

# EXPLORING EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COACHING PRACTICES FOR TALENT IN THAI SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

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## **PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS WORK**

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## **DECLARATION**

That no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

## ABSTRACT

This empirical study investigated Human Resource Development (HRD) in small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Thailand, with a specific focus on coaching practices for talent. Three case-study organisations were identified as 'critical cases', due to their having received Thailand's SME National Award, which identifies SMEs as top-performing organisations. One case was drawn from each of the trading, manufacturing and service sectors. Within the case-study methodology a variety of qualitative methods were employed, which led to rich interview data being drawn from twenty-seven participants. The sample was progressed through purposive sampling by the owner-managers. Each of the three SME owner-managers selected four manager coaches, who they perceived to be 'talented', after which the coaches' subordinate coachees were identified, with these being deemed 'talented employees'. The fieldwork data was analysed through template analysis. Three major themes emerged from the initial a priori template: the 'perception of talent', 'employee development' and 'coaching practices and perspectives'.

The results illuminated different practices in coaching for talent, with the approach being strongly influenced by the owner-manager. The owner-manager of *Case-study One* perceived himself as head of an organisational 'family', with his Buddhist beliefs providing the guiding principles that underpinned HRD practices and activities. In *Case-study Two* the owner-manager's personal faith system was Protestant-Christian, which aligned with employees being perceived as a vital to organisational success and hence worthy of investment and development. *Case-study Three's* owner-manager was equally ready to invest in employees and, through a dedicated HRD department, established HR systems and HRD projects. Thus, in all three case studies, the owner-manager's individual philosophy played a vital role in allocating resources in support of HRD initiatives and determining how talent should be coached. Informal coaching for talent included on-the-job support,

with managers functioning as coaches and internal training. Subsequently, some coachees cascaded their learning to an inter-employee level, which resulted in a further sharing of talent. Further, within the tight-knit work relationships, a deep desire existed for all to support and value each other, with 'friendly coaching' emerging as a key concept.

The current study makes a valuable theoretical contribution to HRD theory by integrating and analysing the elements of coaching for talent within the SME environment of Thailand. The study draws together the conceptual elements in a unique framework of 'Circles of coaching practice for talent', which can also stimulate discussions on organisational practice, thus adding value to individuals and the SME organisations themselves. An important finding refers the extent to which an owner-manager's personal characteristics can influence the support and effectiveness of organisational learning and development, which makes a contribution to both theory and practice.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is especially dedicated to my families with love:

- My beloved mum, Buarean Panya, who always believed in me; will always be my inspiration and who encouraged me to fulfil my goal. Her strong spirit helped me through the challenging journey of completing this doctoral degree.
- My lovely sister, Nunthaphan Panya and my lovely niece, Thunchanok Panya; they always supported me, stood by me and trusted me.

This thesis is dedicated to the memories of the Panya and Weanwon family, in recognition of their endless love, support and encouragement.

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## Glossary and Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EQ	Emotional Intelligence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
IDP	Individual Development Plan
KM	Knowledge Management
KPIs	Key Performance Indicator
MBNQA	Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award
OD	Organisational Development
OJT	On-the-Job Training
OSMEP	Office of Small and Medium Enterprises
PM	Performance Management
PMP	Performance Management Plan
ProductSME	Case study from production sector
ServiceSME	Case study from the service sector
TQA	Thailand Quality Award
TradingSME	Case study from the trading sector
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

In this initial chapter the research is placed in context, beginning with an outline of the research background and a statement of the research problem. An overview of SMEs in Thailand is followed by the study rationale, which place the study in context. The study aim and research questions are next set out, with the thesis structure being presented at the end.

## 1.1 Background to Study

Throughout the world, SMEs have made a positive and substantial contribution to economic growth (Ates et al., 2013; Jasra et al., 2011). The importance of SMEs is recognised worldwide, with them being influential in sustaining the economic growth of both national and regional development (Craig et al., 2004; Jasra et al., 2011; Ates et al., 2013). When focusing on developing countries, SMEs play an important part, as they enhance economic growth and the expansion of industry (Chen and Rozelle, 1999). There are two additional reasons for the interest shown in SMEs in developing economies. First, SMEs can help developing economies to combat poverty and to build innovation and sustainable growth (Keskin et al., 2010). The current study is set in Thailand, which is classified as a developing economy and yet the SMEs perform an important role in sustaining the nation's Gross Domestic Product (Chittithaworn et al., 2011; Kluaypa, 2013). According to OSMEP statistics (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion), at the end of 2016, the



total number of SMEs was 3,004,679, or 99.70 per cent of all establishments in Thailand. By the end of 2016, Thai SMEs employed more than 10 million people, accounting for 78.48 per cent of overall employment, with the GDP generated by SMEs having expanded by 4.8 per cent, increasing the SME GDP contribution to 42.2 per cent (OSMEP, 2017). SMEs are therefore perceived as the major driving force behind Thai economic development, although many Thai SMEs face barriers in carrying running an effective business (APEC, 2013). To understand and explore the HRD element of successful SMEs, the current thesis explored three in-depth critical case studies, to further assess SME business in context. The particular focus on SMEs aimed to assess the business practice associated with the coaching element of employee development.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The managerial potential in SMEs needs to be nurtured, with SMEs having different managerial characteristics than large companies (Fuller-Love, 2006). In addition, the diverse characteristics of SMEs merit being studied in a unique way (Peel, 2008). At a practical level, SMEs invariably face a wide range of issues, encountering both internal and external barriers (Johnson and Schaltegger, 2016). One major issue that they often face is paucity of time, which sits alongside the poor financial investment made in Human Resource Development (HRD) (Akterujjaman, 2010). Equally, misunderstandings have arisen concerning how skill sets are developed (Bishop, 2015), with an added SME distraction being that all that is needed to resolve the learning issue is financial support (Zainol et al., 2015). Another big fear amongst managers of

small enterprises is that talented young employees will use their organisation as a stepping stone to the larger enterprises (Saru, 2007), with this being apparent within SMEs in Thailand (Phoemphian et al., 2015). Despite these negative issues, HRD has been identified as a key factor in the survival and growth of an SME (Ahmad et al., 2010).

Earlier studies have suggested that barriers exist that impede organisational effectiveness (APEC, 2013), with a number of areas of concern being highlighted that include management, accounting, financing, production and, importantly for the current study, human resource initiatives. There is also evidence that Thai SMEs have experienced difficulties with adopting Western concepts of HRD, with these 'best practices' not transferring easily across cultural divides (Thassanabanjong et al., 2009). In addition, the form of Organisation Development proposed by foreign specialists does not combine easily with how Thai organisations operate, with cultural variations presenting possible barriers (Akaraborworn and McLean, 2001). To compete in a globalised world, it is important for Thai organisations to develop an effective business approach, including the development of people, which expresses synergy with the values and ethos of Thailand (Pruetipibultham, 2010).

Whilst there are several broad approaches to organisational learning, coaching is perceived as a core development intervention, with respect to both individual and organisational success (Ellinger and Kim, 2014; Beattie et al., 2014; Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012), in particular in maintaining a key role in encouraging high-performance employees (Homan and Miller, 2006). Despite

the importance of individual development, the volume of research on coaching in SMEs remains relatively low, particularly when compared with that undertaken in larger organisations (Lane, 2010). Indeed, it is the dearth of research and the challenges of HRD in SMEs that drove the current study to investigate the coaching of valuable employees, who can themselves impact positively on organisational outcomes (Snell et al., 2015). In order to address the issues surrounding the learning and development of people in SMEs, a rich and deep understanding of the contextual situation needs to be gained, which is how this empirical study emerged. Consequently, it is important to explore thoroughly the current learning and coaching practices that aim to enhance the abilities of SME employees. From the onset, the researcher believed, in addition to the anticipated theoretical contribution being made, the current study would benefit individual employee development and lead to greater SME success.

### **1.3 SMEs in Thailand**

Organisations in Thailand are firstly divided into three broad categories: manufacturing, trading and the service sector (OECD, 2016). Further, an enterprise is identified as being a SME by the value of its fixed assets being less than 200 million baht assets, the organisation has less than two hundred full-time employees and/or its fixed assets are less than 200 million baht. Criteria vary across sectors, with the parameters being determined by the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises (OSMEP, 2015) (seen in Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 Categorisation of Thai Small and Medium Enterprises**

Small Enterprise			Medium Enterprise	
Employees	Fixed Assets (Million Baht)	Employees	Employees	Fixed Assets (Million Baht)
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<= 50	<= 50	>50-200	> 50-200
<b>Trading</b>				
<b>- Wholesaling</b>	<= 50	< =25	>25-50	> 50-100
<b>- Retailing</b>	< =30	< =15	>15-30	> 30-60
<b>Service</b>	<= 50	<=50	>50-200	> 50-200

Source: Adapted from the Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP, 2015)

Note: Exchange rate at time of printing was forty-five Baht = 1 UK pound.

The pivotal role that the SMEs play in the Thai economy has been acknowledged by various scholars (APEC, 2013; Buranajarukorn, 2006; Chittithaworn et al., 2011; Kluaypa, 2013; Pruetipibultham, 2010). Indeed, in 2016 the three million Thai SMEs comprised 99.70 per cent of all enterprises and accounted for 42.2 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and nearly 78.5 per cent of the workforce (OSMEP, 2017). Thus, it is not surprising that Thai SMEs are increasingly being seen as the source for new job creation (OSMEP, 2015).

The Royal Thai Government has, over several years, promoted SMEs, with the expectation that they can make a positive contribution to economic growth and overcome negative views towards SMEs. Indeed, in an attempt to boost and promote SME development, the Thai Government actively engaged in the formulation of policy measures and related support mechanisms (Swierczek

and Ha, 2003). The Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (OSMEP) was established by the SMEs Promotion Act in 2000, and, as a Governmental agency, has promoted numerous projects to increase SME capability. One initiative is the competition for the SME National Awards (OSMEP, 2017). This competition selects the most successful SMEs through a set of Thailand Quality Award (TQA) criteria, which is considered to be world-class. Indeed, the fundamentals of the technical and decision-making processes are identical to the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) of the United States of America, which has been adopted by numerous countries around the world (Meethom and Kengpol, 2008). The SME National Awards Competition is held regularly, with there being eight annual awards between 2006 and 2017 (OSMEP, 2017). Organisations are judged against a point system within a seven-set criteria, which are as follows:

<b><u>Criteria</u></b>	<b><u>Score</u></b>
1) Leadership	120
2) Strategic Planning	120
3) Customer and Market Focus	120
4) Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management	100
5) Human Resource Focus	140
6) Process Management	160
7) Business Results	240
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>1,000</u></b>

There are three levels of awards as follows:

- 800 – 1,000 points will receive an SME National Award
- 700 – 799 points will receive an SME Outstanding Award
- 600 – 699 points will receive an SME Rising Star Award

Even though there are about three million SMEs in Thailand, only around 200 SME entrepreneurs have been granted these awards, with approximately 30 SMEs being granted the SME National Award in recent years (OSMEP, 2017). Thus, the SME National Award was a key selection criterion for the case studies, in order to help ensure the quality of those SMEs included in the current study. Three organisations were selected from 30 SMEs 'critical cases', drawing one from each of the three sectors, so as to explore HRD and coaching practices in what are termed 'good examples' of SMEs.

#### **1.4 Case-study Rationale**

The three cases were chosen for their potential to provide a contrasting and complementary mix of management styles that impacted on HRD and coaching practices. To provide a sector variation, one case study each was selected from the production, trading and service sectors, with the work being of different types, to include specialist manufacturing operation, waste recycling trading, and IT full lifecycle services, respectively. They were all categorised as medium enterprises. All three cases have been established for more than fifteen years, with Case-study Two being the youngest, at fifteen years. Case-study One was the oldest at forty-two years, whilst Case-study Three was established thirty-two years ago. Overall, each case study

presented different organisational characteristics (Table 1.1). One of the criteria for selecting the study SMEs was that they had achieved Thailand's SME National Award, which identifies those SMEs that operate effectively and pays due attention to the Human Resource aspect of the organisation.

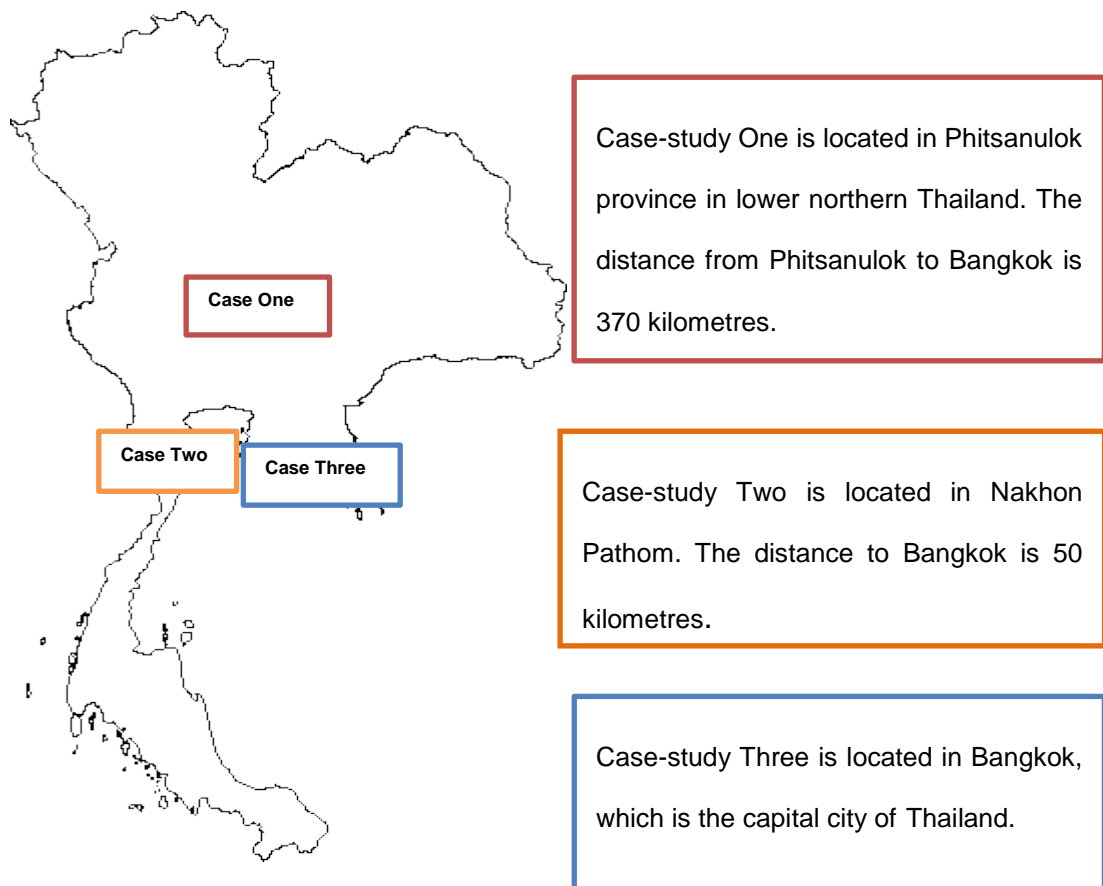
Empirical HRD studies have evidenced training large companies (Zheng et al., 2007; McGraw and Peretz, 2011; McGraw, 2014), although a few small firms have equally placed a high priority on human resource management (Wilkinson et al., 2007). So in a bid to find 'good practice' of employee development in SMEs in Thailand, the current study used the SME National Awards as the key criteria in selecting the three case studies. Moreover, the literature suggests that there are several factors that can influence business success in Thai SMEs, such as entrepreneur characteristics, characteristics of SMEs, resources and finance, strategy, management and know-how (Chittithaworn et al., 2011). However, Thai SMEs, in common with other organisations, still seem to face problems with HRD. For example, they fail to invest any significant time or money in training, preferring to adopt informal training through unstructured On-the-Job Training (OJT). Indeed, most of Thai SMEs train only a few or none of their employees (Thassanabanjong et al., 2009). A further complication is that Thai employees tend to resist change, as they do not feel comfortable with it, which had resulted in Thai firms having low levels of the implementation of new HRM practices and thus, gaining little return on investment in talented employees (Lehmann, 2009). Another fear of Thai SMEs concerns the loss of talented employees, especially young talent, who often see SMEs as a stepping stone to larger firms or more rewarding

jobs (Phoemphian et al., 2015). An added complication is that many owner-managers and managers of local SMEs have inadequate knowledge of business practices (Visara and Hunt, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to study this area by selecting 'good examples' of SMEs in Thailand. This is considered an important strategy for the current research, which focuses on coaching for talent and explores, within the SME environment, the approached used in a 'good' organisation, so that the positive aspects can be used to develop their own and other employees.

The study organisations were located in different regions of Thailand, with TradingSME being located in lower northern Thailand, ProductSME in central Thailand and ServiceSME in the capital city of Thailand (Figure 1.1). This helps place each SME organisation in a geographical context, with one example being Case-study One and, to a lesser extent Case-study Two, who experienced problems in recruiting talent, due to their distance from Thai capital.

In order to address the issues surrounding the learning and development of people in SMEs through coaching practices, a rich and deep understanding of the contextual situation was explored and will be addressed later.





**Figure 1.1 Location of three case studies in Thailand**

Source: Author's Construct

Nonetheless, the study anticipated that the traits of each of the case study owner-managers would have a strong influence on the success of their organisation and affect the different aspect of SME management, particularly the styles of employee development and coaching practices. The individual cases are presented later in Chapters Four to Six.

## **1.5 Research Aim**

The current study aimed to investigate Human Resource Development with a specific focus on how coaching practices for talent were perceived within three Thai SMEs. Particular attention was paid to developing a coaching framework for talent, with a subsidiary aim being the perceived enhancement of employee and organisational performance.

### **1.5.1 Research Questions**

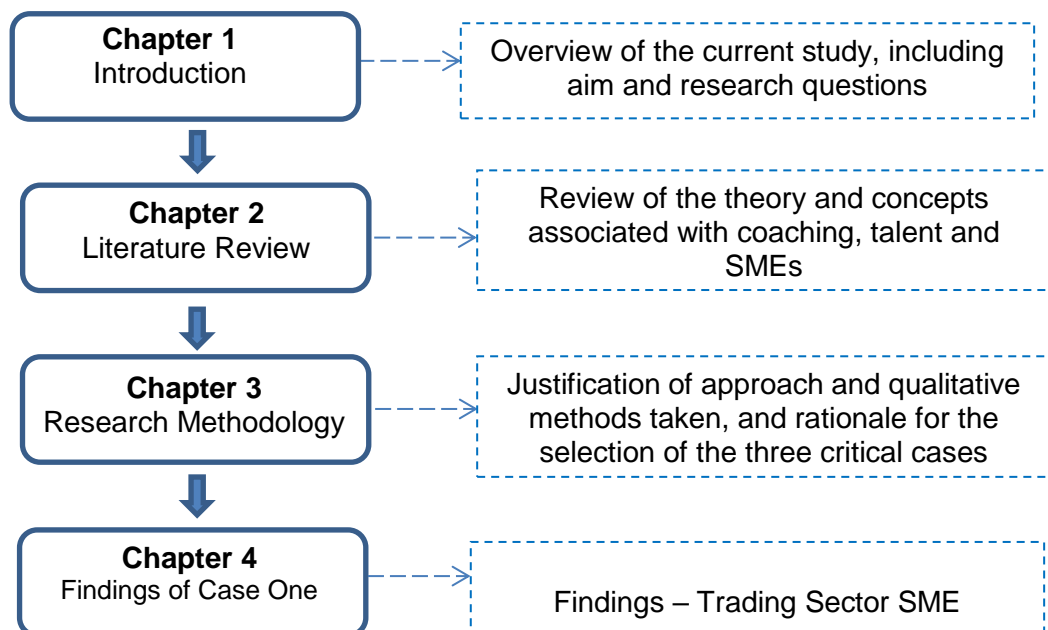
Following on from the research aim, the current study determined to answer three key research questions:

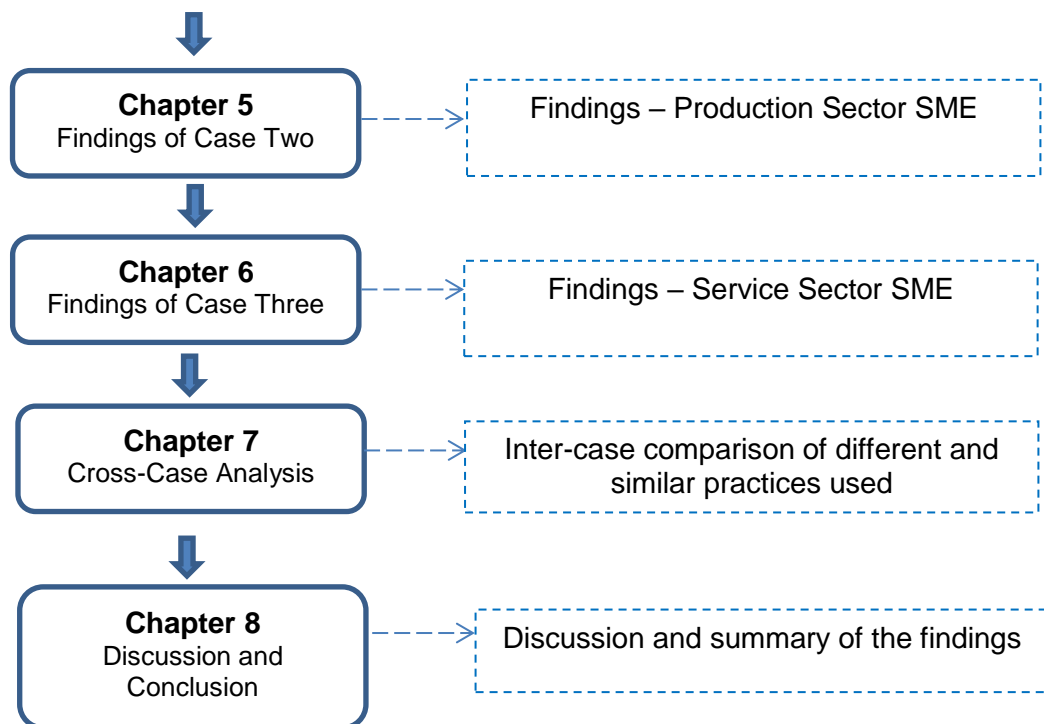
1. In what ways are talented employees identified within three critical case-study organisations and what are the implications for how talented employees are perceived?
2. To what extent and how, do three critical case-study organisations develop their own talented employees and for what purpose?
3. What coaching for talent practices are used and how are these perceived by both employers and employees?

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

The thesis is organised into eight chapters, which are presented subsequently, including the current chapter. Chapter One introduces the thesis outline and deals with different elements in terms of background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions and the research framework. Chapter Two critically reviews the key literature that is relevant to

employee learning, focusing on coaching practices, talented employees and the SME context. The third chapter starts with presenting the research paradigm and justifying the study's philosophical position. Next, the three main stages of the study are justified, to include: research design; data collection and data analysis. A discussion addresses research quality, which is related to the study's trustworthiness. The in-depth findings from the three critical case studies are presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six respectively. Each of the three cases follows the similar presentation of four key themes: the background of SMEs; the attributes of talent; Human Resource Development and, lastly coaching practices. The seventh chapter explores a cross-case analysis of the three case-study organisations in a way that key findings of similar and different practices are compared and discussed. In Chapter Eight the conclusions are presented, along with a wider discussion of the research question. Contributions to both theoretical knowledge and practice are highlighted, along with the research limitations and possible avenues for further research. The structure of the thesis is summarised in Figure 1.2.





**Figure 1.2 Thesis structure**

## Summary

Having presented the background to the study, the specific problem being tackled was addressed. To place the study in context, the SME situation in Thailand was outlined, along with a rationale for case study choice and their background. Although the research aim and three questions emerged from the literature review, for clarity, they are placed in this introductory chapter. Finally, an outline of the structure used in the thesis is presented. Having laid the ground for the current research, the salient concepts that were drawn from the literature are presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

To locate the current study in a theoretical framework, four substantive areas are presented, with these being drawn from the key areas in the literature. First, aspects surrounding SMEs are discussed, such as the defining of SMEs and the concept of employee development within them, with a particular emphasis being placed on the Thai situation. Second, an understanding of how coaching practices are presented is discussed, with a clear focus on the manager-coach role. The owner-manager is particularly relevant to the coaching culture in Thai SMEs and links with talent and business performance. The third area provides a review of talent, focusing on the characteristics of talented employees and the importance of talent within a manager's role in relation to coaching for talent, in SMEs. In reviewing the literature the relevancy and appropriateness of the sources have influenced their inclusion. The final area draws together the key points from the literature, outlines the gaps in the literature and presented the research questions that sought to address this gap.

### **2.1 Context of SMEs**

SMEs have been cited as being the backbone of a worldwide economic growth (Ates et al., 2013; Jasra et al., 2011; Nakwa et al., 2012) in that they provide support to and job opportunities for larger organisations (Anuar and Mohd Yusuff, 2011). There is also a growing recognition of the key role SMEs play in national economic development, along with their greater business presence

(Gasiorowski-Denis, 2015), which that has accelerated wider economy achievements (Cook and Nixon, 2000). Nonetheless, SMEs are not perceived as a group of heterogeneous organisations, which turns the notion of SMEs into a complex entity (Anderson and Boocock, 2002; Mazzarol, 2003; Saru, 2007). Thus, as SMEs provide the 'vehicle' for the current study, the criteria used to define them is clarified and established.

### **2.1.1 Nature of SMEs**

There is no accepted universal definition of SMEs, with different countries adopting varying criteria. Criteria are related to fixed asset value, the number of employees, annual turnover and ownership (Arokiasamy and Ismail, 2009; Jordan et al., 1998; Lopez-Gracia and Aybar-Arias, 2000; Michaelas et al., 1999; Van Der Wijst, 2012). For example, in the USA, the defining of SMEs is based on the North American Industry Classification System, which states that an SME is defined by the number of employees and total turnover, although even this varies between different industries. More specifically, and closer to UK, the European Commission (2003) classifies SMEs by the number of employees (fewer than 250) and having an annual turnover not exceeding fifty million Euros, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding forty-three million Euros. Using such data, SMEs are classified into three groups, broadly comprising: micro enterprises, small enterprises and medium enterprises. How SMEs are classified in Thailand, the home of the current researches case-study organisations, was presented in the first chapter, although briefly SME definition is determined by the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises (OSMEP, 2015). Keeping broadly in line with the US and European criteria, to

be classed as a SME in Thailand an organisation generally has less than 200 employees and fewer fixed assets than 200 million baht. Variation exists between sectors, with for example 'Retailing' having a lower threshold for people and fixed assets than the other sectors.

### **2.1.2 Human Resource Development in SMEs**

In the broadest terms, SMEs are different from the larger organisations and possess unique characteristics that set them apart (Beaver and Jennings, 2000; Hill and Stewart, 2000; Hill and McGowan, 1999). Whilst all organisations seek to survive, the focus in SMEs is often greater, with a narrower scope, which places survival as a primary objective (Storey, 1994). Whilst employee development assists in survival, the typical characteristics of Human Resource Development (HRD) activities in SMEs are invariably informal, reactive and short-term in outlook, with a high proportion of unplanned activities (Saru, 2007; Stewart and Beaver, 2004). Thus, the learning within SMEs often relies on informal and incidental process (Tam and Gray, 2016), with it occurring "...sporadically throughout routine daily tasks" (Matlay, 2000, p.207). In addition, SMEs have a preference for informal training and those general HRD activities that are associated with employee development whilst you work (Patton and Marlow, 2002).

There are positive aspects associated with SMEs, such as their unique and dynamic characteristics (Ritchie and Brindley, 2000). Equally, SMEs have more general traits, in that they are flexible and can adaptor quickly to changes in the external environment (Salavou and Lioukas, 2003; Hoque and Bacon,

2006). To a greater extent than larger organisations, the owner-manager and his or her personality, is invariably a key to success, although it is noted that other managers in the organisation, equally play a particularly important role in the learning process within SMEs (Noori and Lee, 2006). The managers tend to facilitate the learning of others in the organisation (Sadler-Smith et al., 2000) and have an important and direct role to play in a SMEs training and development activities (Heraty and Morley, 1995). However, because owner-managers hold ultimate overall organisational responsibility, they have a particularly significant role with respect to being responsible for the small firms HRD activities (Shelton, 2001; Valkeavaara and Vaherva, 1998). Indeed, it is the owner-managers who, to a large extent, determine the SMEs behavioural characteristics (Lloyd-Reason and Mughan, 2002).

Conversely, a number of constraints face SMEs, although the current study focused on those barriers that are directly relevant to the development of employees. In general, SMEs have fewer human and financial resources than larger firms, and within a less complicated organisational structure there are fewer internal resources, such as people, time and finance (Cragg and King, 1993; Hoque and Bacon, 2006). Invariably there are fewer dedicated training programmes, a shortage of managerial skills and training and fewer qualified employees (Bickerdyke, 2000; Jayawarna et al., 2007; Keep, 2000; Kitching and Blackburn, 2002). These characteristics combine to make their composition unique, in that they differ from larger companies, especially in the areas of HRD expertise, infrastructure and general resources (Hill and Stewart,



2000). Indeed, due to resource constraints, they often fail to maximise their learning potential (Sadler-Smith et al., 2000).

In exploring the main barriers to skills development in SMEs, Lange et al., (2000) identified four key areas. First, there are cultural barriers. Here the SME culture differs from that of large companies in that they have a less complex hierarchical structure, employees often need to be multi-skilled and most activities related to developing the employees depend on the personality and experience of SME owner-managers, such as training and the level of competency. Indeed, the uncomplicated business framework often means that the owner-manager is the sole decision maker, with him or her invariably influencing business success, with their beliefs and personality pervading many managerial aspects, including the strategic approach (Baum and Locke, 2004; Entrialgo, 2002; Feltham et al., 2005; Lloyd-Reason and Mughan, 2002).

The second area refers to financial barriers. Financial constraints are the key barrier for training and learning activities, with many SME owner-managers perceiving this to be a costly organisational activity. A lack of available finances in SMEs has emerged in business failures, particularly with respect to a poor emphasis on human resources (Scott, 1989). Indeed, an important barrier that is concerned directly with the current study refers to SMEs generally being weaker in terms of their financial investment in training and development (Holden et al., 2003). The third area identified by Lange and his colleagues concerns access and provision barriers. In this area, even those who are

interested in accessing skills development opportunities are invariably blocked by a lack of access or suitable learning provision (Lange et al., 2000).

Finally, Lange and his colleagues (2000) point out that a low level of awareness of knowledge opportunities form a barrier; essentially, opportunities for learning are missed. Even though small firms in particular tend not to have highly formalised business strategies (McEvoy, 1984), there is an apparent lack of awareness of development opportunities. However, the training might not be there in the first place. Indeed, one aspect of SME owner-managers being in charge of their employees' training and development, is that they fear training will enhance employees' mobility (Havenga, 2009). Thus a barrier is formed, in that owner-managers fear they might be developing transferable skills and therefore cannot afford the high cost of training, only for the benefits to move away (Abor and Quartey, 2010). It can follow that owner-managers of small organisations have a negative attitude towards formal employee training (Matlay, 1999), even training in general. Even when activities exist, there is a preference for an informal HRD approach, which is not so costly financially (Nolan and Garavan, 2015).

The lack of trust in formal training means that on-the-job training has tended to be practised in small organisations, with SMEs being more willing to use informal activities, which in itself provides one of the most significant barriers to skills development in SMEs (Lange et al., 2000). Further, many SMEs are not fully aware of training methods and thus, find it difficult to select the right kind of management development opportunities, which contributes to the

perennial problem of a lack of engagement with formal development (Gray et al., 2011). Many SME managers are 'home-grown', which means they invariably have highly specific knowledge, but limited experience of broader management competencies, especially people skills (Bolden, 2007).

## **2.2 Practice of Coaching in SMEs**

### **2.2.1 Coaching as Employee Learning**

Learning has become increasingly important for organisations to be able to respond to a rapid and continuously changing external environment (Gardiner et al., 2001; Marsick and Volpe, 1999; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Schein, 1993), in which the capacity for organisational learning is perceived as a key element for economic growth and competitive advantage (Camps and Rodríguez, 2011; Senge, 2006). Learning can occur in various forms, such as incidental or intentional learning and can take place at individual or organisational level, either formally or informally (Harrison, 1997; George P. Huber, 1991; Nadler, 1970; Walton, 1999). However, the organisation itself cannot learn; learning occurs through individuals, so employees are considered to be an important factor and organisations need to focus on them, rather than other assets (Dixon, 1992; Ulrich, 1998). Indeed, employee knowledge and ability are important sources of competitive advantage that can provide the foundation of organisational learning (Schmitt et al., 2012; Argyris, 1995; Drucker, 1992). Within the area of HRD, informal learning has been shown to provide the greatest significant development (Boud and Garrick, 1999), with it being stated that around seventy per cent of all workplace learning occurs in an informal contexts (Cross, 2011). Informal learning, which

is integrated into daily activities, is predominately experimental and unstructured in nature (Marsick and Volpe, 1999).

