:

“...I think I was lucky at that time; that team needed to go through a field development plan and they wanted me to present this to the government and I was asked to prepare that work. So, thank Allah it went fine. But after I finished that project, I went back to the line manager and told him okay what is the plan now? I have finished this. What is my next step? He was unable to answer. He said I don’t know yet. So, at that time I said okay, I think it is the right time for me to move. And it was my decision to leave [Company x] and join [Company y].”

On the other hand, the statement made by TE11 was in stark contrast with that of TE12, thus highlighting the importance of having a challenging and interesting project...
“I got offers [to work for] different companies...I was happy with Company y because of the project. It’s a steam fluid project. Heavy oil.....which is not very common. That interested me......the Enhanced Oil Recovery [EOR].”

4.2.1.7 REWARDING AND RICH EXPERIENCE

Participants discussed careers which are rewarding and allows them to gain rich experience. Perhaps this is related to their passion on improving their future employability. They want to make sure that their jobs would eventually strengthen their competencies and grant them useful and condensed exposure which could draw them closer to becoming experts. This key element within the “Employer Brand” sub-theme showcases the benefits of ensuring that talented employees’ jobs are interesting and rewarding. It was clear that the satisfaction which comes from this encourages them to remain with their employer and take on greater roles and tasks which is beneficial for business performance. For instance, TE02 exquisitely described his surprise at the greater exposure to roles and different aspects of the business:

“I will be honest with you; when I moved to Company y I thought that I would not gain any experience but that was wrong... Though there are a smaller number of wells here, I got the chance to deal with geologists and look deeper into the operation. I also have the chance to make decisions... another advantage is that I am involved in meeting representatives from the ministry of oil and gas.”

Similarly, TE02 further adds to a following question and using a probe:

“... I was involved in preparing, for example, study scope, and preparing contracts. I also did technical evaluation for many companies including foreign companies. This is a chance I never got at Company x.”

Although TE05’s expertise was in IT-related fields, this talented employee was more interested in pursuing a career that would give her a rewarding and rich experience:

“... when I attended the interview, they discussed with me the job. It was something in the office which had to do with exciting geological information and being part of the corporate business of the company. I was able to continue my studies as a programmer and I felt like it
was a nice balance. I am not in the IT department, far from everything exciting that happens in the company, but I am still able to do what I like to do, which is programming.”

TE11 referred to selecting employers who had completed projects using Enhanced Oil Recovery techniques, as they are more rewarding to them:

“I got offers [to work for] different companies...I was happy with Company y because of the project. It’s a steam fluid project. Heavy oil.....which is not very common. That interested me......the Enhanced Oil Recovery [EOR].”

TE12 eloquently summed up the different exposure and rewarding experience which talented employees can reap by joining and working for that particular employer.

“I started with [Company x] because I had a scholarship [to do my BSc] from them. But I was happy working for them. I still think that [Company x] is a good place to work. The nicest thing about [Company x] is that they have a variety of challenges. In an oil company, you need to work in a sandstone environment, then a carbonate environment, then a stringer environment, then a tight rock then a gas. [Company x] has all of this. So, if you stay in Company x and follow what they publicised as their development plan for their staff, it would be excellent!!!”

hence, talented employees enjoy and excel when their careers and jobs are competency, rewarding, challenging, and experience rich ones.

### 4.2.2 TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ VALUE PROPOSITION- TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ IDENTITY

The second sub-theme of “Talented Employees' Value Proposition” is “Talented Employees Identity”. This sub-theme highlights some of the traits and characteristics that surfaced during data collection and mitigated how talented employees perceived their psychological contract breach and violation. It also describes why talented employees form unique types of psychological contract based on their personality, values, and ideologies. As such, understanding talented employees' identity clarifies some of the ambiguity surrounding “how they form their psychological contract”. On the other hand, this understanding becomes
another part of their value proposition, which means that organisations can do something about it to improve talent attraction and retention. Below are some of the key elements that reflect talented employees’ identity. These are supported by the quotes from the interviews.

4.2.2.1 TALENTED EMPLOYEES ARE VISIONARY AND KNOW WHAT THEY WANT

One of the traits I have noticed about talented employees is their ability to analyse and see the bigger picture. They usually know exactly what they want and plan ahead to achieve their goals. A good example of this is the statement made by TE18, who kept moving to different service companies within the sector until he landed an operator company job:

“I was looking for an opportunity to work for an operator company as a geologist... so I kept moving from one service company to another until I finally got the opportunity to work for [Company a]... because there was like an agreement between some companies that you cannot exchange employees...”

Another example is the experience of TE02, who was able to distinguish between the advantages talented employees can acquire with different employers:

“It’s not only job description but also, it’s about package... some guys sometimes call me for advice, they want to move from [Company x to Company y] ... so I ask them why do you want to move? If you are looking for a job description please stay there, but if you are looking for more than that, for example, to be in a higher position, for responsibility, or for better offer and package, then this is the place.”

TE23 chose a particular employer that could allow them to achieve their career aspirations:

“... So I wanted to be an expert in petrol engineering in general and become a Subject Matter Expert (SME) in reservoir engineering itself. So, I chose [Company x] because I know I can grow my career at [Company x]. I will have a lot of experience in oil and gas.”

On a different note, TE05 preferred to work with a bachelor degree instead of pursuing a master degree and without acquiring some experience, even though there was an opportunity to earn such experience:
"It was clear for us – my friends and I – that it was very difficult to get a job, having a master's degree with no job experience. You would receive high pay with no experience in the job market... And so, when I got the opportunity to do my master degree immediately after college, I just refused the opportunity and decided that I needed to get a job first...And then decide after I complete my master if I want to go to a university and teach, or if I like where I am and just continue doing what I am doing."

Along with knowing what they want, talented employees are also visionary; they tend to picture what options they have after a certain number of years and what they could be doing, as well as how to achieve that. So, they look at their current careers as spring boards and stepping stones to accomplish that future vision.

Below is an interesting quote from talented employee TE05:

"...career wise I thought maybe one day I would be working in an educational institution; you know, a university or something. I wanted one day to give back to the society, and in order to do that I would need to have a degree, to teach, for example, in a university. So, I thought if I wanted to have that opportunity later on in my career I would do my masters. PhD is something I also wanted to do, but PhD is not easy to do part-time. Many universities require you to have a full-time offer for two years or three or four, doing your PhD, and for now I am not ready for full-time studies. I still want to work."

Hence, the decisions talented employees make with regards to joining and changing employers is partially embedded on their vision of what they would like to become after certain number of years or how to build a career profile along the years to achieve their personal aspirations after some career years. This could interfere with their perceptions of psychological contract formation and equally affect how they perceive their psychological contract to have been fulfilled, breached, or violated. This is so because it may be that an employer has not created or triggered perceptions of violation or breach and yet the talented employee decides to leave to meet his/her career, social, or personal aspirations that they think are no longer reciprocated by their current or even certain prospect employers in the market.
4.2.2.2 TALENTED EMPLOYEES TAKE INITIATIVE

Similar to the first trait, Initiative was a quality which emerged from many of the talented employees’ statements; they justified their perseverance in developing and overcoming challenges in learning and initiatives. One example is the statement made by TE05, who stated:

“Well as long as I am here, I will try to develop myself. Training is not the only way to develop yourself. You could take a few hours each day to read an article or watch a video online. I also found out a few online websites that offer online training, I briefly negotiated with the company about getting subscribed to those websites where many videos will be available and they were very interested.”

Additionally, TE10 resented simply complaining without attempting to make an effort on a personal level in order to improve or change the underlying situation:

“... this company is not a spoon-feeder... there are [employees] who keep grumbling about training. They want stuff, but they don’t have a plan; they say nobody is looking after us, but I think [employees] need to understand the system of the company itself. Company y is not a spoon-feeder... if you understand the mentality of the organisation you will be able to work throughout.”

On a similar note, TE05 reiterated the thoughts of TE10, although their disciplines and experiences are quite different:

“... personally, I believe I have to look for training opportunities; the thing is that it’s not that easy. In general, I believe we lack advanced training opportunities in Oman for my field. We do need to look wider, maybe abroad like the UAE, UK, Indonesia and other countries, but not in Oman. For that reason, training could be a little bit expensive and logistically speaking it’s very hard to organise; I need to look for tickets, visas and so on.”

Similarly, TE29 revealed a desire to learn more and develop further, even when they have reached the top positions at their companies. This is governed by their pride and perception of self-significance.

“...in 2014, I thought I’d reached the peak of experience and development in this position... chief accountant was the highest position in the subsidiary, so that’s why I requested a change,
and to be moved to the corporate department to have more exposure to different experiences.

I wanted to move out of my comfort zone, and to have a different type of challenge.”

Therefore, talented employees do not necessarily wait to be told what to do or where to go if they had concerns on their career or learning and development. Instead they can sometimes be opportunistic and create their own solutions and opportunity to overcome the challenge they are on. This could mean that during instances of psychological contract breach or violation, talented employees may not show clear reaction but rather an action to solve matters associated with breach or violation.

4.2.2.3 TALENTED EMPLOYEES HAVE 'PRIDE' AND PERCEIVED SELF SIGNIFICANCE

In terms of initiative, it was also evident from the interviews that talented employees have pride in themselves. This, in some ways, was satisfying for them as they felt it was important to their teams and organisations. This translated as an obligation for them to continue delivering high-quality and high-performance work. Below are a number of examples. For instance, TE10’s pride surfaced when describing his significance to the project and organisation:

“Because I was holding a project, the project was [liaised with an international company], so from 2011-2014 I was the only guy who knew the ins and outs of that project, it’ll be a loss for the team lead and the company.”

In contrast, the tone of TE11 reflected the contentment that this talented employee experienced when working on a unique project:

“The project that I am on now is very unique in the oil industry, not only in Oman but worldwide, because it is a carbonate formation and they are using steam... steam flood project in a carbonate. Most common is that they inject steam at high temperatures into sandstone formation, but injecting steam in carbonate is quite challenging, because you have a lot of factors that impact the production, like high risk of water production...which we don’t want.”

Here, we encounter a different pride which TE05 experienced when an employment offer was made and followed through by the employer. The perception of feeling valued and important was alluring.
“well back then, I don’t remember exactly if I did apply to [Company y] or not. Maybe once at a career fair at Sultan Qaboos University while I was still a student, but I don’t remember. What I remember is receiving a phone call from a recruiter, a HR person from [Company y] who wanted me to send over my CV for a job opportunity or opening. A few months later, they called me for an interview. A few months later, I received a phone call with the job offer.”

A similar experience was had by an experienced talented employee (TE12):

“I didn’t apply, I was offered the job. A colleague of mine was working here [Company y] and he asked me to give him my CV and then I was called for an interview and I was offered the job.”

According to TE21, once a decision to move ahead to a new employer has come about, then pride will not let them go back, even when the current employers reveal their significance to the organisation and explicitly request that they stay and grant them better offers.

“... [the] president of [Sultan Qaboos University] called me and said I will not accept your resignation. Come [let’s] sit we’ll discuss. I know why you want to leave and we’ll be fair with you, PhD... granted for you, promotion... will give it to you. I said sorry I will not accept your offer, I am leaving.”

Probably one of the commonly observed trait with participants is the pride and perceived self-significance as they report their status and ability to switch between employers. Equally, the literature makes inferences on similar aspects as these participants described See Section 3. 2. These are as well surface under Section 6.2. This sense of significance as participants indicated could become a strong motivator for talented employees discretionary efforts and tenure as they associate the identification of their significance and opportunities with obligations to deliver better. Hence, it could lead to psychological contract fulfilment if carefully managed or it may become a contender should the talented employee decides to leave their employers.

4.2.2.4 TALENTED EMPLOYEES ARE MATURE AND HOLD IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Talented employees tend to balance their emotions, and before complaining or reacting to an undesired situation, they prefer to understand the situation and assess whether something
can be done about it. Here it is fitting to refer to the example of TE05, who advocated efforts to solve problems with training instead of complaining or becoming upset.

“... personally, I believe I have to look for training opportunities; the thing is that it’s not that easy. In general, I believe we lack advanced training opportunities in Oman for my field. It’s not easy to find a good course or a good training institution or things like that. We do need to look wider, maybe abroad like the UAE, UK, Indonesia and other countries, but not in Oman. For that reason, training could be a little bit expensive and logistically speaking it’s very hard to organise. I need to look for tickets, visas and so on. I believe that the training department does have the same issue that I have; it’s not easy to find training for people like me in Oman.”

On the contrary, TE05 felt that it was impossible to trust the organisation when some employees were being laid off:

“... so far, they are good with me, but I don’t really trust companies; they do what’s best for them eventually – I mean the highest part of the hierarchy, the people who make the strategies. As an example, within the current oil crises, they did let a lot of people go, even though they were high performers and very good, but with a high salary. It’s always better to let go a high salary person rather than five lower salary employees, and sometimes you could be unlucky and be chosen to be the unfortunate one.”

Another trait that was observed among talented employees was their ideological consciousness on certain occasions and justifications and decisions. This was overwhelming, as it appeared to be a game changer in mitigating what would otherwise be perceived as a psychological contract violation and its consequential implications. An example of this is the experience of TE02, which is seen below:

“I said it is okay I will forget this one [PC-Violation]. I will focus on 2015 and it is all good, what’s given from Allah [GOD] is good. So, it is as well something about belief you know. Belief is the ideology and creed of a person. So, for instance, this has already happened but we now need to look for what’s coming. I need to look for reasons. so, when we look for reasons then okay I will say okay I will start a new year and I will put more effort and Allah [GOD] will assist me in succeeding, so we need to take into consideration the reasons for success and act upon them.”
Another example can be seen with TE05; for this participant, career aspiration is not solely self-centred but will be realised after giving back to the society which formed a long-term obligation beyond the employment relationship:

“... career wise I thought maybe one day I would be working in an educational institution you know a university or something. I wanted one day to give back to the society, and in order to do that I would need to have a degree, to teach, for example in a university.”

Hence, talented employees are conscious about their principles and values which gauges their motivation towards the decisions they make. This also could potentially mitigate their perceptions of psychological contract breach and violation by relating their career challenges and problems to a greater good and assessing the trade-offs before deciding on departure. It can thus be concluded that it is important for employers to understand these traits of talented employees in order to align, where possible, their organisation’s values and have corporate social responsibility that could satisfy some of the talented employees’ extrinsic aspirations. Moreover, talented employees are likely to appreciate employers’ efforts to meet their needs and aspirations. This could substantially mitigate potential perceptions of psychological contract breach and violation. It could also pave talented employees’ schema into creating a positive psychological contract, which subsequently improves attraction and retention of current and prospective talents.

4.2.3 INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS - WAR FOR TALENT

It was found that talented employees are sensitive to cultural norms and take advantage of the war of talent when it intensifies in the market. The results revealed that employers who can win the war for talent and are aware of the regulations and respond to cultural norms are better off when it comes to attracting and retaining their talented employees. This operates as a significant value proposition, as it can create a positive employment experience for the talented employees. Here it is fitting to refer to the comments of participant TE32. This participant spoke of their organisation’s achievement in Omanization, which is one of the pressing regulations imposed and encouraged by the Oman Government:
“we managed to achieve 90% Omanization, and last year, we won the trophy for the best Omanization company in the oil and gas industry.”

TE06, on the other hand, revealed their awareness of the war for talent between certain employers and the employment opportunities available during that time:

“...so there was competition between them for labour, for engineers and professionals. Most of them were moving from [Company x to Company y] because there was a big difference between the package between [Company x and Company y] ... they told me if you leave for Company y we will never take you back. There were people in 'other leading roles' who told me if I go to 'so and so company' we will never take you back later.... during that period Company x was losing a lot of good employees to Company y.”

Similarly, TE10 revealed their awareness of the war for talent between certain employers and the politics of employment change between employers, which impacts on talented employees' ability to switch their employers:

“I got a job offer from [Company a], and it was a really good offer in terms of position because it was like a team lead, senior position, acting team lead until I prove myself, and then I’ll be a senior geologist. But at that time between [Company a and Company y], there was a gentlemen's agreement... the two companies' heads [employers] should agree on the move of employees [between them], so Allah [GOD] forgives them for communicating before I even accepted or declined, and I lost that chance.”

For talented employees, entering into a family life changes their views on further education, switching employers, priorities, and working far away or longer hours. Hence, employers having flexible options in this regards so as to attract and retain their talented employers better. One of the reasons why TE05 chose a demanding employer was the fact that he was single at the time:

“... I chose Company y because of the salary; it was a higher pay. I knew it would require me to work longer hours, but when you are a fresh graduate with nothing to worry about, no family, no kids, nothing matters. You are ready to work nine hours at the company.”

A similar concern was related to balancing education requirements, family and social needs, and work requirements, as explained by TE05:

154
“... it is easier to do it [pursue further education] when you don’t have family, obligations. I wasn’t married back then. It was an easy decision, because if you work full time nine hours at the company and then you have to spend another two hours doing a research almost every day, what time do you have left for your family, and your social obligations? And when you are living in Oman, you definitely have social obligations, almost every day.”

With TE27, there was a sense of appreciation, as the employer considered their state of well-being at a sensitive period in their career:

“...when I moved to marketing after a couple of months I figured out that I was pregnant, so he [my manager] was shocked! I told him, I am not saying that I will not travel [overseas] but please I am pregnant, maybe I will have difficulty in eating some foods. So, I went with them; it was very smooth trip and when we came back he was talking highly about me.”

Participant TE10 viewed having a differential package as a strong motive to switch employers after one has a family or attains a higher social status:

“even when my boss asked me, are you going to leave Company y for any reason, I told him if the difference in income from the other company is above 50% I’ll leave, because it’s common sense. We work for our families, to support our social status, to guarantee our future...”

Hence, to recap, the theme 'Talented Employees' Value Proposition' answers the research question, which asked: how do talented employees' form their psychological contract? The above Sections discussed the main sub-themes, including “Employer Brand”, “Talented Employees’ Identity”, and “Institutional Features and Cultural Characteristics”. Moreover, these Sections also presented the quotes and extracts corresponding to the key elements. According to participants and their claims, these sub-themes clearly influenced their perceptions of the potential exchange relationships and mitigation of psychological contract breach and violation. Moreover, the content of the theme also clearly revealed the ability of some employers to attract and retain talented employees and consequently win the war of talent. The following Section will discuss the illustrated findings for this theme, and the relevant literature reviewed.


4.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS FROM THEME ONE

The findings under this theme relates to claims made by Coyle-Shapiro et al. (2008), Conway and Briner (2009), as well as, more recently, Briner (2016). According to these scholars, there has been concern and ambiguity surrounding the formation process of psychological contract and the currencies of exchange. In other words, this relates to how individuals form their psychological contract and the content of the exchange relationship. Furthermore, these concerns have called for qualitative research in the fields of psychological contract in order to better understand psychological contract as perceived by the individuals in the contract themselves, and the content these individuals exchange and expect in return (Conway and Briner, 2005; Rousseau, 2001).

