How Talent Identification Influences Perceptions of Organizational Justice and Basic Psychological Needs: A Self-Determination Theory Approach

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the impact of talent identification practices on employees' psychological needs and to examine the mediating role of distributive justice/injustice between talent identification and psychological needs. Additionally, it investigates procedural justice/injustice as a moderating variable in this mediation. A cross-sectional sample (n=124) with clinical vignettes was used to test the hypotheses through moderated mediation analysis. The findings reveal three key insights. First, talent identification significantly correlates with psychological needs. High-potential individuals reported greater satisfaction of their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness compared to non-high potential employees employees, who reported higher frustration levels. Second, high potentials perceived greater distributive justice, correlating with increased psychological need satisfaction. Conversely, non-high potential employees perceived higher distributive injustice, leading to greater psychological need frustration. Third, procedural justice/injustice did not significantly moderate the mediation. However, procedural justice/injustice was significantly related to psychological needs, independent of distributive justice/injustice. Our research makes a vital addition to the human resource management (HRM) field by providing quantitative empirical analysis of talent identification where prior work has been largely conceptual or qualitative. Given the current labor market's supply-demand imbalance, understanding these dynamics is increasingly critical.

Keywords: Talent management, talent philosophies, talent identification, organizational justice, self-determination theory,

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The strategic role of talent management in enhancing organizational effectiveness is well-recognized (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Iles et al., 2010; O'Toole & Lawler, 2008). Despite a shift towards hiring employees with less experience, the emphasis on talent management programs remains strong, especially within the private sector that often adopts an exclusive approach, favoring employees deemed as high potential (Cappelli, 2008). While the organizational advantages of such programs are documented (Meyers & Van Woerkom, 2014), the individual-level outcomes, particularly for those not identified as high potential, are less understood.

This gap in understanding is particularly significant given the evolving nature of work in the 21st century. The rise of the gig economy (a labor market characterized by short-term contracts, freelance work, and temporary positions, as opposed to permanent jobs), remote work, and the increasing importance of soft skills have transformed traditional notions of talent and potential (Schwab, 2017; Deloitte, 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these trends, forcing organizations to rethink their talent management strategies in the context of unprecedented uncertainty and rapid change (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). This new landscape demands a more nuanced and adaptable understanding of talent identification and development.

Grounded in organizational justice theory (Adams, 1963, 1965) and self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this study aims to investigate the varying responses to talent identification between high potential and non-high potential employees. Our research makes an addition to the human resource management (HRM) field by providing quantitative empirical analysis where prior work has been largely conceptual or qualitative (Huselid & Becker, 2011; Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive talent management practices (Swailes et al.,

2014; Meyers, 2020). By examining the effects of talent identification on both high potential and non-high potential employees, we shed light on the potential unintended consequences of exclusive talent management approaches and offer insights into more equitable and effective practices. Given the current labor market's supply-demand imbalance (Martel, 2019) and the increasing focus on employee well-being and engagement (Gallup, 2021), understanding these dynamics is increasingly critical. Our findings have implications not only for HR practitioners but also for organizational leaders seeking to create more inclusive and motivating work environments in an era of talent scarcity and heightened competition. The following section will discuss the relevant literature and the interplay between the constructs of interest, including organizational justice perceptions, intrinsic motivation, and the psychological effects of talent identification in the workplace.

What is Talent?

Talent is a term used in a variety of disciplines like sports, education, and business. In human resource management literature, talent is often defined as: "The innate abilities of individuals to perform excellently in one or more domains of human functioning, operationalized as performing better than other individuals of the same age or experience, or as performing consistently at their personal best" (Nijs et al., 2014, p. 182). In this regard, talent management aims to make strategic resource allocations at every step of the talent management lifecycle (identification, selection, planning, development, retention). In other words, the primary goal of talent management is to support decision-making that will provide value to the organization, which translates into competencies, skills, abilities, and strengths nurtured in the selected talent (Nijs et al., 2014). Although the importance of talent management in organizations is widely recognized, the conceptualization of its nature varies across different talent management philosophies (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).

Meyers et al. (2020, p. 564) discuss talent management philosophies, drawing on the definition provided by Meyers and Van Woerkom (2014). These philosophies are described as "the core assumptions and beliefs about the nature, significance, and functionality of talent held by a firm's principal decision-makers." According to Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), these philosophies primarily fall into two categories: inclusive and exclusive approaches.The inclusive philosophy of talent management posits that every employee harbor unique strengths that can, with the right focus, contribute significant value to an organization (Buckingham & Vosburgh, 2001; Meyers et al., 2020). It upholds the principle that the collective capabilities of employees constitute the most substantial competitive edge, and that leveraging the strengths of everyone is essential for organizational success (Tulgan, 2002). However, this non-discriminatory approach closely mirrors strategic human resource management, which primarily aims to align employee management with the broader objectives of the organization (Gelens et al., 2013). Additionally, such an approach could lead to substantial development costs, given its expansive scope (Lin, 2006). This, in part, explains why organizations may favor an exclusive talent management philosophy.