HRD is perceived as a facilitator of learning, with its most interesting feature being its 'connection to organisational learning' (Saru, 2007, p.39). This connection is integrated within three key components: organisational development (OD); career development; and training and development to improve individuals, groups and organisational effectiveness (Thomson and Mabey, 1994). For example, the generation of new knowledge and skills training is accepted as an important strategy in developing employees (Camps and Rodríguez, 2011). However, the HRD activities and processes are connected to HRM, such as organisational culture, strategy and structure (Mankin, 2001), and so thus the use of a traditional learning strategy alone may not be sufficient to develop employees. Coaching is one HRD activity that is perceived as a core development intervention, with it being connected to both individual and organisational success (Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012), and described as an 'appropriate' organisational learning intervention (Beattie et al., 2014, p.184). Further, it has been argued that coaching has the potential to enhance the learning and development of individuals and teams whilst making a contribution to organisational growth (Ellinger and Kim, 2014; Hamlin et al., 2008). Indeed, a number of studies have found that coaching, which is predominantly an experiential method for informal learning (Marsick and Watkins, 2015), plays an important role in the activity of HRD professionals (Davis et al., 2004; Jarvis et al., 2006). Moreover, coaching has, for some, become a mantra, with many authors arguing that it can be applied in

numerous areas (Bono et al., 2009; Ellinger et al., 2003; Passmore, 2010c). However, in acknowledging that coaching can take on various forms, a universally agreed definition of coaching remains elusive (Ellinger and Kim, 2014; Passmore, 2015), so it is understandable that a clear definition from the literature will aid the current study.

### **2.2.2 Concept and Definition of Coaching**

The concept of coaching appeared in the management literature in the 1950s (Evered and Selman, 1989), although the term originated in sport science, where it referred to those athletic leaders who developed the performance of individuals and teams (Wenzel, 2000; Whitmore, 2009). However, during the transfer into managerial activities in the 1970s (McLean and Kuo, 2000), the term “underwent a high degree of diversification” and was further popularised in the 1990s (Passmore, 2015, p.11). Coaching continued to be an important business strategy, with its aim being to generate new knowledge and carry out social transformation in a complex society (Bennett and Bush, 2009; Stelter, 2014). Today, coaching in organisations has become worldwide (Segers et al., 2011) and has evolved into different forms, such as life coaching, executive coaching and workplace coaching (Hamlin et al., 2008; Passmore, 2010b). Equally, coaching occurs in different environments, with different goals and a variety of purposes, with examples being employee motivation, problem solving, team building, and employee development (Gray, 2010; Fielden, 2005; Maynard, 2006). Despite the diversity, coaching shares a common goal of enhancing organisational performance (McGuffin and Obonyo, 2010; Ruane, 2013).

Whilst coaching has been used in numerous contexts and covers a wide range of definitions, there is a broad understanding that ‘at the heart of coaching lies the idea of empowering people by facilitating self-directed learning, personal growth and improved performance’ (Passmore, 2010, p.10). As with many concepts, coaching in organisations has evolved in the way it is perceived and a series of definitions is presented in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Selected Definitions of coaching**

	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Source</b>
1	“Coaching is the managerial activity of creating, by communication only, the climate, environment and context that empowers individuals and teams to generate results”.	1989	(Evered and Selman, 1989, p.18)
2	“Coaching is directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and development of skills by a form of tutoring or instruction”.	1995	Parsloe, 1995: p.18)
3	“Coaching is, exclusively, a process focusing on enhanced performance”.	1998	(Burdett, 1998: p.2)
4	“Coaching is a conversation, a dialogue, whereby a coach and coachee interact in a dynamic exchange to achieve goals, enhance	2000	(Zeus and Skiffington, 2000: p.13)

	performance and move the coachee forward to greater success”.		
5	“Coaching is a non-directive process that utilises skilful questioning to illicit solutions from the coachee and it facilitates the development of a collaborative partnership between coach and client”.	2003	(Storey, 2003: p.77)
6	“Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another”.	2003	(Downey, 2003: p.21)
7	“Coaching is a collaborative relationship formed between a coach and the coachee for the purposes of attaining personal development outcomes which are valued by the coachee”.	2007	(Spence and Grant, 2007, p.186)
8	“Coaching is unlocking person’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them learn rather than teaching them”.	2009	(Whitmore, 2009: p.11)
9	“Coaching is a collaborative solution-focused, results-orientate and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of	2012	(The Association for Coaching AC, 2012)

	work performance, life experience, self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee”.		
10	“Coaching is a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders”.	2014	(Cox et al., 2014, p.1)
11	“Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential”.	2015	(The International Coach Federation ICF, 2015)
12	“Coaching is a facilitated, dialogic and reflective learning process that aims to grow the individuals (or teams) awareness, responsibility and choice (thinking and behavioural)”.	2017	(Association for coaching, AC, 2017)
13	“Coaching (a) is a managed conversation that takes place between two people; (b) aims to support sustainable change to behaviours or ways of thinking; (c) focuses on learning and development”.	2017	(van Nieuwerburgh, 2017)

Source: Author’s construct



In scrutinising the sequential definitions in Table 2.1, three focus words are identified: method, relationship and process. Building on the above a working definition for the current study is: 'coaching is a development *method* that can improve employees' performance to achieve their goals through conversation and the learning *process* that is fostered through a cordial *relationship* between the coach and coachee'.

Building on the study's definition of coaching, coaching practices that are relevant to the current study are addressed in the following section. In providing details of coaching, a focus is kept on SMEs. To assist with clarification, the term 'coachee' in the current study referred to anyone receiving coaching from a 'coach', with it also being noted that the terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring' referred to separate activities.

### **2.2.3 Coaching and Mentoring**

The term 'coaching' is invariably used interchangeably with other words, in particular 'mentoring' and whilst a degree of intertwining exists, the concepts are fundamentally different (McLean, 2012). Mentors are generally perceived to draw on their experience and business knowledge and act as an advisor, counsellor, guide or teacher to lower tier employees who are often perceived as being 'high-flyers' (Clutterbuck et al., 2016). For a coach at work, their important role is "to assist coachees in uncovering their own knowledge and skills, and to facilitate coachees in becoming their own advisers" (Passmore, 2015, p.27). Although the distinction is made in the literature, the terms of mentoring and coaching are, in reality, often used interchangeably (Megginson

and Clutterbuck, 2010). It is clear that coaching differs from mentoring, with the process not being dependent on a more experienced individual passing down his or her knowledge, often with career progression in mind. Rather than knowledge alone, coaching requires an expertise in the actual process coaching, as much as the subject area, with the process element being seen as one of its great strengths (Ragins and Kram, 2007). The observation is made that there is an important emotional component in mentoring, with this ongoing nature not necessarily being present in coaching (Mulvie, 2015). The various discussions can lead to confusion in practice, possibly down to both approaches drawing on the particular skills of listening and questioning (Cox et al., 2014).

The situation is further confused by Brock (2010, p.8) acknowledging that “the definition of coaching is not fixed. How coaching is done depends on the coach, client, context and situation”, thus complicating any clear definition and opening the door for the terms to be used interchangeably. Indeed, there are scholars who argue that the separation of coaching and mentoring is extremely difficult, because the terms are often used concurrently to address a particular problem (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2010). It is argued, however, that to achieve maximum organisational benefit, from each role requires “very different conversations” (Hicks and McCracken, 2009, p.73). A summary of the debate is presented in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2 Difference – Coaching and Mentoring; current study**

<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Mentoring</b>
A relationship between a manager, the coach and his or her direct subordinate, the coachee.	A relationship between a more experienced colleague, the mentor and a less experienced colleague, the mentee.

To summarise, coaching is distinguished from mentioning in that it focuses on enhancing performance to maximise a coachee’s potential, in a way that helps them to learn, rather than teaching them directly (Dunlop, 2006). Mentoring concerns the transfer of knowledge from a more experienced colleague to another employee to advance their achievements, particularly in terms of career progression (Hicks and McCracken, 2009).

Finally, to clarify the terms used in the current study, the more traditional approach of separation was applied. Coaching referred to when the managers acted as a coach to help unlock their subordinates’ potential, with a view to maximising their performance, whilst mentoring focused on the role of a more experienced colleague, who was not a coach, in transferring their knowledge and understanding to other, less experienced colleagues in the same organisation.

#### **2.2.4 Coaching in Organisations**

Coaching in organisations can broadly be divided into executive and managerial coaching (Gregory and Levy, 2010; Hagen, 2012; Maltbia et al.,

2014). Further, a coach can be appointed that is external to the organisation or internally, in which case it is often the coachees' line manager (Passmore, 2015).

### ***Executive Coaching***

Executive coaching initially emerged as a process that aimed at helping executives to deal with transition and underperformance, either of themselves and their organisations as a whole (Mulvie, 2015). Although executive coaching was originally used with CEOs and Vice Presidents, it was later extended to senior and lower levels of management, with the process invariably using external coaches (Baron and Morin, 2010). Executive coaches do not have direct authority over the coachees, with the short- to medium-term relationship being designed to improve senior management efficiency in their current post (Spaten and Flensburg, 2013). In short, "The primary objective of executive coaching is to facilitate performance-enhancing behavioural change within the workplace" (Passmore, 2007).

### ***Managerial Coaching***

Falling within the managerial field of employee coaching, four variants of coaching exist: peer, team, cross-organisational and hierarchical, with the latter being considered as the most used approach (Beattie et al., 2014). This internal organisational process is viewed as a developmental activity, wherein direct line managers engage their employees on a one-on-one basis, with a view to improving job performance and developing capabilities (Gregory and Levy, 2010; Heslin et al., 2006). The success of managerial coaching is, in

addition to using objective information, such as feedback, performance data, or assessments, predominately dependent on the relationship between the employee and manager (Hagen, 2012). Whilst the manager as coach seeks to facilitates learning in the workplace, for the coachees to be empowered in their leaning, specific behavioural expressions from the manager are required (Ellinger et al., 2010). Consequently, for success to follow, the competency of a manager’s coaching skills is of high importance (Hunt and Weintraub, 2010; Passmore, 2010b). In summary, the manager as coach approach involves giving advice, providing direction, encouraging and guiding in a way that encourages subordinates to the greater achievement of personal and organisational goals (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000).

**Table 2.3 Summary – Key Differences between Executive and Managerial Coaching**

<b>Executive Coaching</b>	<b>Managerial Coaching (Manager as Coach)</b>
<p>a. External professional coach plays the role of coach with a higher-level individual (Joo, 2005) such as the CEO (Baron and Morin, 2010), or top manager (Spaten and Flensburg, 2013).</p> <p>b. External coach acts as coach whilst a high-level employee in the</p>	<p>a. Manager or supervisor plays the role of coaching with his or her subordinate (Hagen, 2012).</p> <p>b. Internal coach acts as coach whilst an employee, who direct reports to the manager, is coached. This relationship is known as ‘manager as coach’ or ‘managerial</p>

<p>organisation is coached. This relationship is termed executive coaching (Joo, 2005), with the coach being viewed as an 'executive coach' (Baron and Morin, 2010).</p>	<p>coaching' (Gregory and Levy, 2010; Hagen, 2012; Hunt and Weintraub, 2016), with the coach being viewed as a 'coaching manager' (Beattie et al., 2014).</p>
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### 2.2.5 Internal Versus External Coaching

Whilst internal or external coaching are commonly differentiated, some authors consider them to be the same, except that the internal coach is employed in the same organisation as those they coach (Carter, 2005). Within the context of SMEs, the expensive cost of external coaching programmes may need to be heavily subsidised, although owner-managers often consider the commercial price levels to be prohibitive and unacceptable (Gray and Goregaokar, 2007). In a typical SME, owner-managers generally fund any coaching services directly, whilst in larger companies a third-party HR professional invariably approves funding for training (Baker, 2014). Indeed, financial constraints have been identified as a major barrier to coaching practices taking place in SMEs, with the view being further compounded by the lack of evidence for a return being made on the investment, with the cost disadvantages associated with external coaches being an added burden (Peel, 2008). As a result, many SMEs have turned to internal coaches, who have the ability to align their work to the organisation's competencies and values can "organise coaching around company values and leadership competencies", thereby providing coaching that is imbedded within the organisation (McKee et al., 2009, p.61). Around eighty per cent of organisations adopt internal

coaching (St John-Brooks, 2013), with the approach being claimed to improve leadership skills and the retention of managers (Leonard-Cross, 2010).

There are considerable advantages in using internal over external coaches, which include lower costs, greater cultural and organisational familiarity, easier accessibility and more contactable (St John-Brooks, 2013), with the most rudimentary benefits being the reduced costs (Carter, 2005). Larger organisations are equally reducing their dependence on external coaching (Hawkins, 2012); an Institute of Leadership and Management (2011) survey on creating a coaching culture found that 83 per cent of the 250 large organisations surveyed used internal coaching. Many forms of internal coaches are available, such as line managers, HR department personnel and staff specifically employed to coach (Frisch, 2001), with many organisations expecting their own managers to facilitate the process. As the concept of manager as coach is of particular importance to SMEs and the current study, this area is now addressed.

#### **2.2.6 Role of Manager as Coach**

Informal learning processes are preferred in small firms (Billett et al., 2003), wherein managers play an important role in supporting, fostering and encouraging employees to learn (Coetzer, 2006; Sadler-Smith et al., 2000). Whilst responsibility for employee development invariably lies with line managers (Hyman and Cunningham, 1998), there are different management styles, such as persuaders, debaters and abdicators, that coaches can adopt (Whitmore, 2009). Fundamentally, in order to develop employees, the

manager transforms from manager into being a coach (Tamkin et al., 2003), with some seeing the role as being “an absolute prerequisite for managers” (Whitmore, 2009, p.43). If the role is an absolute prerequisite, then in practice managers as coaches play a key role in developing individuals, although they are required to be proficient and have the skills and appropriate interpersonal and cognitive behaviours to facilitate the process (Ellinger et al., 2006). Managers as coaches need to have the personal qualities to provide effective support, such as empathy, integrity, detachment, willingness and adaptability, rather than being perceived as a threat (Whitmore, 2009). Coaching sessions can occur spontaneously and can last from just a few minutes, up to an hour, although a key element is effective communication and the explanation the manager provides (Billett et al., 2003; Gibb, 1997).

It is apparent that the line manager’s role is to engage in those coaching practices that improve the skills, competence and performance of their coachees (Beattie et al., 2014). Regardless of their level in the organisation, the manager as coach is seen to have three distinct roles: coach, manager and evaluator (Orth et al., 1987). In obtaining the best from those they coach, managers need to adopt the style that is most effective for the situation and person being coached. Passmore (2015) offers nine core elements of effective coaching: 1) Awareness 2) Responsibility 3) Self-belief 4) Blame-free 5) Solution focus 6) Challenge 7) Action 8) Trust and 9) Self-directed learning. The coach needs skill to listen, question, clarify, summarise and reflect through goal setting. There is no shortage of qualities required of a high-quality coach, such as patience, being supportive and a good listener, and having technical



expertise, knowledge and experience to function effectively (Whitmore, 2009). Such qualities place pressure on managers to look at their own development, which may be more challenging with the smaller number involved in SMEs. Nonetheless, organisations need to establish training programmes to develop their managers is effective coaching techniques (Graham et al., 1994; Peterson and Hicks, 1996), although the personal qualities of a 'good' manager are down to individual temperament and self-development.

Drawing on the coaching and SME literature, it is apparent that the manager as coach concept provides a suitable fit for SME organisations, particularly with respect to finance not being so readily available. Fortuitously, a number of studies support the positive results associated with internal coaches, especially in that the manager a coach role has been seen to create a trusting and supportive environment, which itself is promoted through the 'chemistry' between the manager (coach) and their employees (coachees) (Hunt and Weintraub, 2016). Whilst organisations train and provide managers with the skills and competencies to coach, the creation of a coaching culture is equally important for an organisation (Bennett and Bush, 2009; Ellinger and Kim, 2014).

### **2.2.7 Creating a Coaching Culture – the Thai Context**

Coaching cultures occur when groups of employees employ coaching “as a way of making holistic improvements to individuals within their organisation” (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014: p.92), which may be either through formal or informal channels. Whilst the integration of coaching interventions

can be successful through a mixture of coaching support and personal development (Anderson and Anderson, 2005), building a coaching culture is likely to be beneficial and worthy of investment, particularly if the aim is to facilitate organisational change (Anderson et al., 2009). The power of organisational culture is apparent when employees feel they can do anything or can create special things, and especially when employees are satisfied and content in the current atmosphere (Gostick and Elton, 2007). Typically, positive organisational cultures receive constant feedback, are committed to communication and the leadership sets and declares the expectations of employees (Lindbom, 2007).

The manager as coach is considered as another means of developing a coaching culture, in that, through facilitation and guidance, managers encourage subordinates to learn for themselves (Whybrow and Henderson, 2007), Other drivers that can enhance a coaching culture in an organisation concern responsive management styles, team working, support for developing employee skills and the management of talent (Jarvis et al., 2006). The manager as coach concept is particularly applicable to the current study in SME organisations, with the process being able to create an effective culture as there the commitment to coaching is present at all levels (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000). The idea that effective coaching can help produce a higher performance and support the coaching culture is relevant to the smaller communities that exist in SME (Hunt and Weintraub, 2016; Lindbom, 2007). Moreover, characteristics such as easier communication flow, face-to-face involvement and greater flexibility are all equally suited to the smaller number

of employees in SMEs (Wilkinson, 1999). Finally, leaders play a crucial role in creating a collaborative work culture (Meister and Willyerd, 2010). This requires leaders to act in ethical ways, develop mutual trust, be open and show a willingness to help others through coaching (Ellinger et al., 2010).

When an organisation is creating a coaching culture the specific context needs to be taken into consideration, which for the current study refers to SMEs in the wider Thai context. Whilst Thai culture is based largely on agriculture, Thai people show respect to others and they are generally culturally homogenous when involved in entrepreneurial activities (Box et al., 1995; Komin, 1995; Swierczek and Jatusripatak, 1994). However, whilst Thai people are receptive to new ideas, that culture in Thai SMEs tends to be conservative and risk-averse (Swierczek and Ha, 2003). One of the greatest influences on wider Thai culture is Buddhism, which is a powerful part of Thai nationality and “so deeply meaningful to the hearts of the people as to form the dominant core of Thai culture” (Ratanakul, 1999, p.17). Buddhism has a strong influence on the values Thai people hold, specifically on moral perspectives and their actions (Gupta et al., 2002; Thakur and Walsh, 2013). In that Buddhism moulds the development of Thai cultural values, it also influences organisational culture. For example, meditation, which has a positive effect on a person’s well-being, is a widespread activity in many Thai organisations. Indeed, meditation receives support from many organisational leaders, who believe that it helps to build valuable people for their organisations and for society (Petchsawang and McLean, 2017). Thus, it is in these unique cultural characteristics, with its

paternalism, benevolent ways and family-oriented culture (Gupta et al., 2002), that an organisational coaching culture is formed.

Within the wider Thai context, the work by Hofstede (1980) and his colleagues (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010) identified various dimensions within Thai culture. For example, in terms of individualism, the Thai people are perceived as being highly collectivists (Deyo, 1978). The 'collectivist' affiliation is felt to derive from the influence generated by people living with the extended family, along with the value Thai society places on group relationships, rather than those surrounding an individual, (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). In addition, Thai society values group norms and rules over any great desire for flexibility, which leads to an avoidance of ambiguity and non-conformance. The avoidance of change is perceived to be associated with the corresponding discomfort it may cause in others, which is often conveyed in the Thai phrase 'Kreng Jai', whereby individuals restrain their feelings to avoid potential conflict. Finally, with respect to gender differences, when compared with Western nations the Masculinity dimension score in Thai society is relatively low. The emphasis on a feminine society corresponds with the high value placed on general harmonious social relationship and the avoidance of conflict (Hallinger, Chantarapanya, Sriboonma and Kantamara, 2000). In relation to the workplace, there is considered to be an emphasis on creating an atmosphere that is pleasurable and which favours a strong community spirit (Yukongdi, 2010).

Whilst the approaches used by Hofstede and others provide a broad overview, at a moment in time, they are insufficient to convey a 'true' understanding of a culture. In addition, the various models of dimensions fail to provide a deeper understanding as to why Thai society thinks the way it does. Further, although Thailand is culturally different from Western nations (Yukongdi, 2010), the influence of Western values, such as materialism and individual betterment, have emergence, especially among the new generation (Niffenegger, Kulviwat and Engchanil, 2006). Thus, identifying cultural difference alone does not necessarily imply a complete explanation between coaching practice for talent and the cultural context within Thailand. It is apparent that an investigation into coaching for talent in Thailand, whilst needing to be conducted within the national context also needs to gather primary data from the key stakeholders involved.

### **2.2.8 Coaching for Talent and Business Performance**

Coaching is a widely used intervention for improving the learning process, with it being a key element in individual and organisational growth (Bueno, 2010; Ellinger and Kim, 2014; Hamlin et al., 2008; Hunt and Weintraub, 2016; Lane, 2010; Neale et al., 2009; Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012). Coaching also creates benefits in the form of positive individual change and improved organisational results (Gormley and van Nieuwerburgh, 2014). Indeed, there are numerous potential outcomes of coaching, ranging from the individual to social level, of which Passmore (2015, p.28-29) identified four. First is the individual level, which refers to personal growth, improved communication and relationships, better self-awareness, increased individual performance, higher

motivation and commitment. Team level comes next, which relates to improved team performance, team spirit, better communication and relationships and unleashing group potential. The third, the organisational level, is viewed as improved organisational performance, better staff motivation and retention, more effective communication, sustainable form of learning and development. The final aspect is the social level which relates to a successful organisation, a positive role model for other organisations and promotion of cleaner high performance.

When focusing on the manager as coach, a key enabler refers to individual performance improvement that is sustained over the longer term (Towell, 2012), with performance being highlighted in each of Passmore's levels. In addition to the individual perspective, organisational outcomes are equally valid when coaching for talent (Hagen, 2012). First, individual outcomes refer to improvements in job satisfaction, task performance, organisation commitment, employee learning and morale and helping to decrease turnover intention. At the organisational level, outcomes comprise improvement in cost saving and team performance, along with a decrease in project budgets and the duration of these.

Managers have used coaching to facilitate employee development and, through improved relationship between managers and employees, increase production (Evered and Selman, 1989; McLean et al., 2005; Rothwell and Sullivan, 2005). The coaching effect also has the potential to increase personal development and business performance, as well as retaining talented

employees within the organisation (Feldman, 2001; Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Homan and Miller, 2006; Witherspoon, 2000).

The identified benefits from coaching are claimed to increase performance at individual, team, organisation and social level, yet the literature provides little empirical research for its effectiveness in improving individual and organisational performance (Grant, 2003; Hamlin et al., 2006; McLean et al., 2005), with there being “far fewer on managerial coaching in particular” (Hagen, 2012, p.24). Indeed, coaching practices for talent in SMEs is not being studied presently, especially in the context of Thailand. Although talented people are viewed as a source of competitive advantage in SMEs (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2008; Williams, 2000), they face challenges associated with the recruitment and retaining of key talent (Cairncross, 2000; Barney and Wright, 1997). As already cited, coaching has the potential to retain high-performing employees (Homan and Miller, 2006). Generally, research into coaching has focused on large organisations with research on the talent management or the effect of coaching in SMEs being minimal (Grant and Zackon, 2004; Peel, 2008; Scullion and Ryan, 2013). Hence, it is fitting to explore coaching with talented employees in SMEs, before expanding to other groups of people in the organisation.

### **2.3 Talented Employees – SME Perspective**

The concept of Talent Management (TM) was coined in 1997, from ‘The War on Talent’, led by McKinsey (Michaels et al., 2001). The original concept

highlighted the importance of talent and explored challenges to talent-building in a business environment. Talent Management is currently of interest to HRD academics and practitioners, with it being perceived as a business strategy that leads to business success (Iles, 2008; Iles et al., 2010), although little has been written with respect to SMEs and coaching practices.

### **2.3.1 Talent as a Concept**

As with many of the HRD areas, there are numerous definitions of talent in the academic human resource literature (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Guerci and Solari, 2012; Iles, 2008; Thunnissen et al., 2013; Wilcox, 2016). Although there is no single agreed definition of talent, it is possible to explore the various characteristics of the phenomenon.

The first characteristic of talent concerns the nurture-nature debate, with it being considered either as an innate component or something that is environmentally constructed, say through education or training (Barab and Plucker, 2002; Echols, 2007). The second talent characteristic refers to people as a subject or people as objects (Gallardo et al., 2013). The object view of people identifies talent as the excellent characteristics an individual employee possesses, such as capability, commitment, experience, knowledge, ability and skill (Bethke-Langenegger, 2012; Michaels et al., 2001; Stahl et al., 2007; Ulrich, 2008). When referring to talent in people in the subject sense, it is perceived as high performance and high potential individuals. The final view of talent is that it refers to some people who are more dominant than others, or to the entire employee population in an organisation (Gallardo-Gallardo et al.,



2013; Wilcox, 2016). The two viewpoints are equally seen as providing exclusive or inclusive approaches (Swales, Downs and Orr, 2014). Within the exclusive perspective, talent is seen as an employee who has high potential and can demonstrate high performance, whilst the inclusive view of talent views talent as the whole staff (Iles et al., 2010). In dealing with scope, Swales et al. (2014, p.532) argue that whilst seeing everyone as talent is 'laudable', in reality, this cannot be sustained as realistic in most organisations. However, with respect to the 'whole staff' option in small organisations, it may be possible for to fill all posts by recruiting talented individuals, given a favourable market supply (*Ibid*). How an organisation determines its talent target and strategy will vary across organisations, with particular reference being made to owner-operators of SMEs (Iles, 2008).

The academic discussion surrounding talent is of interest, however, to provide clarity for the current study a working definition was adopted from the UK's governing HR body: "Talent consists of those individuals who can make a difference to organisational performance either through their immediate contribution or, in the longer term, by demonstrating the highest levels of potential" (CIPD, 2015, p.2). In this way, talented employees are perceived as those employees who are high performers and possess high potential, although, from an organisational perspective, 'talent' is what the organisation, or a direct line manager recognise in an individual that is enabling them to further the business goals.

### **2.3.2 Importance of Talent in Organisations**

Talented employees are seen as a critical success factor in organisational success (Norma D'Annunzio-Green et al., 2008; Elkeles et al., 2016; Ingham, 2006; Malikeh et al., 2012; Porkiani et al., 2010), with there being a positive relationship between talent management efforts and an organisation's performance (Devins and Gold, 2014; Latukha, 2015). Indeed, talented employees are a key aspect of organisational efficiency and greatly valued by organisations, large and small (Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Dries, 2013). As well as internal development, organisations may need to take action to recruit talented individuals, so as to reduce the business risk (Cairncross, 2000; Barney and Wright, 1997). Regardless of the source of talent, in small firms, highly skilled people are a key factor to remaining competitive in the business world (Hornsby and Kuratko, 2003).

In larger organisations responsibility for talent management invariably falls to the HR Department, who aims to attract, develop, motivate and retain employee within the organisation (Latukha, 2015). Different talent management strategies have emerged to encourage talented employees, which include talent mapping, talent pools, talent selection and talent development. However, effective talent management is seen as an integrated approach that correctly places talented individuals within the organisation so as to achieve its strategic aims (Wilcox, 2016). The foundation of the approach is that the talent and organisational strategy must be intrinsically linked. Overall, an organisation's talent strategy needs to have a clear process for identifying and developing high potential talent (Elkeles et al., 2016). It is

apparent that, due to the smaller numbers in SMEs and to provide a greater opportunity for business success, a rigorous process is needed to identify and to foster their develop talent.

### **2.3.3 Talent and SME Coaching Practices**

Coaching, which has the potential to empower, release latent potential and get the best out of employees (Whitmore, 2009), has been identified as a significant corporate support means in talent management (Chan, 2015). In addition, coaching provides a powerful opportunity for talented employees to build strong relationship between coach and coachee and to enhance leadership development (Carey et al., 2011). Studies suggest that forty-eight per cent of coaching is directed towards developing high potential staff or in facilitating transition (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009), with many coaching practices being perceived as fundamental to effective management. Coaching managers can adopt their process to support talent development, for example by daily interaction with talented individuals, where challenging questions are raised and discussed (Wilcox, 2016).

The Toyota Car Company provides and exemplar for developing talented employees. The organisation holds the belief that ten per cent of talent relates to a person's native-born gifts, with the remainder being acquired through learning effort and repeated practice. This belief provides the central pillar of Toyota's success, in that it places people development at the very foundation of developing talent (Liker and Meier, 2007). In addition, all leaders have a clear responsibility to develop their subordinates, with the organisation

recognising that 'investing in people and developing talent in everyone will break the cycle of struggle and defeat and replace it with a cycle of success and growth' (Liker and Meier, 2007, p.162). Other authors have linked talent management with the carrot principle, arguing that the most effective talent managers apply the four basic principles of management: goal setting, communication, trust and accountability (Gostick and Elton, 2007). The four elements serve as accelerators to engage, develop and retain talented employees, which follows the analogy of a carrot's lifecycle: 1) *seed*: set clear goals; 2) *plant*: communicate openly; 3) *nurture*: build trust; 4) *weed*: hold everyone accountable; and 5) *harvest*: employee engagement, employee satisfaction, higher profitability and higher customer loyalty (Gostick and Elton, 2007, p.24).

Within the specific context of SMEs, managers tend to lack wider management competencies, which is compounded by little being known about effective coaching styles in SMEs (Bolden, 2007; Gray and Goregaokar, 2007; Gray et al., 2011) or how managers can develop their coaching skills (Gray and Goregaokar, 2007). One strong barrier to talent development is the inability of many SMEs to recognise of the benefits of employee development, including coaching. Within the SME environment, owner-managers have been identified as being key to coaching success and it is important for them to avail themselves of Government agencies or providers that can provide support for their business (Peel, 2008). Coaching and talent are recognised as beneficial to a business success; however, despite them combining to provide an important development tool, there remains a real dearth of empirical research

into talent in SMEs, with the majority of talent research being focused on multinational organisations, often in the Western world (Berger and Berger, 2011; Valverde et al., 2013).

One particularly concern of SMEs is that the barriers to talent development relate to the financial constraints they face, particularly cash flow (Akoena and Gockel, 2002; Aryeetey, 1998). From their perspective, owner-managers see the cost of training with no guaranteed return, as being high risk (Abor and Quartey, 2010). One avenue for overcoming the financial issue is for SMEs to adopt the relatively low-cost coaching approach, where managers act as coaches, although even this low cost option might be too much to bear for some SMEs. To narrow the approach further, the coaching could be targeted to one developmental area alone, say to address poor work performance, or target specific talented employees and develop their potential (Joo et al., 2012; Sharmila and Gopalakrishnan, 2014).

Talent is one of the central areas that underpin the current study, with SMEs often experiencing a scarcity of talent, especially as they compete with larger organisations, to attract talented employees, especially managers (Abor and Quartey, 2010). All organisations need talented people 'to do their best' (James, 2016: p.2), but the fear for SMEs is that they are being used as a stepping stone to the larger companies (Phoemphian et al., 2015; Saru, 2007). Despite SMEs being small expert organisations, where employees are the primary source of value creation, they rarely have an established HR function

that can coordinate the development of talented employees, or foster a wider learning culture (Finegold and Frenkel, 2006).

In providing an overview of talent, it is apparent that, whilst there is no agreed definition, the concept broadly refers to a person who has natural ability, often without being taught. For some this can read as being more of an innate ability, in say intelligence, or some other gifted area (van Nieuwerburgh, 2017). One of the areas the current study sought to explore was the way in which the potential of talented employees was unlocked, so that their performance was maximised. In this respect, the Thai concept for talent needs to be born in mind. The Thai language has two broad references to talent, with these being ‘payyā’ (ปัญญา) and ‘khwām sāmārth phiṣeṣ’ (ความสามารถพิเศษ). The meaning of these can vary, although ‘payyā’ generally refers to intellect, wisdom and knowledge, and whilst it is not directly related to ‘talent’, ‘payya’ signifies that the person has intelligence. ‘Khwām sāmārth phiṣeṣ’ refers to someone who has a high skill level, which could be interpreted as ‘talent’. Whilst talent is a new concept within the Thai business world, particularly when compared with its Western presence, a recent study in Thailand suggested that the concept refers to the high potential and performance of an individual, which give rise to different needs and the expectations of others (Phoemphian, Sakulkoo and Tubsree, 2015). Indeed, invariably, in any exploration of coaching practice for talent, it can be seen that a more localised interpretation of ‘talent’ needs to be applied, rather than simply accepting the Western literature. Even with a localised focus the various perceptions and interpretations are still likely to provide a degree of ambiguity.