The literature has certainly identified some of the antecedents for psychological contract which affect the state of the psychological contract (Guest and Conway, 1997; Guest, 2004; Rousseau and Robinson, 1994). However, there were ambiguity surrounding the process and tools used in capturing these antecedents in quantitative research, which assumes that these are a priori, explicit constructs, and not necessarily contractual. Indeed, this has led to questions regarding the extent to which these studies, and many more, actually capture and represent the psychological contract or merely expectation, which is not necessarily contractual. On the other hand, there is ambiguity related to how talented employees are defined and identified, as argued by Collings and Mellahi (2009) and Dries (2013) among others; this influence how well employees optimise the value they create and assist organisations' capacity to retain them.

In response, this doctoral thesis first ensured that participants were carefully selected, in order to present the perspective of talented employees' (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). Secondly, the qualitative design allowed participants to explicate their own opinions on, and impressions of, the contract. Hence, the findings were actively associated with a second party in the contract (the employer) and were highly associated with future expectations. These findings, as presented in the Sections above (4.3.1-4.3.3) are therefore considered
Antecedents for psychological contract formation and equally influence the attitude and behaviour of talented employees towards their employer.

Similarly, the literature on HR and talent management made reference to employee value proposition (Michaels et al., 2001; CIPD, 2011). The emphasis, however, was not on psychological contract, but rather on designing and delivering a promising and rewarding value proposition that employees would relate to and be attracted to. While no clear connection was made between this value proposition and how psychological contracts are formed, the findings of the present research revealed that there is a relationship between them. Hence, the name of the theme “Talented Employee Value Proposition” revealed how talented employees associate employer brand with their aspirations and expect to fulfil these aspirations and expectations during their employment period. Hence, this theme still influences talented employees’ attitude and behaviour, but also acts as an antecedent to the formation of their psychological contract. This theme, as mentioned in Section 4.3, is an emergent one and was not anticipated, as further clarified below. The literature has paid little or no attention to the relationship between the value proposition of talented employees and their psychological contract.

This finding is unique, not only because it answers one of the research questions, but also because it extends the knowledge in multiple ways. Firstly, it claims that the value proposition is articulated not only by organisations, but also by the individuals themselves, and the context. The examined literature (Barrow, 2005; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Martin and Cerdin, 2014) argues that employer branding is and will become increasingly significant in attracting and retaining employees. This doctoral thesis supports the claims made in the literature, but also extends the knowledge by linking the findings and showcasing the dynamics of employer brand with regard to a particular context and sector, namely Oman’s oil and gas sector. Similarly, the findings, as described in Section 4.3.1 and Section 4.3.3, categorise and include a variety of elements feeding into the existing knowledge of creating strong employer brand and other linking features of the contexts. This is one way in which the value proposition has been articulated in this study, through the organisations and the context.
The second way in which the value proposition is articulated – a method which has only been discovered in this doctoral thesis – is with 'identity'. This is another significant finding which has emerged from the present doctoral thesis. On one hand, the existing literature concerning psychological contract has shown that there is a strong correlation between identity and personality (Raja et al., 2004; Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004; Metz et al., 2016). On the other hand, the literature on talent management has been struggling to establish a concise definition of talent and the identification of talented employees (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2014) but rather suggests that it is contextually driven. As such, the findings of this research (see Chapter 3 on sample characteristics) and particularly Section 4.3.1 and Section 4.3.2, provide the contextual features of talented employees.

The results also highlight these employees’ unique traits, and showcase how such traits influence the formation and the state of their psychological contract. In this thesis, the identity of talented employees was discovered and understood through their employment experience and unique reaction to psychological contract violation and breach incidents as they remained positive instead of burning out as the literature suggested. Moreover, in some other instances, where there was no breach or violation of psychological contract, these talented employees still left their employer, as they were driven by their character and identity, which meant that they aspired to obtain rewarding experiences and achieve continuous development.

This research could therefore be considered one of the few studies that has explained the personality of talented employees and provided an insight into their daily employment experience in Oman’s oil and gas sector within a specific time frame. Hence, more research is required to investigate talented employees’ identity and how this influences their psychological contract within different contexts and work groups. The last articulation of the value proposition is related to contextual factors. The researcher carefully linked the contextual features which influence talented employees’ psychological contract formation and its state under Section 4.3.3 Some of these features have been examined in different literature concerning culture (Al-Hamadi and Budhwar, 2006; Moideenkutty et al., 2011; Aycan et al., 2007), and institutional theories (Scott, 2005; Sidani and Al Ariss, 2014).
However, they have not been directly correlated with talented employees and there is a limitation with regard to research on the oil and gas sector and Oman.

Hence, with reference to the above findings, and specifically regarding the nature of the research context, the following could be discussed in more detail, while making reference to findings on identity and employer brand. The GCC countries, according to the Word Bank (2008 cited by Raheem, 2016) are considered resource-rich, labour-poor countries compared to countries such as Egypt and Jordan. Historically, and as noted by Raheem (2016), nationals within the GCC would prefer to work for the public sector rather than the private sector. Culturally speaking, it is held that nationals in the GCC pay attention to their social status which they associate with the type of job and its social context (Raheem, 2016).

Consequently, employment in the public sector is regarded as prestigious compared to the private sector, as noted by Raheem (2016, p. 67):

> One’s role and social interactions within it affect the social status of the employee, and thus the type of work and industry of employment are of importance beyond the organisational setting (Mellahi, 2007). The drive to obtain the prestige and comfort of a public sector job essentially created a ‘rentier mentality’, where income is a result of the situation and not proportionate to the efforts exerted (Winkler, 2010; Shaham, 2009).

However, the findings of the present study show that this was not the case with the talented employees. They perceived employment in the private sector, and specifically the oil and gas sector, as a rewarding and a preferred one, as emphasised in Section 4.3 and Section 4.3.1. This was highly associated with their value proposition and personality traits. The willingness and passion to learn and develop prevails that of a routine and relaxed jobs, which is one of the characteristics they associated with public sector employment. This was very salient, with participants perceiving themselves as equally important and valued in the oil and gas sector and other sectors, such as the banking, telecommunication sector, and the wider public sector. Moreover, this opinion could be due to the fact that these employees viewed themselves and the type of job (See Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 for participants’ profile) as significant to the business’s ‘Core & Supporting’; however, they also regarded the sector as a prestigious one due to its economic significance and its development compared to the public and other competing sectors.
On a different note, this research is not comparative, and thus it does not investigate or report the opinions of talented employees who are working elsewhere. However, some of the participants have had some experience working in a number of sectors other than the oil and gas sector, including the public, military, automobile, and brokerage sectors, among others. They were also asked about their opinion on other sectors, including the prominent ones such as the banking and telecommunications sectors. Their answers revealed a preference for the oil and gas sector. This can be interpreted in two main ways; firstly, the oil and gas sector and these organisations have been able to attract, develop, and retain their talents. Secondly, these talented employees realise and perpetuate their significance and the value they bring to their organisations and employers. This responds to speculation within the literature on talented employees' ability to shift the power balance from their employer to the employee through their significance. This also coincides with the claims made by Raheem (2016, p. 70), “Locals who are highly qualified and have the needed skills enjoy multiple offers and find employment with greater ease (Alzalabani, 2002)”.

Organisations will have to invest considerably in order to attract, develop, and retain these national talents, as they are scarce in this context (Raheem, 2016).

Thus, the above discussion demonstrated how talented employees form their psychological contract and the implications of the value proposition for their employment choices. The originality of this value proposition is further emphasised by referring to the elements and the role identified under employer brand and talented employees' identity in forming their psychological contract and mitigating perceptions of breach and violation in their psychological contract. The role of context was highly associated with their employment choice and their impression of the sector, which informs the content of their prospect and current psychological contract. Overall, the value proposition argued for in this research study is considered novel in terms of the way it cross-links talented employees literature and relates to psychological contract theory.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY
This Chapter began by describing the modified thematic analysis applied in the present study. It then illustrated, in great detail, the development of themes along the stages of data analysis, from the initial themes up to reporting the fine-tuned themes. The Chapter then presented the final thematic map and described the themes and their sub-themes. This was followed by a detailed and wide-reaching description of theme 1 (“Talented Employees' Value Proposition”), and its sub-themes. The compelling quotes and their interpretations were included to support each sub-theme and key elements thereafter. Finally, the Chapter moved to discuss the above-mentioned theme. It has stressed the emergent findings associated with the theme, and specifically employer brand and talented employees' identity. In addition, the discussion made reference to the relevant literature concerning the implications of the context for talented employees' psychological contract and value proposition.

The next Chapter will describe and discuss the remaining themes (“The Talent Deal” and “Dynamics of Talented Employees Psychological Contract”) of this doctoral thesis.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE TALENT DEAL AND DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT - FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5.1</th>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>163</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>THE TALENT DEAL</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>THE TALENT DEAL- TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND IMPLICATIONS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>THE TALENT DEAL- THE ROLE OF PROMISES, EXPECTATIONS, AND OBLIGATIONS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>TALENT DEAL- EMERGENT TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1</td>
<td>PC-FULFILLMENT</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2</td>
<td>PC-BREACH</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3</td>
<td>PC-VIOLATION</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4</td>
<td>MITIGATING- PC BREACH AND PC VIOLATION</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>DISCUSSION OF THEME TWO AND THEME THREE</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the researcher described the findings under the first overarching theme, namely 'talented employees' value proposition'. Subsequently, the chapter argued and discussed how they integrate with the existing knowledge in literature and the contribution that is made through the revelations of talented employees. In this chapter, the researcher begins by describing the two remaining themes which answer the remaining research questions. Each theme is presented and described independently. They are interpreted using extracts and quotes from the data. The chapter then moves to the discussion section where it argues and elaborates the knowledge and contribution that has been achieved from the two themes against the existing literature. The chapter then readdresses the relationship between the three themes as depicted in Figure 4.5 towards the end of Chapter 4. Finally, the chapter summarises the overall thesis and reiterates the main findings and contribution. This is followed by a discussion of the research limitations and potential areas for future research under the limitations and recommendations sub-heading.

5.2 THE TALENT DEAL

This overarching theme mainly corresponds to the content of talented employees' psychological contract. In other words, the currencies of exchange which talented employees perceive and believe are agreed upon between them and their employer i.e. what they are obligated to do for their employer and what their entitlements are in return (Rousseau, 1995; Guest and Conway, 1997; Herriot, 2001). Additionally, this theme describes the micro-process of psychological contract formation. That is, the moments, incidents, events, and situations when talented employees perceived and/or believed that their employer has communicated or promised them whether explicitly or implicitly a return on their efforts and contribution to the team, department, or the organisation. I therefore define 'talent deal' as

'The currencies of exchange which talented employees believe or perceive to have been communicated between them and their employer as part of their psychological contract formation and reciprocation process' (Author, 2017)
Hence this 'talent deal' theme is related to the previous theme in that the previous theme discussed in Chapter 4, 'talented employee value proposition' serves as an antecedent to the formation process and also as a mitigating mechanism on how talented employees perceive a change in the state of their psychological contract (see Sections 4.2 and 4.3 of Chapter 4). With respect to the research questions, this theme answers the following questions; 'how do talented employees form their psychological contract?' This theme also answers the research question on 'what constitutes talented employees' psychological contract.'

The next section will dismantle the talent deal theme into its main sub-themes and describe them in greater details and interpret the compelling quotes which resemble them. Following the fine-tuning process of the developed sub-themes from Chapter 3, the sub-themes 'mutuality' and 'pre and early employment' have been merged to the newly sub-themes below based on their similarity and suitability. Thus, the following are the finalised sub-themes that together make up the talent deal theme:

1. Talent Identification and Implications on Psychological Contract Formation
2. The Role of Promises, Expectations, and Obligations on Psychological Contract Formation
3. Emergent Talented Employees' Psychological Contract

5.2.1 THE TALENT DEAL- TALENT IDENTIFICATION AND IMPLICATIONS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION

This is the first sub-theme under the theme 'talent deal'. In order to understand the content of talented employees' psychological contract it is important to understand how talented employees’ resonate with and react when they are identified and labelled as talented by their employers. As this was one of the main research gaps, participants were asked during the interview whether they knew whether they were considered talented by their employer and whether it affected their psychological contract in particular and the employment relationship in general. The data analysis (see Chapter 4, Section 4.10 under 'Modified Thematic Analysis') revealed how talented employees resonated with talent identification
and its implication on their psychological contract. Their feedback and answers formed unique patterns which were grouped together under this sub-theme.

Commenting with their identification and labelling, some participants stated that they were explicitly informed of being labelled as talented; others explained how they implicitly perceived this through the attention received from their employer, while others knew they were talented because their employer explicitly communicated it to them and they simultaneously deduced it implicitly through decisions and actions made on their careers. This, as they claimed was through development opportunities, end of year performance review ranking, responsibility assigned to them by their line managers, exposure to unique projects, via their position and contribution, or a mixture of those aspects. Here, TE02 explains his awareness of being talented by word of mouth, through end of year review, by handling extra roles, and the valuable exposure to top management:

‘... I have been told and I’ve been recognised through what is called IPF, it is the individual performance factor. I was told [I am talented] in 2007 and also in 2011 where I’ve been given a role to coordinate forecast for whole [location a] fields in Oman... [it also meant] that I was in contact with the directors...’

Whereas, TE33 suggests that it is not always explicit but rather less explicit means that are used, for example by highlighting that a particular employee is a potential candidate to take future positions or appreciating the efforts exerted towards solving a problem:

‘...clearly not [word] 'talent' but they might give indication that you are a potential candidate to take this position... it all goes back to the line manager sometimes just the fact that he thanks you and you did a good job and say that you did a good job in front of people it's all saying indirectly I am talented. See they do not have to say the word itself but just showing appreciation...’

This talented employee (TE02) realised he is talented through his line manager's evaluation and ranking but was not explicitly informed.

‘In [company b] I have not been directly told that I am talented. I knew it through my ranking by my team leader who recognised me’
Another participant TE32 commended on the role of his manager and how it indicated to him that he was among the ones considered talented.

‘I mean for me my managers used to tell me but informally, so it wasn’t something formal that TE32 you are a high potential in our organisation and will make sure to retain you, no, however I sensed it in terms of my progression, also my manager had a role, be it in developing me, be it in requesting those promotion...’

This talented employee TE11 realised that he is considered talented because of the significance reflected by his employer towards his efforts and work. Also, by offering him the opportunity to work on an assignment overseas called 'cross-posting'.

‘... you can feel it [identified as talent] like when they select you to present to partners or to like high level presentations...and they ask for presentation slides which you prepared...They directly asked if I was interested [in the cross-posting assignment], and they had like a group of four or five candidates....and they selected two....yeah...two out of five...’

Hence, these employees sensed their importance to their employer and were consequently aware that they were talented, which significantly contributed to the formation of their unique psychological contract. Similarly, on identification, some talented employees were also aware of how their organisations identified and labelled talented employees. They made references to and discussed about the talent management system which existed in their organisations including the competency matrix, succession plan, individual development plan, and psychometric tests and individual assessments, performance management systems, and current estimate potential. Through these, employers identify high potential and high performers who are subsequently considered talented by their employers. Here is an example of implicit talent identification through development opportunities as TE32 justifies;

‘... Succession planning is not normally communicated to staff, however you will get to know, because you will get through lots of development, you would know that, I mean it’s not explicit that you will know that I’m a high potential but you will get to know because you will get lots of development...’
Equally expressed by TE33, talented employees would sense their importance to employers by grooming them and preparing them for critical positions internally or with business partners:

‘... We have the other part which is the succession planning, we identify and select the guys with less competency gaps... we sense the readiness of these employees to move to leadership positions or to be selected even in other business units [outside Oman], maybe [western county overseas] maybe [neighbouring country], maybe other business units where they have vacancies and we have the potential right here, they can move to these business units’

Furthermore, TE34 describes the process of succession planning practiced at his organisation as part of talent identification mechanism.

‘Succession planning depends on key positions rather than people and we have a matrix with these positions in place. Then we look at the position profile in terms of competency requirements including years of experience, skills, type of experience, education, etc. Then we see if we have candidates internally and check their readiness to undertake the position and if there are any gaps to be filled against number of years. If we have to look externally [for candidates] we close it. Then we revise the list every six months. Of course, succession planning is a confidential document and only the management team with HR and few selected staff are involved. We of course take feedback from each department while doing so.’

Comparatively, talented employee TE32 discusses how talented employees are identified as an outcome of an integrated process involving the use of the 9 Box Grid:

‘...so if you look at succession planning, it’s the umbrella of all these; performance management will go to the succession planning, the high potential identification will go to the succession planning. I mean you know the 9 Box Grid looks at the high potential and performance so those two elements lead to coming to the picture because you might have a high potential yet not performing well maybe he is in the wrong role maybe now it’s time to change his role, so we will look at it, so you see all of this will come to the succession planning. In our succession planning we’ve identified the critical roles; what are the critical roles to manage them.’
Succession planning is therefore an important feeder to talent management and identification mechanism although it is secretly conducted by the employer. It signals the privilege and importance a talent employee resonates with as employers invest in them for future critical roles for the business. Therefore, talented employees would usually be high performers with high potential; this is exactly what TE33 confirms in terms of identifying high potential, top performance using the competency matrix.

‘...high potential [means] you see people who are proactive, those who come with solutions, and run for things; they are not waiting for others to tell them what to do... also, we have individual development plan based on competency, so those employees who are having less gaps, then these guys are ready to move forward to the next step, these are more talented than the others... we have competencies for each and every targeted job, most of the functions specially technical functions we have competency matrix, which have all the knowledge skills and attitude need to be to perform the job successfully...’

Talented employee TE31 exquisitely elaborates with examples on who is talented and advised that most wanted talented employees’ are those whose skills/talents match those required by the core of the business.

‘we are looking for basically someone who is able to innovate which is one of the company values and someone who is able to provide an excellent job with high quality which is the second value of the company and someone who has the communication skills that will enable him to sell and maintain the services outside with the clients I will summarise the talent description into these three but there are very talented people but they are not matching the three that I have mentioned but they are talented but maybe not the type of talent that the organisation wants... For example, excellent graphic design skills we will need this talent but on a very small scale compared to the consulting skills or talent... so, if you have someone who is very excellent in IT programming because this is not part of the core business of our organisation it’s not going to be that much helpful, you might have and need that competency or talent from time to time but it’s not going to happen frequently

In a similar vein, TE33 confirms that talented employees are those working for the core and are mostly technical oriented disciplines rather than support disciplines:
‘... In our succession planning we’ve identified the critical roles; what are the critical roles to manage them... being in the oil and gas sector, we usually look at the technical roles as critical to be honest, but it’s a mix I’d say two-third would be technical and the third nontechnical [support].’