The premise of an exclusive talent management philosophy is that it allocates resources differently among employees through differentiation or segmentation practices. This segmentation is often based on the estimated value that specific employees could provide to the organization if their potential were honed and developed (Tansley et al., 2013). Employees who are high performers or have the potential to perform above average are therefore considered the elite ("A *Players*") (Anlesinya et al., 2019; Cappelli, 2008b; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Thunnissen et al., 2013b). These employees are identified as having high market value given their unique skills and abilities that are difficult to replace (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Employee segmentation is therefore a fundamental aspect to exclusive talent management practices (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Ledford & Kochanski, 2004).

Various studies indicate that workforce differentiation positively impacts organizational performance (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Gelens et al., 2013; Lepak & Snell, 1999). However, exclusive talent management approaches—those that segregate employees into categories like "high potential" and " non-high potential employee"—face scrutiny. Critics argue that such stratification may undermine group cohesion and morale, especially among non-selected employees (Cappelli, 2017; Delong & Vijayaraghavan, 2003; Marescaux et al., 2013).

Therefore, organizational justice theory becomes a pertinent framework to examine the effects of talent management philosophies on employee perceptions. Research suggests a correlation between talent identification processes and employees' perceptions of fairness or lack thereof within an organization (De Boeck et al., 2018; Gelens et al., 2013, 2014; Peterson et al., 2022).

How Talent Management Philosophies Affect Perceived Organizational Justice?

Colquitt and Greenberg (2003) define organizational justice as "the extent to which individuals perceive organizational events to be just" (p.159). Perceived justice is positively related to job satisfaction, commitment, performance, trust in the organization and prosocial behaviors (Collings et al., 2011). Perceptions of injustice, however, are linked to many individual outcomes such as intention to leave (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), poor job performance (Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991) and job dissatisfaction (Colquitt et al., 2001). Organizational justice theory includes distributive justice (is the distribution of resources fair?), procedural justice (are the procedures that justify the distribution of resources fair?) and interactional justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), which is comprised of two subcategories, informational justice (is the access to information fair?) and interpersonal justice (is the treatment of employees fair?) (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Talent management philosophies are about allocation of resources. In an exclusive talent management philosophy, resource allocation is asymmetric, which can be perceived as unfair. De Boeck et al.'s (2018) systematic review indicates that employees' perceptions of distributive justice—how benefits and rewards are allocated—play a pivotal mediating role between their status (as high potential or non-high potential employees) and their reactions, whether cognitive, emotional, or behavioral. Gelens et al. (2014) further demonstrate that employees' perception of procedural justice moderates the link between distributive justice and work effort. This underscores the importance of fair processes in talent management, as fair procedures positively influence the employee responses to talent segmentation (De Boeck et al., 2018; Van Prooijen, 2009). In sum, the direct influence of talent identification on perceived justice of resource distribution affects work outcomes, while the perceived justice of the identification process itself can strengthen or weaken this effect.

Self-determination theory (SDT), as developed by Ryan & Deci (2000), provides a valuable lens for understanding how perceptions of organizational justice can influence the satisfaction of employees' basic psychological needs. In the context of talent identification, SDT suggests that the effectiveness of human resource interventions can be evaluated based on their ability to satisfy these intrinsic needs while minimizing frustration (Aldama et al., 2021; Marescaux et al., 2013; Van Prooijen, 2009).

How Talent Identification Influences Employees' Basic Psychological Needs?

Self-Determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is a macro theory of motivation and, has been validated and supported across a broad spectrum of fields such as sports, education, psychotherapy, health, parenting and work (Deci et al., 2017). One of the foundational postulates of SDT is that it suggests human beings are inherently proactive organisms in constant search for opportunities to improve their circumstances (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). This desire to seek greater personal and social integrity requires certain "vitamins" to achieve it. Under SDT, those vitamins correspond to the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

There are three psychological needs: autonomy (e.g., the ability to act with volition), competence (e.g., to be adequately equipped to perform one`s duties) and relatedness (e.g., the degree to which one feels they belong) (Deci et al., 2017). Fulfilling basic psychological needs is linked to enhanced job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions (Lian et al., 2012), and reduced burnout (Van den Broeck et al., 2008). Additionally, satisfying these needs contributes to more self-determined forms of motivation, serving as independent predictors of intrinsic motivation and overall psychological well-being (De Cooman et al., 2013; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Research indicates that distributive justice precedes the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (Aldama et al., 2021; Van Prooijen, 2009), and that talent identification directly affects perceptions of distributive justice (De Boeck et al., 2018).

This study posits that distributive justice indirectly influences the connection between talent identification and the satisfaction of psychological needs.

Hypothesis 1: Distributive justice mediates the relationship between talent identification and basic need satisfaction, such that participants identified as high potentials will perceive greater distributive justice, which will lead to greater need satisfaction than participants not identified as high potentials.

On the other hand, need frustration can result in detrimental effects on both employee well-being and organizational performance (Forest et al., 2022). For example, Vander Elst et al. (2012) observed that Finnish employees experiencing need frustration reported lower job performance, decreased well-being, and increased burnout. This suggests that human resource management (HRM) practices should aim to simultaneously enhance need satisfaction and reduce need frustration (Marescaux et al, 2013). Consequently, we suggest that talent identification impacts need frustration through its influence on perceptions of distributive injustice.