## 2.4 Gaps in the Literature

Having reviewed the salient literature, it is apparent that there is no research that explores coaching for talent in Thai SMEs, which strongly suggests that a gap exists in the literature for this topic area. More specifically, and first, whilst HRD in SMEs is acknowledged as being important, the number of empirical studies remains low (Nolan and Garavan, 2015), with the focus being more on larger organisations (Panagiotakopoulos, 2011). Second, although coaching comprises a widely used intervention for developing learning (Ellinger and Kim, 2014; Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012), which has many benefits; researchers have largely neglected this management function, particularly within smaller organisations (Hawkins, 2009). In addition, that research is invariably undertaken in Western economies (Valverde et al., 2013), with a gap presenting itself for a study in an Eastern SME organisation (Bresser, 2009). Equally, with respect to coaching, there is little evidence of empirical studies being undertaken in SMEs into the manager as coach (Ellinger et al., 2006). Third, although talented employees are perceived as the key factors for organisational success, there is a dearth of research into this area (Malikeh et al., 2012), especially that being undertaken into SMEs. Again, a gap exists within the talent management research that is being done, is that it tends to follow the research traditions of Europe and America (Collings et al., 2011). Fourth, given that SMEs play an crucial role in national economic growth, the expectation would be for greater research into the contribution they make and in particular the contributing role that owner-managers play and the wider

coaching competencies they possess, particularly in Thailand (Niratpattanasai, 2014; OrchidSlingshot, 2013).

The four gaps in the literature regarding coaching for talent in Thai SMEs invite being addressed, with the current study accepting the challenge. Indeed, the establishment of the gap led to the main research question: 'What is the perception of employee development and coaching for talent practices within Thai SMEs?' which was followed by three research questions that were devised to address the issues:

1. In what ways are talented employees identified within three critical case-study organisations and what are the implications for how talented employees are perceived?
2. To what extent and how, do the three critical case-study organisations develop their own talented employees and for what purpose?
3. What coaching for talent practices are used and how are these perceived by both employers and employees?

## **Summary**

The literature concerning coaching, talented employees and SMEs has been reviewed, with salient points being explored. The key purpose of the literature review was to explore the published works critically and to discuss the differing viewpoints, so as to identify gaps in the literature and to provide a foundation for the way the current study was conducted. The literature provided the source for those theoretical concepts that were strongly associated with the current study and the ensuing framework comprised the development of employees in



SMEs: ‘HRD’; ‘talented employees’; ‘managers as coaches’; ‘coaching practices’ and the importance surrounding ‘SME Owner-Managers’, whose perceptions of talent were central to the study. These conceptual areas, drawn from the literature, are presented diagrammatically in Figure 2.1. The framework provided a structure within which the current HRD study operated, with each of the major elements being related to the three Research Questions (RQ).



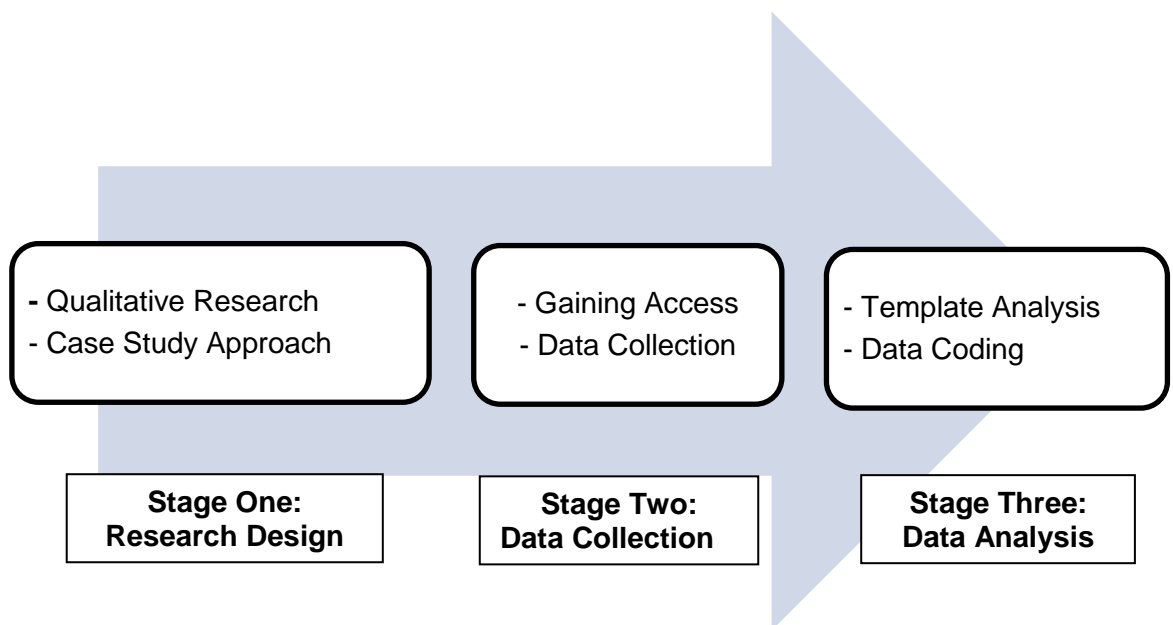
**Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework for a study of Coaching for talent in Thai SMEs**

Having reviewed the literature, with a view to shedding light on the wicked problem of coaching in Thai SMEs, attention now turns to the philosophical stance adopted for the study and the methods that were applied to answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Within this chapter the key philosophical and methods stages used in the current study are presented and justified. The chapter begins with the research paradigm and justifies the philosophical position adopted for the current study, after which the three main stages are addressed (Figure 3.1.). Finally, the quality aspect of qualitative research is explored, with this being related to the trustworthiness of the data and findings.



**Figure 3.1 Main Research Processes**

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy refers to the research paradigm (Collis and Hussey, 2013), which is outlined as “the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed” (Kuhn, 1963, p.45). This “system of beliefs and assumptions about the

development of knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2016, p.124) is considered particularly important, as it impacts on the choice of research approach. In broader terms, a paradigm comprises a belief based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Guba, 1990), with ontology referring to the nature of reality and its existence; the ‘what is reality?’ question. Epistemology concerns the theory of knowledge and the question: ‘how do you know something?’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Indeed, as Grix (2002) argues, “If ontology is about what we may know, then epistemology is about how we come to know what we know”.

### **3.1.1 Ontological Considerations**

In social science, the two most commonly ontological positions are objectivism and subjectivism. The former views social phenomena and their meaning, as having an existence that is independent and separate from social actors. On the other hand, subjectivism provides an alternative ontological position, in that it views social phenomena as being created from individual perceptions, which is continually being reinvented by social actors. The process gives rise to the term ‘social constructionism’, which is often associated with subjectivism (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2016).

Social constructionism was adopted as the ontological position for the current study as it is directly relevant to the study aims. The concept holds that meaning is not discovered, but is constructed through social life (Crotty, 1998) and social interactions, through which individuals build meaning and realities that they partly share with others (Saunders et al., 2016). The concept of social

constructionism has four areas that are associated with it: no meaning in the world exists until we construct it; meaning is not found, individuals make it; any meaning that individuals make is affected by a social interpretation of things and finally, the meaning we derive for objects arises an interactive human community (Kim, 2001).

### **3.1.2 Epistemological Considerations**

With the ontological approach of social constructionism having been selected, an epistemological position, which helped the researcher to select the criteria for the methodology and to describe the research process (Crotty, 1998), was determined. The two most commonly used research paradigms in business and management research are 'Positivism' and 'Interpretivism' (Blumberg et al., 2014), with each epistemological stance adopting a different approach.

#### ***Positivism***

As a research philosophy, the epistemological position adopted by positivism has its roots in the natural sciences, with it subsequently being applied to social reality and beyond (Bryman, 2016; Bryman, 2012). From a positivist position, "reality is objectively given and can be described by measurable properties, which are independent of the researcher and his or her instruments" (Myers 1997, p.3). Thus, the focus of a positivist study is on discovering observable and measurable facts that are open to quantifiable measures and hypotheses testing. Here the aim is drawing inferences about a phenomenon from the sample and apply them to a target population; the notion of generalisation (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). The process uses existing theory to develop,

test and confirm hypotheses, which leads to further theory development (Saunders et al., 2016). Further, positivism emphasises the objectivity of study, with this being based on empirical evidence, invariably through quantitative research.

### ***Interpretivism***

Interpretivism focuses on understanding phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them, which relates to individual views and interactions between individuals (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The philosophy, which considers the cultural context within the workplace, is predominately associated with qualitative research. Under the interpretive paradigm, the approach emphasises explanation that is held within the subjective consciousness of the social participants, as opposed to being an objective observer (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Its subjective nature is one of the important characteristics of interpretive research, which tends to involve small sample sizes, with a range of collected data that are investigated in depth (Saunders et al., 2016). Gibbs (2002, p.2) offers that “The interpretative view is that people are constantly interpreting the world they live in. They are always trying to understand the world or to imbue it with meaning”. In this way, interpretive researchers seek to understand phenomena through the meanings that people create by their interaction and interpretation, which is based on perception, conceptualisation and judgement (Myers, 1997).

From the above research paradigms of positivism and interpretivism, the paradigmatic standpoint of the research in the current study followed the

interpretivist paradigm. The study took the view that reality is complex and rich, with it being socially constructed through culture, language and multiple meanings. In adopting an inductive approach the researcher aims to surface deep understanding and focus on the narrative, perceptions and interpretations. In this way, the approach provides a process that makes it possible to build theory around the observed phenomena.

### **3.1.3 Philosophical Position of Current Study**

In business research, interpretivism seeks to understand the social context from the perspective of different groups of people within an organisation, which is supported by social constructionism, which regards meaning as being constructed by individuals and groups (Bryman, 2016). Thus, the interpretive position and social constructionism are identified as the research paradigm most closely allied with the current study, as the intention of the study was to understand the perceptions of those in the workplace. The qualitative nature of the inquiry was directly linked to the in-depth and detailed data being sought. In order to answer the research questions comprehensively, appropriate data collection methodology and analysis were needed; these will be presented in the next section.

In summary and drawing on the framework provided by Guba (1990), the characteristics of the position adopted by the current research is outlined.

- **Ontology:** What is reality?
- Reality is constructed through social interaction, which is the ontological position of social constructionism

- **Epistemology:** How do you know something?
- Understanding phenomena through the meaning that people assign to them. These data are interpreted by the researcher in the social context which is the epistemological position of interpretivism
- **Methodology:** How do you go about finding it out?
- A variety of qualitative methods were utilised through three case studies, which is the methodological position of qualitative research

The current study adopted a social constructionist ontology, with the aim being to understand and interpret data under an interpretivist epistemology. This approach led to a multiple-case-study approach that investigated employee learning, with a particular focus on coaching practices within selected SMEs in Thailand.

### **3.2 Stage One: Research Design**

Having established the methodological elements of the current study, attention now turns to the practical elements of research design. A key requirement for the research design is that the process needs to be in line with the overall study aim and to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2016). The overall aim of the current study, 'to investigate Human Resource Development with a specific focus on how coaching practices for talent were perceived within three Thai SMEs', surfaced a specific research question: 'What is the perception of employee development and coaching for talent practices within Thai SMEs?' The subsequent research questions, which were drawn from the literature, informed the conceptual framework presented at the end of Chapter Two, with

the concepts relating to 'HRD', 'Talented employees', 'Managers as coaches for talent' and 'Coaching practices'.

### **3.2.1 Qualitative Research**

Having identified the research philosophy, this section discusses the research strategy design and how choosing the social constructionism position leads one to an appropriate methodology. The research methodology is how the researcher investigates what they believe can be known, along with the rationale behind these procedures (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Put another way, "research methodology is a model which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm" (Sarantakos, 1998: p.32). Two distinct research strategies present themselves: the quantitative and qualitative approach.

The current study, the research methodology related to a qualitative approach, as this provided a more holistic view, whereby the in-depth information to be gathered related to human experiences and beliefs, which attained a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Denscombe, 2007). It enabled the researcher to uncover the subjective experiences of the individuals being studied, rather than performing social world measurements (Schwandt, 2001). The approach is ideally suited to exploring the study participants' interpretation of the study phenomenon (Marshall and Rossman, 2014).

The purpose of the current study was, in a critical way, to scrutinise qualitative data that related to the perceptions of employee learning and coaching



practices that existed within case-study SMEs. The research problem was perceived as being complex in nature, for which a qualitative approach offered the greatest means of translating the meaning held by the actors, rather than measuring their social world (Schwandt, 2001). Particularly in business research, a qualitative approach can enable the researcher to gain a deeper insight and richer understanding of the research problem (Zikmund et al., 2013).

Contrarily, the quantitative approach is concerned with measuring phenomena through the use of scales, which provide numeric values from which statistical computations test out the underlying hypotheses (Zikmund et al., 2013). The approach uses a deductive logic of inquiry that is linked to the claims of positivism (Creswell, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The quantitative approach is therefore considered to deviate from the purpose of the current study, which is more concerned with words and meaning than numbers.

### **3.2.2 Case Study Approach**

Numerous techniques are available to qualitative researchers, although there are five main traditions (Zikmund et al., 2013). The five areas relate to: narrative research; phenomenology; grounded theory; ethnography and case study. Selection is dependent on the intended research outcome (Creswell, 2012) and for the current research the case study was selected. Case studies provide, through a detailed insight of experiences within a specific target organisation, inductive data that can be utilised to learn about meaning and to seek to understand specific issues. Case studies are commonly adopted in

business to gain an understanding of the documented history of a particular organisation and to surface the events of a specific company (Zikmund et al., 2013). The approach provides a suitable methodology for exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research, is perceived to comprise a useful research technique for in-depth studies (Berg and Lune, 2012; Gill and Johnson, 2010; Yin, 2014). Case study is widely accepted in social science studies (Miles and Huberman, 1994), with it being an empirical inquiry for investigating a phenomenon in depth. Further, the approach deals with a 'real-world context' (Yin, 2014: p.16) and is especially useful when the boundaries are not evident or distinct.

In studying a social phenomenon, the case study is conducted within the boundaries of the case, which is perceived as a social system, and with the organisation being seen as the case's natural context (Swanborn, 2010). In obtaining empirical evidence within a contemporary organisation, the case-study approach is suited to an in-depth exploration that requires multiple perspectives to address the complexity and uniqueness of a particular real-life study (Myers, 2013; Simons, 2009). Therefore, the case-study approach was an appropriate strategy for the current study, which aimed to gain a deep understanding of HRD, through the perceptions of coaching practices, present in multiple organisations. The study aimed to gather data, from different perspectives, from the three case-study organisations and at different hierarchical levels; owner-managers, managers and subordinates.

It has been suggested that case selection should not be random (Denscombe, 2010); rather, selection needs to be on the basis of known attributes, with an essential part of the methodology being that the selection criteria is made explicit. Accordingly, the following section provides a justification for the current case-study approach.

### ***Rationale for Case Study Selection***

An initial issue that researchers face concerns the criteria used to select the case-study organisation (Cassell and Symon, 2004). Case studies can be either single case or multiple cases, with, for example, a single case being more appropriate when the research intends to study a critical case phenomenon, which is its classic form (Thomas, 2016). However, the recommendation for postgraduate research is that several cases should be adopted, so that opportunities are provided for richer cross-case analysis (Perry, 1998). Stake (2013) also argues that it is important to conduct several case studies, so that the researcher can observe how the phenomenon is surfaced in different environments. To employ the ability for cross-case analysis, a multiple-case research strategy was selected for the current study, with the decision being based on two key factors.

First, as SMEs in Thailand operate within the three sectors of Production, Service and Trading, it was felt appropriate to select a case-study organisation from each of the three sectors. Such an approach would allow differences in perceptions of coaching practice to be explored between the sectors. The multiple-case approach equally provided an opportunity to explore the same

phenomenon through the lenses of varying cases and members (Stake, 2013). Second, in line with the thinking of Berg and Lune (2012, p.342) that case studies organisations need to specialise by “placing particular emphasis on a specific area... occurring in the organisation”, each case study in the current study had an opportunity to develop its employees differently. However, whilst cases from different sectors can provide examples of similar and contrary practices, the current study aimed to later condense the data through cross-case analysis.

### ***Criteria for Identifying Case Studies***

Although different authors argue different criteria for categorising case studies, a primary concern of the current study was the quality of the three prospective case studies. Many researchers naturally prioritise those cases that will provide rich information and which have an outstanding interest to the proposed study (Patton, 1990; Stake, 2006; Thomas, 2016). In line with the above, three case-study organisations that were chosen for the current study were drawn from top performing SMEs, with each being a recipient of Thailand’s SME prestigious National Awards. These awards identify the SMEs as high-performing organisations that ascribe to outstanding Human Resource practices.

The ‘outstanding’ label of the selected cases is further supported by the fact that, out of the total three million SMEs in Thailand, only around 30 SMEs have received SME National Awards in the last eight years (OSMEP, 2017). The three SMEs were selected in accordance with their high score for the human

resource focus, which is one of the seven Award criteria. The rationale behind selecting the companies that were high for human resources suggested that the practice of coaching, the subject of the current enquiry, was likely to be of a high standard. It was perceived that the particular focus on developing employees would provide a model template for other SMEs. Thus, the selection criteria identified the potential for the three case studies to provide exemplary cases that were capable of shedding light on study phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Thomas, 2016; Yin, 2014).

In summary, there are three key criteria for selecting the critical cases:

- (1) The companies were registered as Thai SMEs within a specific sector;
- (2) Each organisation had received a SME National Award; and
- (3) The organisations allowed research access to their employees.

### ***Case Selection Process***

After these three criteria were set, the case selection process proceeded as follows:

1. The lists of 30 SMEs who had won SME national awards were considered.
2. The researcher contacted Mr. Smart (pseudonym), who was a SME technical officer in the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (OSMEP). He was responsible for coordinating the SME national awards from the beginning until the present day, and was familiar with the SMEs who won

awards. He suggested four companies that he thought would volunteer for the research. Thus, he was the initial gatekeeper.

3. One organisation was contacted to request permission for the research.

4. The organisation provided a positive response and was labelled Case-study One; they had won their Award in 2012.

5. The year 2012 was used as a standard to select two other SMEs for cross-case analysis. Using the same year would allow for ease of comparison. In 2012, eight organisations won one of the SME National Awards (OSMEP, 2012); three were eventually selected for the current study.

The three case-study organisations, which satisfied the study criteria, operated in the trading, manufacturing and service sectors. In addition, it was assumed that Award criteria would provide evidence of good practice. Next, the details surrounding participant selection are provided.

### ***Selection of Participants***

In qualitative research there are few rules concerning the precise sample size, with the number and nature of cases studied being considered provisional (Patton, 1990). An overriding factor is that the selection needs to be clear. Whilst Small (2009) suggests that the number of cases is unknown until the study is complete, for the current study, numbers needed to be negotiated with the study organisations, with the final agreed number being nine participants from each case study. The starting number of twenty-seven participants was considered sufficient to reach data saturation, when little new or surprising

information is forthcoming (Thomas, 2016). Furthermore, whilst participant selection often needs to enhance the range of the stories shared (Creswell, 2012), researchers are often dependent on the availability and access to people within the organisation. Within the constraints of the organisation a purposive sampling technique, which is common in qualitative studies (Bryman and Bell, 2011), was used to select the twenty-seven participants.

It was outside the researcher's jurisdiction to dictate which managers were selected for the study, or the specific criteria used for selection, although a request for 'good coaches' was made. It was always possible that the managers were selected on their perceived ability as a manager, rather than their ability as an effective coach, although to an extent, the two terms are interchangeable in Thai SMEs. As the aim of the current study was to investigate how coaching practice for talent was perceived within the three Thai SMEs, the perceptions the manager coaches held were important. Of equal importance were the Owners-Managers' perceptions and in this regard, their selection of those they perceived as effective coaches was paramount. The overall importance of the Owner-Managers will be returned to later in this thesis.

### ***Participant Selection and Processes***

Whilst, ideally, interviews involve a series of encounters at different levels of hierarchical (Perry, 1998), difficulty can exist in small business studies or Asian organisations in gaining more than one interview. The current study did, however, achieve a selection of participants from three hierarchical levels, in each of the organisations. Policy dictated that the owner-manager was first

interviewed and because he was also the gate keeper for other key participants. Owner-managers identified four middle-level managers as coaches, with these cascading down to their subordinates, as coachees. The participants in each organisation were identified by their managers as being 'talented', although the researcher did not have any insight in to the selection.

It is apparent from the literature that a clear definition of 'talent' is absent, even within a Western context. In a business sense, the concept of 'talent' is a relatively new phenomena in Thailand, although recent studies have suggested that the concept relates to high potential individuals that ascribe to a different perception of expectations from others (Phoemphian, Sakulkoo and Tubsree, 2015). Within a positivist domain, where absolute 'truth' is being sought, the elusive definition of 'talent' would cause considerable concern (Creswell, 2013). However, the aim of the current study was to seek a deeper understanding and the thoughts of business-world participants. Thus, the absolute truth was not being sought; rather it was how the key stakeholders in the coaching process perceived talent, within their social context.

***Table 3.1 Details of Participants***

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>No. of owner-managers</b>	<b>No. of managers as coaches</b>	<b>No. of subordinates as coachees</b>	<b>Total</b>
Case-study One	1	4	4	<b>9</b>
Case-study Two	1	4	4	<b>9</b>
Case-study Three	1	4	4	<b>9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>27</b>



The aim in selecting the twenty-seven participants was to provide valid data that would produce meaningful insights into their perceptions on coaching and ultimately generate information-rich data. In qualitative enquiry, richness of information is of greater concern than the sample size (Patton, 1990). Ultimately, the researcher felt that, although some elements were outside her control, the case-study organisations and the key participants' selection provided sufficient data for the challenging endeavour (Gerring and McDermott, 2007; Seawright and Gerring, 2008). Attention now turns to data collection design.

### **3.3 Stage Two: Data Collection**

#### **3.3.1 Gaining Access**

It is only by gaining access to the case-study organisations that the researcher is able to obtain information. Thus, the gatekeeper is an important person who facilitates the research (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). As with other areas of research, business research requires informed consent to be given. Participants need to be given information to help ensure that they can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Informed consent, along with other ethical considerations, both protects the individual's rights and presents a professional approach to research.

#### ***Ethical Approval and Consent Forms***

Ethics refer to the moral principles and values that researchers need to follow to ensure that their research is carried out honestly and accurately (Ghauri and

Grønhaug, 2010). In keeping with University policy, the current study gained ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee before data collection commenced. Further, each of the twenty-seven participants involved in the three case-study organisations were requested to sign consent two forms before data collection. The first comprised a participant information sheet, which provided an understanding of why the research was being done and what it involved, reiterating that they were free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. The second consent form provided information relating to their decision as to whether they wished to allow audio recording to be used, the taking of notes during the interview and the possible use of unattributed verbatim quotations in journal articles.

### ***Confidentiality and Anonymity***

The issues surrounding confidentiality and anonymity involve legal as well as ethical considerations (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In social research, when gathering data from participants, it is important that the data cannot be traced back to them in any form of dissemination, such as the thesis, presentations and publications. The use of pseudonyms is the primary method for preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, and often the organisation itself (Crow and Wiles, 2008). Consequently, the anonymity of interviewees and case-study organisations were guarded by a pseudonym replacement of peoples' names and the organisations. In addition, data files were downloaded onto the University computer system that was password protected by myself.

### **3.3.2 Data Collection**

Data collect methods depend on the nature of the research questions and researchers need to select one method or, where appropriate, combine several methods (Devers and Frankel, 2000). In qualitative case study research, researchers tend to draw the data from multiple sources (Merriam, 1998), with the opportunity to utilise a variety of sources being one of the principle advantages of case studies (Yin, 2014). Six data sources are commonly available: documentation, archival records, interview, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts (Merriam, 1998), along with the data-gathering tools of interview (Stake, 1995). So as to gain a rich and full range of data the current study used a combination of three qualitative methods: document analysis, non-participant observation and in-depth interviews.

#### ***Document Analysis***

Documentary evidence can be used to support other techniques of data collection, with there being a range of organisational documents that can be used in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009; Myers, 2013). According to Bryman (2016), public documents, such as organisational or Government documents, along with newspaper reports can be used to surface important historic events. To gain a greater understanding of the case-study organisations the following documents were sourced: organisational annual reports, vision and mission statements, policy statements, company journals, websites and regulations, along with other relevant documents, such as National Awards feedback

reports. These documents were used to give meaning to and place the interview data and observations in context.

### ***Non-participant Observation***

Non-participant observation is often used to supplement other data collection methods (Liu and Maitlis, 2010) and comprises a systematic process of observing people, objects, events or other phenomena, with a view to gathering a wide variety of information (Zigmund et al., 2013). There is also the opportunity to gather and analysis of visual images, with these having the potential to place a lens on aspects of organisational culture that are not easily captured by other methods alone (Kunter and Bell, 2006). Within this subfield of qualitative study, photography, film and video can reveal important data that is sometimes missing from the interview process. Equally, image-based methods can be blended easily with other research methods (Thomas, 2016). Thus, non-participant observation represents another data collection technique used in the current study, and which allowed the researcher to more fully understand the organisations' coaching practices, whilst remaining apart from the observed activities. Following the interview process a request was made to observe a coaching session in Case-study One, although as the organisation did not operate formal coaching sessions, this was not possible, although permission was granted to observe other sessions that were relevant to employee development. Coaching observations were carried out in the other two case-study organisations. Moreover, led by the owner-manager, all participants allowed the researcher to take photographs in these sessions, so that meaningful photographs could be presented in the current study.

### ***In-depth Interviews and Analysis Process***

Interviews provide an effective method for qualitative researchers to discover the participant's opinions and rationale with respect to a specific activity (Myers, 2013). It has been argued that, in business research, semi-structured interviews are preferable to the structured version, as they allow greater flexibility (Noor, 2008). Thus, in having a structure, with a list of issues to be covered, semi-structured interviews allow the freedom to follow up points as necessary (Thomas, 2016). Moreover, within a set of interview guidelines, semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to express themselves freely (Wahyuni, 2012). Given the research direction and the aim to gather in-depth data, semi-structured interviews were decided upon as the primary data-gathering method. Hence, a total of twenty-seven participants took part in face-to-face semi-structured interviews that lasted between thirty and sixty minutes, and which were recorded with an audio device. In detail, the data collecting process was as follows:

First, a review of the literature strengthened the researcher's understanding of the topic area, with interview questions being drawn from the review. The questions were translated into the Thai Language by the researcher and subsequently back-checked by Dr. Uthairat Muangsan, a Lecturer in International Business at Sripatum University, Thailand, who is fluent in both the English and Thai language. Next, so as to ensure that the wording, meaning and clarity of the interview questions, they were piloted with three people from a Thai university. The individual face-to-face interviews did not raise any fundamental issues, although some questions created minor

confusion in the Thai language; these amended and with words being readjusted to aid clarity. Following ethical approval from LJMU (Ref: 15/LBS/027. 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015), interviews commenced in Case-study One with the owner-manager, which was followed by the four managers as coaches and lastly the subordinates as coachees. The semi-structured interview process was cascaded to the other two case-study organisations.

In reality, the feasibility of the data analysis followed the interviews in Case-study One, whereby the findings were analysed and written up before progressing to Case-study Two (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The same process applied to Case-study Two, before progressing to the final case study. This iterative approach enabled the researcher to remain reflective and reflexive as the research progressed. The primary means of communication during the interviews was the Thai language, which was used to put the participants at ease. Subsequently, all data was transcribed verbatim in the Thai language, with the coding for data interpretation and analysis, being drawn from the interview transcripts. To ensure accuracy in interpretation, all themes and participant statements presented in this report have been translated by the researcher, with an additional check being provided through a bilingual expert. The section of the data analysis process is contained in section 3.4.

### **3.3.3 Time Horizon for Data Collection**

The research time horizon is divided into either cross-sectional or longitudinal studies; cross-sectional studies collect the data by studying

more than one case at a particular time, whilst longitudinal studies gather data to study change and development over a period of time (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Whilst the time horizon choice depends on the specific research questions for each research, it is noted that studies that are based on interviews are invariably carried out “...over a short period of time” (Saunders et al., 2016, p.155).

As the aim of the current study was to explore employee perceptions of coaching practices as they stand currently a cross-sectional approach was adopted. Data gathering was undertaken over three periods of 3-4 months, although as the interviews had to fit in with organisational business, activity was sporadic (Table 3.2). For example, due to participants clearing jobs before in the New Year, only one interview took place in December.

**Table 3.2 Time Frame for Collecting Data**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Period</b>
1	Case-study One	1 <sup>st</sup> time: 1 Apr 2015 – 5 June 2015 (2 months) 2 <sup>rd</sup> time: 8 Apr 2016 – 9 May 2016 (1 months)
2	Case-study Two	3 Nov 2015 – 3 Mar 2016 (4 months)
3	Case-study Three	10 Feb 2016 – 15 May 2016 (3 months)

### **3.4 Stage Three: Data Analysis**

#### **3.4.1 Template Analysis and Data Coding**

Template Analysis comprises a generic qualitative research approach that can be used flexibly within different philosophical approaches (Waring and Wainwright, 2008). The highly iterative process is suitable for different kinds of textual data, such as observational field notes, interview transcripts and diaries, with it being particularly suitable for comparing the perspectives of different groups (Brooks and King, 2017). Thus, the Template Analysis process was deemed appropriate for the current study, particularly the interview transcripts. Moreover, the flexible nature of the technique allowed for codes and themes to be tailored to the study's requirements, in particular the development of priori codes drawn from the literature. These tentative theoretical constructs were initially used to structure the qualitative data and provide direction for the data analysis (Saunders et al., 2016).

Coding is an important part of qualitative data analysis, which identifies categories or themes that help explain the phenomenon being studied (Basit, 2003). The process is fluid, at least in the early stages, when characteristics are being sought in the data and with it being common for the initial codes to be modified, as the analysis progresses (Miller and Crabtree, 1999). Methods of devising codes vary, although one approach is to establish a provisional 'start list' that is drawn up before fieldwork (Miles and Huberman, 1994), with, in Template Analysis, this referring to a priori codes. These pre-defined codes that can be tailored to the exploration of the data (Brooks and King, 2017). To create the initial a priori codes for the current research, categories were



adopted from the relevant literature that closely aligned with the research aims and the three research questions, which themselves were embedded within the study's conceptual framework. The literature deliberations resulted in ten initial a priori themes (see Appendix II), grouped under four headings and which included 'Coaching practices for talent' and the 'Perspective for coaching talent'. Nine subdivisions were identified and overall the a priori themes formed the basis of the interview questions.

The analysis process commenced with the organising of the interview and field notes, which had been transcribed verbatim in the Thai language due to some participants not being fluent in English. Transcripts were read carefully a number of times, to engage with, understand and become familiar with the data (Brooks and King, 2017). During this process the coding scheme was developed further to develop open coding (Graser and Struss, 2009; Struss and Corbin, 1990), with the initial template being used as a guide. Throughout the process of devising categories and labelling themes, the codes were evolving continually, with the themes being adjusted so that the data from all participants was covered. These modifications of the template, where themes are merged, redefined, deleted, or become redundant, are generally accepted practice (*Ibid*). The final template that emerged comprised three key themes: 'Perception of talent'; 'HRD practices'; and 'Coaching practices and perspective' (see Appendix II). With the final template complete, the data was fully analysed, with a rigorous process being seen as a useful indicator of quality (Yin, 2014).

### 3.5 Quality of Research

The value of the piece of research should be verified by using a form of a quality check that is suited to the philosophical position adopted by study (Brooks and King, 2017; Johnson et al., 2006). Problems with data validity, bias and generalisation have been raised as the typical criticisms of case-study research (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Swanborn, 2010). These criticisms, however, are not valid as qualitative case-study research does not seek to generalise through number; the aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases in a specific issue (Creswell, 2013). The 'small numbers' issue cited by Morrow (2005) ignores the point that the purpose of qualitative is to illuminate practice, rather than use statistical analysis to generalise to a wider population. Nonetheless, although sample sizes in qualitative studies are invariably small, the participants are often carefully selected for the detailed contribution they can make to the emerging theory. Indeed, Morse (1999: p.5) argues that the compactness of qualitative research "ensures that the theory is comprehensive, complete, saturated and accounts for negative cases". Morse goes on to argue that the resulting theory may still be applicable to other similar scenarios in other organisations. Moreover, in case-study research, a major strength of the research design is the opportunity to gather information from multiple sources of evidence through triangulation (Yin, 2014), which relates to the quality of research.