Hence, the above excerpts clearly indicate that talented employees are those working in the core of the business and/or holding critical posts. Hence, they can sense and realise their inclusion to the talent pool by their roles and critical positions which subsequently informs their psychological contracts. Importantly, the process of identifying talents is not a straightforward one and requires cooperation between different actors in the organisation. It has been observed that tensions may occasionally arise among these actors as they disagree on labelling some candidate employees talented. This is echoed by interviewees as expressed in the following excerpts. This talented employee viewed talent identification role as a balance between HR and other departments. Assertively speaking TE33 said

‘we in the HR we don't judge people you know we take their history... in terms of their performance we see their history, what they have done, what they have achieved in the previous years, or know in terms of development, where have we [so far] placed them according to their level... we are depending on the direct manager and the function head to conduct these and send the reports to us. So whatever we gave them it is not us as HR build it, it is their senior peers those in senior positions, those who are experienced, know the job, and know what they need to do in order to reach to that level...’

Almost verbatim to earlier comments, TE34 refers to line managers as the main actors identifying employees as talented or not. He argues that:

‘... Because, see at the end of the day, appraisal or whatever it is, the line manager should own it because he is closer to his team. And the HR as you know, they design the process, put the criteria and everything and that is left to the line manager. HR is there at the time of ranking to ensure that things are moving smoothly and there is no favouritism and all of these things...’

TE33 further emphasised these statements by adding:

‘mainly... the department managers are the ones Identifying either this person is a talent or not based on competencies, based on the abilities, leadership skills, capabilities of that
employee, the way he is presenting, his work with his manager, his commitment, all these factors is helping the managers to say if this employee a potential or not. So we are focusing a lot on highfliers, consider them as a talented but as an HR we are just getting the feedback on them, then we initiate the discussion if there is a need for clarification or justification, but it is all the time the department management themselves who are identifying if this employee is talented or not.’

On the other hand, TE31 argues that proper talent identification depends on selecting individuals whose qualities are aligned with the organisational strategies. This is achieved by applying proper tests to understand the qualities of each candidate employee.

‘...we have assessments which include two psychometric tests; personality assessment and ability assessment, which should be followed by an interview with one of our psychologists just to verify the results of the assessment and then summarise all of the findings of the assessment team into an easy to read report to be submitted to the line managers. This is basically just to identify who is the talent which is going to be aligned with our organisational culture, because we are aiming to have our own culture and we want to make sure that we are recruiting those people who have at least the essentials’

Furthermore, actors occasionally challenge one another to justify why they believe that certain talented employees have or lack the potential to reach higher or lower job groups in the future. All this would have implications on the development plans targeted at those specific talented employees as part of their succession plan. A number of quotes echo the sum of these concerns, TE34 for instance agitatedly responded:

‘...this is why there is an HR committee, if we talk about performance appraisal in particular, it is not one man decision, so usually line managers are challenged, if we feel we for example, that he has given somebody above what he deserves we challenge him, vice-versa also, if we feel that why a particular guy got low, we challenge him also , and we won't change anything unless he gives us justification during that meeting, the ranking session meeting, to justify what he did and sometimes we give him tough time, we tell him that we feel that MR. X or Z are not in line with others, why or why not, can you give us explanation, sometimes we give him 2 or 3 days to go and think and look at the list again and find out...’
While TE33 succinctly elaborated on this by stating that it is not a single man's call but rather different members' collective efforts that lead to the appropriate talent identification:

‘... sometimes the RM [Reservoir Management] team manager will not have the full knowledge of [his team members] specialisations like petro physics for example. So we have the function role whereby the lead in the petro physics will be responsible of development for those employees [in different RMT]. So now, HR, the direct manager, and the function lead are all involved in defining where this guy [particular employee] stands today and where he can be in the future. So, it's different factors... we see what has [s/he] in previous years achieved in terms of performance, [moreover,] will ask their direct manager [does] he have potential you know to grow, what is he lacking right now, and compare this against the competency matrix for that function [discipline]. For each function, you know the leads/managers in each function the managers, they are involved in creating competency matrix for all key roles across the organisation all the way to the [top management]...’

Therefore, proper talented employee identification entails the cooperation ad integration of multiple actors and departments in an organisation. The payoff is substantial as employees make sense of these efforts during their inclusion and the development and attention that would be reflected by their line managers and related departments in managing their career progression and training needs. This subsequently informs their psychological contract and becomes a strong trigger which sparks their perceived obligations towards and perceived expectations from their employer. Hence, it informs their 'talent deal'. Below, more examples reflecting interviewees' views on being identified as talented are described. This talented employee, TE27 explained that their organisation adapts an exclusive talent management approach where they identify a particular few on the accelerated development scheme which she was on. She soon realises that she is considered a high potential candidate:

‘I was supposed to move each 6 months to a different section but because they had shortage at one of the sections which I started on they kept me longer which delayed my actual development plan. When I talked to them they said we are short of staff maybe we will keep you here, you are doing very good, you are a potential section head here...’

Upon understanding how the identification has influenced talented employees' psychological contract in terms of their perceived obligations to and entitlements from the employer, a
consensus from participants explained their amusement and contentment when they first knew about this inclusion. Once they knew this from their line manager or through their team leader they formed a unique psychological contract. It was reinforced when employers walked the talk by reciprocating talented employees' perceptions and delivered on promises. All participants echoed the implications of talent identification; a selection of expressive quotes is reported below to substantiate claims made. For instance, the reaction on this identification by TE02 was better performance and contribution to the organisation

‘... this made me work harder and pushed me towards progression. I remember that my team leader said I should hold this position by my hands and not give it away because I’ve been appreciated for the hard work I have done. It gave me a chance to later on to move to the planning and development team because development and planning team is involved more in the projects, studies and planning and this kind of stuff so normally that they choose mature people to go for this team.’

Interestingly, some participants knew that being identified as talented is partly about having the right attitude, TE33 states:

‘at the end of the day, development and reaching to be talented employee and being of value to the organisation depends on the individual himself or herself to decide that I am going for extra miles, so I can be recognised, I can be appreciated more because I have done something more. But if you do just what you are told to do, being only reactive then at the end of the day you are not recognised as much as your colleague who’s doing something more’

What is unique with talented employees is that their first impression of being labelled or recognised as talented is the feeling and obligation to work harder and prove that they deserve being labelled as talented. This is coupled with feelings of appreciation and gratification for honouring their competencies and recognising their efforts. However, this chain of reciprocation evolves and talented employees are likely to expect higher and more tangible returns for their contribution and efforts. This includes, opportunity for cross-posting, working on special projects and assignments, promotion, substantial increment, higher bonuses, monetary and prestigious rewards. This experienced TE02 extends his expression of what he expected from being identified as talented by stating that
‘... one of them is called end of year appraisal where there will be a salary increment and bonus... also what’s called “Sukran Awards” [Thank you awards] for example if an employee is appreciated they will give him two stars or three stars awards which is equivalent to some amount of money’

Here, TE04 differentiates between 'word of mouth' and 'an official arrangement' requested by the employer and its implication on 'generating a deal' by the talented employee and it influences their perceptions on obligation and entitlements, i.e. psychological contract formation.

‘... it was actually mentioned to me as a word of mouth. They said it’s good to be involved, it’s good to know about, to be informed, to start contribute, it’s not official that I should work on that, it was only an agreement, as what do you think to be involved in that project? It’ll help your knowledge, it’ll help your career, I told them OK, then I took the big part from them on that project’

In return, this is what the talented employee expect as entitlement:

‘... Yes, like promotion or something like this, and my manager, he did his job, he promoted me’

Another example of informing an employee about being talented and its implication on feeling valued for the outstanding contribution is with TE05 as addressed below:

‘... I think yes, I have been informed implicitly and explicitly as well... It felt good, it felt that I was appreciated and what I was doing was substantial for the company to see me as a valuable person contributing to the company... my manager said they think I’m doing valuable work and that it is difficult to find a replacement for me, and that they wouldn’t like seeing me moving not even to a different team, [so] you kind of understand that your role is important, and I think we would all like to feel that way in any organisation.’

Talented employees therefore realise that they are talented either explicitly or implicitly. They also realise that organisations have a number of policies and practices that send cues and messages that they associate with and therefore stimulate their psychological contract formation of a talent status. Accordingly, talented employees attach some expectations with
this psychological contract and perceive that they are obligated to stand by this recognition in terms of performance and discretionary efforts. The next section describes and explains the second sub-theme under this overarching theme, 'the talent deal'.

5.2.2 THE TALENT DEAL- THE ROLE OF PROMISES, EXPECTATIONS, AND OBLIGATIONS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT FORMATION

Findings from interviews revealed that talented employees form psychological contracts along their employment relationship. The one they form as part of their identification also in addition to the subsequent ones they form over the course of their careers. This occurs when talented employees believe that a promise has been explicitly made by an employer or implicitly perceive that their employer promised them. Similarly, data also revealed that psychological contracts are also created when talented employees perceive that their employer has communicated or indicated whether implicitly or explicitly a return for a specific task, assignment, or effort. This informed talented employees' obligations to deliver and their expectations to receive a return after delivering their part of the deal. Equally, findings also suggested that talented employees' feel the urge to reciprocate when their employer privileges them and support them achieve their aspiration. Examples of these are described below with excerpts from the interviews. Here is a statement from a senior and experienced talented employee TE33 describing how promises should be made:

‘... promised should be there but you should not be over promised and under-deliver. You need to work in that because the other time you made a promise and that promise is not able to fulfil so you need to give explanation sometimes its external factor’

And coinciding with what TE33 stated, other interviewees made similar reference to the role of promises and how they were perceived in forming the psychological contract. For some, promises are likely to materialise if it is on a team level but not a company level or via different actors. Here is an example of what TE04 stated in this regard:

‘... they make promises, not on day-to-day basis, more likely from time-to-time, and sometimes they keep those promises, but you can understand there and then if it'll happen or
not, so it’s not necessarily that promises will materialise. It’s a limited thing that I know might happen, but on a company scale, no, on a team scale yeah, so it depends on the level of the promise and is it doable. And I can identify which are and which aren’t doable from my experience.

Therefore, TE04 only holds a psychological contract with promises she believes that will materialise i.e. doable. The rest are merely empty ones as she learned from experience. Talented employees can hold multiple psychological contracts with their employer. The most obvious of these are usually the ones they create with their direct bosses and colleagues but they as well hold other psychological contracts with HR department and other organisational representatives. Such as what TE05 experienced with regard to educational opportunity.

’so what happens is when you find university and you apply for it, and if your manager thinks that this will add value to the company and to your career, he would approve it. And then they [HR department] will refund the fees and tuition and everything once you get the grades. So for me it was the perfect opportunity to have that balance of having my job and also doing my masters...’

The talented employee TE05 above has two psychological contracts, one in which they believe that the line managers’ approval is necessary for further studies and this entails finding a relation and close match between the education subject and the job, and, the second one with the HR department on that basis that they will reimburse her after passing her courses. And here is the claim made by TE01 on the likelihood of getting the promotion every two years, this reflects her expectations and perceived obligation which is her deal with respect to promotion. Note that this psychological contract is implicit rather than explicit which relates also to the first sub-theme.

‘... not explicitly, implicitly yes, I think I have that understanding that the company would promote someone... annually we have ratings, with our managers and their rating of our work, if we get exceptional ratings, exceptional ratings means a definite promotion, I didn’t get an exceptional rating. I got a very good rating just below exceptional, and I got my promotions almost every two years, it was reasonable for me’
Another example of an implicit PC is the one narrated by TE27 regarding the implicit agreement of having a positive relationship with line manager in which mutual respect and a positive vibe is nurtured thus implying tenure and satisfaction:

‘... it is very important to be happy and comfortable in your working environment, they always say you will leave your boss and not the company, I read that many times and it is true because I was very lucky, my line managers were good with me so far, and I’m comfortable being part of that team, I try to have healthy relationship with all the employees that directly work with me, so I’m happy with the situation so far, and as long as we have understanding and respect, as long as we have a friendly working environment, I am happy to continue working here,’

Here is an example of a belief and perception which has gone wrong such as that TE20 experienced with getting their training and development:

‘... Well, when you join a company, you're not told that training and development are hard to find for your field [Psychological Contract Formation], you find that after a few years-chuckles- [Psychological Contract Breach].

The above psychological contract transition was due to a false expectations anticipated from the organisation to continue offering advanced training courses for supporting disciplines. Therefore, talented employees form their psychological contract not only from perception of promises; they make inferences based on perceived expectations and obligations which informs their psychological contract. This shows that psychological contract is a schema and talented employees hold general assumptions from their past experiences or pre-employment period they utilise to make further inferences on their daily experiences, consequently, creating the psychological. The next section will highlight, describe and explain the last sub-theme under this overarching theme ‘the talent deal’.

5.2.3 TALENT DEAL- EMERGENT TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

Under this theme, I describe the content of talented employees' psychological contract, the currencies of exchange and what talented employees expect from the employer as a result of
being identified as talented. This overtly answers the second research question ‘what constitutes talented employees' psychological contract’ as it extends what has been interpreted under the first and second sub-themes. These are emergent because they reflect the currencies as talented employees perceived them following the initial identification and also along their employment relationship. The quotes are therefore also reflecting an evolved version of the psychological contract for talented employees. Here are some examples of talented employees’ emergent psychological contract as talented employees discuss and justify their perceived obligations towards and entitlements from the employer. For example for TE23 being a core employee, he emphasised maximising production as the main obligation while he expects to receive in return a fair remuneration through his inference of the company’s vision/mission statement.

‘...I want to participate in maximising hydro-carbonate recovery, and maintain a good growth of the company and its profits in the benefit of Oman and the company shareholders. I believe this is the mission actually of the company itself. Or let’s say the vision, which is maximising the recovery. That’s what everyone should work towards achieving at [Company B]. I believe I play a big role in this, you know, we are in the core business that’s our role, maximising the reserves.’ [and in return,] ‘... I want to receive fair remuneration & benefits and to be treated fairly and be granted fair working environment. Also, respect from colleagues and my manager, get the right job and to be given a chance to do my job rightly by providing me with the right tool... Yeah, I think I have received these until now. That’s why I am still here. I am being treated fairly’

This talented employee’s TE23 psychological contract reflected a strong sense of ownership towards achieving the goal which was inferred and deduced from the mission/vision statement. This is another form of implicit psychological contract. This is probably reinforced through the identity of talented employees of perceived self-significance and kinship to improve their employability. In return the talented employee expected and received fair remuneration and benefits. Another interesting example of the meaning associated with talented employees’ emergent psychological contract is the one discussed by TE24 below. As this talented employee perceives his input valuable, loyalty from him towards the employer is a key reciprocation which naturally means deploying his talent so long as he is working for the employer.
I’m obliged to be loyal. From a principle point of view, if you pay me money, for a job, I have to be loyal. Loyal here is within the boundaries of the contract. For example, if they’re [employer] acting commercially, ok, so we will act commercially [in return], but within the boundary of my contract, so if I say I want to work for a year, and I’m here for a year, I’ve to be loyal for that year. I’d accept or reject the contract, I’d say no, I don’t want to renew my contract anymore, that doesn’t mean I’m not loyal, but the contract is ending. So, yeah, being told that I am talented makes me feel that I have [obliged] to perform better but also in return I expect to be satisfied financially and in terms of appreciations’

Another good example on the emergent psychological contract is with TE10. This employee talked about the importance to the organisation he felt and the opportunity to go first for cross-post overseas and in return believed he was obliged to improve the quality of work and reflect organisational citizenship behaviour.

‘I’ve been told over the years, you’re doing a great job, above your salary grade, above your experience, and above what’s expected from you. I got opportunities for cross-posting before my peers; it really made me feel important…. Going back to your question, the quality of work should be on a good level, not negotiable, so I provide the best quality I can, even if I spend like late hours [for example], last week I stayed until 11.30 pm, trying to finish a good presentation that I had to present next day, and it was a last minute request, so usually you have the commitment and you have the quality of work, obligation towards the company, you really care about the company status’

For other talented employees this emergent psychological contract entailed going an extra mile when needed and in return expecting an increase in salary or promotion such as what TE06 expressed:

‘… It makes me feel that I need to work better, work harder trying to deliver better things, more quality and this [trend] built up with time, even if I have to stay for long hours from time to time. I was expecting [in return] an increase in salary and promotion at the by the end of that year, and I got it after completing the first year.’

This talented employee TE11 psychological contract is one of the most recurring ones among participants. Their gratitude for feeling appreciated by their organization through
opportunities to work on an assignment overseas called 'cross-posting' makes them feel obliged in return to reciprocate this appreciation by adding value into work.

‘... you can feel it like when they select you to present to partners or to like high level presentations...and they ask for presentation slides which you prepared...They directly asked if I was interested [in cross-posting assignment], and they had like a group of four or five candidates....and they selected two....yeah...two out of five... then I see that....I mean internally I feel that I am important and they appreciate my work... it gave me like adrenaline to continue to perform even better...like to add value into the work.’

In addition, and perhaps one of the most catching psychological contract is with TE11 who perceived that one of his obligations as part of this emergent psychological contract is to take care of the teams he worked with while he expects a proportionate reward for his contribution and efforts:

‘... I have an obligation to....to deliver what they expect in terms of projects...in terms of daily activities....like making sure that the team I am on now, the RMT, is achieving the intended goals....in terms of oil production, safety, and other aspects. I feel that it is an obligation for me to do that [in return] I think the more I perform, the more I expect to get in return. It is directly proportional.‘

TE23 on the other hand, believes that being talented entails acquiring certain competencies through an exposure and development plan which demands effort, persistence, and patience.

‘... It is also for career leadership [through which] I covered different roles, for example, I covered at that time some studies or projects as a part of what is called competency for reservoir engineering [in order] to be confident for example in project analysis... then I moved to the study centre where the focus is on unconventional studies and not conventional ones. This is really unique in the world [of oil and gas] and is called Enhanced Oil Recovery if you’ve heard about it. So I think I have covered most of these parts which are also different things for my experience...’

Similarly, being independent as a result of covering all required competency and gaining sufficient experience, so in order to enjoy this autonomy, talented employees accelerate and exert effort as explained by TE03:
‘... I was looking forward to be independent, when we started I was under someone directly, so now I’m not anymore a trainee under someone, and you can get out of that, when the [team lead] feel that you’re good enough... when they feel you can manage your (wells) part and do your job in a good way. And I was trying to accelerate in reaching this point...’