Hypothesis 2: Distributive injustice mediates the relationship between talent identification and basic need frustration, such that participants identified as high potential will perceive less distributive injustice, which will lead to lower need frustration than participants not identified as high potentials.

In light of the literature, it is evident that employees' views on procedural justice play a crucial role in the relationship between distributive justice and work outcomes. This highlights the significance of equitable processes in talent management. Specifically, fair procedures can enhance how employees react to talent segmentation. In more concrete terms, the direct impact of talent identification on the perceived justice of resource distribution influences work outcomes (De Boeck et al., 2018; Van Prooijen, 2009). Moreover, how fair the identification process is perceived can either amplify or diminish this impact. Therefore, in this study, we posit that procedural justice will moderate the mediating role of distributive justice, both in its just and unjust forms, in the link between talent identification and the satisfaction or frustration of needs.

Hypothesis 3: Procedural justice moderates the mediation, such that when procedural justice is high, it increases perceptions of distributive justice and therefore increase all the more the satisfaction of basic psychological needs.

Hypothesis 4: Procedural injustice moderates the mediation, such that when procedural injustice is high, it increases perceptions of distributive injustice and therefore increase all the more the frustration of basic psychological needs.

Method

Study Design

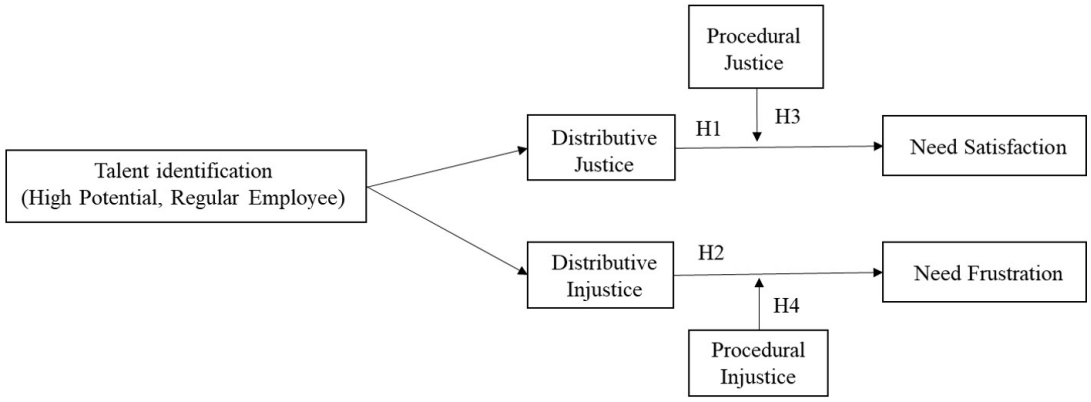
For this cross-sectional study, we used vignettes and quantitative questionnaires to explore the research objectives and hypotheses. Figure 1 illustrates all the proposed hypotheses. It is through the use of vignettes that we were able to manipulate our main variable of interest: talent identification. Both vignettes and their respective questionnaires were offered both in French and English. In order to perform the two moderated mediations required to explore our four hypotheses, we used the software R version 4.2.2 (Team, 2021).

Participants

Our initial sample of 146 participants was collected using two methods: snowball sampling and a professional recruitment platform. Snowball sampling, a technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances, was used to recruit participants (n=79) within the researcher's academic and professional networks. The remaining participants (n=67) were recruited through the Prolific Academic platform, a specialized online service for recruiting research participants. This dual-strategy approach was chosen to balance the benefits and limitations of each method. Snowball sampling allowed for

Figure 1

Theoretical Model



cost-effective recruitment within relevant professional networks, while the use of Prolific Academic provided access to a diverse pool of participants, potentially reducing bias and increasing generalizability. We performed a listwise deletion of 22 participants who had answered less than 30% of the questionnaire, resulting in a final sample size of 124 participants. The only inclusion criterion was being at least 18 years of age.The final sample comprised 124 participants with the following age distribution: 5.64% were 18-20 years old, 39.52% were 21-29, 20.16% were 30-39, 11.29% were 40-49, 8.87% were 50-59, 2.42% were over 60, and 12.1% did not disclose their age. Regarding gender, 34.68% identified as male, 51.61% as female, and 13.71% did not disclose their gender. Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of these descriptive statistics.

Table 1

Sample Descriptive Statistics

	n	%
Gender		
Male	6	39%
Female	96	60%
Prefer not to answer	2	1%
Age Group		
18-20	7	4%
21-29	60	38%
30-39	44	28%
40-49	28	18%
50-59	17	11%
60+	4	2%
Racial Group		
Black	2	1%
East Asian	11	7%
Latino	8	5%
Middle Eastern	3	2%

Procedure

After obtaining consent, each participant was randomly assigned a talent status, either as a high potential or a non-high potential employee. Participants were asked to embody this status when reading the vignettes as well as answering the questionnaires. Following the talent status assignment, participants read a short context which introduced the reader to the concept of exclusive talent management philosophies as well as the kind of treatment that employees identified as high potential or non-high potential employees are expected to receive.