The terms 'reliability' and 'validity' were developed in quantitative research and were subsequently transferred to the qualitative approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011). According to Chenail (2010: p.1), some people regard reliability validity

and generalisability to be “too well grounded in positivist thinking to be relevant for qualitative inquiry”, although the question is still raised. In positivist Denscombe (2003: p.100) sees validity as a measure of “the accuracy of the questions asked, the data collected and the explanations offered”, with reliability referring to “the extent to which a test would give consistent results if applied more than once to the same people under standard conditions” (Miller and Wilson, 1983: p.96). However, whilst the positivist view considers validity and reliability to represent the highest levels of accuracy, qualitative study tend to focuses more on rigour to ensure trustworthiness. Some researchers have suggested that it is not appropriate to discuss the reliability of qualitative research, because reliability “is intrinsically concerned with issues of measurement” (Brooks and King, 2017, p.39). Therefore, techniques for measuring validity and reliability should be emphasised in a different way in qualitative work (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). There have been numerous attempts to introduce alternative quality criteria for qualitative research, with some researchers suggesting that it should be evaluated with different criteria to those employed in quantitative studies (Brook and King, 2017).

The trustworthiness of research is offered as an alternative criterion for evaluating reliability and validity in qualitative research; in that it provides a measure of the quality, which is one of primary criteria for assessing this type of research (Bell and Bryman, 2011). Further, qualitative researchers “should draw on those elements of quality that they think are most relevant to their own research and be careful in their writings to indicate to potential assessors what the aims of the research were and therefore how it should be judged” (Symon

and Cassell, 2012, p.221). Thus, in order to minimise bias and demonstrate research quality, trustworthiness was justified as the key quality criteria for the current study.

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence that can be placed in the data, its interpretation and the research methods employed to ensure the study's quality. Thus, the strength or quality of qualitative research is achieved with reference to the accuracy of the findings from the researcher's, participants' and the reader's perspective (Creswell and Miller, 2000). The trustworthiness approach outlines four criteria for qualitative research that parallel quantitative terminology: credibility (internal validity); transferability (external validity); dependability (reliability); and confirmability (objectivity) (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Whilst these criteria are accepted by qualitative researchers, there are alternative considerations for qualitative research rigour. Creswell (2003) outlines eight key strategies that relate to trustworthiness in qualitative studies: 1) Triangulation and multiple sourcing of data; 2) Member checking; 3) Thick description; 4) Clarifying of researcher bias; 5) Negative case analysis; 6) Prolonged engagement; 7) Peer debriefing; and 8) External audit (Creswell, 2003). The author argued that qualitative researcher should use at least two of these eight strategies. Whilst accepting that bias exists in all research (Dubois and Gadde, 2002, Yin, 2014), the current study sought to employ three of Creswell's strategies: Triangulation, Member checking and Thick description.

### **3.5.1 Trustworthiness by ‘Triangulation’**

As a strategy, triangulation offers an acceptable view of quality for qualitative research (Rossman and Wilson, 1985). Within this strategy, four basic types of triangulation are presented: Multiple data sources, Methods, Investigators and Theories (Denzin, 1989), with two being considered appropriate for the current study:

#### ***Data Triangulation***

This triangulation strategy involves using multiple sources of data as a means of providing corroborating evidence (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980). In order to build the data triangulation process, three different types of material were collected from three data sources: the owner-manager, the managers as coaches and the subordinates as coachees. The resulting data illuminated both an employer’s and an employee’s perspective, with these three different groups of people being replicated in each case study. In this way the qualitative research depicts the situation being studied in sufficient detail for the researcher to be able to claim to that the conclusion “makes sense” (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). Further, it is the consistency of the information gathered from multiple data sources that is to be compared, so as to create a logically coherent justification for the data analysis (Creswell, 2003).

#### ***Method Triangulation***

It is beneficial to research quality if more than one method to study is used to solve a single problem, with the triangulation being formed through multiple

methods being employed (Denzin, 1970, Webb et al, 1966). Following this strategy, the current study utilised document analysis, in-depth interviews and non-participant observation to check the consistency of findings generated from three data collection methods. However, it is pointed out that rather than being a tool or strategy for validation itself, triangulation is seen as “an alternative to validation” (Flick, 1998: p.230).

### **3.5.2 Trustworthiness by ‘Member Checking’**

Member checking is an important technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), in that it involves allowing the individuals, from who the data was collected, the opportunity to check analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions drawn from their data. In the current study, verbatim transcriptions were returned to the twenty-seven participants for checking, in confidence, with an invitation to comment. The returned transcriptions provided feedback, for example where a phrase did not make sense, or agreement or disagreement was apparent. The feedback was considered in amending the interview, which meant that the input increased the credence of the data interpretation (Stake, 1995).

### **3.5.3 Trustworthiness by ‘Thick Description’**

The ‘thick description’ approach provides rich detail about the context of the research and to check its potential application to other people, places, times and contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The approach involves accurately describing the social actions being studied and ensuring that the interpretations are described in rich and thick manner (Geertz, 1973). The

current study had presented the data clearly in Chapters Four to Six, with the presentation being both deep and thorough. Moreover, ample direct quotations are presented to support the interpretations and to offer a greater depth of understanding.

## **Summary**

In summary, this chapter presented the underpinning methodology and methods from a theoretical standpoint, although a focused rationale for the direction of the current research was also provided. The fundamental principle is that any methodological approach needs to relate to the purpose of the research, with the aim of the current study being to explore the perceptions of coaching talented employees in Thai SMEs. Being empirical in nature and wishing to capture personal meaning, a social constructionist ontology was adopted, with the aim being to interpret data from an individual perspective. Within the interpretive paradigm an inductive approach was selected, so that the narratives of the individual actors could be explored. The early methodological decisions shaped the approach to data collection, with the qualitative techniques being employed through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Working within the organisational constraints, purposive sampling identified twenty-seven key participants, comprising three owner-managers and twelve organisational coaches, along with their coachees, who were deemed 'talented employees'.

The case study choice of strategy was justified, particularly in respect to the criteria used to select the three National Award SMEs; one for each of the work

sectors. The methods associated with field data generation was equally justified, with explanations of the template analysis process. In keeping with standard research practice, ethical considerations were explored. Finally the area of research quality was featured, with the qualitative dilemmas and solutions being presented, particularly with regard to triangulation.

Before moving onto the next chapter and the findings from Case-study One, a summary table is placed below (Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3 Summary of Research Philosophy and Approaches**

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Adopted Position</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>Philosophy</b>	Interpretivism	To understand personal narratives and meaning
<b>Approach</b>	Inductive	Drawing on current Western approaches
<b>Methodological Choice</b>	Qualitative, Multi-method	Rich in-depth data being sought
<b>Strategy</b>	Case Study	Three National Award SMEs selected; one for each sector: industry; retail and service
<b>Time Horizon</b>	Cross-sectional	Organisational constraints
<b>Techniques</b>	Semi-structured interview	Twenty-seven participants, including owner-managers, coaches and coachees
<b>Analysis</b>	Template	Interviews transcribed and analysed. Elements of trustworthiness to support quality



## **CHAPTER 4: CASE-STUDY ONE – TradingSME**

### **Context Setting, Findings and Initial Interpretations**

#### **Introduction**

This is the first chapter of three, in which the context for each of the three case studies is reported, along with findings from the semi-structured interviews and initial interpretations, being made. The current chapter introduces Case-study One, which is drawn from the trading sector of SMEs in Thailand. The organisation, TradingSME, was considered as a critical case, in that it received numerous national and international awards, such as the His Majesty the King's Golden Decoration, the National Outstanding Organisation Award on Social Development and the ASEAN Business Award. In addition, this organisation was a recipient of Thailand's National Award for SMEs in 2012, which identified it as a high-performing organisation that ascribes to 'outstanding' Human Resource practices. The pseudonym 'TradingSME' was used and after placing the organisation in context, four major findings from the data analysis are presented.

#### **4.1 Organisation Background**

TradingSME was a trading company, whose core business was to purchase waste and discarded materials from the villagers. It was perceived as a pioneer in this kind of business, in Thailand. It was founded by the current owner-manager, who has been operating the recycling organisation since 1974. He started with 1,000 Thai Baht capital (around 20 pound Stirling) and an old pick-up truck, by visiting villages and coined the term 'waste is gold', which sums

the philosophy of his organisation. From small beginnings, TradingSME, which continues in the waste recycling business, had expanded widely to include national to international developments. Currently, there are over 1,000 franchised branches spreading across Thailand and sixteen overseas countries in Laos, Malaysia, Cambodia, Myanmar, Japan, Dubai and the USA. Indeed, in turning waste into cash, TradingSME used a franchise system to scale up the business and provide opportunities for new entrants to start their own recycling businesses. In addition, disadvantaged groups, such as those from welfare foster homes, have been offered training and job opportunities in the organisation. At the time of writing, the head office had in the region of 160 employees, with the owner-manager being responsible for management decisions and the development of employees, which are carried out through the Buddhist concept referring to the 'moral values of life'.

## **4.2 Participants' Background**

The participants in the current study comprised the owner-manager, four managers who acted as coaches and four subordinates who have worked in TradingSME and have been coached (coachees). All coaches and coachees were identified as being talented by their direct managers. Pseudonyms were used to represent the participant, that is, the Trading-Owner, TradingC1, C2, C3, C4 and TradingCe1, Ce2, Ce3, Ce4, respectively (with the letter C representing the Coach, the letter Ce indicating the Coachees and with numbers 1-4 providing an ordinal number for each coach and coachee). The demographic profile of the participants is summarised in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Summary of Participants Demographic Profile**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Work Experience in TradingSME (years)</b>	<b>Religion</b>
1.Trading-Owner	The Owner-Manager	Male	63	43	Buddhism
<b><u>Coaches</u></b>					
2. TradingC1	Branch Manager	Male	38	16	Buddhism
3. TradingC2	PR Manager	Female	34	11	Buddhism
4. TradingC3	Administration Manager	Female	44	22	Buddhism
5. TradingC4	Head of Plastic Department	Male	29	6	Buddhism
<b><u>Coachees</u></b>					
6. TradingCe1	Assistant Branch Manager	Female	36	9	Buddhism
7. TradingCe2	PR Officer	Female	28	6	Buddhism
8. TradingCe3	Logistic Officer	Female	34	7	Buddhism
9. TradingCe4	Production Worker	Female	37	16	Buddhism

Source: Author's Construct

There is a spread of profiles with respect to age and gender, whilst two of the four manager-coaches were male, with all coachees being female. All participants followed the Buddhist faith, which is in keeping with the national profile.

### 4.3 TradingSME's National Award Result

TradingSME received the 5<sup>th</sup> SMEs National Awards in 2012 (SMEs National Award, 2012), earning 801 points, with the result being contained in the official feedback report from OSMEP (the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, a Governmental agency). The feedback document, which was sent directly to TradingSME, is not normally disclosed to the public, as it contains internal audit results. However, the Trading-Owner agreed to relevant information being displayed in the current study, on the grounds that it would be educational and, thus, selected results are presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2 Outline of TradingSME's SME National Award (2012)**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Full Score</b>	<b>Evaluated Results</b>
Leadership	120	103
Strategic Planning	120	96
Customer and Market Focus	120	97
Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management	100	83
<b>Human Resource Focus</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>111</b>
Process Management	160	124
Business Results	240	187
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>801</b>

Source: feedback report of SMEs National Award, 2012

The result of the SMEs National Award was a key criterion for each case study selection, in particular the score an organisation achieved in relation to the

human resource, with TradingSME achieving 111 out of a maximum of 140, which was the lowest of the three case-study organisations.

#### 4.4 Findings

The findings from TradingSME were classified and grouped into themes, which were based primarily on HRD and coaching practices for talent. The emerging themes (four) and sub-themes (ten) are presented in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3 Themes and sub-themes from TradingSME**

Theme	Sub-theme
1. The perception of talent	
2. Human Resource Development practices	
3. Coaching Practices	3.1 Coaching Approaches
	3.2 Coaching Techniques
	3.3 Appraisal and Evaluation of Coaching
	3.4 Issues in Coaching
4. Coaching Perspective	4.1 Effectiveness of Coaching
	4.2 The characteristics of good coaches
	4.3 The characteristics of good coachees
	4.4 Benefits of Coaching
	4.5 Negative Effect of Coaching
	4.6 Suggestions for Coaching

Each theme is now presented, along with initial discussions and a selection of the participants' quotations that surface perceptions on the different themes.

#### 4.4.1 Theme One: Perception of Talent in TradingSME

The first theme refers to how talent was defined and the attributes an individual is required to possess to be considered talented in TradingSME. The approach helped to gain a wider understanding of HRD and coaching practices. The finding from the owner of TradingSME was that talent is perceived to include everyone in the organisation, with all employees being treated as equals. In short, the Trading-Owner, when reporting on talent, stated that:

*“I look upon all my employees like my children and siblings, I look upon all employees as equals, even though there is a different gap between high and low potential. They are not praised in order to protect them from jealousy because all human emotions have jealousy in common.”*

The Trading-Owner’s focus on the moral values of life for all employees is drawn from his Buddhist belief, which relates to building both people and the organisation. However, in practice, there were indications that, with respect to talent, some employees were treated differently and in this regard the perception was held that the SME might not be that different to larger organisations. In addition, talented people were considered as those who had already dedicated themselves to TradingSME. The Trading-Owner also explained:

*“My talent means the individual who prefers to stand and fight shoulder by shoulder with the company. They must also be good people with honesty and integrity. It is not necessary for them to graduate with first class honours, but they need to be able to adapt to the whole society. Besides, they must be eager and enthusiastic to learn new things, but lack good opportunities. I select the honest person before the genius person.”*

One example of talent within TradingSME refers to TradingCe2, who was a logistics officer. She worked directly to the Trading-Owner and was perceived by some to be a high-performing employee. The Administration Manager identified her as 'talent' because she was able to multi-task and often assisted those who worked in the administration department. In addition, the PR Manager acknowledged that when TradingCe2 undertook work assigned to her, she completed the tasks effectively, indeed, the Trading-Owner regularly called on her to complete tasks. The Administration Manager felt that:

*“TradingCe2 can do multi-tasking and she can do it in all departments such as HR documents, training, IT, technician and computer repair. She is a jack-of-all-trades. She can work instead of me.”*

TradingC2, who was a PR Manager, also added:

*“She is talented and an expert in electrical techniques. She can maintain the electrical system. She often helps in the PR department to set electronic devices for training programmes and the Trading-Owner always assigns the job to her.”*

The above statements suggest that talent in TradingSME refers to a person who can perform various tasks, particularly in standing in for their supervisors or managers. Indeed, talent in TradingSME embraces individuals who are flexible enough to operate in different functions.

An important finding is that the employees who were considered as talented have been trained consistently, have had an opportunity to express their potential and have been promoted to higher positions. One example is a branch manager who has worked at TradingSME since arriving as an intern student 16 years ago. He was perceived as being capable, dedicated to his work and ready to learn in new areas. Further, once the Trading-Owner, who

claimed to have trained and taught TradingC1 everything, had gained confidence in his performance, he was tasked with expanding a branch in another province. TradingC1 currently remained in the new venture that he had built, holding the responsibility for all aspects of the business. TradingC1 told his story:

*“I have learnt everything from here, from when I was an intern student until now, when I am a manager. I have trained in all departments in the company.”*

During the interview process, each manager coach identified a subordinate coachee, for the next round of interviews. One important criterion was that each target coachee was perceived as talented by their coach. However, the interview data revealed that not all of the coachees interviewed were previously aware that they were perceived as talented by their coach. Some coachees spoke about this issue:

*“I did not think that I was talented because everybody works and helps together.” (TradingCe1)*

*“I did not know before, I normally work.” (TradingCe3)*

TradingSME had no formal talent management programme, although, in practice, a form of hidden talent management appeared to exist. The development of individuals was perceived to be practised differently according to levels, with high potential individuals or talent, gaining greater development. Talented individuals can stand out from the colleagues and TradingSME had employee development and promotion practices that recognise this, as well as other rewards that were made almost subconsciously. When the characteristics of a talented person were explored during interview, a consensus view emerged that a talented person could be trusted to do the



work instead of them; a sort of ‘right-hand man’ who can perform a variety of tasks. The perceptions for talented attributes in TradingSME that were surfaced during interview are presented in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4 Attributes of Talent in TradingME**

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<b>Attributes of talent in TradingSME</b>	
•	Being relied on to work instead of you
•	Can perform various tasks
•	Dedication to work and devoted to the organisation
•	Being able to develop themselves, ready to learn new things
•	Congruent ideas and compatibility
•	Quick learning and easy to understand
•	Compliance and versatility according to the situation
•	Being honest
•	Having excellent human relations
•	Positive thinking

---

The following are a selection of direct quotations that illuminate the perception of talent in TradingSME.

*“My organisation is small and there is a limitation. It is not necessary to recruit engineers with an honours degree, we just want people who graduate from a high school but they need to be able to speak clearly and to follow me in my work. The important thing is that their ideas are congruent with ours. I can give some jobs to my talented employees to do instead of me.”*  
(TradingC1)

*“Talent, who can learn quickly, were assigned to work instead of me. When I am not free, I trust them to do the work.”*  
(TradingC4)

*“Talent can do everything, such as my manager; she sometimes did the important jobs instead of the owner-manager. Also, talent is clever and they can collaborate with*

*others without problems and they think positively.”  
(TradingCe2)*

Moreover, from interviews with the managers, it was found that the recruitment, employment and particularly the retention of talent caused an issue within TraingSME. The Administration Manager put forward that:

*“We have talented employees and they can do everything, but whenever their parents want them to become a Government officer, they follow and resign. The financial performance is the limitation of SMEs.”*

Also, another manager supported this view:

*“Talent is difficult to recruit. In some cases, after we have already trained them, they move on to others”.*

In drawing together the details surrounding Theme One, it was apparent that the meaning of talent had not been raised as an important issue within TradingSME. Further, whilst the claim is that employees were treated as equals, in practice those employees who demonstrated high potential and who performed well were invariably perceived as talent, with it being likely that they received greater development opportunities. Interestingly, whilst the ‘high-flyers’ were treated and developed slightly differently, some were not aware of being perceived as talented. Hence, it is interesting to investigate employee development and coaching practices for talent in greater detail, with these being explored in themes Two and Three respectively.

#### **4.4.2 Theme Two: Human Resource Development Practices**

The second theme concerns how talent was developed in TradingSME, for which five practices for developing employees emerged (Table 4.5), although there were different levels of development for talent.

***Table 4.5 Human Resource Development***

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**Developing employees**

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- Training
    - On-the-Job Training
    - No planned Off-the-Job Training
  - Family business
  - Buddhist Approach
  - A 'good' role model
  - Job rotation
- 

Within TradingSME it was apparent that no yearly HR training plan existed, with there being no formal mechanisms concerning how time and finances for training were invested. Nonetheless, both on-the-job and off-the-job training were used.

***On-the-Job Training***

On-the-job training provided the central method with which to develop employees in TradingSME. New employees were sent directly to their department to learn the skills and knowledge needed to function in their work, by working directly under the control and supervision of their manager. In mastering areas such as job functions, company rules and safety regulations, the 'learning by doing' approach dominates. Indeed, around 80 per cent of training was on-the-job, with the remainder being off-the training. One of the nine participants, a manager, shared the following about on-the-job training.

*“At the beginning of work, we have to teach and explain the basic process of working in the right way and any cautions and prohibitions to them. After that we identify and explain the working processes which are the basics of working and then let them learn and practice the working methods that they will use.”*

### ***Off-the-Job Training***

TradingSME did not operate an in-house training facility and where certain training was a legal requirement, they were forced to use external providers. Many legally required training programmes were provided by Government agencies and, as these have a duty to support SMEs, most courses were free. With no formal plans for off-the-job training; the Trading-Owner was the sole decision maker as to who attended the external training programmes. Similarly, the Trading-Owner selected those employees who were to attend fee-paying training programmes, which were often focused on specific technical skills.

With respect to function, the organisation's documentation showed that TradingSME did not have a HR department, with responsibility being with the Administration Department. Within the Department there was an Administration Manager who had responsibility for HR functions and whose role was to assist the Owner-manager in achieving the daily administrative duties of the organisation. Whilst an organisational chart was obtained it was felt that displaying this in the thesis could lead to a breach of anonymity of the organisation.

Within TradingSME's organisational chart it was clear that the HR role was widespread, involving the areas of pay, social security and recruiting and selecting personnel, although it was not directly responsible for developing employees. Indeed, HRD policies and development activities were predominately planned and organised by the Trading-Owner. For example,

TradingSME's received an invitation to attend external public training, following which the Trading-Owner considered which employees to assign to the training, with there being no advance plan for training. The Administration Manager shared the following about off-the-job training.

*"We have no formal training plan for each employee and have no in-house training; most training programmes in our company come from outside and the Trading-Owner selects the suitable employees to attend."*

### ***Family Business***

Being a family-run business was a distinct attribute of TradingSME and one that supported HR practices, including employee development. The Trading-Owner was recognised as the head of the 'family', with it equally being recognised that the first generation established and expanded the organisation through toil and endeavour. The Owner-manager was transferring parts of his organisation to his sons and daughters, the second generation, with the first example being the appointment of his first son to manage and expand a regional branch of the organisation. However, at the present time, the first generation retained control, with the Trading-Owner still making key decisions and controlling what was happening in the organisation, including in relation to HR practices. Current family members consisted of the Trader-owner's wife, son and relatives, all of whom were entitled to top management positions. There were managers who were not blood relations who, in the owner-manager's view, were perceived as talented. For example, the Trading-Owner entrusted TradingC1 to assist his first son in managing the regional branch.

In TradingSME the family business encouraged a close relationship amongst employees, which was accomplished through team working, support for others and working together harmoniously, all of which helped support learning in the organisation. TradingCe2 shared the following:

*“My manager takes care of me very well and she is ready to give good advice on many aspects. We always go together and share our stories, both personal and work-related and when I have any doubts, I can ask her right away. It makes me understand and know what I should do”.*

### ***Buddhist Approach***

The Buddhist faith is a key concept in supporting HRD practices within TradingSME, in that it provides a discipline that helps employees to be good people. For the Trading-Owner himself, it provided a solid platform for building talent and a supportive organisational culture. The Trading-Owner followed the Buddhist faith, as did ninety-five per cent of the employees. Within TradingSME Buddhism had an important role to play and it was apparent in religious ceremonies, merit-making, providing food for monks, monastic ritual, the forest-robe presentation ceremony and situating religious imagery around the premises. The Trading-Owner strongly believed that Buddhism could be adapted into the employees' daily lives and, in helping them to be good people; this provided an important principle on which to develop them as humans. He also believed that Buddhism could bind the mind and encourage people to apply the Buddha's teaching to their work and strengthen their focus on moral values of life. Thus, TradingSME emphasised doing good, helping others, making merit and undertaking charitable activities. Indeed, the Trading-Owner put forward:

*“Here we set the policy of encouraging our employees to make merit and to do charitable activities often. Our staff are encouraged to pray and the monks are usually invited to preach to the employees. We also have a distinct hermitage of God in my factory. This place has preaching practices, giving dharma and providing principles as the tool for binding minds. For conveying Buddhism’s principles, it is perfect for our employees. By performing these principles, they are developing themselves. Every year I have a merit project to take my employees to India in order to practice dharma and prostrate themselves at the Bodhi tree and Buddhist temple; all bad behaviours and the malignant attitudes of those employees completely vanish.”*

And TradingCe1 supported that:

*“There are a lot of merit projects in my company and the owner-manager offers to cover all expenses, to allow all employees to attend.”*

Gratitude was as a sense of obligation that the Trading-Owner often taught his employees. Gratitude is the symbol of a good person and it is a basic lesson taught amongst Thai people, being equally one of the most valued characteristics in Buddhist teaching and in Thai society. Gratitude can equally have a positive effect on organisational HRD practices, with the interview data showing that there were employees who continued working for TradingSME because they wished to repay the Trading-Owner’s kindness; with this being bound up in the phrase ‘one good turn deserves another’. TradingC3, who was a female manager and had worked at TradingSME for more than 20 years, expressed that:

*“I am impressed with my boss, he teaches me about all kinds of things and all the work processes. He is also my benefactor who suggests and sometimes helps me in my personal life. So I still work here after more than 20 years, because I use my heart to work and in order to repay his kindness”.*

Data from participant observation supported strongly that there were five or six areas within and around the grounds that served as a spiritual house, including images of Buddha, Ganesha and a Statue of King Naresuan. These sacred manifestations aimed to bind the employees' minds and to have them pay homage, pray and worship. Photographs were taken in-situ, although it was subsequently thought that their inclusion here may positively identify the organisation and breach anonymity. Nonetheless, the religious artefacts were perceived to be a source for boosting employee morals. In addition, TradingSME documents showed that the organisation assisted disadvantaged people in securing a job, which it has done for 10 years.

Interesting information about religious beliefs came from the Administration Manager's interview. The manager discovered that food offerings to the religious artefacts took place every day, and were carefully prepared by the factory maid, with this being ordered by the Trading-Owner:

*“Trading-Owner told me that as long as we eat rice every day, we have to offer food to these Gods every day as well”.*

### ***A Good Role Model***

One finding that emerged from the data analysis referred to the Trading-Owner's role, who spoke about being a good role model to help develop his employees:

*“It is wrong for us to teach others to do good things, but to misbehave ourselves; therefore being a good model is important. This is a skills ready for transfer; it is necessary to pass good things to replace the bad. It is also repeated that if the prototype is good, the followers are invariably good and this is the virtue concept.”*



The good role model came from the characteristics of the Trading-Owner, such as being a pure man, open-minded, generous and being of the mind to help others. This made most employees love and trust him, have faith in him, and made them feel warm, and bonded together. CoachB1 said:

*“The impressive things in the Trading-Owner ... the first is that he trains me by himself; second, he uses reason in his teaching; third, there is goodness in everything he does. If we live in a company where there is a bad owner, we are not okay. In our company, the Trading-Owner always talks about goodness, and always shows good practices. We are not only focused on business, but also on social responsibilities.”*

### **Job Rotation**

TradingSME used job rotation to move the employees around various factory jobs. The data from one branch showed that the forty-five production-line employees required multiple skills, to allow rotation to all positions in the factory. The thinking behind this flexible job rotation is that most jobs in the factory were basic and did not require any special skills. TradingC1, who was the Branch Manager, shared the following:

*“All employees can work on every job, and they can rotate in all positions; we do not fix the job. For example, the employees work on this job for about two to three weeks, then they will rotate to another job, so that they can do all of the tasks”.*

At this point, it can be summarised that TradingSME supported HRD and coaching practices, through a strong preference for on-the-job training, which suited the ethos of the family-run business. Moreover, the key role of the Owner-manager and the influence of his Buddhist beliefs provided the key concepts that underpinned HRD. He also strongly believed that the Buddhist approach can build good people, who then provided the right talent fit for his organisation. The positive characteristics of the manager stimulated employee

trust in him, which cascaded down to his effect on coaching practices, which is presented as Theme Three.

#### **4.4.3 Theme Three Coaching Practices: four sub-themes**

The Third Theme concerns coaching practices, which are divided into four sub-themes.

##### ***Sub-theme One: Coaching Approaches***

The first sub-theme of coaching practices concerns the approaches used, for which three main concepts emerged (Table 4.6). It was found that whilst no formal coaching sessions took place, informal coaching was strongly evident. The adaptation of internal coaching, using a manager as the coach, provided the central means for unstructured on-the-job training, with activities being unplanned, flexible and informal, as TradingC4 reported:

*“The company does not determine when to coach the employees, how frequently or how long to coach. Generally, the main jobs are still worked on each day but it sometimes depends on whether new tasks are coming. I will explain, or if the employees do not understand, they can ask me directly. When we have new employees, they are sent to their department directly and have the manager or the supervisor, at that unit, train and coach them.”*

**Table 4.6 Coaching Approaches**

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<b>Coaching Approaches</b>	
•	Informal Coaching
•	Internal Coaches through:
➤	Assign the manager as coach
➤	Assign seniors or colleagues
•	Friendly Coaching

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Whilst TradingSME's preferred use of informal coaching was through the manager as a coach, the system depended on the style of each coach. TradingSME did not set in advance when they would coach; neither was there a specific budget to support the coaching programme. As a general principle, TradingSME did not hire external coaches, preferring to use internal managers as coaches. A manager might sometimes be assigned – an individual who had greater experience than most, so that they could coach the individual for when cover is needed. However, whilst external coaches have not been used by TradingSME, at least one manager thought it might be beneficial:

*“I have heard that big companies provide a personal coach to the employees, effecting good results. I have not used an external coach, but I would like to use one because my thoughts are sometimes confused. A coach may help me to manage and make it better.”*

Whilst managers received no formal training in coaching, many of the topic areas were basic, for example the legally compulsory Fire Fighting Training. One HR manager supported this:

*“We have Forklift Driver Training about two to three times, Occupational Safety Training two times and annual training in fire drills and fire evacuation.”*

A particular aspect of the coaching approach was the close relationship that existed between coach and coachee, to which the term 'friendly coaching' has been applied. The term is new word to the current study and refers to the unique characteristics that existed at TradingSME and which arose through the Trading-Owner's actions. The foundations of living in harmony with others, along with training in mental development through Buddhist beliefs, helped

ensure that employees had a deep connection and bond that created a strong relationship between coaches and coachees.

It can be said that building strong relationships based on 'friendly coaching' supports coaching practices. When the employees are content to work, ready to approach new tasks with an open mind, express their potential and respond to their coaches' feedback, the potential exists for a strong relationship. Such a relationship enhances the quality of coaching and helps retain the talent within the organisation. Information drawn from the interview indicated that talented employees, who had worked at TradingSME for a long time, did so because of a feeling of pride and a sense of loyalty towards the Trading-Owner, and feeling of love and engagement with their colleagues. TradingC3, who had worked there more than 20 years, explained that:

*"I can work here for a very long time because of my colleagues, who are lovely, and my boss."*

TradingC1, who has worked there for 15 years, also said that:

*"Two things make employees love and feel engagement with TradingSME: Firstly, the HR policy on retention: my boss provides good welfare for the employees compared with similar businesses and he is ready to help. The second is a personal reason, because of my deep connection with the boss and the company."*

In practice, the ethos surrounding TradingSME's family business provided an ideal environment for friendly coaching. Further, the Trading-Owner and his managers took time, inside and outside work, to understand the background and values of their employees. They developed connections through daily conversation, and listened to and learned about the employees. They also took time to enquire about their employees' well-being and their family, which

created a perception that they loved and cared about their employees. These personal elements are an important part of coaching and although they are often conducted subconsciously, the fact that they happen encourages employees to feel connected, warm and supported, which supports ‘friendly coaching’.

In summary, TradingSME’s approaches to coaching have been integrated into developing the employees in an informal, ongoing way, with the major areas being summarised in Table 4.7. The central findings refer to and include three areas:

- 1) Informal Coaching is evident through the Buddhist approach and perceiving the Trading-Owner as a role model
- 2) Internal coaching is adopted through training and job rotation
- 3) ‘Friendly coaching’ is used throughout the family business

**Table 4.7 Coaching Approaches and Employee Development in TradingSME**

Coaching Approaches	<i>Through</i>	Employee Development:
1) Informal coaching	→	<input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism Approach <input type="checkbox"/> A good role model
-----		
2) Internal Coaching	}	<input type="checkbox"/> Training
2.1 Assign the manager as coach		- On-the-job training
2.2 Assign the seniors or colleagues		- No plan for off-the-job training
		<input type="checkbox"/> Job rotation
-----		
3) Friendly Coaching	→	<input type="checkbox"/> Family system

Source: Author’s Construct

### ***Sub-theme Two: Coaching Techniques***

Although the Trading-Owner regarded everyone as equals, in practice there were reports that talented individuals received different treatment. They were more trusted and had been trained, developed and coached to a higher level. The primary coaching techniques referred to managers providing more challenging tasks and then consistently advising and supporting the coachees in their work, whilst providing freedom to work creatively to achieve set goals. After completion the tasks were assessed by the coach, to test learning. Four coaching techniques were identified from the participants, which are presented in Table 4.8. With respect to the detail of coaching techniques, TradingC1 felt that:

*“We have to test the talent by setting questions and job assignments. For example, we assign the task and then question – how do you lift many objects onto the truck? And we allow them to try; if they can do it, they will show off their performance. We try to assign the jobs to them regularly as it develops their talents and skills. When I have a difficult and challenging job, I often assign a talented employee to do it.”*

**Table 4.8 Coaching Techniques**

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<b>Coaching Techniques</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide challenging tasks and assign tasks consistently</li><li>• Give them freedom to create work</li><li>• Act as a good exemplary model</li><li>• Use reasons to coach them</li></ul>

---

An illustrative direct quotation represents one experience of coaching techniques in TradingSME, with TradingC2 offering the following opinion:

*“The effective coaching technique learnt from my boss (the Trading-Owner) is that I always practice and learn from him directly; he teaches me everything. I sometimes think I cannot do it, but he tells me I can and then he will act as an example. If there are some problems or we make something incorrectly, he will tell us, explaining the reasons. Here, everyone knows that he always uses reason to teach.”*

The basic coaching techniques in TradingSME were led by the Trading-Owner, who believed in good deeds being passed to all employees and it was this caring for others that formed the central pillar by which talent was built in the organisation.