Another exchange relation is with acquiring on the job learning and performing well which is likely to be reciprocated with a promotion. TE05 is a good example of this:

‘I chose [company] because of the salary, it was a higher pay. So I knew, I had a lot to learn coming out of college. I did learn a lot of things independently. My mentor was there to support me occasionally. With hard work, I expected to get a promotion’

Consistent with most participants, working under effective and self-managing teams would most likely lead to better performance and greater levels of satisfaction as TE04 stated:

‘... but with time I started to communicate and look for more challenge, and at the same time this change [restructuring] happened, and all together helped my psychological contract yes... once we started forming RMT, I [Reservoir Engineer] had the same wells that I need to focus on with the production [engineer], with the geologist, and petro-physician. So if I have a question [relevant to them] about my place [Well], I won’t have to explain a lot to them [team members]... so it [work structure and team] was coordinated better’

The above excerpts and description make it evident that talented employees' 'deals' are closely related to high performance work features. Their perceived obligation can be summarised as differential performance and quality of work which together with passion for autonomy and working for self-managing teams are key to innovation and could substantially improve business performance. In return, most talented employees would like to see that promotion, pay increase, and benefits including the opportunity for cross-posting and to work on unconventional projects. This could lead to a greater sense of appreciation and intentions to remain which improves employers' retention capacity. Hence, the overarching talent deal includes three sub-themes described above. Together, they answered the first and second research questions, 'how do talented form their psychological contract' and 'what constitutes talented employees psychological contract'. The next section will describe the final overarching theme of this thesis.
5.3 DYNAMICS OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT

The process of how this theme has been identified, developed, and fine-tuned is detailed under Section 4.1 in Chapter 4. The theme describes the meanings talented employees attach when they perceived their psychological contract has been breached, violated, or fulfilled. Hence, the theme mainly answers the last research question of how talented employees respond to perceptions of psychological contract breach, violation, or fulfilment. In addition, this theme contributes to the earlier theme 'The Talent Deal’ as it makes references to the content of talented employees’ psychological contract by way of explaining and describing the reasons that caused a change to the state of psychological contract. Hence, this theme is defined as

‘The meanings and response of talented employees to perceptions of psychological contract breach, violation, or fulfilment.’ (Author, 2017)

During the data collection phase, participants referred to incidents and events as they discussed and explained their state of psychological contract. Hence, the researcher corroborated them and grouped them into four main categories. Psychological Contract Fulfilment denoted as PC-Fulfilment, Psychological Contract Breach denoted as PC-Breach, Psychological Contract Violation denoted as PC-Violation, and Mitigating PC-Breach and PC-Violation. Moreover, there are additional sub-groups under the categories as noted below. The choice to name these as groups and sub-groups instead of sub-themes is because they are not heterogamous enough to be segregated or completely homogenous to be merged under one category. Secondly, the labelling of this overarching theme unlike the previous overarching themes one and two, is embedded in the literature including its categories except with the mitigating category. However, the literature as noted in Chapter 2 (also see Section 4.2 for the analytical process) remains poor and scholars increasingly call for more research to understand how these states of psychological contracts unfold. This argument is covered in detail under the discussion Section 5.4 below. The researcher now describes the findings and their corresponding quotes and examples from the interviews. These are presented under each group.
5.3.1 PC-FULFILMENT

Under this category, the main meaning attached expressed by talented employees was feelings of satisfaction and higher levels of trust towards their line managers, departments and employer. Psychological contract fulfilment occurs when talented employees’ expectations were met and well reciprocated by their employer for what they have contributed along their careers. Furthermore, as the findings suggest, some talented employees expressed their gratitude and willingness to remain with their teams and employer. In addition, talented employees similar to the descriptions above felt an obligation to perform better, improve quality, add value, and support their employer when there is a need i.e. reflecting discreitional efforts and organisational citizenship behaviour. The incidents that preceded or led to these are labelled in bold below. In exceptional cases, talented employees left their employer for competitors who substantially made a difference in offer and packages even if their psychological contract was fulfilled. This point was addressed under Section 5.3.3 and justified under Discussion Section 5.4. It is reinforced here with further quotes and arguments under the discussion section below.

COMPETITIVE PACKAGES AND BENEFITS: Here are some of the instances talented employees expressed their satisfaction and gratification towards their employer. Talented employee TE17 reflects on the overall package and benefits reciprocated by his employer when expressing a state of psychological contract fulfilment. For TE17 this is a collection of providing him with the opportunity and benefits of working in the field, cross-posting, scholarship to pursue a masters’ degree, and the financial gains that come with these.

'I think, yeah [my PC has been fulfilled] I cannot complain. I think maybe I’m fortunate. I got what I asked for...yeah... I mean, for example, working in the field is something that people will need and it is good for a career... and I got that. Going for overseas assignment [cross-posting]...it was something to experience in the oil and gas industry, especially when you work in a global organisation like [Company Y]... and I got that, it is like an appreciation from the employer to go [for overseas assignment]... I mean, you get even extra money when you go overseas.... so it is like rewarding also... and also, this scholarship I think not everywhere you can go for a scholarship...I mean they give you like paid leave. I mean you know you are
studying, but it is not like that stress... it is different than work stress. You break the routine, so like I appreciate it, actually the time I spent here and I think yes, my [PC] is fulfilled.’

Here, although there is no psychological contract violation or breach but rather fulfilment, TE02 has still decided to move forward having received an attractive offer somewhere else and the interest in experiencing a different set-up and work environment.

‘During my assessment interview, I was asked the by HR representative, why are you moving from the COMPANY, I told [him] I don’t have any single [incident which upset me] from COMPANY but I think the COMPANY is a big organisation and I have not seen outside [its] walls so it is like a big country for example like USA with different states you don’t know what is [the] world like outside. [That’s] one thing and second thing I told them that I’m getting a better offer so I’m looking also for a better offer...

TE02 replies to a similar question on the type of offers and packages that makes one move from one employer to another by stating

‘... you see.... we need to consider what other benefits are we getting from [Company Y] which are valuable for us.... for example full medical coverage with good bonus so sometimes we wait for other things such as [promotion] to come by...’

TE10 justification is somewhat in line with TE02, he states the tipping point for moving to another employer even if the psychological contract is fulfilled.

‘... even when my boss asked me, are you going to leave COMPANY Y for any reason, I told him if the difference in income from the other company is above 50% I’ll leave, because it’s common sense, we work for our families, to support our social status, to guarantee our future’

Hence, talented employees are open to further and better opportunities should they arise in the market even in cases of PC fulfilment. This is influenced by the variation and gap between the packages and benefits they currently enjoy and the promised ones by prospect employers.
RESPECT AND RECOGNITION: Here is an example of TE06 on the impact of respect and recognition of talents that may supersede material gains of money. Here the talented employee reciprocates efforts for respect and recognition.

‘...after that when he [line manager] was fired and I was treated differently. Yes, I received respect more respect and also people started to appreciate my work, the package... I was looking only at respect at the moment and package didn't matter that much... I received a different treatment; they looked at me as a pioneer; the only one who knows how things happen. I was communicating directly with bosses of my boss, sometimes with the VP [Vice President] directly. I was representing the company to the MOG [Ministry of Oil and Gas] and started to know people from upstairs [top management]. For me, this wasn't a goal but you don't say no, they start knowing your name, seeing you in the corridor, saying hi TE06. It felt great’

The example presented by TE06 also showcases a positive reciprocation for his quality work which was not mutual though.

‘...yes, I received respect more respect and also people started to appreciate my work, the package... I was looking only at respect at the moment and package didn't matter that much... I received a different treatment; they looked at me as a pioneer; the only one who knows how things happen. I was communicating directly with bosses of my boss, sometimes with the VP [Vice President] directly. I was representing the company to the MOG [Ministry of Oil and Gas] and started to know people from upstairs [top management]. For me, this wasn't a goal but you don't say no, they start knowing your name, seeing you in the corridor, saying hi TE06. It felt great’

SUPPORT FROM LINE MANAGER: Talented employees place a lot of weight on the role of their line manager in developing them, gaining access and exposure to challenging and exciting opportunities. Usually, these talented employees associate their state of psychological contract to the support they receive from line managers. Here are some examples illustrating line managers’ support with the perception of psychological contract fulfilment.
TE10 is one of the exceptional examples as his salary doubled in less than 4 years within the same organisation following the support of his line manager in going for cross-posting overseas then later working on a newly and interesting project and getting good rankings throughout the years from 2011 to 2014 that exponentially granted him promotions.

‘... in terms of bosses, I usually get good bosses, except for that one supervisor, from 2012 until 2014, I had a really good boss, that I learned a lot of things from, in terms of work, in terms of experience, knowledge and everything, yes I was pleased with him. So from that time onwards, I was somehow boosting, in terms of yearly income, grades, money, I think I doubled up my salary from 2011 to 2014, and I think because the boss really appreciated the things I’m doing and he had nice comments, that I was able to do that, even before that, from 2010 I was getting good, but from 2011-2014 was the real boost. In 2012 I had a lot of factors [allowed me to boost], new boss, new project, it’s just started, I came from overseas, already had good ranking, so things worked together, so 2011-2014 I was able to double up my salary, I really didn’t ever ask for that, but you know the boss would appreciate, recommend and he’ll tell for example, TE 10, his set of experience, knowledge, is like this and we need to put him on another level so he was trying to give me yearly promotion.’

This was attained by TE10 through his commitment and hard work as he stated in the above comment and his comments under section 'emergent talented employee psychological contract' in sustaining high quality work in return for the appreciations and opportunities received. He reemphasised:

‘... I never ask for something because I don’t like this way of dealing with people, I work on my own, do my best, and I believe good things will come, and if you have a good guy in your career, he’ll appreciate your things and also, I had a good boss, and then another good boss on top of him, so both were helping me to boost my career...’

Another example is with TE27 who appreciated the consideration and support of her line manager during difficult times.

‘...when I moved to marketing after couple of months I figured out that I am pregnant, so he [my manager] was shocked! I told him, I am not saying that I will not travel [overseas] but please I am pregnant maybe I will have difficulty in eating some foods. So, I went with them it was a very smooth trip and when we came back he was talking highly about me.’
TE06 on the other hand was stunned by the constant support and back up he received from his line manager including the cross-posting opportunity and scholarship opportunity.

‘...they asked me to go for cross-posting many times maybe three years after each other they asked me to go, I refused to go for personal reason. Then after that there was a chance for a scholarship and I applied for it and I see them helping me to get that scholarship I felt those people want me.... want to help me, they’re trying to push me to go’

In a similar vein, talented employees associate such challenging tasks and projects to their development and growth which consequently strengthens their future employability and competitiveness. Hence, talented employees perceive that it is their employers’ duty to plan for and assign challenging tasks to them. This is reinforced by TE12’s comments below:

‘I would like to have new challenges every now and then... because you can’t evolve, you can’t improve yourself if you don’t take those challenges... I would say I would sacrifice my promotion if I got new challenges. Because I would evolve more if I got more challenges. If I don’t get challenges, then I am doing a routine job. So I am losing both, I don’t evolve and I don’t develop myself and at the same time I am losing money. But if I get new challenges, at least I got knowledge. This knowledge will compensate for the thing with money.’

Hence, line managers’ support plays a crucial role in talented employees’ psychological contract and their subsequent actions and reaction on how they reciprocated to such support. With some talented employees their satisfaction and contentment is reflected with high quality work, appreciation, and intention to remain with the employer.

5.3.2 PC-BREACH

Under this category, the main attached meaning expressed by talented employees was confusion and disappointment towards their line managers, departments and employer. Psychological contract breach occurs when talented employees’ expectations were not well reciprocated, in some instances, they were reciprocated but were not mutual to what talented employees expected in return. Findings suggest that some talented employees didn’t
place much weight on the confusion as they expected their employers to deliver on future occasions. Their performance was not tampered except when they believed that their employer could have done better in reciprocating and therefore were disappointed. However, with others, their levels of trust towards the organisation reduced. Another important finding with the perception of PC-Breach is that talented employees did not actually leave their employer but may have expressed their intention to do so.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AND SUPPORT FROM HR: Here, the talented employee TE05 explains their disappointment with the company and HR department for not taking courses in her IT specialisation and the lack of support from HR. Instead the attention has been specifically focused on oil and gas core courses.

‘When you compare yourself against your peers and anyone else, you find out that you do go to training courses but only to say that you went to training courses. I did go to trainings but not within my field, mostly, it was about what’s the company is doing; like introduction to oil and gas, introduction to reservoir engineering. So, I do understand that it was important to go to these courses, because I am working in the department where all those fields are being practiced, and you really need to understand what’s happening around you. But then, you realise the trend, where you are not going to the courses that you supposed to be going to, instead you are studying more within other fields, and when I started to ask the HR department about training opportunities, the answer was either, it wasn’t planned for this year, or it was at the last year, but always you are not at the right time for asking about a training opportunity.

But TE05 did not actually leave even when she found a competing employer where she could potentially apply equivalent to her current employer. This is because the offer provided by the other sectors did not substantiate when compared to the overall package by the oil and gas sector:

‘One of the jobs offers I got was being a tutor at a certain college. It was a good opportunity as I was teaching something I learned within my masters, but I wasn’t very comfortable with the salary, it was much less than what I get here. Also I was not very comfortable with the working hours; sometimes lectures end at 8 p.m., which wasn’t very good for me. So eventually, I rejected the offer....’
TE02 on the other hand expresses his confusion and reduced levels of trust towards the HR department as there was a lack of transparency with the employment contract signed as well as with how the bonus was calculated when he moved to a new employer.

‘There is amount of money they have been transferring to me each month at the beginning of each month and I told them why it is not in my salary instead, they said no, because of salary planning and it will be merged later in your total salary, [however] until now they didn’t solve this issue. This is affecting my behaviour, how I can trust in a company that’s not clear in their employment contract, I trust in [company b] but for example HR department how we trust them if we are given a contract like this!

In a follow-up question, this talented employee (TE02) shared more examples:

‘... this is also during the survey that was made; we suggested that we would like the HR to have high transparency. For example last year, a lot of people were upset because they did not know how their bonuses have been calculated; they just saw an amount credited to their account. So, we asked HR and they said no will not give you any clue as to how the calculations have been made. But in [Company x] they have very high transparency in such system. They will have a circular with an equation, you can access into your account and you can know how it has been calculated and how it is linked directly to your appraisal.’

LACK OF TAILORED ASSESSMENT SYSTEM HR: Another source of PC breach as expressed by some talented employees has to do with the design of the appraisal system and its governance through HR. This talented employee TE24 believes that the system fails to recognise their innovative solutions or unique recommendations which positively affect the overall business performance. Moreover, the system fails to differentiate between different disciplines during assessments. This, as TE24 argues, could be and should have been changed by HR but it has not been changed yet.

‘For the company, it was about 300 meter cube of oil extra daily, that was missing for 10 years, it got back out of our team's effort, we got 'thanks' award, which is one of the company awards, all of this during my first year. Our breakthrough solution was later on presented at so many places, and yet my ranking was normal... You see, 300 meter cube every meter cube is around 6.3 barrels, so you say 6 barrels, so around 1800 barrels per day, almost the average price was
100, so multiplied by 100 dollars, and yet it wasn’t reflected on my end of year performance!... they don’t pay you equivalently, and that’s your contract with the company... so that’s why I’m telling you that I don’t trust it, I trust life is fair, but I don’t trust them, because the system is as I told you... we are a broad company with diverse disciplines and speciality but what happens is that the same system of the ranking is applied on everyone, whether you are doing HR, IT, or technical; this tells you how much they want to simplify things instead of tailoring them, so in our company, the treat the nurse the same as the engineer the same as HR while there are broad differences, so this tells you how lazy they are...’

Hence, there has been general resentment towards HR by most participants as they held negative judgments on HR staff role in facilitating practices and policies and supporting employees. Others blame HR for not providing enough support or hampering their promotion and progress. There have been many references to the politics that HR imply to justify decisions made which in some cases fumes talented employees and made them leave. Nonetheless, there are other instances where line managers do the same to their employees.

LACK OF TECHNICAL CAREER LADDER: According to TE22, talented employees would prefer a technical career ladder to a managerial career ladder but with some employers’ there is no dual career ladder and if an employee would like to progress to a higher position, s/he must leave the technical route and become managerial which is not an aspiring option for some of them.

‘... now, [in our company] if you want to become a manager you have to quit your discipline. You can’t be line manager if you are still doing some kind of technical work. In [Company X] they have two ladders they call it; technical ladder and managerial ladder. So you will be in the same position as manager but from the technical side. So in term of payment and salary groups and in terms of the other advantages; they are the same in both positions but one is a manager like a department head, and the other is from the technical side. We discussed that here [Company B], they said that they could do that but it is still not happening.’

LACK OF SUPPORT FROM LINE MANAGER: Here are some instances similar to that of TE24 where talented employees believe that their recommendations and solutions will make a difference to the overall business performance. However, here the line manager has not supported the suggestion which created perceptions of breach to their psychological
contract. This is so because this talent employee (TE18) similar to others expects that his 'intelligence' will always be respected and therefore his recommendations are taken into actions but here, it was not the case. Nevertheless, eventually as noted under a different section (PC-fulfilment-respect and recognition), the line manager got fired and this talented employee and his recommendations become the central focus on similar projects.

‘...just as an example, we were drilling a well horizontally to produce oil and we’ve been doing this for five years, already, millions were spent because the manager has made this decision. [On the other hand,] Then I made a study using theories, numbers, etc. and the results suggested that we should drill vertically [instead of horizontally]. We should drill 5 vertically instead of 1 horizontally; they will perform better long-term and short-term. This [approach] will pay off better. I was expecting the manager to be rational when I went to him instead, he push me back and said NO, we have to stick to this, it’s in the plan... I disagreed and told them either they took my work that vertical is the best or they keep me aside and send someone else to continue my role’

This stance and disagreement expressed by this talented employee (TE18) was driven by his principles similar to that of TE24 in terms of loyalty. However, here this talented employee stated that they sought to maintain integrity which corresponds to the ideological principles described under talented employees’ identity in Chapter 5 and affects their perceptions as was discussed in Chapter 5.

‘... the most important thing I think to me which comes priority number one is integrity and fulfilling my obligation, I want to make sure that whatever I got as a salary I deserve it. I have the right to take it in terms of satisfying my beliefs that Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala [Worshipped Deity] is aware that this salary I deserve it and I did my best to get it... I tried to fulfil the contract because it said in Qur'an, which translates as ‘O believers, you have to fulfil all your contracts’ and in my contract I have the timeline, I have this job to do, so this I think the most important thing for me... it’s an obligation from me first toward Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala [Worshipped Deity] and toward the country then toward the employer. In return, I only expect them to respect me.’