Each participant was asked to read two vignettes, one vignette describing an exclusive talent management context adopting a transparent approach, and one vignette describing an exclusive talent management context adopting an ambiguous approach. The two vignettes were set to alternate from one participant to another to avoid habituation. At the

	n	%
South Asian	7	4%
Southeast Asian	3	2%
Caucasian	121	76%
Other	4	3%
Activity Sector		
Commerce	7	4%
Fabrication	3	2%
Primary Sector	1	1%
Public Services	17	11%
Teaching, Health, & Social Sciences	33	21%
Professional & Administrative Services	16	10%
Construction	3	2%
Culture, Information, Lodging	11	7%
Public Administration	11	7%
Transportation & Storage	5	3%
Other	52	33%
Education		
High School	15	9%
CEGEP	2	1%
Diploma of Collegiate Studies	12	8%
Undergraduate	76	48%
Masters	50	31%
Phd, Post Doctorate	4	3%
Work Position		
Employee	119	75%
Manager	22	14%
Middle Manager	13	8%
Top Management	4	3%

Note. N= 123

end of each vignette, participants had to complete a questionnaire measuring their perceptions of justice and injustice as well as their basic psychological needs. The same questionnaire was therefore completed twice, Why did you do this? hence doubling the number of observations from 124 to 248.

A short debrief at the very end of the questionnaire revealed the details of the random assignment and its objective, given participants were not aware of the random assignment of talent status. Participants were asked to renew their consent before submitting.

Vignettes

Vignettes were developed through a structured process led by the first author. Clear theoretical anchors were first identified based on the literature review and study's conceptual framework. The vignettes then underwent several rounds of review by team members who possess complementary expertise in employee development, work motivation, and experimental research design, ensuring their theoretical alignment and practical relevance (see Appendix for the complete vignettes). The first vignette described a portrait of a branch within a large organization adopting a transparent approach to their talent identification practices, while the second vignette described another branch within that same large organization adopting an ambiguous (i.e., opaque) approach to their talent identification process. The vignettes are of the "Paper-People Studies" type, a method that aims to obtain explicit responses from respondents based on fictitious scenarios (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). We adopted a mixed-design approach in the conceptualization, meaning all respondents read both vignettes. This design enables both between- and within-subject comparisons (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). The purpose of this doubling (having all participants read both vignettes) was twofold. Firstly, it allowed for within-subject comparisons, providing insights into how individual participants' responses differ between transparent and opaque talent identification practices. Secondly, it increased statistical power and reduced the impact of individual differences by having each participant serve as their own control. This approach enhances the robustness of our findings by allowing us to examine both individual-level changes and group-level differences in responses to different talent identification practices.

Scales

Perception of Distributive and Procedural Justice and Injustice

We chose Hansen et al. (2013) shortened version of Colquitt et al. (2015; 2001) perception of organizational justice scale due to its established validity and specific focus on distributive and procedural justice. For the French version of the questionnaires, items were translated in French using the back-translation method as recommended by Hambleton et Kanjee (1993). Furthermore, following Chan's (1998) compositional approach commonly used in organizational research, we adapted specific items from the original scale to align with our study context. For instance, the original item "*Are those outcomes justified, given your performance*?" was modified to "*Is the status assignment justified, given your performance?*" This adaptation maintained the validated structure of the scale while addressing status assignment beliefs rather than general outcomes. Following Chan's (1998) guidelines, we only modified the referent terms while preserving the core properties of the validated scale. Distributive justice subscale contains 3 items (α = .92; e.g. *Is the status assignment consistent with the effort employees put into their work*?) and the distributive injustice subscale also contains 3 items (α= .76; e.g. *Is the status assignment inconsistent with the efforts employees put into their work?*). Procedural justice is measured with 6 items (α = .72; e.g. *Do you feel that these procedures are consistent over time?*), and procedural injustice is measured with 6 items (α = .52; e.g. *Do you feel these processes are unevenly applied?*). The procedural injustice items fall within the recommended limit of .50 for emerging constructs (Ahire & Devaraj, 2001; Nunnally, 1978). Each item is measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very Strongly).

Basic Need Satisfaction and Frustration

The satisfaction and frustration of basic psychological needs are measured with the Basic Psychological Needs at Work Scale (BPNW-S) developed by Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al. (2020). The questionnaire, available both in English and French, is comprised of 25 items measuring the satisfaction and frustration of the basic psychological needs, respectively 3 items for autonomy satisfaction (α = .86; e.g. *I feel free to make choices with regards to the way I work*), 3 items measure for competence satisfaction (α = .90; e.g. *I feel skilled*), and 6 items measuring relatedness (α = .96; e.g. *I feel included*). As for the frustration of basic psychological needs, 4 items measure autonomy frustration (α = .85; e.g. *I feel forced to follow decisions about my work*), 4 items for competence frustration (α = .94; e.g. *I feel useless*), and five items measure relatedness frustration (α = .93; e.g. *I feel disliked*).

Socio-Demographic Variables

In addition to the validated items from the justice/injustice scale, the questionnaire incorporated a consent form as well as socio-demographic questions. As recommended by Cohen-Charash & Spector (2001) in their meta-analysis on perception of organizational justice, we collected information on participant's age, gender, education level, race and current position within their organization.