### ***Sub-theme Three: Appraisal and Evaluation of Coaching***

Results refer to key performance indicators, which can also be used to evaluate coaching practices. According to the manager-coaches, the results at work were evaluated in order to determine what had been understood, with the options available in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9 Coaching Evaluation**

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<b>Coaching Evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Result-oriented</li><li>• Using informal Appraisals</li></ul>

---

It is interesting that informal activities have been adopted for evaluation, with these being used to providing feedback for improving coaching practices. From the interviews, the Branch Manager, who was an experienced coach, suggested using informal activities that may unrelated with work, such as after-work parties being used to gather information. The Manager commented:

*“These persons are likely to keep silent, so we have to use their results for evaluation, which is rather difficult. Anyway, I can approach these male employees when they are having a party after work. I can ask them by offering whisky or some alcohol, which is really like playing a trick on them. When they are drunk, the truth is gradually disclosed. For example, when they begin to get drunk, some subordinates tell me that ‘everything can be heard and I think this is too serious’. I sometimes join the party with the women and make general conversation with them, or sometimes I stay in the office and call in on some of them to talk privately, or sometimes I take them to do CSR activities outside. These informal activities help me to gain important feedback and to know whether they are satisfied or not.”*

Whilst such gathering of information was a means to an end, being the improvement of coaching practices, there may be ethical considerations as to the actual techniques used.

#### ***Sub-theme Four: Issues in Coaching***

Whilst coaching issues arose in this sub-theme, the incidences were small. The actual issues came from both coaches and coachees, such as a lack of understanding, the resignation of talented employees, poor communication and people expressing envy. These are shown in Table 4.10, with TradingC1 believing that:

*“Our organisation is relatively small, such as in the case of parents who want their children to be Government officers; however, after they learn how to work, they are forced to resign. The solution to the problem relies on the coachee more than the coach because that part of the job is rather easy, but it is difficult to recruit new employees to work. So, it is necessary to reengineer the employment system and welfare system, which needs to consider the payment capability of entrepreneurs, because of the limitations of SMEs, which cannot hire many employees or pay lots of money.”*



**Table 4.10 Issues in Coaching**

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**Coaching Issues**

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- Being unable to understand and poor communication
  - Resignation of talent after they have been coached
  - Being afraid of high performance because of other peoples' envy
  - Not having enough time to coach
  - Pretentious and disobedient employees
- 

The following are illustrative quotations that represent the problems of coaching in the organisation.

*“When I will promote a talented person, some talent will be afraid because in my branch I hire the people from the same region. There are immediate relatives and most of them have the same surname, so it has both advantages and disadvantages. It is good to help to keep them together, but there is a problem – if someone is promoted, other people have envy; meaning that some talent are afraid to show their performance. Especially, in the social kinship of Thai people, there is a seniority system. For example, some talent have their aunts or uncles working here and later, when promoted to a higher level, they will not dare to act because they are worried about their relatives being jealous or sarcastic.” (TradingC1)*

*“I sometime teach talent things that they know already, but later they still made mistakes. Sometimes, they do not want to listen.” (TradingCe1)*

*“When I worked here in the initial stage, I had a problem with communication, we did not understand each other and I did not understand the work and personal style of my manager. Now, that has gone because we can talk about all matters in the same style. Moreover, some departments have a problem about not having enough time to coach.” (TradingCe2)*

Moreover, to better understand the problems of coaching in TradingSME, the field study observation and interview process were analysed together. The important data emerging from the observation suggested that the participants

did not fully understand the true concepts of coaching, probably because they had not previously been trained in coaching programmes. Moreover, when the word 'coaching' was translated into the Thai language it appeared as 'Gan Sorn Ngan', which overlapped with 'instruction' and 'teaching', with 'Gan Sorn' having the same two syllables and a similar meaning. This could cause confusion in the employees' understanding and practice, so during the interviews the researcher used the word 'coaching' alongside 'Gan Sorn Ngan' to clarify the research question. However, most participants tended to use the words 'coaching' 'teaching' and 'instruction' interchangeably, and sometimes even used 'training' 'development' and 'mentoring' as a substitute for 'coaching'. The underlined words in the following transcript illustrate the mix of words used:

*"We are a small company, we do not have job descriptions, we use the job as training, we assign them to learn directly with their department and we have the supervisor or manager to instruct them. They are coached from the easy tasks to the difficult ones. We use on-the-job training to coach them."*

Another participant example is:

*"Coaching has two meanings: first, transferring existing work to others and second, teaching employees until they can work by themselves and solve the problems."*

Thus, confusion can arise over the term of coaching, as it often overlaps with similar some words in the Thai language. There may be a need for practitioners in TradingSME and others Thai organisations, to understand the various terms used to describe coaching, before they can fully understand it in a SME context. In the current study, this issue will be returned to later.

#### **4.4.4 Theme Four: Coaching Perspectives: Six Sub-themes**

The final theme surrounding coaching perspectives was divided into six sub-themes: effectiveness, characteristics of a 'good' coach, characteristics of a 'good' coachee, benefits of coaching, negative effects and suggestions for coaching.

##### ***Sub-theme One: Effective Coaching***

The perceived effectiveness of the coaching practices employed in TradingSME is divided into the employer's and employees' perspectives.

From the employer's perspective, the Trading-Owner believed that coaching was a central part of TradingSME. He felt that it was important to build 'wakefulness' in the employees' minds, stimulating them to be alert to learning new ideas and approaches. This approach helped ensure that employees could face problems with confidence and were ready to solve these issues through their own work skills.

In the Trading-Owner's opinion, the most important factor that supported the effectiveness of coaching was business success, which he believed to be the foundation and key driver for coaching. On the one hand, as employees worked in a successful organisation and received ample compensation, they were happy, which provided a situation where coaching was easy to operate. Conversely, when employees work in a loss-making organisation, they can feel insecure and be less ready to receive coaching. Thus, for Trading-Owner, having a successful business was seen as a clear requirement for effective

coaching. In a circular way, coaching is also a success factor, in that it supports the stability of the business.

There was an important idea from the Trading-Owner to coach others, he felt that:

*“No matter how expertly people coach, if a business still faces a huge loss successively, this leads to the situation of the snake eating its tail. Every time when the business owner looks displeased, this has a negative impact on the employees as well. Therefore, the capability of running the business and making the profit, and the expertise about marketing, are such important properties that they can be transferred and coached to the employees in order to make the organisation successful. The successful company is the main factor that helps the coach convey many techniques to the employees and helps the business to be prosperous and sustainable.”*

From the employees’ perspective, determining whether goals have been achieved defines the effectiveness of coaching, because when a person is coached and he or she achieves positive results, then there is a tendency to comment that coaching has been successful. Other perceived measures of the effectiveness of coaching can be seen in Table 4.11, which includes ‘least mistakes’ and being able to coach the next person.

**Table 4.11 Effective Coaching – employees’ perspective**

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<b>Effective Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Goals achievement and productivity</li><li>• The least amount of errors or mistakes</li><li>• Being able to coach the next person</li><li>• Enhanced development</li><li>• Being able to solve problems</li></ul>

---

- 
- Trust to work instead
  - Receiving compliments
  - Coaching to work in practice
- 

The following are illustrative quotations concerning what was perceived as the effectiveness of coaching.

*“If my subordinates can do the work by following our agreed plan and goal, this is successful coaching. Also, they are able to solve unexpected problems; they have developed more, which is an important thing in evaluating the effectiveness of coaching.” (TradingC1)*

*“They can work and they have productivity, and the least amount of mistakes; they are able to coach the next person.” (TradingCe3)*

*“Effective coaching, in my opinion, is that my boss trusts me to work instead of him, and I receive compliments from other colleagues.” (TradingC2)*

*“The effectiveness of coaching is that they teach me to work in practice, which is in the real situation.” (TradingCe2)*

### **Sub-theme Two: Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coach**

Sub-theme two relates to the good characteristics of coaches. The theme identified fifteen valuable characteristics, with personal qualities being included, such as being open-minded, patient and friendly. A full list of the characteristics is shown in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12 Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coach**

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#### **Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coaches**

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- Understanding the coachees
  - Open-minded and ready to listen to any opinions
  - Having technique and psychology for coaching
-

- 
- Being patient and calm
  - Being a good person
  - Following the results of coaching
  - Having lots of knowledge and expertise
  - Being friendly to subordinates
  - Being an effective role model
  - Having trust in employees and providing beneficial opportunities
  - Being sincere and candid in coaching
  - Having leadership skills
  - Discretion and prudence
  - Being kind
- 

The following are illustrative quotations that represent the good characteristics of a TradingSME coach.

*“The managers, who are coaches, have the expertise to coach; they have morality and they are good people, in body, speech and mind. They are ready to listen when the subordinates have a problem and they are also ready to give them a chance.” (Trading-Owner)*

*“Good coaches need to be sincere in coaching and they need to be a good role model for their subordinates. My managers are friendly and have good human relations.” (TradingCe2)*

*“Good coaches have leadership skills to protect and support their subordinates, and they can solve problems when the subordinates are unable to. Moreover, they are calm, discreet and prudent.” (TradingCe3)*

### **Sub-theme Three: The Characteristics of a Good Coachee**

Following on from coaches, the characteristics associated with effective coachees comprised sub-theme three. In total, eight characteristics were reported, which included having positive interactions, being alert, being open-minded and being calm. The characteristics that refer to good coachees are presented in Table 4.13.

**Table 4.13 Characteristics of a 'Good' Coachee**

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**Characteristics of a 'Good' Coachee**

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- Being open-minded and paying attention
  - Having positive interaction and daring to ask questions
  - Being alert and enthusiastic
  - Calm
  - Being sincere
  - Accepting what is taught, but having discretion
  - Ready to adjust to a new environment
  - Positive thinking
- 

The following are representative quotations that illustrate what the participants shared about a good coachee:

*“The coachee has to pay attention to what the coach teaches. If they do not understand, they must ask their coaches. If they do not ask, their work will go astray; even the minute details that they fail to ask about, when confused, will cause some mistakes later.” (TradingCe1)*

*“When the manager teaches me, I do not ignore this and I keep calm when listening.” (TradingCe4)*

*“The good coachee needs to have an open mind. When the manager is sincere, I need to be sincere back as well. Moreover, I believe what she teaches me and after that I have to consider if it is true or not.” (TradingCe2)*

*“A good coachee has positive thinking and they can adjust to a new environment and other people.” (TradingC2)*

**Sub-theme Four: Benefits of Coaching**

Sub-theme four concerns the perception held about the benefits of coaching, particularly with respect to learning speed and assisting coaches' ability to help share the workload. A particular coaching benefit that was frequently raised

referred to the ability of being able to coach others, although for clarity, all of the benefits that were mentioned by the participants are laid out in Table 4.14

**Table 4.14 Benefits of coaching**

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<b>Benefits of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promotes speedy learning and helps share the manager's workload</li><li>• Being able to coach others successively</li><li>• Ability to work following the assigned tasks</li><li>• The manager and employees improve their mutual understandings</li><li>• Coaching can support the growth of the organisation</li><li>• Promotes a learning cultural organisation</li><li>• Leads to more effective coordination</li><li>• Makes people feel good about themselves</li></ul>

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With respect to the coaching benefits within TradingSME, the following five quotations, from all levels, provide a flavour of the reports:

*“Oh, we are more comfortable. In the past, around 2004, I was assigned to open the new site at the Ayutthaya branch. There were five employees and I had to do everything. Now, I have built up the employees and I can let them do some jobs instead of me.” (TradingC1)*

*“After I am coached, I can do the work, which means my job is successful and I have gained more knowledge. Moreover, I am able to teach and coach others; understandably, because I have passed on these experiences already.” (TradingCe1)*

*“The benefit of coaching is that it makes you learn quickly and to be more productive. It makes the supervisors and their subordinates have greater mutual understanding.” (TradingC4)*

*“When someone is coached, he or she can coach others successively and this improves the effectiveness and efficiency of working and the final result is seen in the productivity of the organisation. In addition, after I teach them, they are more developed and good people.” (Trading-Owner)*



*“I attended the merit project in India three times with my boss and my colleagues; this project was held every year. I had meditation from 9.00 p.m. until 3.00 a.m. and I saw the daily life of Indian people, which made me think and question why I need to have more than others, and I feel peace of mind.”*  
(TradingC3)

### **Sub-theme Five: Negative Effects of Coaching**

There was a general feeling amongst the participants that there were few, if any, negative effects arising from coaching, so at least for the TradingSME participants, it would appear that they had not experienced negative coaching.

#### **Table 4.15 Negative Effects of Coaching**

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<b>Negative Effects of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No Negative Effects of Coaching</li></ul>

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The following two quotations are illustrative of the absence of any perceived negative effects associated with coaching at TradingSME.

*“Mostly coaching is good, not having negative effects.”*  
(TradingCe1)

*“I have not met any negative effects of coaching.”* (TradingC2)

### **Sub-theme Six: Suggestions for Coaching**

When the participants were asked to comment or put forward any recommendations for the ways in which coaching at TradingSME could have been changed or improved, a number responded that they were satisfied with working within the organisation and did not feel that any changes were necessary. Some participants did provide feedback, although this was more of a general nature and often being seen as reaffirming what they had reported

previously. One comment referred to ensuring that the organisation was successful before beginning to coach, along with having an effective management system in place. The role of mentor for new employees arose and this will be returned to later. The key suggestions are shown in Table 4.16.

**Table 4.16 Suggestion for Coaching**

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<b>Suggestion for Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing ideas and helping together</li><li>• Make sure that organisation is successful first</li><li>• Having an effective management system</li><li>• Taking care of new employees</li><li>• Having a mentor for new employees</li></ul>

---

As outlined in the 'effectiveness of coaching' section, the owner-manager's perspective was that business success needs to come before coaching, with organisational success being seen as the key driver for successful coaching. Then, coaching is also supported by business success, meaning that both of them support each other. Taking a broader view, the following quotations provide a representative view of the detail associated with the suggestions put forward by the participants.

*"We rarely have coaching problems; however, we should be concerned about building a good system to support coaching, such as an employment system and welfare system in the company. For example, we have set a basic process in work such as job descriptions and working routines. We are a small company and we teach, and treat each other like in a sibling relationship. Thus, the problem is not coaching, it is related to the people who will be coached, because the managers are ready to coach. We need to look at the employment, recruitment, retention and welfare systems in order to consider how to recruit and retain talent in our organisation." (TradingC1)*

*“In coaching, I did not know how each department shared and I wanted other departments to do the same as I do; I help, share and suggest guidelines for my subordinates. I do a lot of explaining in my department in order to make coaching easier. After they understand the things I teach, I let them learn by themselves.” (TradingC2)*

*“My company should have mentors, who are not necessarily direct managers, to train new employees directly. The mentors can train and suggest things to employees, because they are newcomers and sometimes they may not know how to work in the initial stages.” (TradingCe2)*

TradingCe2 suggestion tends to support the interview data from all participants that at the time of the study a mentoring programme was not in place. Indeed one key participant, who was perceived as talent, suggested that mentoring should be used to support the employee learning process in her organisation.

### **Summary – Case-study One: TradingSME**

In summary, this case study focused on the Thai trading sector of SMEs, with its core business being the purchase and recycling of waste. The organisation has expanded from national to international level, with over 1,000 franchise branches across Thailand and overseas. The owner-manager was ultimately responsible for all decisions, including those that related to developing employees. Drawing on his Buddhist belief the owner-manager saw the concept of ‘moral values of life’ being present throughout the whole organisation, including within the coaching process.

In drawing the chapter together, the key finding from each of the four sections is used to illustrate the views within TradingSME. First, with regard to the perception of talent, it was reported that talented employees referred to

everyone in the organisation, with all being treated as equals, although some reports suggest that levels of support for coaching and development differed. Second, five main factors were identified for developing employees, which included training, providing a Buddhist approach, operating as a family-run business, job rotation and having seniors that provide good role models. Again, report was made that different levels of development for talent existed. With respect to the third theme of coaching practice, it is apparent that, whilst formal coaching did not exist, effective informal coaching was reported as being evident. One particular internal practice referred to managers operating as coaches, often through unstructured on-the-job training and within a 'friendly coaching' ethos. Lastly, from a perspective of coaching success, the owner-manager believed that organisational success and coaching were strongly interlinked, with each driving the other. The employee reports were along similar lines, and felt that coaching effectiveness was determined by the extent to which personal and organisational goals were achieved.

As with many SMEs, the owner-manager of TradingSME played a central role in the organisation. It was clear that his Buddhist beliefs, especially that employees need to be good people before talent can be built, were influential in underpinning employee learning and coaching practices in this organisation.

Having explored the findings of Case-study One, the manufacturing SME that forms the second case study is addressed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5: CASE-STUDY TWO – ProductSME**

### **Context Setting, Findings and Initial Interpretations**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter the case-study organisation representing the manufacturing-production sector of Thai SMEs is explored. The case study was considered as critical due to it having received the SME National Award for four consecutive years (2012-2016). The pseudonym “ProductSME” was used to represent the organisation and following an introduction to the organisation, four major findings from the data are presented.

#### **5.1 Organisation Background**

ProductSME was a manufacturing company, the core business of which was to produce T-shirts, polo shirts and jackets. The manufacturing process included yarn spinning, weaving, dyeing, sewing and the selling of its branded products to department stores. After the owner-manager graduated from the oldest university in Thailand he worked in a large organisation for eight years, before he decided to step into the textile business. In establishing a new business he opened a textile factory, which included a research and development centre, to manufacturer numerous branded garments, which focused on niche markets. He believed that a successful business, especially an SME, should adopt a segmentation approach, as this helps SMEs to exploit their distinct competence and to gain a competitive market advantage. For example, following the Free Trade Area opening up, the market became highly competitive, with China in particular aiming to seize a large market share.

Thus, in order to contribute to sustainable development, he adjusted the business strategy to build an own brand, which incorporated advanced technology. Other innovations included mosquito-proof robes for monks and a mosquito-replant T-shirts. Whilst his organisation was started from the ground up, due to the products being well received, it has expanded dramatically and now ProductSME makes a considerable profit each year.

## **5.2 Participants' Background**

The number of participants for ProductSME was the same ( $n = 9$ ) as those for TradingSME: one owner-manager, four managers who acted as coaches, and four employees who had worked for ProductSME and who had been coached (coachees). Each level of direct management identified the coaches and coachees that were perceived as being talented. Pseudonyms were used to represent participants' names, that is: 'Product-Owner', 'ProductC1', C2, C3, C4 and 'ProductCe1', Ce2, Ce3, Ce4, respectively (with the letter C representing the Coach, letters Ce signifying the Coachee and the number sequence referring to each of the coaches and coachees). The backgrounds of the participants are summarised in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1 Summary – Demographic Profile of Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Work Experience in 'ProductSME' (years)</b>	<b>Religion</b>
1. Product-Owner	The Owner-Manager, Managing Director (MD)	Male	43	16	Christian
<b><u>Coaches</u></b>					
2. ProductC1	Assistant Managing Director	Female	43	16	Buddhism
3. ProductC2	Factory Manager	Male	37	8	Buddhism
4. ProductC3	Financial and Accountant manager	Female	40	9	Buddhism
5. ProductC4	General Manager	Male	40	6	Buddhism
<b><u>Coachees</u></b>					
6. ProductCe1	Warehouse Manager	Female	43	4	Buddhism
7. ProductCe2	Industrial Engineer	Male	28	3	Buddhism
8. ProductCe3	Head of Accounts Receivable	Female	34	9	Buddhism
9. ProductCe4	Deputy Sales Manager	Male	33	11	Christian

Source: Author's Construct

The owner-manager and one other followed the Christian faith, although Buddhism was the most commonly occurring faith. Gender was broadly divided, with the age range being lower than in Case-study One, particularly with respect to the owner-manager.

### **5.3 SME National Award Result**

ProductSME received SMEs National Awards in four consecutive years, as follows, although it is noted that a decline in scores is shown for the last two years:

- The 5<sup>th</sup> SMEs National Awards in 2012 – they earned 805 points.
- In 2013, the 6<sup>th</sup> SMEs National Awards was postponed to 2014; the organisation earned 861 points.
- The 7<sup>th</sup> SMEs National Awards in 2015 – they earned 820 points.
- The 8<sup>th</sup> SMEs National Awards in 2016 – they earned 802 points.

In addition, ProductSME received the 2<sup>nd</sup> SMEs National Award in 2009, along with a consolation prize in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> SMEs National Awards in 2010 and 2011 respectively. The Product-Owner allowed the disclosure of the 2012 confidential results, which are shown in Table 5.2. Results are similar to TradingSME's in the same year, although the HR Focus is a few points higher.

**Table 5.2 Results of 'ProductSME' SME National Award (2012)**

Criteria	Full Score	Evaluated Results
Leadership	120	98
Strategic Planning	120	100
Customer and Market Focus	120	102
Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management	100	83
<b>Human Resource Focus</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>116</b>
Process Management	160	121
Business Results	240	185
Total	1,000	805

Source: feedback report of SMEs National Award, 2012

The most noticeable feature of ProductSME is the organisation's ability to achieve National Awards over consecutive years, although they have other



awards, such as the SMART Award, and a Happy Model for Happy Workplace Project of SHARE. However, the National Award results were the determining criteria for ProductSME's inclusion in the current study.

## **5.4 Findings**

In line with TradingSME, the findings from ProductSME were grouped and classified using the same themes, which starts with the perception of talent in the organisation.

### **5.4.1 Theme One: Perception of Talent in ProductSME**

From the owner-manager's perspective, the reported findings for Theme One were that talent can be divided into general and specific categories, both of which affect employee development and coaching practices. From a general perspective, talented employees were perceived as those people who had worked in ProductSME for more than three years. This duration was thought to provide an employee with an organisational awareness, such as with regard to cultures and tasks, and be in a position to progress their career. The Product-Owner commented that:

*“The person who can work more than three years, I use this as an indicator and whoever has worked more than three years gets a bonus in the third year, a lot more than in the past, because it shows that first, you understand the culture. Second, you understand your job and third, you are ready to be another's supervisor.”*

An additional and important attribute of talent is that people should have endured or have passed through hardship and life's difficulties, before they become talented. It is not sufficient to graduate from a leading university, or to graduate at all. The Product-Owner supported this by explaining:

*“I do not select people from a high-quality university, but when I have an interview process I select the person who has passed the difficulties of life; patience is the first thing, then ability and skill can come later.”*

From this point, it is observed that talent included everyone in the organisation who had worked more than three years, with the quality of patience being a key selection criterion in this context.

Taking a more specific view, the interviews and field observation data found that the owner-manager perceived the organisation to have around twenty talented employees, who all operated at managerial level. In addition, each talented manager had their own talented employees at the lower level. In this way the Product-Owner was perceived as having built talent as would a ‘warlord’, in that the aim was to devolve a lot of the workload. Moreover, there was a tendency for the Product-Owner to treat ‘senior’ talented employees differently, with respect to investing time and financial investment in their training and development. Within ProductSME talent management did not exist formally, with the approach being to capitalise on those employees identified as talent. Thus, any talent management strategies, policies and practices were pursued on an informal basis. Nonetheless, the Product-Owner invested more in what he perceived as preparing individuals with talent for future positions. He put forward that:

*“Talent is different from a general employee; different in terms of budget. If I have the HRD budget to build an employee up to the management level, I will choose someone who will be invested in together; humans are a resource that is invested in through training, study trips and time.”*

From the employees' perspective of talent, the report was similar to that of the owner-manager's view. Further, talented employees were seen to be trusted and capable of taking over work from their superior, which confirms the cascading effect the owner-manager put forward. Talented employees were equally expected to have a positive attitude, do a good job, to be capable of development, through learning new knowledge and techniques. The attributes of what was perceived as talented individuals in ProductSME are presented in Table 5.3.

***Table 5.3 Attributes of Talent in ProductSME***

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<b>The Attributes of Talented Employees</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being sufficiently reliable to be able to take over from you</li><li>• Doing a good job, as expected and achieving positive results</li><li>• Being able to develop themselves – desire to learn new things</li><li>• Knowledge, skill and attitude</li><li>• Responsibility</li><li>• Being patient, being a fighter</li><li>• Positive thinking</li><li>• Leadership</li><li>• Ability to learn quickly</li><li>• Devoted to the organisation and pays attention to work</li><li>• Good human relations</li></ul>

---

The following are an illustrative selection of quotations that represent the perceived attributes of talented employees in ProductSME.

*“Talented employees need to have positive thinking, which is the first thing; later they have agility, patience and high responsibility, so they have the intention to work, and have*

*quick feedback and good results more than others; they are my representatives. When I am not free, they can work instead of me.” (ProductC1)*

*“Talented employees have to first know about their jobs very well; second, they have the skills to work and third, they have a positive attitude when working, which is an important part for developing employees in the future. Talent are ready to learn all the time.” (ProductC2)*

*“Talent is my representative, like my right and left hand. The first thing they should have is a positive attitude with colleagues, the supervisor and everything in the organisation. The second thing is the job performance of employees ... they need to have responsibilities and leadership to manage people. For me, both job performance and attitude will be outstanding in talented people, and they understand quickly.” (ProductC3)*

In addition, the interviews revealed that the participant coachees knew, although informally, that they were perceived as talented by their coaches. They were also aware, from the works assigned to them, that they were expected to contribute more than others in the organisation. ‘ProductCe1’ spoke about this issue:

*“It may be acknowledged that my manager looks at me as her legs and her arms. When she has ten tasks, she sends me to do one task and sends it again, and again, thus, she trusts me to do it.”*

‘ProductCe3’ added:

*“My feeling is that my manager likes me to do more than others. She often assigns some tasks that are not my direct job, which she has an assistant to do, but she uses me instead, as I am more efficient than her assistant.”*

Indeed, most talented participants understood their status by the jobs assigned to them and they recognised this as an informal acknowledgement of talent. This process of talented employees in ProductSME being recognised informally aligns with the absence of a formal talent management in the

organisation. It was also apparent that more resources were invested in talented employees than general employees, with these talented individuals being treated differently in ProductSME with respect to employee development and coaching practices for talent, which is the topic of the next theme.

#### **5.4.2 Theme Two: Human Resource Development**

In an SME the owner-manager is invariably key to employee development and other HR activities, which was the case for ProductSME. Indeed, as the owner-manager thought highly of human resources, perceiving them to be a key factor in business success, he supported the giving of both time and money to numerous HRD projects. Such projects included training programmes, mentoring initiatives and a 'happy workplace' project. Although ProductSME operates as a SME, the owner-manager appointed a HRD officer in 2015, who was made directly responsible for developing the employees. The HRD Officer's responsibilities included identifying employees in need of development, with the Product-Owner expecting this initiative to enhance the organisation's success. The Product-Owner gave his opinion on this issue by saying:

*"I think the key success of my business is human, not machines, even though my machines are the most high-tech. The competitor can understand my business models, but they cannot manage the paradigm of the human elements like I do."*

In detailed terms, talented employee development in ProductSME has been progressed through six basic employee development activities, which are outlined in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4 Human Resource Development in ProductSME**

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**Human Resource Development**

---

- Training
    - On-the-Job Training
    - Off-the-Job Training
    - In-house training
  - Mentoring
  - Leadership development
  - Ownership quotient and organisation awareness
  - Happy workplace
  - Exit Interview
- 

***On-the-Job Training***

The Product-Owner's policy was that on-the-job training was the primary method used to develop employees, although this varied between levels of management. At top management level, on-the-job training is given a 100 per cent focus, because these managers, it was argued, had sufficient academic knowledge to carry out the task; the application was important. The middle and lower management levels were reported to use on-the-job training for 80 per cent of the time, to enhance practical skills, whilst the remainder comprised theoretical learning. The knowledge focus referred to product and management knowledge, such as documentation, HR roles, accounting and finance. With respect to talented managers being sent on external training, this was available only to top management level and even then any such training needed to be sanctioned by the owner-manager.

### ***Off-the-Job Training***

Off-the-job training was used in support of internal training, with public training programmes being supported by the Product-Owner, who selected which talented managers would attend. Before any external fee-paying programmes were used, the owner-manager attended the course personally, to determine its suitability for ProductSME managers. Once determined suitable, he selected which talented managers would attend which course. The Product-Owner explained:

*“The public training that I send them outside for are the things I use myself, such as self-development programmes or leadership development by the Landmark Forum, which I force two managers per month to attend. I will use the programmes and attend the sessions already, before I assign them to the managers.”*

At the lower level, each manager could select their direct subordinates to attend free public training programmes. Managers were required to take into account the employee's current job needs, which may require the learning of new technology or acquiring updated knowledge. In addition, if employees wished to expand their knowledge or skills, they were able to request attendance on a training programme, after which the manager would consider if the course was appropriate. ProductC2 added the following:

*“If it is the basic tasks within the factory, we use on-the-job training chiefly, except when having new technology – new knowledge that I cannot transfer in a meeting – then I will allow them to learn outside. However, one employee will be sent to train outside at least once a year; for about two days and one night.”*

In addition to the training programmes, the Product-Owner supported the use of Government agencies initiatives, which included SHARE (Thai Garment

Development Foundation Committee) and ThaiHealth (Thai Health Promotion Foundation), which sponsors Thai SMEs.

### ***In-house Training***

In addition to internally organised training, ProductSME invited key speakers to provide a training class, at least on an annual basis. These key speakers usually had a close relationship with the Product-Owner, which provided a personal connection for the input. Guest trainers were also provided in the form of Governmental agencies, who delivered free in-house training programmes to ProductSME, in areas of legal requirements.

### ***Mentoring***

There were three original reasons for introducing the mentoring programme in ProductSME. First, having been introduced to the mentoring in his church, the Product-Owner, who is a Christian (Protestant), felt he could adopt the concept within his organisation. In the initial stages he informally mentored managers, acting as a friend, who shared feelings and opinions. However, given the line management relationship, this would not fit all models of the mentoring process. Second, as the organisation was expanding he felt the need for a support mechanism to be put in place. Finally, there was a concern over the high turnover of people and the number of employees who have not passed probation. Whilst employees can continue to work until they pass probation, the process was taking a long time, with it being thought that mentoring could support those on probation. As the Product-Owner explained:

*“I applied the mentoring programme. In the past we did not have this project. Now my organisation is bigger than in the past and we found that we had a high turnover rate, a high number of employees who did not pass probation. So we agreed to have*



*mentoring, which uses the same concepts as the church. I undertook informal mentoring with my direct subordinates, more than ten people for a long time, but it was not announced formally.”*

These three reasons convinced ProductSME to give precedence to mentoring, which was first trialled in production department, as this was the largest department which was experiencing high turnover of people. The mentoring programme was a systematic and formalised process, with there being handbooks, guidelines and support available. For example, one section in the handbook outlined the mentor selection criteria:

#### **Mentor Selection Criteria of ProductSME**

The company is seeking qualified mentors based on the following criteria:

1. Positive attitude towards the company
2. The mentor is older than the mentee at least six months
3. Should be the same gender as the mentee in order to ensure proper behaviour
4. Should work in the same department, but should not be the direct supervisor (except in some cases when the department will assign)
5. Well-behaved, conform to the company's rules and have a good work profile, so as to be a good example for new employees
6. Understanding the tasks that the new employee will have to do
7. Leadership, maturity in order to motivate and persuade the new employees
8. Have knowledge and understanding about management and general company rules
9. Good human relationships

The mentoring programme was considered to be an effective tool for developing employees continuously. During the past two years ProductSME

has, through 'trial and error', developed systematic mentoring programme and to expand to other departments by the method, although refinements were still ongoing. For example, a financial incentive was offered to those mentors who fully supported their mentee until they passed their 119 day probation period. The Factory Manager gave details:

*“Previously, we have tried intensively to get our employees to suggest to their friends that they should work in a rare position, which we call ‘a friend gets a friend’. We have done the mentoring programme by trial and error for two years; this year we may adapt ‘a friend gets a friend’ into the mentoring programme, which means a mentor takes care of a mentee until passing probation, so the mentor will receive 3,000-4,000 baht (about £60-80) per mentee.”*

### ***Leadership Development***

Leader roles in HRD were a key success factor in ProductSME, particularly with respect to supporting the owner-manager's roles. The Product-Owner, who fully realised the importance of leadership development, often sent managers on training programmes that he thought would benefit the continuous personal and professional development of their skills. He selected carefully and the programmes could carry a high cost, however, with regard to his presence in the actual building, he conveyed a leadership style that showed positive thinking, kindness and friendship; he acted as a role model.