Talented employee TE11 had established an implicit psychological contract which was not mutually reciprocated as the other party to the contract did not apparently agree with the
deal of the perceived psychological contract by TE11 in terms of promotion and dynamic movement as he states. Similarly, there is a more explicit form of the contract with the promises made by the employer on development but they were not reciprocated either.

'The issue is I have been given impression that I was doing very well, ahead of my colleagues that time, I was expecting these words to be reflected as promotions, or as a dynamic movement of my career. But at that time I was hit to know it was not as I expected... Most of the people I know who left [Company X], left due to this issue. We have been promised things, we would like to develop, and we would like to stay. But they didn't happen.'

5.3.3 PC-VIOLATION

The main distinctions between this category and the previous one, is the eroding trust level and talented employees’ departure from their employer to another after expression how the perceptions of psychological contract were translated into anger, depression, and resentment leading to serious actions look for other employer and finally departure. Here are some examples from the interviews.

FAILURE TO RECIPROCATE BY THE EMPLOYER: Here, talented employee TE05 was not satisfied with the training courses within the discipline and specialisation and this made her look around for other opportunities outside although she was pleased with the opportunity to have completed her master's.

'The main reason that I was looking around was training and development; it's true that the company gave me the opportunity to get my master's degree, but unfortunately the training and development within our company, compared to other places that we can mention, is behind. Especially for the field of Information technology which is my field, maybe for other jobs or fields things are much better regarding trainings, but for IT field, a year could go by without me taking a pure technical course.'

The lack of support from HR and line manager and politics experienced by this talented employee TE22 has led him to leave the organisation.
‘... I did several studies when I joined first. I did the study with a senior. And I did it very hard, but it was reflected on his performance that he taught me. This is how they received it. This is the problem in [Company x]. Your seniors train you, if you did very well, then they are given the credits. If you did badly, they don’t get the bad credits, you get them. Also, when I requested to move to the next job group as I was entitled for it. They said no, you have to be self-dependent. Then I did many studies myself alone. But even then they said no, we can't give you because of the age. Again you see each time you go and ask for something, they have a reply ready for you. So if your age is ok, they said no you have gaps in your competencies, if you don’t they say it is your age. You are very young you can’t go to that next group. So then this is when I decided to leave because I saw there was no point in staying and working hard, and I don’t get recognised for that.’

Here this talented employee (TE22) underwent the experience of breach when the company could not provide a reasonable justification for his poor ranking. Instead, it appeared there was a common understanding of ranking new employees poorly in their first performance review.

‘... So [ranking of] three means that you are not doing well. So I got three in the first year, and the explanation was that everyone who joined [company b] in his first assignment or performance, he will get three by default, regardless of how hard he is working. So that’s actually very bad. I worked hard because I saw there are a lot of required improvements to be made. I worked for a long time, you know. [Company x] has a more systematic work. They have the most structure work; here it is more of loose. So I tried to improve the business, but doing all of that hard work I got three. So that was a very bad experience at that time.’

Here is another example by TE13 emphasising the loss of trust and resentment due to the unfairness experienced with the promotion i.e. an experience of psychological contract violation. Although the employee still works for the company his trust has eroded and deteriorated affecting his behaviour as he explains. This also shows that his expectations of promotion were not mutually reciprocated although he might have been compensated with a different reward i.e. moving to a better team.

‘... and I asked him [line manager] why everyone is talking to me and wants to meet me [to console me], his reply was that this [selection for promotion among the team] was unfair, and
that was what I wanted to hear. So it was very clear that it was unfair. So I asked him what do you want from me? He replied that he wanted me to move to another team called exploration project geologist which is something better and I agreed; I saw this as a compensation but I don’t trust my managers any more I did trust them in the past when they were completely fair. But now I don’t trust them. If they make me a promise I will never trust that they will keep up with it, I don’t trust anyone at this moment actually, I just keep quiet and silent… I can even recall the last incident, they have told me in September 2015 that I will be moved to be an exploration geologist, and now it’s 2016 and nothing has happened yet.’

LOSS OF TRUST IN PROMISES: It is not sufficient to have promises made verbally when they have been breached; here is an example of a talented employee who refused to stay with an organisation without a written promise TE02:

‘they are not keeping and they are not making promises. For example, [career] progression in [company x] just when I was about to leave I told them give me a letter for that [verbal promise] but they didn’t. I am saying this because they promised me before that I will go for… cross-posting, they gave me that chance by saying in 2013 that you can go cross-posting by 2015 but it did not happen. When I was about to resign, they said we can reschedule this one once you will get a promotion and then you can go cross-posting later on. However, they refused to give me a letter or send me an official e-mail stating this so I stay but just giving me the promise is not good. So I decided to leave.’

Here is an example with TE21 as his patience ran out and even when the top management approached him to stay and promised to meet his initial unmet requests for promotion and further education he decided to leave:

‘... [the] president of [Sultan Qaboos University] called me and said I will not accept your resignation. I know why want to leave and we’ll be fair with you, come [let’s] sit we’ll discuss. I know why you want to leave and we’ll be fair with you, PhD... granted for you, promotion... will give it to you, I said sorry I will not accept your offer, I am leaving.’
5.3.4 MITIGATING- PC BREACH AND PC VIOLATION

Normally, employees who feel they were either wronged or deceived lose trust in their employer and leave. Also, they could hold a belief that there are no trustworthy employers in the market (Pate and Malone, 2000; Pugh et al., 2003; Rousseau, 2004; Eilam-Shamir and Yaakob, 2014) (see Chapter 2 under the Section: State of Psychological Contract). However, with some talented employees, the tables have turned and their reactions are not necessarily conventional. Rather, in most instances their reactions are an exception to the norm as in some instances they perform better. To recap, it is rarely disputed that employees' reporting or experiencing psychological contracts breach or violation would enjoy or sustain similar levels of trust towards their employer or express intentions to leave. Talented employees, on the other hand, remain with their employer and try to perform better and suggest solutions as preliminary actions to improve the situations. They do leave eventually when nothing changes or in instances where their employer and line manager fail to rectify the problems associated with breach and violation or continues to under-deliver on promises and deals. Some talented employees also utilise their employment experiences and maturity levels to see problems from different perspectives whereby it eliminates or reduces perceptions of psychological contract breach or violations. A good example on this is what TE32 explains with regard to maturity and perceptions of deception.

'... So yes, there were times when I felt that yes I was deceived by the organisation because of this [delayed promotion], however, maturity level, you know being already seven years working in [Government body] and I’ve seen lots of challenges in there coming to this employer, it was helping for me [to ignore such perceptions of PC-V]. So it wasn’t really that much affecting my performance because at the end of the day I wanted to prove myself to my superiors that yes, he is coming here to make a change you know...’

Similarly, TE02 further elaborates on how he mitigated what would otherwise be perceived as a PC breach, instead, the opportunity to work within a rewarding centre with experienced members was greater than him not receiving an exceptional ranking for the efforts made:

'By the way, when I was at [R&D Unit] this is the lowest ranking I have ever got [but] I was not disappointed, I was even happy because I know that I have worked with a team which have
25 years’ experience [comparative to him having less than 10 years’ experience and a Bachelor Degree], my team leader got his PhD 25 years back so he is also [well-established in] research so he gave me ranking that I was on target. To me, this was a big achievement in such a team.’

And here talented employee TE05 refers to the status of oil prices over the recent years and its negative implication on their promotion which they used to receive every two years or so. Hence, where there is supposed to be a breach and violation, this is mitigated by the realisation of and pre-communication by the employer on the effects of oil prices on planned promotions and increments.

‘... at the moment with the fall in oil prices and all I think that things may change a little bit [promotion]... it is fair and it is for everyone, I’m not targeted by the company or something like that! If I’m giving everything that I can and they are giving all they can for me then I see it’s fair...’

Hence, to recap, the themes 'the talent deal' and 'dynamics of talented employees' answer the remaining research questions on formation, content, and the response to the psychological contract. The aforementioned sections discussed the main sub-themes including identification implication', 'role of promises, expectations, and obligations' and 'emergent talented employees’ psychological contract', and presented the quotes and extracts corresponding to each sub-theme and category. According to participants and their claims, these sub-themes, being identified as talented, spark a unique psychological contract with unique contents, including discretionary behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviour, for sustained development and career progression opportunities and competitive packages and benefits. Moreover, the content of the themes also revealed how talented employees could mitigate the perceptions of psychological contract breach and violation while fulfilments can guarantee sustained employment which are unique to this research study. The next section will discuss and argue the illustrated findings against the literature and how they contribute to existing knowledge.
5.4 DISCUSSION OF THEME TWO AND THEME THREE

In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the main findings associated with the first theme and how it contributes to the knowledge of the talented employees' psychological contract. Below the researcher argues the contribution made based on the findings under themes two 'the talent deal' and three 'dynamics of talented employees' psychological contract. In addition to answering the research questions based on gaps in the literature, the themes portray a complete masterpiece which explains the nature of talented employees' psychological contract in Oman's oil and gas sector, an area that has received limited attention. The findings of themes two and three of this chapter confirm what Rousseau (1989, 1995, 2001, 2004), Conway and Briner (2005) and Rousseau et al. (2015) emphasised that psychological contracts are in the 'eyes of the beholder' and it is not necessarily the two parties to the contract that agree for it to form. This is obvious with the examples and cases discussed under theme two following explicit and implicit identification as well as through the promises and talent management systems and practices. Talented employees form a unique psychological contract based on cues and messages they receive or perceive in this regard. This initiates a spiral of reciprocal exchange that leads to fruitful and healthy employment relationships in which organisations can reap their most valuable asset 'talent' while returning this favour through ensuring that their experiences and work are rewarding and challenging. Talented employees solve complex problems and provide innovative solutions which could help organisations create and sustain their competitive advantage (Hoglund, 2012; Dries et al., 2012; Sparrow et al., 2014)

The findings of this research as described under sub-theme one 'The Talent Deal- Talent Identification and Implications on Psychological Contract Formation' confirm the arguments within the literature (Mellahi and Minibeva, 2014; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2014;) that talent identification is not a straightforward process and heavily relies on the context of the study. Similarly, the findings substantiate the arguments made that talent management systems are more divergent between organisations rather than being convergent, however, this claim is with respect to a sector specific analysis rather than across sectors (Heckman and Lewis, 2006; Pfeffer, 2001; CIPD, 2007). Specifically, with regard to practices and procedures on talent identification and labelling as these highly depend and
rely on the maturity and sophistication levels of the talent management system by each organisation (Dries et al., 2013). To recap, under sub-theme one, some organisations utilised the competency matrix, others used a performance management system, while others had an integrated 9 Grid Box system aligned with succession planning and performance management and the competency matrix to identify and develop talented employees. Furthermore, the findings under sub-theme 1 concur with those argued in the literature. The talent identification process is not a one man job or single department task rather it has to be coordinated across departments within the organisation albeit being managed by HR and relevant talent departments. It should be governed by the organisational strategy and owned by the top management which would increase its effectiveness. This is equally discussed in CIPD (2007), Sparrow et al. (2014), the Centre for Performance-Led HR (2011), and Coulson-Thomas (2012) where organisations need to orchestrate an integrated talent management system to identify high potential and high performers.

Yet, the unique contribution under this sub-theme is its correspondence to minimise the knowledge gap by conducting context-specific research that links talent management with an equally interesting theory (see the Research Gap Sections in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3). Hence, the findings of this sub-theme extend the premises by explaining how talent identification informs psychological contract formation (Minibeva and Collings, 2013; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2014; Greip et al., 2016; Vantilborgh et al., 2016). Here, the findings advocate that collaboration and integration towards having a vigorous talent management system would be reciprocated by the spark of a unique psychological contract of talented employees. Talented employees feel indebted towards their employer to perform better, add value, and innovate. In order to sustain this, talented employees would expect their employer to further reciprocate according to their contribution by creating and supporting them in learning and development opportunities, career progression, and competitive packages and promotions. Sustaining this reciprocation chain leads to a healthy employment relationship which improves talented employees tenure and intentions to remain with their employer. As a result, the employer could retain their existing and attract prospective talents.
Moreover, with respect to identifying talented employees for the study and as some researchers in the field of oil and gas and talent management argued (IHS Global Inc., 2016; Dickey et al., 2011; Doh et al., 2011; Orr and McVerry, 2007; Dries et al., 2012) the findings support the claims that talented employees are mostly those employees on technical roles compared to those on support roles. This is so as the technical roles are usually aligned with the nature of core business. This has been highlighted under sub-themes 1 and 3 by some participants and was consistently indicated by most participants in terms of the development and exposure opportunities they received from their employer. Interestingly, this also confirms the alignment of this research inclusion and exclusion criteria of the sample in which the focus was on selecting those employees working for the core business and technical N=24 compared to those who held Support roles and critical N=12 (see Table 4.5 on Sample Characteristics). Significantly, the sample is considered a unique one unlike the common trend taken by practitioners and researchers in the field of talent management of selecting senior manager or leaders in organisations as the talented sample (Michaels et al., 2001; Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Dries et al., 2012; Makela et al., 2010; Rothwell, 2011; Sparrow et al., 2014). Similarly, their quest and research questions usually focus on the managerial aspect and effectiveness of talent management whereas this study focused on the experiences of those employees identified as talented and their reflections as part of being groomed and developed under the talent management system (Sparrow et al., 2014, 2015; Farndale et al., 2010).

Psychological contract fulfilment is an under-researched area in the field as most research studies and empirical evidence tend to focus on psychological contract violation and post-psychological contract violation and their attitudinal and behavioural consequences (Conway and Briner, 2005; Tomprou et al., 2015; Rousseau et al., 2015). This research reported in response to its objectives to 'understand the dynamics of PC of talented employees' instances and implications of psychological contract fulfilment. More interestingly, this research contends that not all situations of psychological contract fulfilments were reciprocated with prolonged tenure by the talented employees (Sections 6.3.2 and 5.2.1). In some instances, talented employees left their employer in order to look for more rewarding and enriching careers elsewhere even when they were happy with their employer. This as discussed can be traced back to two main intertwining aspects. One is
talented employees' value proposition in which their passion for learning and development as well as their vision identity aspires and guides their view on employers and opportunities outside the market. Hence, some careers may be viewed as stepping stones for them to fulfil their aspirations. The second point is mainly market driven where employers compete among each other for specific talents and when there is shortage in talent supply competition intensifies and subsequently, talented employees receive competitive packages from competing organisations.

In addition to illuminating the experiences associated with psychological contract fulfilment, these research findings in terms of the implications of psychological contract breach and psychological contract violation are unique (Bankings et al., 2015; Morrison and Rousseau, 1994; Robinson, 1996). Talented employees do not necessarily or immediately leave their employer with perceptions of violations or breach nor does their performance deteriorate in response to these perceptions. On the contrary, they tend to initially sustain their performance levels or perform better to prove their quality and 'talent' status to their line managers as well as their desire to give their line managers a chance to deliver on a promise or make necessary changes. The same has been witnessed for perceptions of psychological contract breach. Their perseverance and tolerance were found to be mostly driven by their ideological principles and perceptions of self-significance (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003; Vantilborgh et al., 2014; Raja et al., 2004) However, they eventually leave or experience resentment and low self-esteem if the violation is not rectified following their subsequent efforts to make a difference after they have experienced the initial breach and violation. Similarly, when the violation is perceived due to a lack of distributional or interactional justice and were not justified or amended by the employer, then talented employees would be aggravated and leave their employer. The other plausible explanation of why talented employees react differently to perceptions of PC breach and violation is their levels of maturity and experience. This is perhaps best justified by the 'been there and done that' notion (see Sections 6.3.4, 6.2.1, 5.2.1). This was noted when some participants including TE33 and the need to prove himself, TE17 for receiving exceptional development opportunities, TE26 for working in a comparatively better sector and employer, TE05 being encouraged to search for the right training and courses, TE13 for experiencing a comparatively accelerated career progression with early career years, and TE02 for working
with experienced and knowledgeable teams. These talented employees’ experiences and others perceived incidents and situations that would usually trigger perceptions of psychological contract breach as being trivial and not worthy of discontentment or inconvenience.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter discussed the two main themes that emerged from the data analysis and supported them with relevant quotes and examples. The chapter mainly answers the research question on what constitutes talented employees’ psychological contract and how they respond to perceptions of breach, violation, and fulfilment. The chapter emphasised that identification sparks a unique psychological contract with special currencies of exchange that talented employees aim to reciprocate with their employer. This was later discussed and argued against the literature to highlight the main contribution of this research. The next chapter will summarise the key elements of the thesis and recommend potential future research areas in light of the contribution and limitations of this doctoral study.
### CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 REVIEW OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION AND ENHANCED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATION</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws the thesis to a close. The study has explored the nature of talented employees' psychological contract and its implications on the employment relationship. The chapter reviews the research aim and questions and summarises the main findings of this study. It moves on to highlight the substantial contributions of this study to theory and practice. The chapter is concluded by the study limitations along with recommendations and opportunities for future research.

6.2 REVIEW OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS

This thesis aims to understand the nature of talented employees' psychological contract and its implications on the employment relationship in Oman's oil and gas sector. The thesis identified the main gaps in the literature by crosslinking the two streams: psychological contract and talent and talent management. This resulted in three main research questions as stated below and summarised against the main findings in Table 6.1 below;

1. How do Talented Employees form their Psychological Contract? This is addressed under themes one and two in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

2. What Constitutes Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract? This is addressed under themes two and three from Chapter 5.