Results

We used the statistical language R version 4.2.2 (Team, 2021) to perform the moderated mediation analysis, based on an initial sample of 124 participants. The "process" function developed by Hayes (2017) was used to perform the moderated mediation. Furthermore, we mean centered all variables of interest for the analysis . In an analysis involving an interaction between variables like a moderated mediation, calculations from *M* to *Y* considers *W* as equal to 0. Given our moderator variable *W* (Procedural Justice/Injustice) ranges from 1 to 7, it would not have made statistical sense to consider it as equal to 0. Therefore, mean centering would make the variable coefficients implicated in the interaction interpretable.

Descriptive Statistics

An initial sample of 146 participants was collected. A listwise deletion was performed of participants who completed less than 30% of the questionnaire, removing 22 participants. The final sample size was therefore 124 participants. A summary of means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables of interest is available in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlations

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Distributive Justice	124	4.11	1.46	_					
2. Distributive Injustice	124	3.54	1.20	-0.61**	_				
3. Procedural Justice	121	3.55	1.01	0.58**	-0.23*	_			
4. Procedural Injustice	121	3.76	0.86	-0.39*	0.46**	-0.39**	_		
5. Need Satisfaction	119	4.54	1.24	0.69**	-0.51**	0.42**	-0.36**	_	
6. Need Frustration	110	3.44	1.17	-0.56**	0.56**	-0.36**	0.49**	-0.84**	_

Note: *p<.05 **p<.001

Preliminary Analysis

First, we performed a chi-square analysis between the socio-demographic variables to verify there were no significant differences between the snowball method sample and the Prolific sample. Results revealed that neither Age (p = .09), Gender (p = .09), Race (p = .19), Activity Sector (p = .062) nor Level of Education (p = .11) had a significant difference between samples. There was however a significant difference for the Position within the organization, with 18% Prolific participants identifying as being managers and 17% non-prolific participants identifying as being part of middle-management. Given the similarities between the two categories and potential overlap in definition, no further statistical manipulations were made.

Second, we conducted a non-parametric test of homoscedasticity in order to examine which type of missing data our dataset was comprised of using the R package "MissMech" (Jamshidian et al., 2014). The non-parametric test of homoscedasticity was non-significant for both the distributive justice and distributive injustice subscales, therefore showing that missing data was Missing Completely at Random (MCAR), hence rejecting the null hypothesis of normality. To minimize data manipulation, we computed variables using average item scores. Given the MCAR nature of missing data, we decided to retain the missing values without imputation and proceed with our preliminary analysis..

Third, in examining outliers within our sample, no univariate outliers were found for most variables, except for procedural injustice, which presented four outliers due to a leptokurtic distribution. These were retained. For multivariate outliers, we used Mahalanobis distance, a statistical measure that identifies cases with unusual combinations of scores across multiple variables by calculating the distance of each observation from the mean center of all observations. We selected this method because it accounts for the covariance structure of the data and is particularly effective for detecting outliers in multivariate normal distributions. Using a critical threshold of 22.46 for six degrees of freedom, corresponding to our six variables, one observation exceeded this threshold (D^2 = 27.4). However, given it was a single instance, it was not excluded. The analyses utilized "car" and "psych" packages in R.

Finally, we examine the normality of our variables of interest, both univariate and multivariate. The Mardia Test, applied using the "MVN" R package, confirmed that procedural justice, distributive injustice, and need frustration adhered to normality. Distributive justice, procedural injustice, and need satisfaction, however, did not. Despite this, all variables displayed skewness and kurtosis within the acceptable range of |1|, suggesting the deviations from normality in our data are not significant enough to require adjustments.

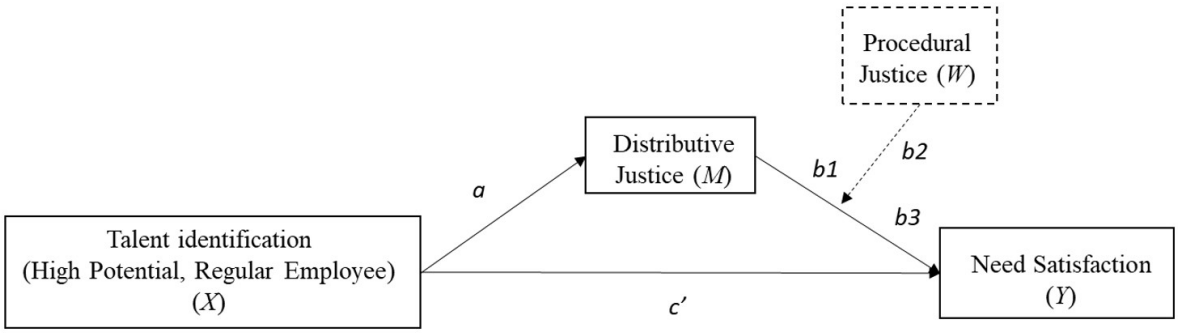
Primary Analysis

Moderated Mediation 1

For *H1* and *H2*, we used Process' function Model 14 (Hayes, 2017) to perform a moderated mediation with needs satisfaction as dependent variable (Y), status as independent variable (X), distributive justice as mediator (M) and procedural justice as moderator (W) of the relationship between M and Y (see Figure 2). Results revealed significant direct effects between status and need satisfaction (B = 1.17, SE = 0.19, p < .001, 95% CI [0.7991, 1.5426]), status and distributive justice (B = 1.77, SE = 0.22, p < .001, 95% CI [1.35, 2.20]) as well as distributive justice and need satisfaction (B = 0.19, SE = 0.09, p < .05, 95% CI [0.008,0.37]).