Participants supported the positive characteristics of the owner-manager and his presence as a role model:

*“The Product-Owner has more positive thinking than me; he always teaches me to have a positive attitude.” (ProductC4)*

*“I worked with the Product-Owner who suggested that I attended many training courses. I worked hard and did not meet*

*a lot of people, so when I faced a problem I was irritable. I got moody easily; my subordinates did not dare to consult me. After I attended a training class from outside, I found a new experience and the Product-Owner taught me about the subordinate developmental method, and how to win the subordinates' hearts. I gained more experience and I changed myself. Then, my subordinates dared to consult and talk with me.” (ProductC1)*

*“My boss is a genius, we have shared together and I can talk to him about all kinds of things, like my sibling; he gives me the chances and freedom to do things, he is very fair to subordinates and he trusts us to work.” (ProductC3)*

### **Organisation Awareness**

The Product-Owner cultivated an organisational ownership ethos for his talented employees, so that they loved the organisation and engaged with it. He built business-belonging into employees through teaching talented employees to love the organisation. In return, employees were rewarded with generous bonuses and salary, so that they protected the organisation's assets like they were their own. Building an organisational awareness in ProductSME brought positive benefits, in that employee could be trusted to take that pressure off the owner and other managers, thereby releasing them for important strategic work. However, ultimate control was still maintained through the internet or the telephone. ProductC1 shared the following information:

*“He teaches with his heart, he cultivates employees so that we live together like a family. He teaches all employees that we own the business together, because he believes that if each employee thinks they own the business, they will put their best effort into it. They do not evade their duties and responsibilities towards others.”*

## *Happy Workplace*

Having adopted the 'happy workplace' project, ProductSME has run the programme continuously for three years, with the aim of building a family-like work environment. This project was a Government agency initiative, supported by the Thai Garment Development Foundation Committee (SHARE) and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. The happy workplace programme is designed to promote the employees' physical and mental health through the Happy Eight initiative: Happy Body, Happy Heart, Happy Relax, Happy Brain, Happy Soul, Happy Money, Happy Family and Happy Society. The success of this project in ProductSME was partly attributed to the support, time and resources the owner-manager provided. In speaking about the happy workplace project, the Product-Owner observed that:

*"A factory or a company is like a second home, as you may live at the workplace more than at your own home. If employees work happily and live together like a family, there is unity. Whatever I can support, I am pleased to support. I should participate in this project; if you want me to do something, you can call me. I am pleased to support, both in time and budget."*

The policy for the happy workplace project had been established as a formal system and appeared in ProductSMEs documents, which included a master plan, happy index reports, outcome maps and a HappinoMeter review. The positive results from this project supported a liveable organisation and tended to reduce the turnover rate. Support was provided during the Product-Owner's interview:

*"They request the budget for the whole year and then I approve it, and allow them to decide in detail how to use each item. A happy workplace teaches employees to build a liveable workplace and I also see the good results in a low turnover rate".*

The happy workplace project in ProductSME focused on the middle and lower levels of employees, which accounted for around 90 per cent of all employees. Numerous communal activities were apparent in the workplace, together, such as cultivating vegetables, sports days, aerobic dance classes, karaoke contests and a New Year party. ProductC2's comment is indicative of the happiness element in ProductSME:

*“The happy workplace is matched with my factory; we use employees as the key factor. One question that is asked is, are the employees happy to work 10 to 11 hours per day? The concept of the happy workplace uses humans to drive it and if the employees are happy, then the work is successful as well”.*

### **Exit Interview**

Empathy is a characteristic that the Product-Owner demonstrated, with him being perceived as an empathetic leader who cared for his employees and provided a positive role model. When an employee wished to leave the organisation, the owner-manager cared sufficiently to offer the employee an exit interview, to assist the employee in developing themselves and for the organisation to determine where any improvements needed to be made. Product-Owner shared the following:

*“I care quite a bit if someone resigns; when someone quits, I will have an exit interview, particularly at the managerial level. I leave it open to them to choose the interviewer, which does not necessarily need to be the direct supervisor and they can choose whoever they like to do the exit interview, including me; they can choose to do the interview with me.”*

In ProductSME, the role of the owner-manager was important in supporting employee development practices, although the religious approach seen in TradingSME was not evident. Indeed, whilst the majority of the employees followed Buddhism there was an absence of religious symbols, either Buddhist

or Christian, with the latter being the owner-manager's faith. However, in drawing on documentation, observation and interview data, it was clear that happiness was a key concept in ProductSME, with the owner-manager providing numerous activities in support of a happy workplace. Photographs were taken on the organisation's premises that showed news displays, a vegetable growing area and 'happy' activities, although, in a similar way to the first case study, these have not been included here, due to the potential for a breach of anonymity.

#### **5.4.3 Theme Three: Coaching Practices: four sub-themes**

There are four sub-themes in the theme of coaching practices as follows:

##### ***Sub-theme One: Coaching Approaches***

ProductSME demonstrated three main approaches to coaching (Table 5.5.), with it being found that informal coaching, coaching through on-the-job training, produced the most effective results. Managers acted as coaches, with the nature of the process being informal, flexible and friendly. Whilst managers acted as coaches they occasionally assigned their subordinates to seniors or colleagues who had greater knowledge or skills in a particular area, which illustrated another element of flexibility. CoacheeA2 shared the following practice for informal and internal coaching:

*“The coachee does not only learn from the coach; they can also ask their colleagues what to do and then their colleagues teach, because the task can be shared. The more the team members can work together, the quicker the tasks are reduced.”*

**Table 5.5 Coaching Approaches**

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<b>Coaching Approaches</b>	
•	Informal Coaching
•	Internal Coaches
➤	Assign the manager as coach
➤	Assign seniors or colleagues
•	Friendly Coaching

---

ProductSME had previously hired external coaches, although the practice was stopped after the organisation discovered that they produced no better results than internal coaching. There was also a perceived variation in the quality of external consultants, which reinforced the current internal approach for developing employee skills and stability. The Product-Owner supported this by saying:

*“I have used a lot of consultants and coaches, but it is a waste of money. I agree that external coaches are good, but they do not stay for long and when the coach is not here, the system starts to fail. So I believe my company should be run by a good system that does not depend on an external coach or individual. For me, good coaches are managers, not coaches from outside.”*

As with TradingSME, ‘friendly coaching’ emerged as a concept in ProductSME with the phrase having a dual meaning. ‘Friendly coaching’ referred to a close relationship between employees who assisted and supported each other, with it also being used to describe a positive relationship between a coach and coachee. Thus, in practice ProductSME’s meaning was slightly different from that of TradingSME, in that the concept went outside the coaching and mentoring programmes to embrace the ‘happy workplace’. Again, the influence

of the Product-Owner was important in building and sustaining a family-like work environment; where employees supported each other as they would in a family. The family concept was enhanced by the Product-Owner spending time with talented managers and being open to their ideas in both meetings and in daily conversations. It was reported that they could contact the Product-Owner all the times, either face-to-face or through the telephone or e-mail. The Product-Owner said:

*“For all subordinates who are under me directly, I talk with them about all things, both work-related and personal, because they sometimes have a personal life problem affecting their work. This can decrease their performance, so I have tried to have no organisational politics and I ensure that the employees love the organisation, and think about the organisational benefits. They have an organisational awareness and these issues have to be built, before the knowledge part can be built.”*

Within the coaching approaches, the Product-Owner laid the foundation for an organisational awareness of the mutual benefits of development, for both the employees and employer. Indeed, it was argued that, whenever employees were content and dedicated to their work, the organisation gained the benefit. Within this mutual framework, the dedicated workforce received a high bonus-based salary, along with an annual increase, thereby creating a win-win situation. In addition, the coaching practices were reported to contribute towards employee happiness, with the close relationship being valued. The office areas were designed so that a single department could work together, which further supported friendly coaching in this organisation.

To draw together the coaching approaches, it was again apparent that the Product-Owner played a central role in determining the activities. Areas of



importance included the support for friendly coaching, with its strong integration of coaching approaches and employee development practices. The key outcomes are summarised in Table 5.6, with the linkage issues being concluded as follows:

1. Informal and internal coaching was linked through training, leadership development and mentoring.
2. Friendly coaching was integrated with some projects, such as happy workplace and organisation awareness. Having the Product-Owner support this initiative was the key to current success.

**Table 5.6 Coaching Approaches and Employee Development**

<b>Coaching Approaches <i>Through</i> HRD:</b>	
1) Informal and Internal coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ □ Training</li> <li>□ Leadership Development</li> <li>□ Mentoring</li> </ul>
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2) Friendly Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ □ Happy workplace</li> <li>□ Organisation awareness</li> </ul>

Source: Author's Construct

### ***Sub-theme Two: Coaching Techniques***

The Product-Owner has invested resources into talented employees, although it is apparent that they have been developed, and coached differently for higher management. The Product-Owner and his managers assigned challenging tasks to test their talented employees, with set goals, whilst providing them the

freedom to work creatively in achieving these. Seven coaching techniques were identified (Table 5.7.) with an overview being provided by ProductC2:

*“Talent will be crammed. Before I worked here, I just knew that I was seen as talent by a Western boss, who was my ex-boss. He tested me a lot, such as in my attitude, patience, knowledge and skill. He assigned me many projects and set the goals and time together. After that, when I was successful and finished early, the tasks came continuously and my jobs also increased continuously. I just knew that it was a test. Thus, when I am tested in this style and I see that it is good, I use this for my talent as well. It means that we can learn and work, like other people do, but my results are better than others. The compensation should be more like, the more you do the more you get”.*

ProductC2 also suggested that:

*“I use different methods for each person because each personality is different. Some topics are sometimes not suited to a person, but they can talk with others, so I consider the things that they are interested in, to help motivate them. My technique is that I teach my talent the general knowledge they need to know and then they practise this through on-the-job training. In this process, I evaluate that they can succeed 70 to 80 per cent by themselves and 20 to 30 percent if I support them. I give them freedom to do the work, but if it is near the deadline and they cannot do it, I will fill in.”*

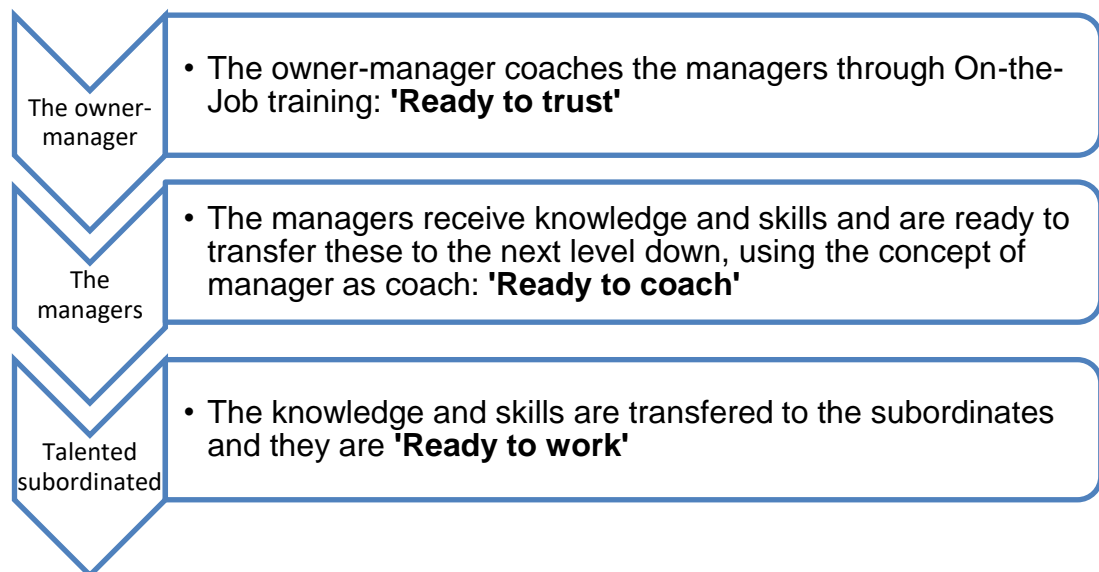
**Table 5.7 Coaching Techniques**

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<b>Coaching Techniques</b>	
•	Provide challenging tasks
•	Assign tasks consistently
•	Provide freedom to create solutions
•	Act as an exemplary model
•	Special investment
•	Using case study
•	Discuss topics and issues together

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It is apparent from the findings that the coaching techniques used in this SME were guided by the Product-Owner, who believed in human resources as the key asset to success in this organisation. He supported internal and external training for talented managers, whilst concurrently building trust in them to undertake tasks and 'act-up'. That is, he built talent by trusting the managers to practise at the next level. The Product-Owner also represented an important figure in building talented employees. Here the technique was that the expertise that the owner-manager passed to managers was cascaded down to lower level, using managers as coaches. The summarised coaching techniques are shown in Figure 5.1., with the three 'ready' concepts associated with ProductSME, being created by the researcher:



**Figure 5.1 Existing Expertise – owner-manager to his subordinates**

### ***Sub-theme Three: Appraisal and Evaluation of Coaching***

ProductSME focused on being results oriented, with key performance indicators (KPI) being set for each employee so as to evaluate each individual's result. The details for this sub-theme are shown in Table 5.8.

***Table 5.8 Coaching Evaluation***

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<b>Coaching Evaluation</b>	
•	Results-oriented
➤	KPIs Evaluation
➤	Informal activities

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### ***Results orientation***

Within the results orientation framework two approaches were used to evaluate coaching performance in this organisation, with these being KPIs and informal activities. KPIs evaluate employee performance, which was considered crucial for individual and organisational success. The process of KPIs was to manage employee performance and assist employees in knowing where they were and what was needed to progress. The adoption of the KPI evaluation in ProductSME came from the Product-Owner, which in turn resulted from hiring external consultants and the realisation that when the coaches were not in the building, everything went back to normal. In this way KPIs were envisaged as a means by which to control employee's work behaviour enhance the overall productivity. KPIs also provided an effective system for evaluating the employees. The owner-manager shared the following:

*“I think the external coach is good, but they cannot remain for a long time. It is coaching and if the coach disappears, the system disappears as well, so it is a failed system. I believe that a good system does not depend on individuals. If the coach is not in the company, it goes back to the same as before, so we have built the KPIs for evaluating”.*

In practice, managers set KPIs for each subordinate according to their position, with the outcomes being evaluated annually. The KPI outcomes were used to determine bonuses and salary adjustment, with it being felt that this placed to control for evaluation back onto the employee. In short, pay was related to performance, with each person having individual KPIs. ProductC3 commented:

*“I set the KPIs for my subordinates; the KPIs of each person are not the same. For example, one subordinate, who is an accounting officer, has 10 KPIs, so she needs to follow these KPIs. If she cannot do it, it is counted as a percentage loss for performance appraisal.”*

Managers also used informal evaluation by obtaining useful feedback from within the coaching practice itself, by discussing and talking through any issues or points. ProductCe3 highlighted the point:

*“I and my manager can talk together all the time, when I have some problems and I can ask her immediately. Also, I have followed up my subordinates by asking and supporting them to do their work.”*

#### ***Sub-theme Four: Issues Surrounding Coaching***

From the interview process, seven coaching issues emerged for this sub-theme, with these being relevant to both direct and indirect coaching practices (Table 5.9).

**Table 5.9 Issues surrounding coaching**

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<b>Coaching Issues</b>	
•	Difficult to recruit talent
•	New generations are not patient
•	Communication problems
•	High employee turnover rate
•	Some talent have no supervisory skills
•	They do not like to train outside
•	Do not understand how to coach

---

***Difficulty in Recruiting Talent***

ProductSME was located in Nakhon Pathom province, approximately fifty kilometres south of Bangkok. The distance from the city was identified as causing a recruitment issue, in that talent workers tended to prefer a city location. For example, the city office area of Silom, which has ample high-rise office blocks full of workers, is a lively and popular area to work in Bangkok, having everything a worker could need. The location was convenient, with a BTS sky train and a MRT subway providing speedy transport and there were department stores, shops and restaurants nearby. The owner-manager stated that:

*“Just doing recruitment to work in these areas [location of ProductSME] is more difficult than the Silom area; it is very different.”*

***New Generation is Impatient***

One of the important issues of this SME was that talent, particularly the new generation, was perceived as lacking patience. ProductC1 gave the following opinion on this issue:

*“The new generation employees, at the present, are very well treated by their parents, which is not the same as the past when everyone needed to work to support themselves. These new generations are well taken care of before they start work, so we cannot scold or comment on them; sometimes when we scold them, they do not come to work. They are impatient.”*

### **Communication Issues**

Within coaching, poor communication skills can cause misunderstanding and poor results, so feedback on coaching was identified as an important aspect to be considered. ProductC3 shared the following:

*“I teach them, then they have adverse results; I think over how I taught them, sometimes I use writing to teach them and I think that I have miscommunicated with them, or that they do not get my ideas. After, I review the results, so I communicate with them again.”*

Also, whilst certain talented managers had a large amount of knowledge, they were unable to teach other people effectively, due to their poor communication skills. The Product-Owner spoke about this issue:

*“I think the coaching problem is communication; for example, the Production Manager, who is a high theorist and academic, he understands everything, but when I assigned him to teach and attended his class for three hours, I found that I could not understand the content that he was teaching and neither could the other 20 listeners. He is academic, but he cannot teach or coach others to understand.”*

### **High Rate of Employee Turnover**

In the past, ProductSME faced a high employee turnover, although the owner-manager took steps to resolve the issue, which alleviated the problem. Elements such as coaching were introduced, as it was felt that building people throughout all levels of the organisation was, in the owner-manager's view, the key to a successful business. The various initiatives resulted in reducing the employee turnover rate to low, with employee development, a happy

workplace project, a mentoring programme and support for training all assisting. ProductC3 felt that:

*“It is better now than the past, with the high employee turnover rate. I do not know why they resign; sometimes, new employees are neglected by the old employees, thus, they do not want to work. After that, when there is mentoring, the mentors take care of the new employees; it is good for them to have a mentor.”*

The Product-Owner supported this:

*“The employee turnover rate is low because of building people together, with building the system. For example, the happy workplace project means that they teach employees to participate in order to build a liveable working environment and I see that the turnover rate is low.”*

### ***Talented Employees – Do not Always Possess Supervisory Skills***

It was apparent from the interviews that some talented employees had high technical or specialist skills, but lacked supervisory skills. Indeed, although they were developed for the supervisor role, it was beyond their ability. They were productive workers and whilst they were unable to supervise others, they were often grateful to return to their earlier work position. The Product-Owner shared the following:

*“I found a mistake; sometimes, we have talented employees who are skilful sewers, who can work 80 to 90 per cent from one-hundred per cent. However, when we promoted them to be supervisors, there was poor performance. They may be good workers, but not good supervisors. Sometimes, we pushed to promote and coach them, but they still could not become an effective supervisor. I think that the employees have the same opportunities, but they can develop differently. If they cannot take advantage of the opportunities, they can go back to their last position.”*

### ***Talented Employees – Preference to Train Internally***

The interview data from the owner-manager illuminated that some managers did not like to train outside the organisation. The Product-Owner felt that:



*“I assign them to train outside; I push them to go, but I am surprised that they sometimes do not like to attend, in spite of the fact that the cost is 10,000 to 20,000 Baht (200-400 pounds Sterling). I have tried to force them to go.”*

### ***Understanding the Unlocking of People Potential***

In a traditional hierarchy, supervisors and managers have a tendency to command and order their subordinates in their work, feeling that, in the chain of command, they need to report up to their manager. However, the concept of coaching generally moves beyond command. Indeed, coaching concerns the unlocking of an individual's potential, so that performance is maximised (Whitmore, 2009). Within ProductSME the owner-manager conveyed that certain managers had a tendency to order their subordinates, more than coaching them to motivate themselves. An important issue was that some managers did not fully understand how to coach, which the Product-Owner clarified as one of the coaching issues:

*“The managers or supervisors do not understand the method used to change the subordinates' way of using their thinking at work; they have a tendency to order people and then when the subordinates work outside the box, they are not okay. It is a coaching problem. The subordinates follow instructions because of fears and they do not dare to express their ideas. Thus, it is important to change from commanding, to being open-minded and listening to their suggestions.”*

With reference to mentoring, data from non-participant observations supported the interviews and showed that the participants used coaching and mentoring interchangeably. One possible cause is that the mentoring programme had been in continuous operation for three years, whilst coaching did not have a formal framework. Coaching evolved more spontaneously, through informal on-the-job training that used managers as coaches. It was clear that when the

participants were asked about coaching, both coaches and coachees commented that coaching overlapped with mentoring. ProductC4 offered that:

*“A coach needs to be a mentor; mentors need to be a sister, a brother; this is my definition of coaching. When I have subordinates, I try to be their brother.”*

Another coach added:

*“Coaching is like mentoring. We need to look and learn in advance, before coaching them. This is the coaching concept.”*

Most participants reported that they had not been trained in coaching directly, although there were elements of coaching knowledge contained within the Landmark Forum training. Most of the Landmark Forum programme involved leadership development, with coaching being one of elements that unlocked the employees’ potential and helped them to resolve problems, through life coaching. However, the Landmark programme did not cover all concepts of coaching.

*“I attended the landmark forum, which has a part on life coaching, but I have never attended coaching training directly.”*

#### **5.4.4 Theme Four: Coaching Perspectives: Six Sub-themes**

Six sub-themes of coaching perspectives were identified for Theme Four.

##### ***Sub-theme One: Effective Coaching***

The perceived effectiveness of coaching practices employed within ProductSME was explored from both the employer’s and employees’ perspectives.

From the employer’s perspective, the perceived effectiveness of coaching was guided by earlier negative experiences with external coaches, who referred to themselves as consultants. There were also indications that the role of a

consultant and that of a coach might overlap, although the first was much less sustainable. The Product-Owner shared the following:

*“I used consultants a lot and I feel it was a waste of money. I hired the consultants to coach in many aspects, such as accounting, production and process. For example, I used to hire a production consultant, who has knowledge of life coaching, to coach me and about five managers: marketing, accounting, factory and production managers. He was an expert and highly academic; he has coaching jobs that can make money, many ten thousand baht per day. I hired him as a monthly consultant. He coached everything; I think it worked, but it is not sustainable.”*

An effective coach, from the employer’s perspective, was a manager operating as a coach and producing supportive on-the-job training for around eighty per cent of their training. The effectiveness of using managers as coaches was supplemented through other management support tools, such as the happy workplace initiative and mentoring. The owner-manager trained individuals at management level, with the system being that these managers then cascaded their skills and knowledge to lower organisational level. Thus, a coach that could coach the next person and achieve positive results was considered effective coaching, in the owner-manager’s view. In addition to perceiving coaches as part of the effectiveness process, the owner-manager cited the role the supervisors play and emphasised that:

*“I trained and built the supervisor level, and deployed it in the lower level.”*

From the employee’s perspective effective coaching referred to placing a focus on outcomes, rather than processes. Indeed, all of the participants asserted that a coaching session was considered successful only when coachees

achieved the desired results and their coaches trusted them to work independently.

*“My subordinates can do every job instead of me.”  
(ProductCe1)*

*“I evaluate my subordinates from their results.” (ProductC1)*

*“I teach her and then she does more.” (ProductCe3)*

*“My boss looks at my results.” (ProductCe2)*

*“Sales beyond goal”. (ProductC4)*

Other perceived measures for effective coaching that were identified are presented in Table 5.10, which includes the ability to coach the next person, work together, a low amount of errors and believing.

**Table 5.10 Effectiveness of Coaching**

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<b>Effectiveness of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Goals achieved and productivity increased</li><li>• Being able to coach the next person</li><li>• Doing the work together</li><li>• Coaching to work in practice</li><li>• The least amount of errors or mistakes</li><li>• Believing</li></ul>

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In summary, whilst consultants may have general and specific skills appropriate to ProductSME and had been used in the past, the organisation felt that the approach was not sustainable. Thus, the manager as coach emerged as the most effective form of coaching in ProductSME. The employees' were equally happy with their managers as coaches, undertaking

on-the-job training, although they tended to take a more results-orientated view of effectiveness.

### ***Sub-theme Two: Characteristics of a 'Good' Coach***

Drawing on all of the participant data, sixteen characteristics of a good coach were identified (Table 5.11), which included having effective coaching technique. Many of the participants also identified characteristics of open-mindedness, faith and understanding, along with being friendly and patient, as being important.

**Table 5.11 Characteristics of a 'good' coach**

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<b>Characteristics of 'Good' Coaches</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having an effective coaching technique</li><li>• Open-minded and ready to listen to others' opinions</li><li>• Having faith and open to good opportunities</li><li>• Understanding the coachees</li><li>• Being friendly to their coachees</li><li>• Positive thinking and attitude</li><li>• Having sufficient knowledge and expertise</li><li>• Acting as a role model</li><li>• Being a patient and calm person</li><li>• Being a good person, with strong characteristics</li><li>• Provides feedback following the results of coaching</li><li>• Good mentor</li><li>• Coach from heart</li><li>• Using reason and being observant</li><li>• Having the ability to be a good example</li><li>• Having leadership</li></ul>

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The following direct quotations represent what was perceived as good characteristics of a coach for ProductSME.

*“Positive thinking, cheering up others, open-minded, faith and employee motivation are the important things for a good coach.” (Product-Owner)*

*“Having different techniques for different people; understanding, positive thinking and being open-minded, make a good coach.” (ProcdutC1)*

*“The first thing is that I need to know what I teach. Having techniques for each person, using reason to teach and following the results of the work.” (ProcdutCe1)*

*“A good coach has a good personality, is observant and very friendly. They will do anything that makes the coachee want to approach and learn; these things can build a good relationship and trust with each other.” (ProcdutC2)*

*“A good coach is a versatile person; maybe they do not need to know everything, but they need to have knowledge in their own department. A good coach needs to know and understand before teaching and transferring to others, and they need to know teaching methods. I focus on the work and organisational attitude.” (ProcdutC3)*

*“A good coach should be friendly; teach by being open, open to thinking, saying and asking; this makes a friendly atmosphere.” (ProcdutCe2)*

*“The good coach needs to understand the coachee, depending on who you are with; the coach needs to adapt the method for each person.” (ProcdutCe4)*

As outlined in sub-theme four, concerning the issues associated with coaching, in ProductSME the term was often used interchangeably with mentoring. In the current sub-theme, it was expressed that one of the good characteristics of a coach is operating effectively as a mentor. Some of the participants said that:

*“A good coach is like a good mentor as well” (ProcdutC2).*

*“A coach needs to be a mentor.” (ProcdutCe4)*

Here it is apparent that not only did the concepts coaching and mentoring overlap, but the concepts had a similar meaning for some participants. Regardless of any overlap, the perception was that a good coach should also be an effective mentor.

### ***Sub-theme Three: Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coachee***

Coaching perspectives of a good coachee comprise six characteristics, which include the personal aspects of being open-mindedness and polite. All of the desired characteristics of coachees are shown in Table 5.12.

**Table 5.12 Characteristics of a ‘good’ coachee**

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<b>Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coachee</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being open-minded and paying attention</li><li>• Having positive interaction and daring to ask questions</li><li>• Being alert and enthusiastic</li><li>• Positive thinking</li><li>• Politeness</li><li>• Taking notes during sessions</li></ul>

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The identified points for good coachees are illustrated below in a selection of direct quotations from the participants:

*“There are many good coachees, but some people act like a glass full of water; they do not want to learn new things. In my opinion, the employees who have a chance to be promoted are not geniuses, but they are ready to learn all the time.” (Product-Owner)*

*“Good coachees want to learn and grow in their career path and they have willpower.” (ProcdctC1)*

*“Listening is important for a good coachee; I tell all of my direct subordinates that I do not know what you face or where your genius is from. But when you work here, you begin with zero and you should open your mind to new things and you can take your own experience and adapt it in your work.” (ProcdutCe1)*

*“The good coachees are not harsh; they are humble and polite, ready to do work and have open minds to new practice.” (ProcdutC2)*

*“I think using the brain to remember means that the information does not stay long, you need to take notes. In my case, when my manager teaches me, I take notes. It helps me to remember. I take notes and when I remember, I can teach others.” (ProcdutC3)*

#### **Sub-theme Four: Benefits of Coaching**

Six benefits of coaching were identified within sub-theme four. All of the participants agreed that after they were coached, their learning enabled them to share the workload with their coaches. Other areas arose, such as improved mutual understanding, development of leadership and reducing turnover (Table.5.13).

**Table 5.13 Benefits of Coaching**

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<b>Benefits of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning quickly, sharing of manager’s workload, increased productivity</li><li>• Being able to coach others successively</li><li>• Improve mutual understandings between manager and employees</li><li>• Leadership development</li><li>• Reduced turnover rate</li><li>• Being reliable to work</li></ul>

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In support of the points above, the direct quotations below provide a flavour of how coaching benefits were perceived in ProductSME:

*“I think I have less work to do. Now, I work at the factory two man-days per month; I work with the sales department at the city office four man-days per month and when compared with the period of building the factory, the first seven years, I worked at the factory five man-days per week, and then I needed to sell outside, so I was very tired. After I used a better management method, especially in the last two years, I rarely work and the company can survive. I have a duty to sign the cheques and I think my success is building people and systems together; it helps to reduce the employee turnover rate.” (Product-Owner)*

*“I learn from the owner-manager; I learnt many things from him; he is disciplined. He is a role model who teaches me all kinds of things. I receive these things from him and then I can teach my subordinates. Also it helps to build a mutual understanding, like a sibling.” (ProcdutC4)*

*“I think that they can work smoothly, and have no problems with the organisation. The things I have taught them mean that they can work instead of me.” (ProcdutC1)*

### **Sub-theme Five: Negative Effects of Coaching**

Most of the participants agreed that there were no significant negative effects of coaching. However, minor negatives emerged in the eyes of some participants, such as resistance or negative attitudes towards the process.

**Table 5.14 Negative Effects of Coaching**

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<b>Negative Effects of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No significant negative effects of coaching</li><li>• Making small mistakes</li><li>• Resistant in the beginning to working</li><li>• Boring and they do not want to do it</li><li>• Negative attitude from new employees</li></ul>

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The selection of direct quotations presented below, is included so as to provide examples of the negatives views associated with coaching:

*“They make a mistake, but I can accept it. After I coach them, they go back to think and do their work, although sometimes they make a mistake. I used to attend a training class where the speaker said that if you still control every authority, you are tired for 24 hours; you need to let other people do some tasks and give them the authority to do them. If the mistake does not damage the company, I can accept it. I give them some authority; it is one type of coaching, to give authority to them and then I listen to their opinions. I know that it has the risk of them making a mistake, but it does not make trouble for the company.” (Product-Owner)*

*“On the negative side, there is a resistance in the first period of working, so I tell them the goals and the potential growth in their career path. I tell them what I want and listen to what they want. I think this group of people (talent) is different from other groups, which are more difficult to teach. We talk together, like talking between siblings.” (ProcdutC1)*

*“A negative side may occur if you give employees a lot of tasks to do; it is more than their potential, especially if the work is continuous and takes a long time, they become bored and discouraged.” (ProcdutC2)*

*“If a coach has a negative attitude towards the company, it is then transferred to the coachee. Suppose you are a coach who has a negative organisational attitude to teaching others, it is like the long chain, which sometimes can make trouble for the company as well.” (ProcdutCe4)*

### **Sub-theme Six: Recommendations for Coaching**

On invitation, participants put forward recommendations for coaching practices in their organisation, with items such as a greater sharing of ideas, helping each other more and having a good mentor for new employees, being raised.

The full list is presented in Table 5.15.

**Table 5.15 Suggestion for Coaching**

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<b>Suggestions for Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing ideas and helping each other</li><li>• Having a good mentor for new employees</li><li>• Employee training by the managers</li><li>• Building the talent to build the organisation</li><li>• Having voice on the line</li><li>• Telling the story to HRD</li><li>• Setting up a good HRD system</li><li>• Building a good organisational culture</li></ul>

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The following direct quotations further explore examples of positive suggestions for coaching:

*“I want everyone in the department to help each other, I do not want to act as one.” (ProcdutCe3)*

*“If there is a mentor, it is good and it is better than in the past. In the mentoring programme, the new employees know who they can ask when they have a problem, sometimes the newcomers do not dare to ask me and they choose to ask the mentor instead.” (ProcdutC3)*

*“We suggested that HRD have monthly or bimonthly training for employees, to teach them about life skills. The owner-manager and each manager will be invited as speakers, to teach employees about lifestyle, family and expenses. Also, we have a policy about the ‘voice on the line’ in the morning, for around five minutes, to teach the daily workers.” (ProcdutC1)*

*“In my opinion, we can coach and build the talent by not using the old style of centralisation, but using decentralisation to build the people to work, instead of us.” (Product-owner)*

## **Summary – Case-study Two: ProductSME**

In summary, this case study, which represents the manufacturing-production sector of SMEs in Thailand, had textiles as its niche market. In addition to

manufacturing the goods, the complete progress of production was carried out on-site, where a research and development centre has been established to further the process. The owner-manager strongly believed that the human resources were vital to organisational success and therefore allocated valuable resources to support of HRD initiatives, including coaching and training. Four key findings emerged, with the perception of talent, the first, referring specifically to those who were developed to a level where they could act as a substitute for the owner-manager.