3. How do Talented Employees Respond to Perceptions of Psychological Contract Breach, Psychological Contract Violation, and Psychological Contract Fulfilment? This has been addressed under theme 3 from Chapter 5.
TABLE 6.1: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Main Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do Talented Employees form their Psychological Contract? | 1. Elements under the value proposition act as the antecedents in the process of forming their psychological contract. Hence, talented employees associate an employer’s brand with their aspirations and expect to fulfil these aspirations and expectations during their employment period. For example, the oil and gas sector is perceived as a rewarding and a preferred one.  
2. The originality of this value proposition is further emphasised by referring to the elements and the role identified under the employer brand and talented employees’ identity in forming their psychological contract and mitigating the perceptions of breach and violation in their psychological contract.  
3. Psychological contracts are in the ‘eyes of the beholder’ and it is not necessarily the two parties agreeing to the contract for it to form. This is obvious with the examples and cases discussed under theme two following explicit and implicit identification as well as through the promises and talent management systems and practices. Talented employees form a unique psychological contract based on the cues and messages they receive or perceive in this regard. This initiates a spiral of reciprocal exchange that leads to fruitful and healthy employment relationships in which organisations can reap their most valuable asset, ‘talent’, while returning this favour through ensuring that their experiences and work are rewarding and challenging. Talented employees solve complex problems and provide innovative solutions which could assist organisations create and sustain their competitive advantage.  
4. The findings advocate that collaborations and integration towards having a vigorous talent management system would be reciprocated by the spark of a unique psychological contract of talented employees. Talented employees feel indebted towards their employer to perform better, add value, and innovate. In order to
sustain this, talented employees would expect their employer to further reciprocate according to their contribution by creating and supporting them in learning and development opportunities, career progression, and competitive packages and promotions. Sustaining this reciprocation chain leads to a healthy employment relationship which improves talented employees' tenure and intentions to remain with their employer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Constitutes Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ‘Employer brand’ refers to the opportunity for learning and development and corporate image and reputation. It moreover comprises their identity as they are passionate about challenging tasks and projects. Finally, reference is furthermore made to having a vision and desire to showcase their capabilities and contribution to the team and innovate at jobs and projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do Talented Employees Respond to Perceptions of Psychological Contract Breach, Psychological Contract Violation, and Psychological Contract Fulfilment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The identity of talented employees was discovered and understood through their employment experience and unique reaction to psychological contract violation and breach incidents as they remained positive instead of burning out as the literature suggested. Moreover, in some other instances, where there was no breach or violation of the psychological contract, these talented employees still left their employer, as they were driven by their character and identity, which meant that they aspired to obtain rewarding experiences and achieve continuous development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Psychological Contract Breach and Violation could occur when issues corresponding to their identity are jeopardised. For example, placing routine tasks instead of rewarding ones. Conversely, situations of psychological fulfilment will not necessarily guarantee a sustained employment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study was designed qualitatively and the researcher conducted 34 semi-structured face-to-face interviews using the critical incidents technique in order to answer the research questions. Participants were recruited from Oman’s oil and
gas sector after receiving a favourable ethical opinion from the university ethics committee. The data were qualitatively analysed using a modified thematic analysis version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

The answers to the three research questions can be summarised in Figure 6.1 below, which was introduced and discussed in Chapter 4 by the end of Section 4.6.1, illustrating the interconnection between the overarching themes of this research study and summarising the main contributions as addressed below.

6.2.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION AND ENHANCED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

One of the unique and core areas of this doctoral thesis is recruiting talented employees as the participants and individuals, a process through which this knowledge was investigated and explored (Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Bjorkman et al., 2013; Sonnenberg et al., 2014) thus ensuring that the psychological contract is investigated from the eye of the beholders (Rousseau, 1995; Conway and Briner, 2009) but also in response to a growing and demanding literature of talent management in order to extend the knowledge of the field and bridge it with other sources of knowledge (Hoglund, 2012; Sparrow et al., 2014; Sparrow, 2016; Al Shaqsi et al., 2016b). Hence, this doctoral research has successfully cross-linked the two streams: a) psychological contract by explaining how it is formed, exchanged, and how it changes over time, and b) talent management by carefully selecting talented employees and explaining how their employment experience unfolds. Theoretically, this research captured the experiences associated with the formation of talented employees' psychological contract. Talented employees hold a certain perception and understanding of the oil and gas sector as well as employers, which in most instances pre-date their employment experiences. This along with their cultural and value orientations on personal status at work and community informs the formation of their psychological contract. Hence, these factors act as antecedents to psychological contract formation as well as the contents of the psychological contract and consequently influences their tenure...
and willingness to stay or leave the organisation. This is denoted as talented employees' value propositions. Similarly, this doctoral thesis postulates that psychological contracts are explicitly and implicitly formed through talent identification and labelling mechanisms within organisations. These include talent management systems and practices, succession planning, competency matrices and simply by word-of-mouth and appreciation by the employer’s agents. This is denoted as the talent deal. Finally, this doctoral thesis suggests that talented employees react differently compared to the more conventional and expected reactions to perceptions of psychological contract breach and violation where talented employees do not necessarily leave their employer nor diminish their performance in the first instance. Similarly, psychological contract fulfilment does not necessarily ensure tenure by talented employees. This is due to their identity and values, which are part of the predisposition talented employees hold regarding their careers and employment relationship. This is denoted as the dynamics of talented employees’ psychological contract.

**FIGURE 6.1: FINALISED THEMATIC MAP**

Moreover, to recap and in reference to Figure 6.1 above on the finalised thematic map, the 'value proposition of talented employees' acts as an antecedent for their psychological contract formation with current employers. It also influences their subsequent psychological contracts as they assess their current employment relationship against previous and prospective employers. This assessment is driven by their identity, employer brand image and reputation, and institutional
features and cultural characteristics. It later informs a bundle of expectations, preconceived ideas and thoughts and Schema (Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2008; Conway and Briner, 2009; Sherman and Morley, 2015), which become part of their psychological contract when talented employees believe or perceive that their employer has communicated these to them. Accordingly, talented employees establish ‘the talent deal’, which they believe would be reciprocated by their employer. Undoubtedly, the particular aspect of the talent deal ‘formation and reciprocation process’ is one of the most pressing and called upon research topics by scholars and practitioners in the field of psychological contract to date (Conway and Briner, 2005, 2009; Sherman and Morley, 2015; Briner, 2016; Al Shaqsi et al., 2016) which has been explained under Section 5.3.1 and Section 5.3.2.

Time will eventually reveal the extent to which talented employees believe their employers have done their best to mutually reciprocate the deals and consequently this will shift the state of their psychological contract between fulfilment, breach, or violation as long as they maintain their employment relationship. This reflects the ‘dynamics of talented employees’ psychological contract’ and their reaction to a different state of the contract. The three themes and the way they relate to each other answered the research questions and generated new insights that are considered unconventional and significant in understanding the theory of psychological contract and talent management. Therefore, the findings of this research extend the knowledge on how the psychological contract is formed, currencies of exchange, and reaction with respect to a unique workforce labelled ‘talented’ (Conway and Brier, 2005, 2009; Briner, 2016; Rousseau et al., 2015; Tomprou et al., 2015; Sparrow et al., 2014; Al Amri et al., 2016; Bjorkman et al., 2013). One, it is not necessary for a psychological breach or violation to occur for talented employees to leave their employers. Two, talented employees have traits and characteristics that shape their identity. This identity and their eagerness to remain aware of market dynamics makes them opportunistic and puts pressure on current and prospective employers as they fight the war of attracting and retaining them. These theoretical contributions are incorporated into the earlier conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2 and
the finalised thematic map in Chapter 4, which together result in this enhanced conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 6.2 below.

**FIGURE 6.2: ENHANCED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

1. **Talent Identification and Labelling**
   - **Psychological Contract (PC)**
   - **Attitude and Behaviour**

1. **Talent Management Systems & Practices**
   - Succession Planning
   - 9-Box Grid
   - Learning & Development Opportunities
   - Competency Matrix
   - Performance Appraisal

2. **Word of Mouth & Appreciation by Employer Agents or Direct Boss**

3. **Identity- Self Perceived Significance**

---

**1. Institutional & Cultural Characteristics 'War for Talent'**

**2. Corporate Brand Image & Reputation**

---

1. **PC-Formation:**
   - Brand Image of prospective employer and Personal Identity as antecedents
   - Talent Identification and Labelling Mechanism as process of formation and change.

2. **Constituents of the PC:**
   - Employer Brand of current and prospective employer
   - Promises and perceived obligations
   - Emergent talented employees’ PC
   - PC-fulfilment & restored PC following breach experiences

3. **Reaction and response to the dynamics of the PC:**
   - Improved Performance-PC Breach
   - Showcasing Talent- PCB and PCV
   - Tenure-PCF
   - Departure- Persistent PCB and PCV on distributional and procedural injustice
   - Departure-PCF looking for better learning and development opportunities.

---

1. **Positive PC results in healthy employment relations:**
   - Improved tenure
   - Sustained high performance
   - Innovative solution for Enhanced Oil Recovery
   - Organisational citizenship behaviour
   - Ownership of project and tasks

2. **Persistent PCB or PCV result in poor employment relations:**
   - Withhold knowledge and talent deployment
   - Stress and distorted work relations
   - Turnover
Hence, from the enhanced conceptual framework above, there are three main pillars of the conceptual model, namely: psychological contract, attitude and behaviour, and talent identification and labelling, which is developed based on the initial conceptual framework in Chapter 2 'Talented Employees', as these research findings are now available and enrich the initial understanding gained from the literature review. It is evident that this doctoral thesis has been able to explain how psychological contracts are formed, their contents, and dynamic as denoted in the box linked to the psychological contract. These elements are explained with sufficient details in Chapters 4 and 5 and specifically under the discussion sections. Moreover, this doctoral thesis also states how talented employees in Oman’s oil and gas sector come to terms and become aware of the fact that they are considered talented by their employers. These are denoted in the box linked to talent identification and labelling and are explained in detail under the discussion section of Chapter 5 as well as Section 5.2. Finally, this doctoral thesis also enriches the understanding and knowledge regarding the implications of both pillars: psychological contract and/or talent identification and labelling on attitudes and behaviour of talented employees as denoted in the box linked to attitudes and behaviour. These implications are explained in depth under Section 5.2.3, Section 5.3, and Section 5.4. Furthermore, it is important to note that the main pillars are interconnected as proposed in the aim of conducting this doctoral thesis and also found through the empirical findings. They are as well influenced by the context developed from the initial conceptual framework in Chapter 2 'The Context of Oman Oil and Gas Sector' to a more meaningful and salient feature of the context as discovered and understood from the empirical findings. This is now denoted as Institutional & Cultural Characteristics and Corporate Brand Image and Reputation, which are explained under Section 4.2.3, Section 4.3, and Section 5.4. The next section will explain the practical implications of this doctoral thesis.

**6.2.2 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

In normal situations where employees experience psychological contract fulfilment, especially when there is an economic downturn like the one
experienced by talented employees during the time of the interviews, employees are less likely to move to different employers or look for adventures (IHS Global Inc., 2016; Dickey et al., 2011; Rousseau, 2004). However, with some talented employees, organisations would need to excel and develop strong brands in which they could meet the interests and requirements of talented employees in terms of challenging tasks and projects, competitive packages, and rich experiences, and a conducive work environment in which self-managing teams are designed around projects, and support and recognition is received from line managers, and with a clear career prospect (see Section 5.2.1 and Section 6.2.3). In doing so, many employers should aim to develop their ‘employer brand’, understand the interest and characteristics of their highly valued employees ‘talented employees Identity’, and balance their organisational position against institutional pressure and cultural norms (see Section 5.3). This is because as the findings of the thesis suggests, talented employees’ identity and perceptions of ‘self-significance’ are the key drivers for their opportunistic mind-set and behaviour (see Sections 5.2.2 and Section 6.3). This is a game changer and a pillar that shifts the tenure and retention implications associated with psychological contract fulfilment to include further parameters if employers would continue to attract and retain current and prospective talented employees.

6.3 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the methodological perspective, the nature of this research does not reflect a comprehensive picture of talented employees’ experiences except for Oman’s oil and gas sector as illustrated in Figure 7.2 below. Moreover, the study findings cannot be generalizable to the wider population but instead qualify for theoretical generalisability (Ridder et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009), which provides a detailed and in-depth insight into a collective sample who could be theoretically synthesised (Symon and Cassell, 2012). Hence, this research provided a snap shot of the condescend realities of an elite group within the sector.
Theoretically, this research study, given the time and resource constraints did not investigate the dyadic nature of the psychological contract between talented employees and their employer. This area has been equally emphasised in the literature to understand who the second party to the contract is: the top management, line manager, team members, or human resources staff. Equally, it is sought to understand how the contract moves and its currencies shift among these different contract makers and which one of them is the most salient one in
This research study could be utilised in comparative studies investigating the nature of psychological contracts between talented employees in different sectors. A comparative study could be made between different talent pools or between talented and the non-talented employees within or across different contexts and levels. Furthermore, a complementary study to this doctoral thesis with a larger sample size is potentially rewarding to understand the correlation between the entities discovered. For example, conducting a research study to understand the correlation between talented employees' value propositions from (theme 1) and dynamics of talented employees' psychological contract from (theme 3). This leads to an important recommendation that further research could pursue, understanding which of the elements are more salient to talented employees for switching employers. This research has illustrated and helped understand how some of the above elements interact with the psychological contract and reaction of talented employees. It was not aiming- given the timeframe limitation and research scope- to assess correlations between them or rank them as participants perceive them as significant to sustain an employment relationship.

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This PhD thesis aimed to understand the psychological contract of talented employees within Oman's oil and gas sector. This was translated into three research questions which were answered under three distinctive themes. The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the thesis including research rationale, research process, and details on the research context and introduction of areas for investigation. Chapter 2 covered a critical review of the relevant literature on psychological contract, talent management, and literature that attempts to cross-link these two streams. Moreover, the chapter clearly discusses the gaps in the literature and potential area for contribution. It also presents the initial conceptual framework of the thesis, the research focus, and questions. Chapter 3 presented and described in great detail this research methodology, research design, methods for data collection, and sampling
strategies and sample profile. It also introduces the methods for analysing data and explains how this research has maintained quality throughout the research process. Chapter 4 begins by describing the actual analysis process and actual empirical data. It then describes the first theme and discusses its main contribution to the existing literature and how it responds to the first and second research questions. Chapter 5 on the other hand, describes themes two and three and discusses their main contribution against the existing literature and how they respond to research questions two and three. Finally, the conclusion chapter summarised this study's research questions and the main findings. It also, reiterates and explains the main theoretical contribution of this doctoral research. Consequently, the initial conceptual framework from Chapter 2 is revisited and enhanced. The chapter also addresses this study’s practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Total Word Count for this thesis excluding references and appendices is 735415 words
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Oil and Gas Organisations in Oman

- Petroleum Development Oman
- Occidental Oman
- Daleel Petroleum LLC
- Oman LNG
- BP Exploration
- PTTEP Oman
- Petrotel Oman
- DNO Oman Limited
- Petrogas E&P LLC
- CC Energy Development S.A.L
- Circle Oman
- Odin Energy A.S.
- Masirah Oil Ltd
- Allied Petroleum Exploration
- OOCEP & Subsidiary

Source: (Ministry of Oil and Gas, 2014f)

The researcher will conduct interviews with participants from four organisations selected from the list above. The selection of the organisations depends on the access granted by the first 4. Hence, the researcher will negotiate access with the first four then, given their reply and cooperation, will decide if it is necessary to contact the following organisations on the list. In the unlikely event that less than 4 four organisations grant the researcher access, the required participants for the study will be recruited from the organisations that do grant access until the suggested number of participants (n=30) is achieved, or until the point of saturation is achieved.
Appendix 2: Probes in Interview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Probe</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Probe</td>
<td>Involves repeating the initial question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanatory probes</td>
<td>Building onto incomplete or vague statements made by the respondent by asking ‘what did you mean?’ or ‘what makes you say that?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused probes</td>
<td>Used to obtain specific information. What kind of...?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent Probe</td>
<td>Most effective technique used when respondent is either reluctant or very slowly to answer the question. Simply pause and let the interviewee break the silence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing out</td>
<td>Used when then the interviewee is halted or dried up ‘tell me more about that’, what happened then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving Ideas or suggestion</td>
<td>Offering the interviewee an idea to think about. ‘Have you thought about...?’, ‘have you tried...?’, ‘did you know that...?’, ‘perhaps you should ask why...?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirroring or reflecting</td>
<td>Expressing in your own words what the respondents just said. This is very effective because it may force the respondent to rethink the answer and reconstruct another reply which will amplify the previous answer. ‘What you seem to be saying/feeling is...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Bias probe</td>
<td>Probes should never lead. Instead of saying ‘so you would say that you were really satisfied?’ the interviewer should say ‘can you explain a little more?’ or ‘how do you mean?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., (2008)

Further examples are noted by Saunders et al., (2012: 391-393 and p. 395)
Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet [version 4, 03/03/16]

SENSE MAKING OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES’ PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: EXPLORATORY STUDY ON OMAN OIL AND GAS SECTOR

Introduction
My name is Allah Al Shamsi, and I would like to invite you to take part in a research project. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand. Talk to others about the study if you wish. I am a doctoral student at the University of Surrey where I conduct research investigating ‘Talented Employees’ Psychological Contracts’.

The field study will help me understand what constitutes talented employees’ psychological contracts and the consequences of its changing status. Consequently, data gathered during the field study is anticipated to generate a rich and significant description that will enrich the existing knowledge of psychological contract theory, and will extend its premises to include talented employees’ experiences and meanings attached to their psychological contract. This could lead to the development of a conceptual model of a talented employees’ psychological contract within Oil and Gas sectors in Oman.

A psychological contract is defined in this research as “the sum of perceptions and beliefs of promises that forms expectations on the part of the talented employees for an obligation towards the employer”. It resembles the employment relationship in the form of social exchange whereby employees make expectations and work towards meeting them for a reward that s/he perceives or believes to have been promised in return by the employer.

The psychological contract employees’ form and exchange with their employers have number of implications on their attitude and behaviour as the literature and empirical studies revealed. This includes, intention to stay/quit from the organisation i.e. retention,
knowledge sharing and transfer within and to the workplace, satisfaction, and performance among others.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to understand how talented employees form and react to their psychological contract. This is important because the literature and empirical research in the field of psychological contracts suggests that it has a number of attitudinal and behavioural implications on employees such as performance, satisfaction and turnover.

**Why have I been invited to take part in the study?**

You have been invited to take part in this study because you have been identified by your organisation as a talented employee and, therefore, play an essential role for the success and sustainability of your organisation's competitiveness and well-being. Moreover, individuals such as yourself, who have been identified as talented employees, have been rarely included in studies that aimed at exploring the nature of your psychological contract with your employer.

The researcher has carefully designed criteria for inclusion which all participants must meet in order to be eligible to take part in this study. This includes holding a minimum of a bachelor degree in engineering or related sciences, and having worked for your current employer for a period between 2-5 years. You are one of the 30 participants that have been short listed to take part in this study. All participants are selected under the same criteria, and all will be from Oil and Gas organisations in Oman.

**Do I have to take part?**

No, you do not have to participate. There will be no adverse consequences in terms of your legal rights and your employment status. Similarly, there will be no impact on your career and relation with your employer, if you decide not to participate or withdraw at a later stage. You can withdraw your participation at any time. You can request for your data to be withdrawn until June 2016 after which data will potentially be utilised for publication of the results and research findings.

**What will my involvement require?**

If you agree to take part, I will require that you read and sign a consent form. Subsequently, you will be given this information sheet to keep along with a copy of your signed consent form. This research study will last until February 2017 but your involvement will only be between March 2016 to April 2016 during which all interviews and inquiries will be collected from all participants. The interview will be audio recorded
and any discussion outside the interview that is not audio recorded will not be included in the study. The recorded communication is later transcribed for analysis purposes before findings are generated. Therefore, audio recording is essential for your participation to be eligible.