Figure 2

Moderated Mediation 1



Next, we examined the indirect effect of distributive justice on the relationship between status and need satisfaction (H1), and to examine whether procedural justice acts as a moderator in the mediation of distributive justice on the relationship between status and needs satisfaction (H2). Bootstrap 95% confidence intervals were computed from 5000 bootstrap samples. Results revealed a significant indirect effect of status through distributive justice on need satisfaction (B = 0.47, BootSE = 0.17, 95% CI [0.14,0.82]), supporting H1. Additionally, the moderated mediation revealed to be non-significant (B = 0.003, SE = 0.056, p = .95, 95% CI [-0.11,0.11]), hence rejecting H2. A table summarizing the results of the moderated mediation can be found in Table 3.

In other words, participants identified as high potential scored on average 1.78 points higher in their perception of distributive justice than participants identified as non-high potential employees. Furthermore, while controlling for perceptions of procedural and distributive justice, participants identified as high potential scored on average 1.17 more on their scores of need satisfaction than their non-high potential employee counterparts. Additionally, when distributive justice is held at zero (otherwise understood as the average given, we mean-centered the variables), procedural justice is significantly related to need satisfaction. The interaction between distributive justice and procedural justice was non-significant, thus suggesting there is a relationship between procedural justice and need satisfaction regardless of the score of distributive justice. Lastly, the model explains 61% of the total variability of need satisfaction, F(4,114) = 44.78, p < .001.

Table 3

Results From Moderated Mediation 1

			Consequent										
			M (DJ)						Y (NEEDSAT)				
	Antecedent		Coeff.	SE	*t*	*p*	CI		Coeff.	SE	*t*	*p*	CI
X	Status	*a*	1.78	0.22	8.29	0.00	[1.35, 2.20]	*c'*	1.17	0.19	6.24	0.00	[1.35, 2.20]
M	Distributive Justice		—	—	—	—	—	*b1*	0.26	0.08	3.41	0.00	[0.11, 0.42]
W	Procedural Justice		—	—	—	—	—	*b2*	0.19	0.09	2.07	0.04	[-0.01, 0.37]
	M*W		—	—	—	—	—	*b3*	0.003	0.06	0.06	0.95	[-0.11. 0.11]
	Constant		-0.84	0.15	-5.58	0.00	[-1.14, -0.54]		-0.59	0.12	-4.81	0.00	[-0.84, -0.35]
			R^2= 0.37						R^2= 0.61				
			F(1,117) = 68.69, *p*<.001						F(4,114) = 44.78, *p*<.001				

Moderated Mediation 2

The second moderated mediation exploring *H3* and *H4* was also performed using Process' Model 14 (Hayes, 2017), with this time need frustration as dependent variable (Y), status as independent variable (X), distributive injustice as mediator (M) and procedural injustice as moderator (W) of the relationship between M and Y (see Figure 3). Results revealed significant direct effects between status and need frustration (*B* = -0.84, *SE* = 0.17, *p* < .001, 95% CI [-1.18, -0.49]), status on distributive injustice (*B* = -1.03, *SE* = 1.99, *p* < .001, 95% CI [-1.43, -0.63]) as well as distributive injustice and needs frustration (*B* = 0.26, *SE* = 0.08, *p* < .005, 95% CI [0.09, 0.42]).

Next, we examined the indirect effects of distributive injustice on the relationship between status and needs frustration (H3), and to examine whether procedural injustice acts as a moderator in the mediation of distributive injustice on the relationship between status and need frustration (H4). Bootstrap 95% confidence intervals were computed from 5000 bootstrap samples. Results revealed a significant indirect effect of status through distributive injustice on need frustration (*B* = -0.27, Boot*SE* = 0.11, 95% CI [-0.48, -0.07]), supporting H3. Additionally, the moderated mediation revealed to be non-significant (*B* = 0.02, *SE* = 0.07, *p* = .76, 95% CI [-0.11,0.15]), hence rejecting H4. A table summarizing the results of the mediated moderation can be found in Table 4.