The second area, concerning employee development, identified six key methods that were used to develop employees, which included mentoring, leadership development, creating a happy workplace and a focus on exit-interviews; all of which were used to develop the organisation. Coaching practices comprised the third area, with informal coaching by managers, using on-the-job training, was reported as the main method. The nature of informal coaching was also reported to be flexible and friendly, and involved informal activities with the manager as coachees. In the final area of coaching perspective, the employer's perception of an effective coach referred to the manager as a coach, whilst the results-oriented nature of the process was identified by the employees, who focused on outcomes, rather than processes.

Once more, the owner-manager emerged as a significant factor in determining the direction of activities. For example, he introduced the concept of mentoring, which he had previously experienced in his Christian church and HRD activities such as leadership development, organisation awareness and the

happy workplace project. In drawing to a close the findings for Case-study Two, the next chapter explores the final case study: ServiceSME.

## **CHAPTER 6: CASE-STUDY THREE – Service SME**

### **Context Setting, Findings and Initial Interpretations**

#### **Introduction**

The last of the three case-study organisations, which represented the Thai service sector, is presented in this chapter. This case study was identified as critical, because, like the previous two case studies, it had received the SME National Award in 2012. The pseudonym “ServiceSME” was assigned to represent this organisation and, following a background introduction, four key areas of findings are presented, using a similar format to the previous case studies.

#### **6.1 Organisation Background**

ServiceSME was a service organisation founded in 1985 by Ex-IBM engineers. The organisation they established has expanded into other areas, although at the time of the current study the core business was IT services. The IT services offered included consulting, business, managed, maintenance, relocation services and rental services, and thus, claimed to offer a full lifecycle IT services. ServiceSME had a strong leadership team, comprising three levels of management: the board of directors, management directors and team managers. The employees were also perceived to be part and parcel of the organisation’s strength and will be explored in this chapter.

## 6.2 Participants' Background

There were nine key participants for ServiceSME, which is the same number drawn from TradingSME and ProductSME: one owner-manager, four managers who were coaches, and four employees who were perceived as talented employees. Indeed, the direct managers identified all participants as talented employees. Pseudonyms represent the participants' names, that is, 'Service-Owner', 'ServiceC1', C2, C3, C4 and 'ServiceCe1', Ce2, Ce3, Ce4, respectively (as previously, coaches are represented by the letter C, and coaches by the letters Ce. Numbers refer to each of the coaches and coachees). For reader convenience, the settings follow a similar pattern to those used with TradingSME and ProductSME. The background of the participants is summarised in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1 Summary of demographic profile of participants**

Name	Position	Gender	Age	Work Experience in 'ServiceSME' (years)	Religion
1. Service-Owner	The Owner-Manager, Managing Director (MD)	Male	51	17	Buddhism
<b><u>Coaches</u></b>					
2. ServiceC1	Senior Quality Manager	Female	39	5	Buddhism
3. ServiceC2	HR Manager	Female	39	17	Buddhism
4. ServiceC3	Financial manager	Female	39	4	Buddhism
5. ServiceC4	MD Assistance	Male	32	7	Buddhism

<b><u>Coachees</u></b>					
6. ServiceCe1	Senior Quality Officer	Male	35	2	Buddhism
7. ServiceCe2	Senior HRD Executive	Female	39	9	Buddhism
8. ServiceCe3	Finance Officer	Female	35	3	Buddhism
9. ServiceCe4	Senior Business Analyst	Male	29	5	Buddhism

Source: Author's Construct

All participants followed the Buddhist faith, gender was distributed roughly evenly and there were a range of ages. With respect to service, it can be seen that ServiceC2 had worked at ServiceSME as long as the Managing Director.

### **6.3 SME National Award Result**

ServiceSME received the 5<sup>th</sup> SMEs National Award in 2012, earning 806 points. Confidential feedback was provided in an OSMEP report (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion), however, it is acknowledged here that, in the interest of openness and furthering education, the owner-manager agreed that certain details could be disclosed in the current study. It was an important criterion of case-study selection that an organisation was recipient of Thai's SMEs National Award, with the details being presented below in Table 6.2.



**Table 6.2 ‘ServiceSMEs’ SME National Award Results (2012)**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Full Score</b>	<b>Evaluated Results</b>
Leadership	120	97
Strategic Planning	120	104
Customer and Market Focus	120	98
Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management	100	72
<b>Human Resource Focus</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>113</b>
Process Management	160	122
Business Results	240	200
Total	1,000	806

Source: feedback report of SMEs National Award, 2012

## **6.4 Findings**

The findings of ServiceSME were classified and grouped under the same themes used for TradingSME and ProductSME.

### **6.4.1 Theme One: Perception of Talent in ServiceSME**

The first theme concerns what the employer’s and employees’ perceived as talent in ServiceSME.

The employers’ perspective identified six attributes that constituted top talent, beginning with a. an employee who has expertise, b. is hard-working, c. has a positive attitude, d. holds a winning attitude, e. possesses characteristics that match the organisational culture and f. is proficient in interpersonal skills. The Service-Owner felt that:

*“In my opinion they have expertise in their work; they have good expertise; they have to be hard-working and ready to work hard. The important thing is that they have a positive attitude towards the organisation, which is very important; I mean positive thinking and they have to be a winner type not a loser. ‘Winner’ means you are ready to see solutions in every problem, not see problems in every solution. However, you are a loser, for example, when someone suggests a solution to you and then you reject it; you have many excuses. If you have a person like this, they are not considered talent. I cut out the first because they are not suitable to build the organisation with; they always see problems. I want employees who always see opportunities, even though they are in hard times. I feel that they are talent.”*

The Service-Owner also supported the organisational match:

*“The other important thing is that their culture matches with the organisation. My organisation has team work; we respect working together. If you are a genius, but you cannot work with others, I have found that this causes problems with building the organisation and finally, they are unable to work and resign. So they have to match with the organisation and they need to be team workers, which is the interpersonal skill of working with other employees.”*

Surprisingly, the key finding of this theme from the employer’s perspective is that the number of talented employees was less than ten per cent. In addition, the owner-manager suggested that the organisation needed to recruit talented people, as they could make a difficult task seem easy, but they needed to be placed in an appropriate organisational position.

*“In my standard, talent are less than ten per cent; I may have high expectations and I see that my talent is about five per cent.”*

From the interviews it was apparent that talented employees, at least in the eyes of the owner-manager, form a small group within the organisation. However, he still aimed to develop a new generation of ‘talent’ through internal training programmes, which are explored in the next section.

For employees, talent was identified as a someone who performed well, had potential and creativity and who possessed a positive attitude. The person should be able to stand in and understand the work of their manager. All attributes of talent, as perceived by employees, are presented below.

**Table 6.3 Attributes of talent in ServiceSME**

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**Attributes of Talent – employees’ perspective**

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- Being able to develop themselves and having a desire to learn new things
  - High performance and potential
  - Having creativity – being able to think outside the box
  - Positive attitude and thinking
  - Interpersonal skills to work with others
  - Expertise in their work and in various other tasks
  - Devoted to the organisation and hard working
  - Being relied on to work by themselves
  - Do a good job and exceed expectations: results
  - Being alert
- 

The following direct quotations represent the attributes of talent, as perceived by the employees.

*“Talent can work more than I expect of them and I order them; they always think about developing themselves; they can be my representatives in the future. They can think instead of me and they are my successors.” (ServiceC1)*

*“Talent has to perform well and have good potential, which is dominant like a star and they also have a positive attitude.” (ServiceC2)*

*“Talent are assertive and they think outside the box. Moreover, they have high potential in many aspects, such as their ability to work and their communication skills.” (ServiceC3)*

*“Talent have their own thinking and are hard working. Now, I do not have to do many aspects of my work, because talented employees can do them instead of me and they perform beyond my expectations.” (ServiceC4)*

*“Talent does not have to be on-hundred per cent perfect, but they need to have good interpersonal skills.” (ServiceCe1)*

*“Talent should have good expertise and performance within the company’s competencies; be ready to develop themselves.” (ServiceCe2)*

*“Talented employees have creativity and they should like to learn.” (ServiceCe3)*

*“Talent like to learn all the time, both from the company’s training view and the outside world, such as discussing and sharing ideas with other employees, and reading from the internet.” (ServiceCe4)*

One coach provided a further example of characteristics associated with talent, within ServiceSME.

*“Let me show one example of my talent. They alert me that they need direction and then they think and do more than I expect; they suggest many actions and do a lot of homework. They are my talent, but the person who is not talented will wait for me to do more than they do by themselves. Talent has to have a positive attitude, which is the first important thing and they need to be ready to work hard. We want people to make it happen, not wait for it to happen. They have a good attitude, good skills from their development and good performance – these three things added together are talent.” (ServiceC4)*

There exists, within ServiceSME, a general perception of what talents is, for example coaches of ServiceSME acknowledged that, in their direct managers’ view, they were talented employees, although they had not been informed of this formally. Their talent status was derived informally, from being selected to represent their departments, and to assist in the development of

the talent within the organisation. ServiceSME did not have a formal system of talent management, with talent being developed informally, through internal and external training programmes. For example, managers evaluated employee performance and selected the most effective employee to either represent the department, or attend training classes for talent. ServiceCe3 gave her opinion on this issue:

*“My manager did not tell me directly that I am a talent, but in the special training programme I am the representative who attends with other employees from other departments. The people are chosen for their good performance and potential; by evaluating employee performance over the past three years.”*

Thus, it was interesting to see how ServiceSME developed talented employees, with this area being explored in the next theme.

#### **6.4.2 Theme Two: Human Resource Development (HRD)**

Once again it was apparent that the owner-manager was a key factor in the success of employee development, especially for those talented employees who were trained at a different level than the general employees. The Service-Owner's role in Human Resource Development (HRD) was identified as a factor in the organisation's ability to build and sustain a competitive advantage. In the owner-manager's eyes, HRD was perceived as an investment, not a cost. Indeed, he expressed a concern that the lack of employee training in Thai SMEs was damaging, with many organisations not realising the importance of the human resource. He strongly believed that SME should invest in people, as they were the core of their success:

*“In my opinion, Thai SMEs lack employee training and they do not realise the importance of employees; they look at HRD as an expense, so they rarely invest in HR. I think we should look*

*at HRD as an investment; it means that it can grow in the future. When the companies are small, they only think about how to survive, but for me, we can really survive through building the high potential of the employees; we have to be prepared to invest money in people.”*

ServiceC4, who is the owner-manager’s right-hand man, supported this view:

*“This company is my good school; I am the one person who was developed by this company. Human Resource is the most important aspect to understand, especially HR in the Thai culture. We cannot copy the Western style which is the company pays one hundred and the employees repay one hundred. In the Eastern culture we work and talk with our hearts – we pay ten, and they repay one hundred. Thus, employee development should blend the good things from the West and we have to understand the Eastern culture. The Service-Owner told me that on his first day of work he brought many textbooks from abroad to learn from and to teach the employees; their answer was ‘yes’ and ‘good’, but they did not understand enough to produce the output. For example, we force them to drink a lot of milk which is the Western style and we have tried to suggest to them that milk is a healthy drink, but they vomit because they are used to eating basil fried rice (Thai traditional food). This means that we get the guideline or framework from the West, but it is important to use the skills of the manager; we should take about twenty to thirty per cent from the Western framework and then we have to learn by ourselves about the other seventy per cent, and how to blend the Western framework and how to make them understand.”*

The Service-Owner argued that the human resource was highly important and fifteen years ago he established a HR department, followed by a HRD department five years later. At the time of the study, HRD was one of the main departments within ServiceSME. Within the HRM and HRD functions three HR positions existed: HR manager, senior HRD executive and HRD executive.

These HR appointments confirm the Service-Owner’s commitment to his employees, with him organising numerous HRD activities. Employee development activities comprised four key areas: on-the-job training, internal

training, self-learning and external training. The owner-manager explained that:

*“I divide employee development into four aspects: First, internal training, around thirty per cent of which is human development. Second, self-learning, because we are in the technology sector, so we have to read and develop, you cannot wait for another person to train you, but you have to learn by yourself (thirty per cent). Third, on-the-job training, you have to have hands-on for the new task, you have to try to do it; and finally, external training from the outside (ten per cent). The employees have to be developed in all four aspects.”*

The HR policy of ServiceSME flows from a higher level (the owner-manager) to a lower level, with managers converting the policy into practice for all employees, especially developing talented employees as coaches. The primary HRD activities for ServiceSME are presented in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4 Human Resource Development – ServiceSME**

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### Human Resource Development

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- Training
    - On-the-Job Training (OJT) through OJT plan for employees
    - Off-the-Job Training through internal and external activity:
      - ❖ Standard class
      - ❖ Knowledge sharing
      - ❖ Training centre
      - ❖ Talent and leadership development
  - Self- learning and learning from experienced people
  - Mentoring
  - Happy workplace
  - Company clubs
  - Company journal
-

### ***Training in ServiceSME:***

The main method for developing ServiceSME employees referred to on-the-job training. The training of employees took place after orientation, which was given by the HR department, when the direct manager outlined what the new employee needed to know. Different types of employee training programmes existed in ServiceSME, with these being dependent on the employee's positions. Some training programmes were specifically designed for talented employees, for example, the English programme was implemented to develop talent, with talented representatives being selected from each department, following the judgement of their managers. In addition, employees had to pass an English test before attending. The organisation also had a project to develop future leaders, with selected talented employees being trained as future leaders within the organisation.

The interview and documentary data evidenced that ServiceSME operated an effective system that maintained employee training on a consistent level. A further example of commitment to HRD is that the organisation has designed numerous training documents and established projects that support employee training and development. Employees were encouraged to follow the organisation's HRD plan, wherein goals were set for each training project. There were three ways in which the training system in this organisation was maintained.

First, this organisation, led by the owner-manager, was ready to invest in employees through the proper allocation of training and development budgets



and resources. For example, the organisation provided annual training budgets for all employees, with employees having the opportunity to use their budget to attend training, both internal and external. Second, HR documents were designed in support of the training system, with three documents being presented in the findings. First is the job profile, which each employee had and which contained details that referred to each employee's position. The job profile comprised six main parts, however, of interest to the current study is the 'required training' in the Job Specification section and the 'job competencies'. The Individual Development plan (IDP) was associated with job competencies. Numerous competencies were required for each position; however, four were selected for each person to develop in a year. For example, twenty-five competencies were cited in the Quality Officer's Job Profile, with the manager and Quality Officer deciding which four competencies were to be developed in 2017. The competencies were assessed at the year-end performance appraisal. In the following year, another four competencies were selected, with the progress being recorded on an individual's IDP, which provided a record of development methods and achievements.

Following training completion, the third document, the On-the-Job Training (OJT) form was completed. Thus, each employee knew in advance what the organisation required of them, with their development and training requirement being laid out in their IDP and OJT plan. The annual performance review evaluated progress and impacted on salary increases, promotion and bonuses, which provided employees with incentives. ServiceC1 added:

*“The HR department has set an IDP for each person. All employees have their own IDP, which they monitor by themselves to make sure that they can complete the competencies this year. They have to follow up all of the competencies, because it affects their performance appraisal result at the end of the year.”*

Finally, although the organisation was classified as an SME, it has endeavoured to establish an effective training system, with many activities being created to support employee learning. The trainings initiatives can be divided into the two sub-themes that relate to internal on-the-job training and the off-the-job provision.

### ***On-the-Job Training***

An OJT plan was provided for each employee, dovetailing into their overarching Job Profile. Thus, each employee had their own training requirement and understood the training they would receive for that year. All required trainings needed to be completed. For example, new employees were evaluated after a 90-day probation period by their manager to determine whether they had passed or not. The OJT plan was also used as the sole criterion for the performance appraisal of all employees. Initially, once a training element task was successfully undertaken, employees completed the details on the OJT form, which acted as their record. ServiceC1 explained about OJT:

*“We have an OJT plan that uses an e-document system, to see that training is completed within the schedule.”*

ServiceC2 added:

*“They have to fill in the OJT form because after they have learnt something, we then consider where they can work in a real situation.”*

### ***Off-the-Job Training***

Training was valued and set for all employees, so that they could develop their competencies in line with the organisation's goals. Each employee's target competencies were set by the manager and their subordinate, with the training having to be completed within the prescribed period. In providing a clear goal for training, there were a number of training projects available, both internal and external, that assisted them in achieving these.

***Standard class:*** ServiceSME offered standard classes that were designed according to the different positions an employee could hold. For example, a standard class within the Technical Service (TS) referred to 'core business' and it was compulsory for all employees in the TS department to attend this class. The HR department had overall responsibility for managing each training programme.

***Knowledge sharing:*** ServiceSME have designed their own Knowledge Management website, which, in conjunction with in-house training, provided off-the-job support for employees' learning. The initiative encouraged knowledge sharing; indeed, after an employee attended an external training course, they were required to share their training experiences, their 'training story', to other employees, within one month of completion. The sharing could be completed through in-house training sessions, or via the Knowledge Management web, depending on the training undertaken, with a requirement being to inform the HR department what sharing process would be used. This sharing provided a channel for knowledge to be disseminated within the

organisation and it was used to both inform and inspire other employees to develop their learning further. Training handouts were also used, and could be equally shared on the Knowledge Management web. The owner-manager spoke about this issue:

*“We built standard classes and we have Individual development plans (IDP) for each person per year. All of the employees know what training they need to complete their IDP. We have an evaluation and training system to assess how, after you are trained, you can re-train others.”*

**Training centre:** ServiceSME was aiming to become a successful training centre, wherein each employee would be supplied with a detailed training road map. The training centre concept was designed in parallel with that which exists in Thai schools and it comprised a basic course that was founded on the organisation’s core competencies and core values. It was mandatory for all employees. Following on, there were functional courses that were based on specific functional competencies, which varied according to departments and individual positions. This idea arose from the owner-manager, who shared the following:

*“I look at an international company that has an effective training system; they create employees who are very happy and proud to be a member of staff. These things come from the organisational culture; they have training that makes the employees proud about what they do”.*

Although, at the time of the current study, the training centre was not fully established, ServiceSME was developing continuously, to move towards an effective training centre in the future.

**Talent and leadership development:** In the owner-manager’s view, talent was also perceived as the next generation, that is, those who would build

and further contribute to the organisation. For these 'special' people the Owner-Manager designed a Management School, wherein courses were designed and delivered by him. The Management School, which targeted selected managers, incorporated development activities such as brainstorming and team tasks that built commitment. As an example, the first Management School class was a two-day affair, conducted away from the workplace. The Service-Owner added:

*"I focus on the management level. I have a class of management school people. I teach them about important theories, such as time and people management, which are the key to success, and which managers should know. I teach them and then they need to apply it in their work."*

This project was in its early stages, with only one class having been completed at the time of the current study. However, it was visionary and the owner-manager aimed to develop this further. In the meantime, talented employees were designated to undertake project assignments that were based on their position and which invariably needed team collaboration and input to complete. This involvement aimed to foster interaction and receive ideas from subordinates, who actually worked on the line.

### ***Self-Directed Learning and Drawing from Experienced People***

An important learning process within ServiceSME related to self-directed learning and the learning gained from an experienced person. The organisation provided a variety of resources, including time, to support the notion of self-directed learning. The approach was considered particularly relevant to the information technology world, because knowledge and systems need to be continually refined and updated. However, the organisation

believed that it was beneficial to create an environment where employees were willingly to seek knowledge themselves, instead of being forced to learn, which was echoed by one of the coachees:

*“I learn by myself, such as from the internet and walking and talking with senior staff. I like this method because I can receive direct experience; I learn by myself for thirty-five per cent; training from outside is fifteen per cent and learning from other people is fifty per cent. This is the highest, because I learn from the manager and sometimes I ask my manager to suggest someone to teach me relevant tasks that I need to know. Each employee has a different experience. For example, when you talk with a sales person who has an experience with a customer to share, then you talk with an engineer, he has a different experience, so when I talk with them, it makes me understand the business and get the detail in another style. I choose someone to talk with and I gain knowledge in this way.”*  
(ServiceCe4)

ServiceCe4 was a Senior Business Analyst who needed to understand the business as a whole. Most duties were learnt from his manager, along with task development from his colleagues. The source of knowledge was drawn from both his own department and others in the organisation, whereby he recognised that he needed to approach those who were most knowledgeable, regardless of their location within the organisation.

Support for self-directed learning was equally found in managers, with it being alluded to that learning from experienced people was important learning source.

*“I learn by myself by reading the working processes of each department, through e-documents, which detail the process of working and how to run each working process; I learnt to access the e-documents that the company provides, to make it easy to learn. Also, I listen to the goals, policy and plans from my MD, to apply these in my work. I learn from my experience and then I apply that to the company system.”* (ServiceC3)

Despite organisational aspiration, it is unlikely that a self-learning approach will succeed if the idea is not supported fully by the organisation. At this point, it is observed that the ethos in ServiceSME was to provide a friendly environment, with this being at the heart of workplace learning. Efforts were made to provide the resources necessary to build comfortable relationships, with the aim being to create an 'at home' living environment, where question could be asked and ideas discussed with all people, regardless of their department. Continuing the family analogy, the aim was to work together like siblings, with knowledge being easily communicated and shared between colleagues. The office space was equally designed to facilitate open communication and knowledge sharing, with each of the floors having an open shared design and a relaxation area. The owner-manager's flexible policy was extended beyond time, with employees not having to clock in or out to work, rather he was more interested in results than in checking time. Finally, the owner-manager operated an open-door policy, whereby he was available, other than essential commitments, to speak with any employee throughout the day; Monday to Friday.

Within ServiceSME, self-learning was a voluntary activity. However, learning from experienced people cannot occur if employees do not have the desire to want to learn. The organisation did, however, provide the motivation and resources to learn, for example through the provision of e-documents, the Knowledge Management web, a library and the organisation's journal. One of the most important learning methods for the organisation was the mentoring programme for new employees, who learnt from experienced senior employees. Mentors were able to provide guidance on work and personal life

issues, and support individuals, which was particularly important in the early months of employment.

### ***Mentoring***

Formal mentoring was introduced three years ago to further add to the developmental process for ServiceSME employees. The project, which was outlined in formal organisation documents, had two parts; the mentoring project and the mentoring review. The mentoring project documentation provided the rationale for the project, its objectives and the benefits to mentors and mentees. Also outlined were the qualifications held by mentors and their role and responsibilities. The documentation provided guidelines for practice, with abstracts from the mentor project document being presented below:

<b>ServiceSME</b>	<b><u>Mentoring Project</u></b>
<b>Qualifications for being a mentor in ServiceSME</b>	
1. An employee is required to be at least senior level, have a minimum of three years' experience in ServiceSME and have achieved a good level on their performance review.	
2. Positive attitude, well-behaved and who can act as a role model for new employees (evaluated through the company's core competencies).	
3. Have emotional intelligence, willingness, be service-minded and be strong in human relationships.	
4. Be the star of their team.	



### **The role of the mentor**

1. Provide a warm welcome to and build good relationships with new employees from their first day of working.
2. Being a good representative, in providing a good role model for new employees.
3. Transfer company information, history, society group, company's club and the adaption of the organisation's culture.
4. Introduce the company's rules and tools, such as standard process, KPIs, PMP, and KM web.
5. Provide information about probation review and new employee development with manager and HR department.

### **The scope of mentors' responsibilities**

1. One mentor should take care of no more than two mentees per year
2. Time to take care of a mentee is at least one year

In addition to ServiceSME's formal documents, additional evidence was gathered from the interviews, with information being presented that was not contained in the documentation. For example, in line with normal mentoring practice, an important qualification referred to the mentor not being the mentees direct line manager and also being drawn from a different department. Such an approach helped mentees to learn about wider organisational culture and workings of other departments. To ensure effective mentoring, once mentors achieved the minimum criteria, the organisation's management committee made a formal appointment and announced this in the organisation's journal. Mentoring training followed, which was conducted by an external expert speaker, with this being one of the few occasions where external training sources were used. However, the programme was supplemented with experienced mentors who were at a senior level, and who

had extensive experiences of mentoring in ServiceSME, so that organisational best practice was passed on. Interestingly, mentors received 2,000 baht (40 pounds Stirling) as a welcome gift for taking care of new mentees, which could be used to provide a bonding meal for the mentee and mentor.

When the one-year mentoring process was complete, mentees evaluated their mentors, with the outcomes being passed to the HRD department which ranked the mentors by results and provided a mentor award. The winning mentor was required to share his or her mentoring experience in a web-based article or the organisation's journal, which provided a wider sharing of organisational knowledge. It was explained that all mentors received a bonus, which carried around five per cent weight in their Performance Management Plan (PMP), which was produced after the performance appraisal review. Whilst mentoring in ServiceSME was tied to remuneration, perceiving that it motivated employees to perform better, this was not a usual practice in Western organisations.

The formalised system of mentoring at ServiceSME was perceived as an effective source of learning that could help to develop new employees. The process engendered employees feeling warm towards the workplace, learning quickly and working effectively in the working world. It was the owner-manager's belief that HRD was important and thus, he supported many tools to enhance employee development and create a friendly workplace environment. ServiceCe3 supported that:

*"I am surprised about this new experience, which I have never met before. They are like a family organisation. I used to work*

*in other companies, where they used a manager and subordinate style, but in this company I can ask other employees all the time, like living sibling style.”*

### ***Happy Workplace***

Whilst the concept of a happy workplace was not raised directly during the interview process, the participant observation process within ServiceSME conveyed the ethos. In addition, the HRD executive allowed access to documentation about the happy workplace project, which expressed that the organisation was involved in a joint happy workplace project, supported by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (Thai Health). This 2010 initiative aimed to promote the employees' physical and mental health, channelling this through the Happy Eight scheme, discussed previously in Chapter Five. ServiceSME has applied the eight 'happy' concepts to the organisation and set the success in this project within the HR department's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Numerous happy workplace activities were in place, for example 'Happy Money', which relates to investments and money-saving tips, 'Happy Heart' and 'Happy Soul', which are attained through prayer and meditation on Buddhist Holy Day. Finally, yoga meditation helps throughout, as does the 'Happy Body' focus, built through exercise and sports day activities.

### ***Company Clubs***

ServiceSME provided club membership in the workplace, with employees being permitted to form voluntary groups. At the time of the current study the clubs formed by the employees included Football, Badminton, Golf, Photography, Music and Smart life. ServiceSME offered the space and finances, so that employees attend such clubs before or after work. The owner-

manager's thinking behind the clubs was to provide employees with a happy work environment, to build long-lasting relationship and help them to become part of the organisation's culture. ServiceCe1 made the following comment about the clubs:

*“This company has many things and I am surprised that this company has clubs, like life in a university. We live together like a sibling relationship.”*

Additional activities that were arranged by the Buddhist owner-manager, for all employees, included a staff party at New Year, Company Outings and the 'Make Merit' for the organisation, which is a traditional Buddhist ceremony that is held annually.

### ***Organisational Journal***

For a number of years, the organisational journal was published quarterly by the HR team, although recently, responsibility was given to the CRM division. The journal, which was a bi-annual publication, sought to inform ServiceSME's employees about the organisation's events and included items such as the Editor's note, MD talk, Money talk, Being professional, Easy English and other stories. The journal provided a means of sharing knowledge and news about the organisation, with ServiceSME providing the resources to ensure that all employees received a hard copy of the journal and had electronic access through an easy-to-read QR code.

This second theme of Human Resource Developments provided an overview of how ServiceSME employees were developed. It was apparent that the perception of talented led to different levels of development, although overall,

the organisation supported a range of employee development activities. Further, talented employees were perceived as a special group that needed to be developed more than others, which was achieved through specialist training programmes. The organisation was ready to invest additional resources into high-level talent, as they were perceived as essential to the organisation's future success. In the next theme, coaching practices will be explored as an essential tool for developing employees.

### **6.4.3 Theme Three: Coaching Practices: four sub-themes**

Four sub-themes were identified for Theme Three, which are now explored in greater detail.

#### ***Sub-theme One: Coaching Approaches***

ServiceSME adopted an informal approach to coaching, in that coaching sessions were not planned in advance. Indeed, coaching was thought to occur within a flexible and friendly situation, where coachees could ask questions and speak freely with their managers and colleagues. ServiceCe2 put forward that:

*“I think it is talk, more than direct coaching; when I have a problem or question, I can always ask my manager directly.”*

Despite the informal approach to meeting, formal meetings existed that were seen as one way of supporting coaching practices. The interview data suggested that regular team meetings took place every one or two weeks, depending on each department's policy. The primary purpose of these meeting was to assess the progress of work, but they also provided an opportunity to

discuss ideas in general, share knowledge and assist each other in solving problems. The aspect of communication and development was equally apparent in the informal coaching that was evidenced through on-the-job training. ServiceC4 stated that:

*“I have a meeting with my subordinates every Monday. For example, we talk about the competencies, which competencies are expected and how to complete them. We always talk together to achieve the goals. I also use on-the-job training to go outside with my subordinates – I take them to meet clients.”*

ServiceCe3 added:

*“Almost every week or every day, my manager will ask me what my obstacle or problem is; we talk to solve the problem together.”*

Within the informal coaching framework, the managers were the key coaches, with their main responsibilities being to support their subordinates' learning, motivate them to work effectively and meet expectations, with respect to goals and competencies. CoacheeCe1 felt:

*“I learn my job from the manager; sometimes, she does not answer directly, she asks me to think and find the answers by myself. And then we discuss it together and if I give the wrong answers, she will explain it to me.”*

Sometimes, managers assigned senior staff from the same or another department to coach their subordinates instead of them. ServiceC2, who was the HR Manager, explained about her previous experience of being coached:

*“I have worked here more than 10 years, before I became a manager. I was taught by my manager, along with the managers from other departments and I also learnt from the Owner-Manager.”*

One of the key features of coaching that was highlighted in the interviews referred to the friendly atmosphere that existed. As with Case-studies One and

Two, a friendly atmosphere was seen as a key support for coaching practices, with the close-knit relationships between employees and managers being perceived as creating an environment that supported working, whilst providing employee satisfaction.

**Reward system:** ServiceSME provided a generous system of reward, which included reasonable salary rates, salary increases and a bonus system. A flexible welfare provision also existed, which was dispensed according to individual needs. The system of reward payment, including salary, was considered fair, with ServiceC1 providing an illustrative comment:

*“The HR system regarding compensation is quite okay, so I want to work for the company. There are three things that can keep me working here: First, the high degree of freedom to work compared with big Thai companies that have many work processes, but here I can work in many jobs and have great flexibility. Second, my boss is a good back-up for me to work here; when I work, I feel tired but it is enjoyable. However, my boss has high expectations, but he has a high motivation as well. My company pays higher than other companies; and third, my colleagues are very lovely. My company has a low employee turnover rate – last year it was just one per cent.”*

**Flexible attendance:** The focus on time was minimal, with the owner-manager preferring employees to focus on achieving the expected results with their working. Thus, employees had no fixed time to work, although every employee knew their targets, which further emphasised the importance of the coaching activity.

**Clear performance appraisal:** The organisation’s performance appraisal was clear to all employees, who understood in advance how they were to be evaluated and what learning and skills they needed to achieve their targets. ServiceC1 shared the following:

*“I am most satisfied with the company’s system for performance appraisal when I compare it with the three companies I worked for before. This company has a strong system to evaluate performance using KPIs; we evaluate results; it is very clear and I can ask when I have a problem.”*

**Well-designed office layout.** The built environment provided a convenient workplace, with open offices and rest places being available. The flexible environment helped employees to work and cooperate with each other in a shared way. ServiceCe2 shared:

*“They designed the office layout to be flexible; we can sit everywhere for our work; all employees know each other. For example, some desks are not fixed and everyone can sit at them to work.”*

The systems and approaches outlined here resulted from the owner-manager’s policies and practices. Any effective ongoing operation of the system, however, required the personal drive and ongoing support from the principle role model. Here, the Service-Owner was perceived to have several positive characteristics, such as being cool-headed, friendly, understanding of others, sympathetic and open-minded. In addition, he listened to the subordinates’ voices. The owner-manager provided a friendly and effective atmosphere, as mentioned by some of the participants:

*“The Service-Owner is a very cool-headed guy; he understands and sympathises with other people, and he wants his employees to work happily.” (ServiceC3)*

*“My boss is very positive; working here I feel the most tired, but it is enjoyable work; when I am tired or having problems, my boss’s talk can change my thoughts to be positive.” (ServiceC1)*

*“This organisation takes care of each other, like sibling love, which is ok.” (ServiceCe1)*

The three coaching approaches in ServiceSME are summarised in Table 6.5.



**Table 6.5 Coaching Approaches**

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<b>Coaching Approaches</b>	
•	Informal Coaching
•	Internal Coaches
➤	Assigning the manager as coach
➤	Assigning seniors or colleagues as coach
•	Friendly Coaching

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***Sub-theme Two: Coaching Techniques***

Participants reported that talented employees were developed to a higher level and offered specialist programmes, which prepared them for future leadership positions in the organisation. From the owner-manager's and coaches' perspective, the treatment of talented employees as different was justified.