During this time, you will be asked to participate once in a face-to-face interview with me at your convenience. As we will discuss during the interview, you may be asked on a later date if you would be willing to review your transcribed ‘information exchanged during the interview’ and the extent to which the researcher (that being me) has understood them and described them according to what you intended to convey. This is referred to in the literature as ‘respondent validation’ and is considered one of the strategies that improves the robustness of the data collection and qualitative research. These transcriptions, along with other data collected and analysed, are later utilised to provide rich descriptions forming the findings of this study.

**What will I have to do?**

If you agree to take part, I will ask you to contact me (see my contact information below) in order to make necessary arrangements and schedule a time for the interview. The interview is expected to last approximately 45 minutes. Interviews will be arranged to take place at a mutually convenient time and place. They are going to be conducted in English, unless otherwise specified by you.

I may as well require, as addressed in the invitation letter, access to your personal data such as offer letter, performance appraisals, etc... The need for these data will be decided upon after the interview. You will be notified, before a request to access your personal data is made. The researcher is aware that this data is highly sensitive and personal to you. Hence, you would be eligible to take part in the study even if you and/or your organisation didn't give permission to share your personal data. If you choose to grant me access to your personal data, I will then notify the organisation and permission to obtain a copy would subsequently be sought. Similarly, you can choose not to answer the open-ended questions and this will not affect your participation. This information and your personal data are considered research data and would be used as part of the analysis to improve the quality of the research findings. However, if you and/or your organisation refuse to allow audio recording of the interview, then your participation becomes invalid, as this is essential for reporting the findings and ensuring the robustness of data analysis.
and any discussion outside the interview that is not audio recorded will not be included in the study. The recorded communication is later transcribed for analysis purposes before findings are generated. Therefore, audio recording is essential for your participation to be eligible.

During this time, you will be asked to participate once in a face-to-face interview with me at your convenience. As we will discuss during the interview, you may be asked on a later date if you would be willing to review your transcribed ‘information exchanged during the interview’ and the extent to which the researcher (that being me) has understood them and described them according to what you intended to convey. This is referred to in the literature as ‘respondent validation’ and is considered one of the strategies that improves the robustness of the data collection and qualitative research. These transcriptions, along with other data collected and analysed, are later utilised to provide rich descriptions forming the findings of this study.

What will I have to do?

If you agree to take part, I will ask you to contact me (see my contact information below) in order to make necessary arrangements and schedule a time for the interview. The interview is expected to last approximately 45 minutes. Interviews will be arranged to take place at a mutually convenient time and place. They are going to be conducted in English, unless otherwise specified by you.

I may as well require, as addressed in the invitation letter, access to your personal data such as offer letter, performance appraisals, etc.. The need for these data will be decided upon after the interview. You will be notified, before a request to access your personal data is made. The researcher is aware that this data is highly sensitive and personal to you. Hence, you would be eligible to take part in the study even if you and/or your organisation didn’t give permission to share your personal data. If you choose to grant me access to your personal data, I will then notify the organisation and permission to obtain a copy would subsequently be sought. Similarly, you can choose not to answer the open-ended questions and this will not affect your participation. This information and your personal data are considered research data and would be used as part of the analysis to improve the quality of the research findings. However, if you and/or your organisation refuse to allow audio recording of the interview, then your participation becomes invalid, as this is essential for reporting the findings and ensuring the robustness of data analysis.
This information is reiterated in the Consent Form which you must read & sign prior to the interview.

**Research data** includes "any material collected, observed or created for the purpose of analysis and on which research conclusions are based" while **research project data** includes "data collected as part of the administration of the research project but is not analysed to draw any research conclusions. Such data are contact lists, consent forms, etc." (University of Surrey Ethical Principles and Procedures for Teaching and Research, 2013, p.18), which states that Research data to be retained for a minimum of ten years while research project data to be retained for six years.

**What will happen to data I provide?**

During data collection each participant will be allocated a unique alpha-numeric code, which will be known only to the researcher and the participant, and it will be used throughout the project. This alpha-numeric code uniquely links the participant to the data, but maintains participant anonymity. Personal data will be handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act of 1998, coinciding with the Omani Royal Decree (69/2008) which contains provisions relevant to Data Protection (Articles 43-49). Research data will be securely saved on a password-protected laptop before they are transferred and stored on secure University of Surrey servers in line with university policy.

Participants will be anonymised by using pseudonyms during thesis write up, and any findings that may be disseminated through publications and/or reports as well as utilised in future studies that will have received all relevant legal, professional and ethical approval. These aliases will carry no identifying or distinguishing characteristics (nicknames, business name, and product information). This separation between participant and data will maintain anonymity for talented employees from similar and different organisations. This will also ensure anonymity within and between the organisations.

I cannot tell you at this moment in time what this research will entail or what analyses will be carried out, but I can assure you that all appropriate legal, ethical and other approvals will be in place. For practical reasons your consent will not be sought again unless you indicate you wish us to do so. Your data will not be used for commercial purposes.
What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There are no evident risks or disadvantages associated with taking part in the research beside the ones pertaining to research data as discussed in the previous section. However, at any point in time in the unlikely event that participants experience distress during the interview or become emotionally disturbed as a result of the interview or due to any particular question(s), I would kindly request that you inform me immediately so that I deal with this in a very considerate way by offering to take a break or even terminate the interview. If you require, necessary measures will be taken to restore your wellbeing. This can be arranged with your employer as I will communicate this option with your talent manager prior to our interview.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There is no monetary benefit associated with participating in this study. However, participants will benefit from being given the opportunity to systematically and hopefully comprehensively reflect on his/her own experiences with their current employer. Alternatively, if you would allow me to contact you, I can provide you with a summary of results once analyses are over.

What happens when the research study stops?

All research data and research project data will be handled as per the UK Data Protection Act of 1998 and coinciding with the Omani Royal Decree (69/2008) which contains provisions relevant to Data Protection, and, will be disposed of accordingly. You will be notified as soon as any changes occur in the study.

What if there is a problem?

Any complaint or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed. Please contact in the first instance: Aflah Al Shaqsi, Principal Investigator (+968 96471910) or (+4414836821170) a.alshaqsi@surrey.ac.uk or my principle supervisor Dr. Vurain Tabvuma (v.tabvuma@surrey.ac.uk +441483 686359) or the Acting Head of School, Prof. Andy Adcroft (a.adcroft@surrey.ac.uk +441483-682007).

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. Completely. Your details will be held in complete confidence and I will follow ethical and legal practices in relation to all study procedures. Personal information will be handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act of 1998 and coinciding with the
Omani Royal Decree (69/2008) which contains provisions relevant to Data Protection (Articles 43-49) so that unauthorised individuals will not have access to them.
You will not be identified in any reports/publications resulting from this research, and anyone reading them will not know who has contributed to it. With your permission, I would like to use anonymous verbatim quotations in reports.

**Full contact details of the researcher:**
Aflah Al Shaqsi
PhD Researcher
People and Organisation Department
University of Surrey, UK.
Mobile: +96896471910: Oman;
+4414836821170: UK.
E-Mail: a.alshaqsi@surrey.ac.uk

**Supervisor:**
Dr. Vurain Tabvuma
Senior Lecturer in Human Resources Management and Organisational Behaviour
BSc (Hons), MSc, PhD
People and Organisation Department
Surrey Business School
Office Telephone: +441483 686359
E-mail: v.tabvuma@surrey.ac.uk

**Who is organising and funding the research?**
This research is organised by [the University of Surrey and is funded by the government of the Sultanate of Oman through the Ministry of Manpower.

**Who has reviewed the project?**
This research has been looked at by an independent group of people, called an Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed by and received a favourable ethical opinion from University of Surrey Ethics Committee.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.
Appendix 4: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

Consent Form [version 4, 03/03/16]

SENSE MAKING OF TALENTED EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: EXPLORATORY STUDY ON OMAN OIL AND GAS SECTOR

Please initial each box*

1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided [version 4, 03/03/16]. I have been given a full explanation by the investigator of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do.

2. I have been advised about any disadvantages, risks, and or discomfort on my health and well-being which may result. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

3. I agree to comply with the requirements of the study, as outlined to me, to the best of my abilities. I shall inform the investigator immediately if I have any concern or suffer any deterioration of any kind in my health or well-being.

4. I understand my rights and legal procedures in accordance with the Omani Royal Decree (69/2008) which contains provisions on Data Protection, should there be any potential distress that is likely to result from my participation in this study (as detailed in the participant information sheet).

5. I agree for my anonymised data to be used for this study and future research that will have received all relevant legal, professional and ethical approvals.

6. I give consent to the interview data to be audio recorded.

7. I give consent to anonymous verbatim quotations being used in reports.
8. I give consent for my personal data including, but not limited to offer letter and performance review to accessed (as stated in the participant information sheet).

9. I understand that all project data will be held for at least 6 years and all research data for at least 10 years in accordance with the University policy, and that my personal data is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and coinciding with the Omani Royal Decree (69/2008) which contains provisions relevant to Data Protection (Articles 43-49).

10. I give consent for the answers to the open-ended questions to be utilised after the interview and as part of data analysis and reporting of the results and findings in future reports and in the thesis.

11. I agree to let the researcher contact me to provide me with a summary of results once analyses are over.

12. I understand that all data collected during the study may be looked at for monitoring and auditing purposes by authorised individuals from University if it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.

13. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision, without prejudice and without my legal rights and employment being affected.

14. I understand that I can request for my data to be withdrawn until June 2016 when results and findings could potentially be published, and, that following my request all identifiable data already collected would be retained if I give my permission. Anonymous data already collected will be used.
15. I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I further declare that I have been given adequate time to consider my participation.

Thank You for Providing your Consent
* Please feel free to inquire about any of the above statements. Your participation will still be eligible should you choose not to consent to statements 5, 8, 10, 11, and 12.

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS) ...........................................
Signed ......................................................
Date ........................................................
Name of researcher receiving consent (BLOCK CAPITALS) ....................
Signed ......................................................
Date ........................................................
Appendix 5:

Open-ended questions to be sent to talented employees before conducting the interview

Thank you for agreeing to partake in this research entitled 'Sense Making of Talented Employees' Psychological Contract and Its Implications; Exploratory study on Oman Oil and Gas Sector.' By now you should have read the Participant Information Sheet and read and signed the Consent Form. Your participation and information is valuable and is part of a study that is intended to contribute positively to academia by generating new knowledge and enriching existing theories, as well as generating recommendations on the nature of talented employees' psychological contracts and how organisations can better manage and retain these employees. All information, including your name and experience, will be strictly confidential and will be anonymous. Under no circumstances, or at any point in time will your identity or the information you share be identified to anyone except the researcher (myself). All information will be used for the purpose of academic research only and as part of my PhD Thesis. Kindly, refer to the participant information sheet and consent form sent earlier for further information on this study.

There are two parts in the questions below. The first one is about your demographic profile, and the second is focused on your experience with your current employer. The second part is important, as it will assist the forthcoming interview by enabling you to recall stories, events, and incidents from your current experience with your employer.

Thank you once again for your participation and should you have any questions and/or require further information, please contact me at +96896471910 or a.alshaqel@surrey.ac.uk
**Part one: Demographic Information**

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Current Job Title:
4. List of Academic Qualifications from highest attained qualification to the lowest:
   A.
   B.
   C.
   D.
   E.

5. List of professional qualifications (includes chartered memberships and courses)
   A.
   B.
   C.
   D.
   E.

6. Years of work experience:
7. Years of work experience with the current employer:

**Part two: Your experience with your current employer:**

1) What do you hope to achieve in terms of your employment with your current employer?

This may include anything from:

  A) Career Prospect:

  B) Training and Development:
C) Remuneration (increase in salary):

D) Promotion:

E) Relationship with line manager/peers:

F) The job itself:

G) Others (Please explain):

2) What do you perceive your obligations towards your employer are?
Appendix 6: Interview Schedule

The Use of Critical Incident Technique in a Face-to-Face Interview

Following the general introduction, including thanking the participant for taking part and explaining the purpose of the research to participants, I reiterated the points addressed in the participants' information sheet. These include reminding participants of confidentiality and anonymity of their identity and their shared information, the right to withdraw or not answering any questions at any time without the need for justification, and the option of providing a summary of findings if s/he wishes. Then I requested to audio record the interview, and explained the approximate duration of the interview. Finally, I asked participants to read and sign the consent form, as discussed by Saunders et al., (2012: 390).

I started the interview by reviewing the answers (if provided) to the open-ended questions, including the participant's demography and profile. With some participants, I decided to discuss answers of the open-ended questions towards the end of the interview when participants have shared information on their experience and a sound rapport and trust relationship between us has been well established. Following this stage, I moved the interview to general questions on the participant's work experience. The inquiry also was on critical incidents that occurred to participants during their work experience and their psychological contract, as noted below.

The established rapport has assisted me to gain further insights and details about the main incidents and their corresponding meanings. Important to note that, the questions below are not in their fixed forms as in a real-life interview. The questions included probing elements (See Appendix 2) and were amended depending on the degree of participants' cooperation and in light of achieving the study's objectives. Similarly, and equal to exploratory studies, many questions were spontaneously formed during the interview depending on the revelations shared by the participants.

The following section outlines some of the questions that were designed to elicit answers to main research questions. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) forms of questions in the semi-structured face-to-face interviews are flagged as (CIT) as they requested participants to refer to events, situations, and incidents when providing their answers
and stories. The other questions are considered supporting ones to enhance the discussion and stream the flow of inquiry. They were used to gain some factual information. They, therefore, didn’t require participants to recall or refer to particular incidents. Nevertheless, all the questions, including the ones in the form of CIT, were amended depending on the revelations, accounts, and stories of the participants. Similarly, given the inductive and exploratory nature of this study, the order of the questions was not fixed nor were all of them asked. Some may be omitted and new ones may emerge, depending on the amount of information yielded by the participants.

Moreover, as with qualitative exploratory studies which are inductive in nature, I have learned and improved the interviewing process as I progressed with subsequent interviews and initial findings as noted in section 6.5.3. Hence, this allowed me to amend and improve the sequence and flow of inquiry with subsequent interviews resulting in effective interviews (Chell, 1999; 2004) and (Saunders et al., 2014). Finally, the interviewees were thanked for their time and information provided. I have kept a diary for every interview as part of ‘audit trail’ that includes main learning points. These learning points mainly focus on my experience and that of the participant during the interview and how the questions could be improved for subsequent interviews (See attachment for example).

Similarly, I have used member checks or ‘respondent validation’ whereby I asked participants following data analysis to review their transcribed data and the extent to which I understood them accurately and described their findings according to what they intended to convey. This practice will be emphasized during the first few interviews as pilot studies. Transcriptions of interviews, on the hand, will provide thick and rich descriptions forming the findings of this study. These strategies (audit trial, respondent validation, and the thick and rich description) are part of strategies argued by (Merriam, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Prats, 2009) that improve the robustness of the data collection and qualitative research by enhancing its credibility, dependability, and transferability.
A. Formation and Content of Talented Employees’ Psychological Contract:

1. How does being identified as a 'talented employee' affect your relationship with your employer? Kindly elaborate and provide examples (you may refer to your timeline to assist you).

2. Can you explain how being labelled ‘talented employee’ has influenced your expectations towards your employer?

3. Can you explain how being labelled ‘talented employee’ has influenced your obligations towards your employer?

4. (CIT) Can you explain how does your employer communicate their expectations and obligations to you? Kindly elaborate with examples of incidents/events that reflects this communication.

5. (CIT) Can you explain how do you communicate and/or negotiate your expectations and obligations with your current employer? Kindly elaborate with examples of incidents/events that reflects this communication.

6. Can you explain how does your employer make promises to you? Kindly elaborate with examples from your career at this organisation.

7. (CIT) How do you perceive your employer in making and/or keeping promises?
   a. Can you name particular incidents/events that clarifies your statement?
   b. How did/do you deal with that incident/event you just mentioned?
   c. How did it affect your relationship with your employer?
   d. How did it affect your job?
   e. What were the consequences on your attitude and behaviour?

B. State of Psychological Contract and Its Implications:

1. How do you think your employer has been responding to your expectations and obligations? Kindly explain with examples over your career at this organisation.
2. (CIT) To what extent do you think that your employer has been able to deliver on what has been promised? Kindly explain with some examples on the occasions and incidents/events from your experience at the organisation.

3. (CIT) To what extent do you think that your employer has failed to deliver on what has been promised? Kindly explain with some examples on the occasions and incidents/events from your experience at the organisation.

4. How does the nature of compliance towards making and keeping promises by your current employer affected you?

5. (CIT) Do you think that your employer treats you fairly and respectfully? Kindly reflect from your experience at the organisation.

6. (CIT) Psychological Contract Breach: Can you recall incidents/events where you felt/inferred that;
   o Discrepancies existed between what has been promised to you and what has been delivered,
   o Disappointed, and/or let down by your existing employer for not keeping their promise.
   o Can you explain your personal experiences that are associated with these incidents/events? In other words,
   o Can you explain what it meant for you to undergo such experiences?

7. (CIT) Psychological Contract Violation: Can you recall incidents/events where you felt:
   o Cynical and resentment towards your existing employer including feelings of anger or betrayal by your existing employer.
   o Can you explain your personal experiences that are associated with these incidents/events? In other words,
   o Can you explain what it meant for you to undergo that experience?

8. (CIT) Psychological Contract Fulfilment: Can you recall incidents/events which made you feel:
o happy and/or pleased with your existing employer including expressing loyalty and OCB towards your existing employer
o Can you explain your personal experiences that are associated with these incidents/events? In other words,
  o Can you explain what it meant for you to undergo these experience?

9. Given the above explanation and elaboration, how do you perceive your psychological contract state to have been and changed over time during your employment at this organisation? You may refer to your previous discussion and the timeline to assist you, alternatively, you may provide new examples.

10. How has such experiences with your current employer influence your attitude and behavior towards your current employer and this organisation during your employment at this organisation?

11. What actions did you take/do you consider taking following your experiences with the organisation?

12. **(CIT)** Have you thought of ‘leaving/staying with’ this organisation? Why, why not?
   a. Can you recall further incidents that made you think leaving the organisation? / What are the reasons? What it means to you? **Or**
   b. Can you recall further incidents that made you think of staying with the organisation? / What are the reasons? What it means to you?
   c. How did you deal with the incident or what actions have you taken to deal with the incidents? / Are there other reasons besides the ones you told me?
   d. How do you think will you act in the future? / What did you do next?