Figure 3

Moderated Mediation 2

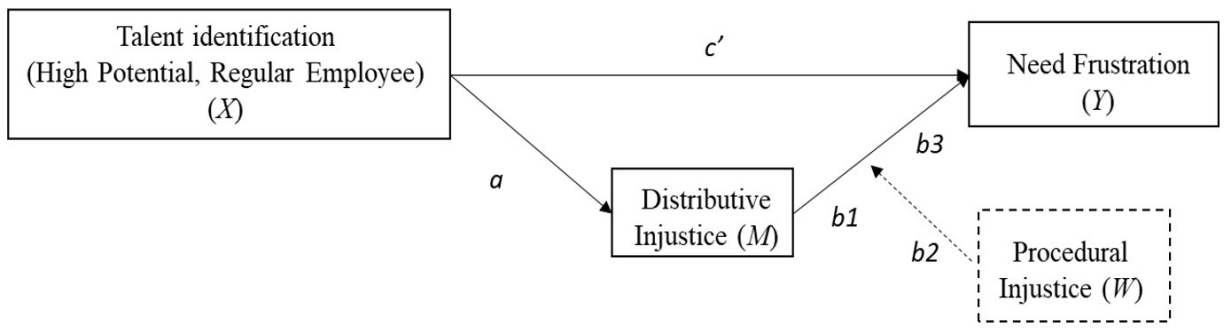


Table 4

Results From Moderated Mediation 2

			Consequent									
			M (DInj)					Y (NEEDFRU)				
	Antecedent		Coeff.	SE	*t*	*p*	CI		Coeff.	SE	*t*	*p*	CI
X	Status	*a*	-1.03	0.20	-5.15	0.00	[-1.43, -0.63]	*c'*	-0.84	0.17	-4.82	0.00	[-1.18, -0.49]
M	Distributive Justice		—	—	—	—	—	*b1*	0.26	0.08	3.22	0.00	[0.10, 0.42]
W	Procedural Justice		—	—	—	—	—	*b2*	0.41	0.10	3.92	0.00	[0.20, 0.61]
	M*W		—	—	—	—	—	*b3*	0.02	0.07	0.30	0.76	[-0.11. 0.15]
	Constant		0.47	0.14	3.37	0.00	[0.20, 0.75]		0.42	0.12	3.45	0.00	[0.18, 0.66]
			R^2= 0.19						R^2= 0.49				
			F(1,117) = 26.56, *p*<.001						F(4,114) = 26.94, *p*<.001				

In other words, participants identified as high potential scored on average 1.03 points lower in their perception of distributive injustice than participants not identified as high potentials. Furthermore, while controlling for perceptions of procedural and distributive injustice, participants identified as high potential scored on average 0.83 points less on their scores of need frustration than their non-high potential employee counterparts. Additionally, when distributive injustice is held at zero (otherwise understood as the average, given we mean-centered the variables), procedural injustice is significantly related to need satisfaction. The interaction between distributive injustice and procedural injustice was non-significant, thus suggesting there is a relationship between procedural injustice and need frustration regardless of the score of distributive injustice. Lastly, the model explains 49% of the total variability of need frustration, $F(4,114) = 26.94$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

There were two aims of this study: first, to explore the mediating role of distributive justice/injustice in the relationship between talent identification and basic psychological needs, and second, to explore the role of procedural justice/injustice as moderator in the mediation described above. While organizational justice theory was often studied in the context of talent management, it is (to our knowledge) the first time that Self-Determination Theory is empirically studied in the context of talent management, specifically talent identification and how it influences employees` basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Moreover, this study contributes significantly to the talent management literature by providing empirical data for the examination of talent identification, which was an aspect where quantitative evidence had been notably scarce in HRM literature (Huselid & Becker, 2011; Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019).

Theoretical Implications

We found that talent identification is significantly related to basic psychological needs, such that participants who were identified as high potential reported higher levels of need satisfaction and lower levels of need frustration compared to those not identified as high potentials. This provides interesting and rare empirical insights into the lived experience of employees when they are assigned a status. Participants identified as high potential report greater satisfaction of their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Literature on the consequences of need satisfaction suggest that people who have high need satisfaction will report more autonomous forms of motivation and well-being (Van den Broeck et al., 2016), and will experience higher personal and professional growth.

On the other hand, results suggest that participants not identified as high potentials will report greater frustration levels for their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Consequences of need frustration has been studied in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) literature, suggesting that employees who report high scores of need frustration will also report less wellbeing, lower job performance, and more exhaustion (Vander Elst et al., 2012).

We found that distributive justice acted as a mediator in the relationship between talent identification and need satisfaction. Distributive injustice also acted as a mediator in the relationship between talent identification and need frustration. In their study on reactions to talent identification and perceived organizational justice, Gelens et al. (2014) had found that the relationship between talent identification and job satisfaction was fully mediated by distributive justice, such that employees identified as high potentials also reported significantly higher on perceived distributive justice than non-high potentials, and perceived distributive justice was significantly related to job satisfaction. Given job satisfaction is reported as a consequence of the satisfaction or frustration of basic psychological needs, our results are coherent with Gelens et al. (2014) and adds further quantitative empirical evidence that talent identification significantly influences employees` reactions and lived experience within the work environment.

In the De Boeck et al. (2018) systematic review of employee reactions to talent management, the authors theorized that perceived distributive justice would mediate the relationship between talent identification and employee reactions (cognitive, affective, behavioral). Our findings empirically support the author`s theory with distributive justice mediating the relationship between talent identification and need satisfaction, and additionally distributive injustice mediating the relationship between talent identification and need frustration.