**C. Alternative Questions on the state of the psychological contract:**

1. **(CIT)** You said that the organisation has delivered/not delivered what it has promised; can you recall particular incidents? /can you tell more about what actually happened?
   a. What actions did you take following that incident? / What did you do when that happened?
b. How would you deal in the future about similar incidents? / If it happens again will you react differently?

2. (CIT) You said that the organisation has ‘treated/not treated’ you fairly; can you recall some incidents that led you to this conclusion?
   a. What actions did you take following that incident? / What did you do when that happened?
   b. How would you deal in the future about similar incidents? / If it happens again will you react differently?

3. (CIT) From what you said, do you think that you ‘trust/don’t trust’ your organisation; can you tell me if there are further incidents that made you think so? / was there anything else that happened which made you think so?

4. (CIT) Given the information about the quality of your relationship with your line manager/employer?
   a. Do you, think that your line manager/employer treats you ‘fairly/unfairly’? Why/why not?
      i. Can you recall incidents that exemplify what you are saying? / Explain what happened?
      ii. What actions did you take following that incident? / What did you do when that happened?
      iii. How would you deal in the future about similar incidents? / If it happens again will you react differently?

b. Let’s go back to your relationship quality: do you think that your line manager has ‘kept/not kept’ his promises?
   i. Can you recall incidents that exemplify what you are saying? / Explain what happened?
   ii. What actions did you take following that incident? / What did you do when that happened?
   iii. How would you deal in the future about similar incidents? / If it happens again will you react differently?
c. I am really intrigued, from what you have been saying, therefore, ‘do you trust/don’t trust’ your line manager?
   i. Can you tell me if there are further incidents that made you think so?

5. How does the nature of compliance towards making and keeping promises by your current employer affected you?

6. (CIT) Have you thought of ‘leaving/staying with’ this organisation? Why, why not?
   I. Can you recall further incidents that made you think leaving the organisation? / What are the reasons? What it means to you? Or
   II. Can you recall further incidents that made you think of staying with the organisation? / What are the reasons? What it means to you?
   III. How did you deal with the incident or what actions have you taken to deal with the incidents? / Are there other reasons besides the ones you told me?
   IV. How do you think you will act in the future? / What did you do next?

Source: Researcher (2015) developed from the work of (Flanagan, 1954; Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau and Robinson, 1994; Robison, 1996; Herriot and Pemberton, 1996; Herriot et al., 1997; Guest and Conway, 1997; Rousseau, 2000; Chell, 2004; Rousseau, 2001; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004; Chell, 1998; 2004; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Flick, 2007)
Appendix 7: Negotiating Access with Talented Employees

Our Ref: TE-**

Date: **/**/**/16

Dear xxxx (Talented Employee)

My name is Aflah Al Shaqsi and I am a PhD student at Surrey Business School (University of Surrey) in UK sponsored by the Ministry of Manpower, Oman. The subject of my study is to understand the psychological contract of talented employees at xxxx and how they respond to what they perceive as psychological contract fulfillment, breach, or violation. Further explanation on the research topic will be provided prior to the interview and to the degree that you may require.

I have coordinated with your Talent Manager and they have approved that I contact you to request your valuable participation in this study. I would like to interview you in order to exchange information and learn about your experience with your employer. The interview is scheduled to take approximately 45 minutes, but depending on our discussion and exchange of information it may take longer, alternatively, you are free to end the interview at your convenience without the need to justify it. Similarly, you may choose to answer or not to answer any part of the interview should you wish to do so without the need to justify and with no prejudice.

More detailed information is available in the Participant Information Sheet which is sent with this invitation letter. The participant information sheet will give detailed information about the research study and the nature of your participation in the study. The details on the participant information sheet should allow you to decide whether to accept to take part in this study or not. The study is scheduled to take place between March 2016 and April 2016. Should you accept to take part, I will then send you the Consent Form which we will discuss prior to conducting the interview when you would be asked to read and sign prior to the start of the interview.
Appendix 8: Negotiating Access with Gate Keepers

Dear xxxx,

Head of Talent Management at xxxx

My name is Aflah Al Shaqsi and I am a PhD student at Surrey Business School (University of Surrey) in the UK, sponsored by the Ministry of Manpower of Oman. The subject of my study is to understand the psychological contract of talented employees at xxxx and how they respond to what they perceive as psychological contract fulfilment, breach or violation. Further explanation on the research topic will be provided prior to conducting the study, and to the degree that you may require. I would be very grateful if you would allow me to include xxxx as one of the organisations for my research. I will require the opportunity to visit xxxx as appropriate between the periods of March 2016 – April 2016 to consult with you regarding your policy and practices on talent and talent management.

As part of my doctoral work, I will inquire about the organisation’s policies and practices for defining and identifying talented employees. Similarly, I will require demographic information about your talented employees (Talent Pool) so I may select the ones that fall into my selection and inclusion criteria to interview them. The approximate number of talented employees that I will need to interview as part of my research is a total of 30 participants. Initially, I will need to interview between 6-8 individuals from xxxx and the rest I am planning to interview from other organisations in the oil and gas sector in Oman. I may require if possible and agreed upon by you and the participants, a copy of their documents such as performance appraisals, offer letters, or reward schemes. The need for these documents will be decided upon after the interview and participants will be notified if I would like to access any of their personal documents. If they grant access, I will then notify you to arrange for the same.
Appendix 10

Interview Logbook

Interviewer: Aflah Al Shaqsi
Number of Interview: 2
Name of Participant:
Date of Interview: 1
Time: 5:02 - 5:53
Place of Interview:
Duration: 51 min
Participant’s Profile: Engineer/Science
Time code / folder: 2 10 2
Learning Points:
* Allow participant to unload by showing them the time scale.
* No need to ask all questions!
* Sequencing of Qs is very important.
* Bring up the current market situation (Oil Price Donp).

Comments of Interviewer:
* Presentation was helpful to prepare for topic.
* Interview was smooth.
* No need for sketch.

Noticed disturbances:
None
Appendix 11: Example of Coded Transcript

### Theme & codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes System</th>
<th>Examples of interview transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Codes’ generating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes’ generating</th>
<th>Examples of interview transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflective, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision, Curna's knowledge of what they want</td>
<td>TID9: I was not disappointed. I was even happier because I knew that I had worked with a team which had 20 years experience. The team leader has got to ISO 9001 and is also registered and it was reassuring...</td>
</tr>
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### Examples of interview transcript

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of interview transcript</th>
<th>Codes’ generating</th>
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267
Appendix 12: Example of fine-tuned themes codes and quotes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>sub-themes</th>
<th>codes</th>
<th>Supported quotes from different interviewee’s’ transcript</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talented Employees Value Proposition</td>
<td>Talented Employees Value Proposition-Employer Brand</td>
<td>(1) Corporate and Brand Image &amp; Social Pressure</td>
<td>TE32: “... we as an organization we are small, when it comes to number of positions we have only about x positions, we have about x employees. So, it’s small, although we contributing to Oman, about 10% of GDP comes from our organization and from these employees.”</td>
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<td>TE32: “...our vision is the best at what we do, and if we want to be the best at what we do we need the best people to help us and reach our aspired vision to join our organisation.”</td>
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<td>TE14: “I graduated from Sultan Qaboos University as a petroleum and natural gas engineer. After graduation, I got an offer from [COMPANY x] to work as Reservoir engineer. I worked for them for just two weeks, then I got another offer from [COMPANY y] and I preferred [COMPANY y] because of its reputation. I believe it’s better”</td>
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<td>TE02: “Well, I chose company x because it is the most famous company in Oman and also they have very good development program which is rare in other companies...”</td>
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<td>TE30: “… if I find similar environment, then yeah why not, I’ll come to think about [moving to different sector or company]. However, I doubt it to be honest, as I believe this environment exists only in the oil and gas sector and this [Organization] specifically.”</td>
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<td>TE28 compares the public sector against the oil and gas sector “... You know, some people live in their comfort zone in the public sector, [they ask] why move to the private sector, my career would be at stake, and the job security etc.... yes, they'll pay you well [private sector], but will strain you to death,</td>
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**this is not true. I was willing to go the extra mile, so yes, I was frustrated but to me, it didn’t work well for me [public sector] so I joined this organization later on.”**

**TE18:** “I wanted to work for [Company y or Company x] since my graduation. I think because [Company x and Company y] market themselves more than the others. They came to university and they did presentation for us. So, I think [Company x and Company y] are famous brands in Oman.”

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<th>(2) Competitive packages and benefits</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TE05:</strong> “In terms of the entitlements that was not discussed in the interview. That was a part of the job offer later on when I received it. When I attended the interview, the job was in the office and has to do with exciting geological information and be part of corporate business of the company, and be able to also practice my studies as a programmer and I felt like it is nice balance. But I had also another job offer from another organization, and then I just compared my entitlements, and what I will be getting and decided to go with [company y instead of company x].”</td>
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| **TE14:** “I got the job offer from COMPANY x in the beginning and then I got another offer from COMPANY y which I feel was a better offer at the time. They promised to give me Master. Another thing, okay the housing loan which is the same.” |
| **TE02:** “you see…. we need to consider what other benefits are we getting from company y which are valuable for us…. for example, full medical coverage with good bones so sometimes we need to wait for other things [promotion]....” |

| **TE10:** “even when my boss asked me, are you going to leave COMPANY y for any reason, I told him if the difference in income from the other company is above 50% I’ll leave, because it’s common sense, we work for our families, to support our social status, to guarantee our future...” |
TE05: “... One of the jobs offers I got was being a tutor at a certain college. It was a good opportunity as I was teaching something I learned within my masters, but I wasn't comfortable with the salary, it was much more less than what I get here. Also, I was not comfortable with the working hours, sometimes there was lecture at 8 p.m., which wasn't very good for me. So eventually, I rejected the offer.”

TE13: “I got two offers one offer from [company x] as operation geologist and another offer in [COMPANY y] as well site geologist, I already worked as well sit geologist in [Company a] but the difference between [company x] and [COMPANY y] was only the money... it was good in COMPANY y... Also, during that time [in 2008], they [employees in Oil and Gas Sector] talked about COMPANY y, that it will have more operation, and more people [employees] will get promotion, good salary, good positions...”

TE30: “To be honest, comparing this [organization’s] work environment with other work environments, I think you’ll not find similar, in my personal opinion. I mean how the team work, how the managers act with the employees, and the rules, because this [Organization] keeps the staff as its aim, the employees their aim, how to make them reach their maximum potential to work, so they take care of them, they have other facilities, housing for example, nearby the company facility [off the capital].”

(3) Development and Career Advancement Opportunities

TE02: “Well, I chose company x because it is the most famous company in Oman and also they have very good development program which is rare in other companies so that’s why I decided to work with them so I can get as much as I can in terms of development.... Also, company x invests a lot in development and research... I cannot say it’s a promise but there was a chance for me also to do master and PhD.”

TE16: “... Within that time, I saw that development here [Company y] was not going well and there were issues with mentors... I was thinking [to] myself, should I return back to [Company x]? they have solid development,
they are well known in the development, they develop fresh graduates very well.”

TE10 “my selection [of employer] was made between two companies, [company x and COMPANY y]. [In company y] we are around 30-40 [employees] in the core business and the sub-surface compared to more than [500 employees in company x] so the chance of growing in the two organizations you can see is different. I know in company x I’ll have a lot of experience, I’ll work in different places in Oman, and there’re a lot of things to learn. So usually company x is like a college after one graduates from university, they can learn technically there and become expert after some years, but progression will be slower there.”

TE13: “yeah and also the career path... when I went to [company x] the career path over there is little bit hard, I saw it was hard and also for the salary, they were little bit restrict. but in [COMPANY y] NO, they gave very good options, you have to work as a site geologist for one or two years and then you have to work as operations geologist and then you have to work as project geologist and so on.

TE29: “… in 2010, there was a change due to the expansion of the company, there were changes in the positions. My boss was transferred to another block [oil field site], and I was promoted at that time to a senior accountant, acting chief accountant, so if you see through my career, you’d see that it’s accelerated very fast, from starting 2008 as assistant accountant, 2010 a senior accountant then an acting chief accountant, then in 2012 I was promoted to chief accountant, I was in charge of the accounting department, 3 staff was reporting at that time to me, and I was reporting to the CEO”
TE02: “my line manager told me I will push for your promotion if you stay but [at the time] I also have proposed to team leader and I was promised I can do my Ph.D. He accepted but we need to discuss with line manager; the line manager told me okay I will give you green light but we need to talk to what is called function head who is responsible for training… [I told them] I have short period, I need to reply to another employer whether I will join them or not. I didn’t get any reply or feedback while I was waiting so I left.”

TE02: “…in company x because it is big organization… different departments are involved in supplying the data to MOG [Ministry of Oil and Gas]… it’s a different team leader who meets with MOG”

TE22: “In [COMPANY x] they have two ladder they call it; technical ladder and managerial ladder. So you will be in the same position as manager but from the technical side. So in term of payment and salary groups in terms of the other advantages you are getting. You are in the same position as manager, but you are from the technical side. We discussed that here [company a], they said that they could do that but it is still not happening.”

TE32: “our organization culture is really good, and you can approach anyone from the CEO downwards, at any time, there’s an open-door policy”

TE02: “…COMPANY x is very huge compared to [my current employer]. Here there is a chance in terms of decision making but in COMPANY x the decision making is difficult even for team leaders. So, they don’t give you full load for decision making here it is totally different, this field [oil and gas concession area] is yours, it is your decision, and this is your responsibility.”

TE22: “The difference [is] you have majority of Omanis [around] 93 % of Omanis in [Company y]. And also, most of the people you are working with,
they don’t have this kind of senior and junior discrimination. That I was told also about Company, that whatever you say is respected. They don’t treat you as you just joined, and you don’t know, no. they treat you positively and they also give you the chance.... [However, COMPANY x] has a more systematic work. They have the most structure work, here it is more of loose”

TE30: “… if I find similar environment, then yeah why not, I’ll come to think about [moving to different sector or company]. However, I doubt it to be honest, as I believe this environment exists only in the oil and gas sector and this [Organization] specifically.”

TE30: “… To be honest, comparing this [organization’s] work environment with other work environments, I think you’ll not find similar, in my personal opinion. I mean how the team work, how the managers act with the employees, and the rules, because this [Organization] keeps the staff as its aim, the employees their aim, how to make them reach their maximum potential to work”

TE10: “… for example, I had a boss that stayed for less than a year, he left the company, and he gave me opportunity to join him in the new company. I went there but I didn’t like even the look of the building, you know like people were putting stamps for attendance and wouldn’t leave without stamping ‘finger prints’ for example, but here, this Company is like a task oriented it is not like a time oriented.”

(6) Learning and Development - Challenging Tasks and Projects

TE02 compares his choices of employers through the job enlargement and enrichment opportunities “… I always compare employers by job description… in COMPANY x I was working on unconventional injection techniques and projects [used in oil fields for production] which are not applied in company y.... they only have conventional injection techniques.... So with company x, the job description or the scope is very heavy and it is of higher level.... [However], I do not want to lower myself by doing the same
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<th>tasks along the years. So, with company y they give me a chance to be a senior engineer which included looking after junior engineers”</th>
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<td><strong>TE17:</strong></td>
<td>“…in the first few months [after joining company x as a fresh graduate] you get like training courses and you get to know the different disciplines in the whole industry. So, they took us through different courses that allows us to get introduced to the different aspects of how like [the cycle is from] exploration to production to development, then abandoning a field. That’s in short the cycle of oil and gas industry.”</td>
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<td><strong>TE29:</strong></td>
<td>“…in 2014, I thought I’ve reached the peak of the experience and development in this position… chief accountant was the highest position in the subsidiary, so that’s why I requested for the change, to be moved to the corporate, to have more exposure to different experiences, I wanted to move out from the comfort zone, and to have a different type of challenge.”</td>
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<td><strong>TE32:</strong></td>
<td>“… in terms of development, learning and development for example, we spend more than 7 million USD for our comparatively lower number of total employees compared to other organizations, so we are second to none when it comes to learning and development, we’re the first when it comes to learning and development.”</td>
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<td><strong>TE05:</strong></td>
<td>“… Yes for sure, I do know that, even after no more than one or two years after joining our company, I knew that I am behind my colleagues who graduated with me from the university, in terms of certified training. Their company has more experience in arranging trainings in my discipline, so it will be easier for them to offer such trainings better than my company.”</td>
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<td><strong>TE17:</strong></td>
<td>“… With COMPANY x, yes... they provide you with courses in the Core. I had courses as well in the soft skills, so this is how I got a chance to get the presentations skills, report writing, everything.”</td>
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(7) Rewarding and Rich Experience

TE02 exquisitely describes his surprise of the greater exposure to roles and different aspects of the business: “I will be honest with you, when I moved to company y I thought I will not gain any experience but that was wrong... Though there are less number of wells here but I got the chance to deal with geologists and look deeper in operation. I also have the chance to make decisions... another advantage that I am involve in meeting representatives from ministry of Oil and gas”. Similarly, TE02 further adds to a following question and using a probe “... I was involved in preparing for example study scope and preparing contract, I also, did technical evaluation for many companies including foreign companies, this is a chance I never get it company x”.

TE05: “... When I attended the interview, they discussed with me the job, it was something in the office has to do with exciting geological information and be a part of corporate business of the company and be able to also practice my studies as a programmer and I felt like it is nice balance. Not to be in the IT department, far from everything exciting that happens in the company, but still being able to do what I like to do which is programming.”

TE23: “by that time, I said why don’t I try to explore something outside [company x]. I saw an advertisement about a senior job. I knew if I stayed in [COMPANY x], I would not get a senior job until I have worked for more 3 or 4 years. Then I can get that senior level job. So I said it is a challenging job, it is a senior. It is like a promotion plus also the other benefits like remuneration benefit. But also development, to go to a different environment, and a different field, trying something that is also different, working for a smaller company. I wanted to experience that also. Different structure of the organization is also something I wanted to experience. So I joined Company in September 2013.”
TE27: “... I was moved back to the plant (facility) again but with the operation team (operations in marketing) [because] we have to know how exactly they are producing the energy... I went to upstream, internal audit, I flown abroad to meet customers, etc...”

TE11 “I got offers [to work for] different companies...I was happy with COMPANY y because of the project. It’s a steam fluid project. Heavy oil.....which is not very common. That interested me......the Enhanced Oil Recovery [EOR].”

TE12 eloquently summed up the different exposure and rewarding experience talented employees can reap by joining and working for that particular employer. “I started with [COMPANY x] because I had a scholarship [to do my BSc] from them. But I was happy working for them. I still think that [COMPANY x] is a good place to work. The nicest thing about [COMPANY x] that they have a variety of challenges. In an Oil company, you need to work in a sandstone environment, then a carbonate environment, then a stringer environment then a tight rock then a gas. [COMPANY x] has all of this.