While it is understood that interactions are often more difficult to detect than individual effects (McClelland & Judd, 1993), results suggest that neither procedural justice nor procedural injustice were significant moderators on the mediation between talent identification, distributive justice/injustice and need satisfaction/frustration. This finding contradicts previous research, including both conceptual articles (e.g., De Boeck et al., 2018) and empirical studies (e.g., Gelens et al., 2014), which suggested that procedural justice might act as moderator in the mediation between talent identification, distributive justice, and employee reactions. While the interactions were non-significant, results from the moderated mediation did however reveal that the simple effect of procedural justice on need satisfaction (and same for procedural injustice on need frustration) was significant, regardless of the score of distributive justice/injustice. Hence, when perceptions of procedural justice increase, so does need satisfaction. Similarly, when perceptions of procedural injustice increase, so does need frustration. Therefore, while acting independently from one another, distributive and procedural justice/injustice significantly influence basic psychological needs.

The magnitude of these moderated mediations' effects on our dependent variables warrants attention. Results indicate that the moderated mediation with distributive and procedural justice (H3) explained 61% of the variance in need satisfaction, representing a substantial effect size. Similarly, the moderated mediation model with distributive and procedural injustice (H4) accounted for 49% of the variance in need frustration.

In sum, the results from this study present two main contributions. First, exclusive talent management practices influence employee`s basic psychological needs, such that employees identified as high potential report greater satisfaction and less frustration of their basic psychological needs than non-high potential employees. Second, while the practice of talent identification influences employees` basic psychological needs, the total model of talent identification, perceived distributive and procedural justice/injustice is responsible for respectively 61% of need satisfaction's variance, and 49% of need frustration`s variance.

Limitations and Future Research

This study contains several limitations and avenues for future research. First, the use of vignettes contained both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is that it facilitated the manipulation of the variable of talent status, which would have been logistically and ethically challenging in a real-world context. It also allowed us to explore our research questions in a contained environment. Vignettes offer strong internal validity at the expense of external validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). The generalizability of results is therefore

not assured. Future studies should validate the proposed model in this study also using longitudinal and quasi-experimental research designs.

Second, while the Colquitt et al. (2001) justice scale was validated (Colquitt, 2001), the updated justice scale proposed by Colquitt et al. (2015) including injustice as the opposite side of the spectrum has, on the other hand, not yet been validated. If the Cronbach's alpha for procedural injustice (α = .53) fell just above the threshold of .50 as recommended by Ahire et Devaraj (2001) for emerging constructs, this raises the need for a validated version of the full-range justice scale. Therefore, it would be valuable for future research to validate the Colquitt et al. (2015) full-range injustice scale in order to further solidify measures that account for both rule adherence and rule violation.

Third, it is important to note that this study's focus on exclusive management practices offers only a partial view of talent management, which is broader than the exclusive approach alone. To develop a more complete understanding of the impact of talent management practices on individual workplace perceptions and reactions, future research should aim to construct a methodology that examines both inclusive and exclusive talent management practices, particularly in relation to employee perceptions of justice and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs.

Fourth, while our mixed-design approach using vignettes offered methodological advantages, including increased statistical power and within-subject comparisons (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), it also presents limitations. Having participants read both vignettes may have introduced order effects or created artificial contrasts between the two talent identification practices. Although this design allowed us to control for individual differences and examine how the same individual responds to different practices, it might have heightened participants' awareness of the differences between transparent and opaque approaches, potentially influencing their responses. Future research might consider employing between-subject designs to complement our findings.

Finally, this study relied solely on self-report measures. Thus, common method bias might have confounded the findings. Future studies would benefit from using a combination of both subjective and objective measures like absenteeism rates or turnover rates.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

The present study`s purpose was to explore the mediating role of distributive justice and injustice in the relationship between talent identification and basic psychological needs. Another objective was to explore the role of procedural justice and injustice as a moderator in the mediation. Our study responds to Thunnissen and Gallardo-Gallardo's (2019) call for greater quantitative empirical studies in the field of talent management philosophies. Current literature has also been heavily oriented towards the United States (Thunnissen et al., 2013a), and the present research offers added cultural and linguistic variety to the talent management philosophies research field. The present research also offers a rare overview of employees reactions to exclusive talent management practices, as such programs consequences and benefits have mostly been studied from an organizational perspective (Thunnissen & Gallardo-Gallardo, 2019). In short, this study suggests that organizations should strive for transparency and fairness in their talent identification processes to ensure the fulfillment of employees' psychological needs.

The results reveal that talent identification as an exclusive talent management practice plays an unequal and significant role in employees` basic psychological needs. Employees identified as high potentials report greater satisfaction of their psychological needs, while non-high potential employees report greater frustration of their psychological needs. This suggests that differentiating employees has the potential to instigate both upward and downward spirals, as research on basic needs is consistent in reporting that satisfying basic needs leads to positive outcomes, while frustrating needs leads to a variety of negative outcomes (Deci et al., 2017). In other words, the findings highlight the need for balanced talent management strategies that also support the needs of employees not identified as high potentials.

While only a small fraction of employees will be identified as high potentials, most employees score greater need frustration through labelling reminding them that they aren`t part of the elite. Given the competitive labor market (Martel, 2019), organizations may need to reevaluate their talent management

practices to mitigate feelings of exclusion among the majority of employees, ensuring a more inclusive approach that contributes to overall business efficacy.

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