ServiceC3 felt that:

*"I coach talent and general employees differently. Talented employees know what their objective is, but general employees always do a routine job and I have to tell them directly what I want. Talented employees have more skills, so they want a different type of communication that makes them know the results I want and I can motivate them to achieve the company's goals."*

ServiceC2 added:

*"I coach talent and non-talent differently; we have a standard class for all employees, but we have a special course to prepare talented employees to be future leaders."*

ServiceC1 put forward that:

*"Talent are different because they cannot receive teaching unequally. I take a long time to teach or supervise employees who are not talent and I need to check every job. However, for talented employees, I trust them; I just tell them a little bit and then talent can expand their ideas, they will develop in their own style."*

Also, ServiceC4 observed:

*“One of my talented employees likes to do difficult jobs so that he feels challenged and he intends to do a lot. The tasks have to be difficult because talented employees like achieving something.”*

It is clear that talent was regarded as being different to general employees; they were brought to a higher level through various coaching techniques. Details of the techniques used at ServiceSME are now explored in the following section.

**Table 6.6 Coaching Techniques**

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<b>Coaching Techniques</b>	
•	Providing challenging tasks and give opportunities to complete these
•	Learning by doing
•	Leaning from errors
•	Giving them freedom to create their own work
•	Motivational techniques
•	Leading by example

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***Provide Challenging Tasks and Give Opportunities to Complete These***

In the view of the owner-manager, providing an opportunity to work was an important coaching technique to develop talent; it was similar to giving them a stage on which to present a show. Further, he felt the organisation had a duty to give talent a chance, whilst arguing that talent has a duty to do their best. The Service-Owner suggested that talented employees should learn to solve real problems in a real situation and argued that this provided best practice for their development:

*“I teach my talent by giving them a chance to do things and you have to do the best. Talented employees have a high level of ability; however, they lack work experience, so they have to get more experience, which is important. We teach them in many ways, such as theories and leadership models, but the important thing is that they can work in a real situation. It is like I give them a stage to present a show on, so they have a duty to perform at full capacity, so that the audience are impressed with the show and the next time they will buy a ticket to watch the show again. I make this comparison in order to point out that when you have a chance, you have to do your best because when you show good results, you will get a new chance to do the same next time. This is learning by doing on the job and giving a good chance to talent.”*

The coaches held a similar perspective to that of the owner-manager and believed that talented employees should be given an opportunity to express their potential, with their role being to support and develop their talent when experimental ‘trial and error’ do not go as planned. ServiceC4 explained:

*“I believe I cannot force employees to understand, but I can give them opportunities to try by themselves; if I let them to do work and they fail, I will find the pillow to support them, and then we will find how they fell and I have a second plan to solve the problem, I do not neglect to help. Let them try and learn from errors, and then I cheer them up to keep going.”*

### **Freedom to Create Work**

Once coaches assigned tasks to talented employees, they provided thinking time, to allow them to create an effective approach to the work. Direct techniques were also used in developing talent, with one being project assignments, where, with the use of a questioning counselling technique, the talent was challenged to create solutions and think by themselves. ServiceC2 provided an illustrative example of the technique:

*“Before a meeting, I usually give the topic to talented employees so that they can study it in advance and then we discuss it together. They always dare to suggest their ideas, because we work like siblings.”*

ServiceC1 suggested:

*“I assign a new project, which is challenging for talent. Talented employees like challenging jobs where they can have freedom to think, without having a track to follow. They can find the methods by themselves.”*

And ServiceC1 also recommended:

*“I use the ‘asking-back’ technique, such as ‘Do you agree?’ ‘What do you think?’ ‘Should it be this style?’ I want them to find the answer by themselves. If they can do it, they will understand better. I do not want to just order. However, if they do not have an answer, I do not tell them, but let them find the answer and the next time, we will discuss this topic again.”*

### **Motivation Technique**

People need to want to learn. In an approach suggested by the owner-manager the coach needs to have the ability to motivate the talent, often by highlighting the business side of the benefits. He claimed that if talent could not see the benefits of their actions, then their interest would wane. Coaches, he asserted, need to clarify the outcomes clearly and convince them of the worth of completing the task, although the styles used by each coach might vary. The Service-Owner expanded further:

*“If I tell you that when I assign people to do a craft and they are not interested in doing it, but if I convince them that the customer will buy 500,000 baht (£10,000) worth of the product, they will be interested in listening and doing the work”.*

### **Lead by Example**

This coaching technique involves acting as an example and, in a collaborative way, learning together. Its use for talent development in ServiceSME, which Service-Owner supported:

*“Leading by example is to act as a role model. It is the best way to learn. I always tell my managers that what you want your subordinates to do, you have to do before them; if you want*

*your subordinates to work hard, you have to work hard yourself; not say one thing, but do another, so their subordinates do not listen.”*

The process of leading by example often goes beyond being a role model and involves coaches sometimes working together with their coaches so as to foster simultaneous learning in a friendly atmosphere. It was stated that coaches were one of the key success factors in coaching, although their approach and techniques varied. ServiceC4 stated that:

*“I do not believe in coaching by punishing them to create fear or having rules to force them to do things, because they will perceive that they have to do it to protect themselves from punishment; they will do it in front of us. The aim of coaching is to make it easier, thus we do it with them, not as a teacher to punish them. I take time with them; I take on the role of their friend.”*

To which ServiceC4 added:

*“Coaches are the most important factor for coaching in the organisation; a coach is a person who has the art to change difficult content to become easier and funny, and who acts as a role model. Finally, the result will be answered indirectly. The next time, we can let talented employees do work by setting a goal so that they can develop skills as we want, and they can change their nature.”*

### ***Sub-theme Three: Evaluation of Coaching***

As outlined in Theme Two, ServiceSME had an established performance management system that was clear and available to every employee. In this sub-section the focus is on coaching evaluation, with the detail being provided below:

**Table 6.7 Coaching Evaluation**

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<b>Coaching Evaluation</b>	
•	Result-oriented
➤	Using KPI and competencies in Performance Management Plan
➤	Using informal activities by asking questions
•	Employee Engagement Survey by Gallup

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### **Focusing on outcomes**

Evaluation at ServiceSME tended to focus on the outcomes of employee performance, with KPIs, informal activities and survey being used to evaluate coaching practices.

**Using KPI and Competency in PMP:** The general system was that managers used KPI and PMP in order to evaluate coaching success. KPIs were set in advance, with a checklist being provided for each employee, and at the year end, managers, in their role as coaches, used these to evaluate their direct reports. The analysis relates to the coachees' productivity, based on the number of tasks that were completed successfully, within the specified period. The owner-manager stated the following:

*“Each manager will have a checklist that helps them to check whether the coachee has completed the coaching process of the company, because they may forget, so we have to have the system to check, and we have KPIs to monitor at the end of the year.”*

ServiceC4 supported this:

*“We talk together about expectations in some competencies.”*

ServiceCe2 added:

*“We have a job evaluation every year. For my job, I have expected competencies to develop and they are evaluated at the end of the year; if some competencies are not developed, they are developed again in the next year. I think that this system can evaluate me and what I can complete.”*

**Using informal activities to ask questions:** As this organisation worked and lived together, as if they were from the same family, informal activities were used to evaluate coaching practice. Within the informal family environment, coaches posed questions to explore their coachee’s understanding. The process was immediate and there was equally an opportunity for the coach to provide useful feedback to their coachees immediately. Further the process could develop into a mutually beneficial interaction. CoachC1 clarified:

*“My method to evaluate is that I ask to test their understanding and look at the assigned results.”*

CoachC2 supported this:

*“I mostly ask them from talking together.”*

CoachCe4 added:

*“We talk together; my manager will follow me in my assigned tasks and she always asks me – ‘Can you do this?’ What is the obstacle? Also, my manager will help me to be clear on things.”*

**Employee Engagement Survey by Gallup:** Every year the HR department in ServiceSME conducts an employee engagement survey to evaluate employee satisfaction. The overall results are presented to the Board of Directors, whilst specific results are sent to each department, so they can identify areas for improvement. Included in the improvements is the development of coaching practices, which provides an opportunity for coaches and coachees to have a

conversation that can lead to increased mutual understanding, and future improvements. ServiceC1 commented:

*“We have a survey about engagement to evaluate job satisfaction and engagement; I use this result to evaluate the success of working and my subordinates’ satisfaction with the coaching.”*

#### ***Sub-theme Four: Issues with Coaching***

There are four issues that both directly and indirectly surrounded coaching, with these being presented in Table 6.8.

***Table 6.8 Coaching Issues***

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<b>Coaching Issues</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor listening habits</li><li>• Retaining talented employees</li><li>• A lack of good trainers</li><li>• Being afraid and fearing to show excellence or prominence</li></ul>

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#### ***Poor Listening Habit***

One aspect associated with coaching in ServiceSME is that certain talented employees displayed unwanted personal characteristics, which had previously been seen as associated with high-performing individuals. In parallel to their high confidence and passion, individuals were perceived to show a degree of stubbornness, which bordered on arrogance. It followed that they were unwilling to listen to advice, or even take notes. The Service-Owner stated that:

*“High confidence is one thing in common for talent, which can be both their strength and weakness, because if they are very confident they sometimes fail to listen.”*

CoachC1 supported this:



*“The talented group has high confidence and high passion; they are able to think for themselves, so they are a little stubborn; I am a little stubborn too.”*

Poor listening, however, is not perceived as a major issue in ServiceSME, who believe that they can control and deal with the situation. ServiceC1, who accepted that she has a stubborn nature, suggested:

*“My boss can teach me and use reason to motivate me to work; my boss teaches me that a good follower needs to believe in the leader, we should meet halfway and we should tune into each other, because each person has their own reasons and perspective. If you are still stubborn, you cannot live with others in the organisation. In my case, my boss tells me about the company goals and I see the same picture that he tells me.”*

Furthermore, the Service-Owner suggested that experiential learning can be used to develop talent, in which takes away from the talent having to believe everything that is said; instead, they learn from their own mistakes and experience. Service-Owner commented that:

*“The best thing to teach talent is experience.”*

In ServiceSME listening was encouraged through the Buddhist doctrine of Su Ji Pu Li, which brought greater focus to coaching sessions. Most employees, including the owner-manager, were Buddhist and would be familiar with the principles of Su Ji Pu Li. The approach comprised four stands: a. Su: listening (which can include reading), b. Ji: thinking, c. Pu: asking or enquiring and d. Li: writing or note taking. Further, the managers, as coaches, suggested that their coachees should adopt the Su Ji Pu Li principles as an effective method for learning and working. ServiceCe1 shared the following:

*“When my manager teaches me, she suggests that I have consciousness and I should follow the Su Ji Pu Li principle, such as taking notes. In the past, I have forgotten some points in meetings, so she suggested this method be applied in my*

*work. Thus, in all of our meetings I now take notes and my manager gives me an opportunity to ask and re-run what she said.”*

### ***Difficulty in Retaining Talent***

Primarily, talent in ServiceSME referred to a group of employees who had demonstrated performance and potential. Engineers made up sixty per cent of all employees and within this professional group some had been identified as talented. However, an issue in developing these talented individuals related to the likelihood of them leaving and transferring their talent to a larger organisation, where higher salaries and promotion were attractive. ServiceC4 outlined the issue:

*“We give a chance to the engineers; they have a high career potential and high performance, and so we push resources towards them. One day, when they are fully developed, they can jump to get a higher salary from other company. For example, our engineers who start from zero with us – after they have been invested in, trained and developed, we have paid a lot of money for training, and then they have many certifications, they are our charming stars, but some talented employees jump to receive salaries more than fifty per cent higher than ours.”*

Service-Owner supported this issue:

*“When they are talent, absolutely, they have a high level of ability and it is difficult to retain them.”*

Retention of talented employees is challenging, due to high-demand organisation targeting trained talent, especially when sectors experience a shortage of skilled labour. In meeting the challenge, ServiceSME established systems that were devised to motivate and retain their talent. ServiceC4 provided a suggestion for retaining talent:

*“We have invested in talent already; if we do not build a bond and good engagement, they are ready to move on to other companies. The easiest way to retain them is to inform them*

*clearly about their career path. Also, building a good relationship and culture in the organisation is important, which means building teams and making them feel happy in the workplace.”*

The interview data revealed that the organisation’s employee turnover rate for last year was approximately one per cent, which is slightly higher than the previous year. Thus, whilst the situation might develop, the issue was not seen as serious, although ServiceSME continued in their efforts to support, develop and retain their employees.

### ***Lack of ‘Good’ Coaches***

Interview data identified a lack of good coaches as an issue for ServiceSME. Whilst the organisation adopted a development system that used ‘managers as coaches’, coaching was not perceived as being key to their formal role. External coaches were tried, although their lack of organisational knowledge, along with their effect only being short-term, meant managers took on the role.

The Service-Owner explained:

*“We lack good coaches who do not just talk, but can motivate and inspire my employees to work. However, they have drawbacks, such as they do not know our culture or our business deeply and they do not understand our problems; thus, they coach using general guidelines and if the company does not follow up, it tends to decline gradually, and we cannot hire them throughout 10 years.”*

Good coaches and coaching demand the art of communication. Indeed, it was reported that whilst some managers possessed extensive skills or knowledge in a specific field, they found difficulty in transferring this to others. Indeed, issues surrounding their lack of teaching and presentation skills meant that they were unable to pass on their knowledge to others, ServiceCe2 shared:

*“Some coaches, especially some engineers, have no teaching skills to teach others; they are geniuses, but they cannot transfer their knowledge to others, which may be typical of the engineer group – they do not talk much, but they focus more on practice. Our company has tried to push and develop them to teach others.”*

The solution, as perceived by the owner-manager, relies on building internal coaches, although initially, external assistance may be required. The Service-Owner suggested:

*“We have to have our own internal coaches; I have a plan to send my talent to train outside about ‘how to train the employees’. After that they will be the professional trainers and they will be ready to train other employees respectively.”*

### ***Being Afraid of Show Prominence***

One participant highlighted an issue whereby some talented employees were concerned about colleagues feeling envious of them, particularly when they were given prominent roles. ServiceC2 clarified:

*“Some talent from the back office are worried about colleagues around them, about how they will look at them if they are more prominent and they are worried about people being envious.”*

Colleague envy may not be a common organisational phenomenon. However ServiceSME was aware of the issue and chose not to make an official announcement of promotions or allocation to special projects, in order to reduce any envy impact. It was felt that a systematic talent management approach would present a clearer picture of the talent system. ServiceC2 stated:

*“Talented employees have several elements, but the talent system is not set perfectly; we set some projects for talent, but when we have to select someone to attend, it is difficult.”*

### ***Confusion Surrounding Mentoring***

It was apparent from the interviews, and supported by the documentary and observational data, that whilst the concept of coaching was broadly understood the term was used interchangeably with mentoring. ServiceSME had established a formal mentoring programme so that it could be adopted as a separate entity. The process allowed for a new employee to have their direct manager as a coach, along with a mentor from a different department, whose role would be to support the manager's coaching. However, ServiceC2 and ServiceC4's reports confuse the issue:

*"We have a mentoring system from the first day for a new employee. Not only do we have a **mentor in their work**, but also we have **a cross-functional mentor** who is from another department." (ServiceC2) (Emphasis added)*

*"Being **a coach** in the organisation is being **a mentor**." (ServiceC4) (Emphasis added)*

The last quotation illustrates how the two terms are confused, whereas in reality the managers and mentors have different roles, particularly with respect to new employees. An overlap was also apparent between the functions of coaching and mentoring, again, with the terms being used interchangeably. One route of the confusion referred to individuals undertaking dual roles. For example, the owner-manager of ServiceSME, who acted as Managing Director (MD), played a crucial role, being both mentor and coach to senior managers. ServiceC1 explained:

*"The MD is my mentor and he is the mentor for most managers. He is both the coach and mentor. In this company, we may say 'mentor' for both roles. My boss has the important role of teaching and coaching me about the organisational culture,*

*corporate direction and expectations. He always supports my work as my mentor.”*

ServiceC4 added:

*“My manager is my mentor; he is ready to put the pen down although he is busy. He always listens to me and helps me to develop in many ways such as in my thoughts and management view, in a way that I have never known before. This makes me learn very quickly, to grow and progress.”*

In summary, it was apparent that the coaching and mentoring activities in ServiceSME were not perceived by everyone as being clearly separate, with some employees seeing both the terms and their associated actions as being interchangeable.

#### **6.4.4 Theme Four: Coaching Perspectives: Six Sub-themes**

The fourth theme of the current study is the coaching perspective, which had six sub-themes.

##### ***Sub-theme One: Effective Coaching***

In the eyes of both the employer and employees, effective coaching was reported to have a similar focus: Results were considered to be of a higher order value than the processes associated with working, with most participants referring to the former. In keeping with the data, ‘effective coaching’ was connected with ‘good results’, which in turn refer to the individual KPIs that were agreed for the evaluation system and by which employee performance was measured.

***Through the employer’s lens:*** There was a clear consensus that result-oriented outputs were perceived as the first priority of effective coaching. That is, the coaching process should be fully completed; beginning with the actual

coaching and going through the KPIs to reach the final evaluation process. The Service-Owner explained that teaching theories, hands-on experience and evaluation were needed to support effective coaching and clarified:

*“In my thoughts, after a coach has studied, he or she can teach others about theories, then the coach should consider how they are to apply them in their work and finally it needs to be evaluated. I think that all of the processes need to be completed, because if you only study and do not apply it in practice, you forget. Or you are only doing the work, not evaluating it; you do not know how well you do, or where you make mistakes. We also have KPIs to evaluate the success of working.” (Service-Owner)*

**Through the employees’ lens:** Coaches and coachees were in agreement that a result-oriented evaluation represented an effective coaching process, adding that outcomes were apparent when coachees demonstrated effective on-the-job skills. ServiceC4 supported this:

*“I believe that after we coach them, their skills are developed. For example, several sales people in my company did not have any sales knowledge, but they had a good attitude towards practising. We put a lot of effort into teaching them and then they began to perform, and they have high-performance potential. They have much more developed skills.”*

ServiceCe3 added the following about the effectiveness of coaching:

*“My manager wants me to develop to level eight. I have been developed from zero and now I am at level five, but she has tried to teach and develop me into level eight.”*

The effectiveness of coaching in ServiceSME is summarised in the Table 9:

**Table 6.9 Effectiveness of Coaching**

---

<b>Effectiveness of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals achieved; productivity; results-based evaluation</li> <li>• Completing all processes of coaching</li> </ul>

---

- 
- Skills development
  - Being able to coach others
  - Being relied on to work instead of managers supervising directly
  - Not making mistakes
  - Able to think for themselves
  - Understanding and learning
  - Making difficult tasks easier
- 

The following direct quotations provide a representative, more detailed view of effective coaching:

*“After I coached them, I expected that they could teach others. Also, they can think by themselves and they can learn by themselves, as much as they can.” (ServiceC1)*

*“I learnt from my MD and then I coached others. If they can do work instead of their supervisors I think it is successful, because we build people.” (ServiceC4)*

*“It is the expected goals and no mistakes.” (ServiceCe1)*

*“Effective coaching means they understand and learn together.” (ServiceC3)*

*“The successful coach is the person who can make difficult things become easier things and be implanted in our brain.” (ServiceC3)*

### ***Sub-theme Two: Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coach***

According to the data drawn from ServiceSME, a good coach can be identified by a number of traits (see Table 6.10). Having a clear understanding and being an effective communicator were reported as being the most important characteristics of a good coach, both from the employer’s and employees’ perspective. The term ‘good understanding’ was seen to convey two meanings. The first meaning referred to a good coach having a sufficient understanding of their material to be able to teach others. The second meaning



concerned the coach being able to understanding their coachees, because each person was different and received knowledge differently. It was reported that then next important characteristic was their ability to select the appropriate communication method for each person. The owner-manager suggested that effective communication was like throwing a bean bag:

*“The first thing they have to understand is what the coaches will transfer; they have to have too much knowledge. And the second thing is, they have to understand the listeners and what level of listener they are. The important thing in communication is that it is like throwing a bean bag; if I have one bean bag and ten managers including men, women, tall people, short people, the old and young and then I throw the bean bag to the young man, he can catch it, but if I throw this bean bag at the same level to the short woman, she cannot catch it. Thus you should consider the different backgrounds of the receivers. You cannot use the same method for everyone, so you should select different methods for different people. For example, I learnt who my receivers are; if they are far, I will throw harshly; if they are near, I will throw gently. In some groups of my subordinates, I use training or I use on-the-job training or learning by doing. For another group, I use one-to-one coaching; different assignments for different people, appropriate for each person.”*

ServiceC2 supported this:

*“A good coach understands and looks at the learners to see that they are ready to learn.”*

ServiceCe3 added:

*“My manager understands me through some issues in my personal life. For example, when she knew my son was sick, she allowed me to leave and she sometimes shares my work load. Thus, I should repay her kindness.”*

Amongst other qualities, the owner-manager’s personality was reported as being one of understanding others, being open-minded, generous, cooperative, friendly and positive and someone who could motivate others. These characteristics impacted on those managers who reported directly to

him. Being impressed by his personal qualities, when requested to outline the characteristics of a good coach, they used the owner-manager to illustrate their points, including his ability to teach others. ServiceC1 explained:

*“He is very open-minded, large-minded. He always motivates me to work; he is a very positive man.”*

ServiceC2 said:

*“My MD is a good role model; he is a good example of being open-minded. He is always ready to listen to others; he is a kind person, very much.”*

ServiceC3 supported this:

*“He has clear goals; he is very cooperative and generous in his relationships and he is a forgiving man, compromising on many issues. A cool-headed guy who uses reason to work, and understands his subordinates.”*

ServiceC4 also supported this view:

*“I have learnt from the MD, I believe in him and I use his style to teach others. I have gradually learnt many things from him and now I believe that many things are good guidelines.”*

The interview data supported the view that the owner-manager’s positive characteristics had been transferred to his managers, for whom he represented a role model of an effective coach. One subordinate added:

*“The good coach is like my manager; she is open-minded in listening to me; she is quite cool-headed and she can control her emotions.”*

**Table 6.10 Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coach**

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<b>Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coaches</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good understanding and effective communication for each person</li><li>• Cool-headed and being cooperative</li></ul>

---

- 
- Having coaching technique and understanding psychology of coaching
  - Using reason to coach
  - Open-minded and ready to listen to others' opinions
  - Motivational person
  - Having a high level of knowledge and expertise
  - Being a friendly person
  - Positive thinking and a supportive attitude
  - Acting as a role model
  - Good mentor
  - Clear and provides realistic examples
- 

The following direct quotations provide additional comment to this important aspect of defining a good coach within ServiceSME.

*“My manager used to be a lecturer before he worked here, so his style of coaching or teaching is that he uses reason, writing and drawing and gives examples and case studies to me. This makes it easier for me to understand.” (ServiceCe4)*

*“She has more experience than me; she can teach me like a consultant and when I have a problem she can help me to solve it.” (ServiceCe2)*

As illustrated earlier, in some participants' minds there was an overlap between coaching and mentoring. This confusion was carried over into identifying the characteristics of a good coach, with it being put forward that a great coach was a good mentor. He said that:

*“It is not a teacher; being a coach in an organisation is being a mentor; being a good coach is being an unsung hero who works behind the scenes of success. My boss is like this; he teaches me like this as well and I have learnt very much from him.”*

The two seemed intertwined and it was possible to recognise that being a good coach might help a person to be an equally good mentor, or vice versa.

### Sub-theme Three: Characteristics of a 'Good' Coachee

Four traits emerged as characteristics of a good coachee within ServiceSME (Table 6.11.)

**Table 6.11 Characteristics of a 'Good' Coachee**

---

Characteristics of a 'Good' Coachee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eager for knowledge and open-minded</li><li>• Good listener</li><li>• Having positive interactions and daring to ask questions</li><li>• Organisational understanding</li></ul>

---

Being eager to learn and having an open-mind to learning new knowledge and skills emerged as the most important characteristics of a good coachee. The owner-manager stated:

*"The first characteristic of being a good coachee is that they want to learn and they are interested to learn."*

Some interesting quotations from coaches are presented below:

*"Being a good coachee means listening and wanting to learn; they pay attention, listen and ask for learning." (ServiceC4)*

*"They are not stubborn and they have to be eager for knowledge, to like to learn new things." (ServiceC1)*

Also, there were some interesting quotations from coachees about the dominant characteristics of talent:

*"I work completely on the expected goal and when I have a problem, I respond and tell my supervisor." (ServiceCe1)*

*"When I have questions, especially about complicated tasks, I ask my manager directly; I listen." (ServiceCe4)*

*“The good coachee should be ready to learn and open-minded to learning new things.” (ServiceCe2)*

#### **Sub-theme Four: Benefits of Coaching**

Drawing from the employer and employees data, six benefits of coaching were revealed, with these being presented in Table 6.12. The dominant view on the benefits referred to, on completion, the coachees being able to learn faster and, importantly, take a share of their coach’s responsibilities. In the wider picture, increased organisational productivity was raised.

**Table 6.12 Benefits of Coaching**

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<b>Benefits of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning speedily, helping to share the manager’s workload, increased productivity</li><li>• Developing each other</li><li>• Talented employees are happy to commit to work</li><li>• Being able to coach others successfully</li><li>• Provides a clear direction</li><li>• Grows ability and emotional intelligence</li></ul>

---

The following direct quotations provide a flavour of the benefits gained through coaching in ServiceSME. ServiceC1 felt:

*“We work easier and are more comfortable. It sometimes makes me develop with them by improving together. And finally, after my subordinates are coached, they can work well and have their own success; they can work by themselves, so I feel they are happy to work.”*

ServiceCe4 commented:

*“I have learnt so much and have developed myself so much. Also, I am absolutely sure that if I have received good coaching*

*then I am able to coach others; I can apply it to work, and I can hand on my knowledge to others.”*

Finally, the owner-manager added that not only can talent build organisational success, but it has the ability grow a person’s character, along with their ability and their emotional intelligence (EQ). The Service-Owner felt that:

*“They will build productivity, being successful for the organisation and also they will enhance their ability and EQ.”*

### ***Sub-theme Five: Negative Effects of Coaching***

As with the other two case studies, no significant negative effects of coaching were reported from either the employers or employees. One small negative effect emerged from the employer’s perspective, with it being thought that the focus on the coaching process people may account for coachees losing concentration on the job in hand, with mistakes resulting. Service-Owner clarified:

*“It may not be negative; it is that if they do not fully focus on their work, they may make a mistake.”*

One general concern expressed by the coaches concerned the retention of talent. As they were coaching the thought arose that the person might leave and join a larger organisation and this, their efforts would be wasted for ServiceSME.

***Table 6.13 Negative Effects of Coaching***

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<b>Negative Effects of Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No significant negative effects of coaching</li><li>• Making small mistakes</li></ul>

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### ***Sub-theme Six: Suggestions for Coaching***

There were five suggestions supporting coaching practices in the eyes of the employer and employees, such as having a good system, having standard classes, a training roadmap, and building effective communication. All of these recommendations are presented in Table 6.14.

***Table 6.14 Suggestion for coaching***

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<b>Suggestions for Coaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Having a strong system to build talent</li><li>• Having standard classes, a training road map, a training centre</li><li>• Building effective communication within the organisation</li><li>• Having high-quality trainers</li><li>• Developing coaching skills to transfer knowledge effectively</li></ul>

---

The direct quotations below offer a selection of views surrounding suggestions for coaching:

*“SMEs should have standard classes and a standard process, as a roadmap, to train and build the employees and they should find high-quality trainers who have many skills, both hard and soft skills.” (Service-Owner)*

*“The thing that they should do is develop a training roadmap for each position; we have tried to establish a training centre, but it has not been fully successful and it should be clear how to develop each person.” (ServiceC1)*

*“I would like to suggest that the organisation should build effective communication with all employees, so that they can understand the same things.” (ServiceC3)*

*“I believe most SMEs are family businesses that have been transferred from the old generation to the new generation, so the important thing is developing the employees through good systems, such as having recruitment and development processes to build talent for the company.” (ServiceC4)*

*“I would like to suggest that the coaches should be trained to be a good coach to teach others.” (ServiceCe2)*

Whilst not all of the above suggestions are directly relevant to coaching, they can serve to stimulate thought on employee development in SME organisations. Indeed, any suggestions that lead to more effective coaching are likely to impact positively on employee well-being and their happiness at work, which is likely to be transposed in greater productivity.

### **Summary – Case-study Three: ServiceSME**

In summary, ServiceSME represented Thai’s service sector, with its core business being to offer a full lifecycle of IT services. Although this case operated as an SME, a HRD department had been in existence for 10 years. As with the other two case studies, the owner-manager of ServiceSME played a pivotal role in deciding the direction of HRD and particularly coaching for talent.

Drawing together the four key areas, it is apparent, firstly, that with respect to the perception of talent, ‘talented employees’ comprised less than ten per cent of employees. From the employer’s perspective, the focus remained on these talented individuals who were developed as future resources for the organisation. It was apparent from observation and the data gathered that the Human Resource Development was quite refined, with processes and procedures being found in essential documents. Whilst HRD projects developed the talented employees, general opportunities and facilities were available to develop the wider workforce, with a happy workplace focus, self-



organised club and the organisational journal being examples. Although some confusion existed, mentoring was introduced, with each new employee being assigned a mentor, who was different than their coach. Within coaching practices, the main approach was through informal coaching, with managers acting as coaches, with the coaching being carried out in a flexible and friendly manner. Knowledge sharing was encouraged throughout the organisation as was the concept of self-learning, which often was coupled with learning support from an experienced person.

With regard to the coaching perspective, the focus, for both employer and employees, was on outputs, rather than the process of working. Set KPIs were central to the evaluation system that measured employee performance and which helped determine employee reward and remuneration. The owner-manager readily invested in employees, particularly the talented future leaders, by providing resources, personal support and commitment.

Having explored the three case studies individually and highlighted initial interpretations, the next chapter draws the three case studies together to present an inter-related view.

## **CHAPTER 7: QUALITATIVE CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS**

### **Findings and Initial Interpretations across the Three Case Studies**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter, which presents a cross-case analysis of the three case studies, compares patterns and trends evident in the five key findings: background of SMEs; the perception of talent; Human Resource Development; coaching practices and coaching perspective. The mutual criterion for the selection of each case study was receiving the SMEs National Award in 2012, thereby providing a benchmark standard for comparison. In 2012, there were 2.7 million SMEs in Thailand, only eight organisations won one of the 5<sup>th</sup> SMEs national awards, with three of them being chosen for the current study.

The in-depth discussion of the three case studies, which were presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six, illustrate the complexities within each case, and provide multi-perspective views on the salient points. Taking the analysis further, in this chapter, the data outcomes of the three SME case studies, in trading, manufacturing and service sectors are compared, in order to analyse the similar and different practices that emerged as collective concepts.

#### **7.1 Cross-case Analysis – SMEs' Background**

The detailed interviews the form the data-gathering method of the current study, were conducted within three SME case-study organisations in Thailand. The case studies were drawn from the three main sectors, being Trading, Production and the Service industry. All companies were recipients of

Thailand's SME national awards, which identifies them as 'high-performing' organisations that follow outstanding human resource practices. The cross-case analysis in this chapter starts with the roles of owner-managers and draws on the background of each case.

### 7.1.1 Role of Owner-managers

From the three cases it is apparent that the owner-managers are the key strength of a successful business, including the success of HRD, which was the key issue in the current study. The three owner-managers, who acted as the organisational leaders, each built trust within their organisations. They tended to focus their efforts on employee development by employing different styles, by which to manage their organisations. The role of the owner-manager as a mediator in the adoption of HR activities and the development of employees was found to be important, and this can be influenced by the owner-managers' demographic characteristics. In each case study, it became clear that some characteristics of the owner-managers affected the SME's practices for developing employees (Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1 Owner-Manager Demographic Characteristics – three cases**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Case-study One</b>	<b>Case-study Two</b>	<b>Case-study Three</b>
Sex	Male	Male	Male
Age	63	43	51
Religion	Buddhist	Christian	Buddhist
Status	Married	Married	Married
Education	Bachelor degree and honorary doctorate in business from Thailand	Master's degree in accounting from Thailand	Master's degree from USA in computer science

The data analysis from the three case studies revealed that the owner-managers' background, such as religion and education, influenced their attitudes towards HRD and the coaching practices.

The owner-manager in Case-study One held a strong belief in Buddhism and championed this as a guiding philosophy to underpin learning and HRD. A Buddhist approach was the key concept supporting HRD practices. Indeed, the Buddhist approach was used in many activities, including religious ceremonies, in order to develop employees. The owner-manager was a devoutly religious person and the most distinguished of the owner's beliefs was the need to develop employees in his organisation. Whilst the owner-manager in Case-study Two followed the Protestant-Christian faith, in parallel to Case-study One's manager, his personal belief system guided the organisation's approach to learning and coaching. However, possibly due to many of the employees being Buddhist, there were no religious symbols, either Buddhist or Christian, on display in this organisation. However, the Christianity of the owner-manager of Case-study Two seemed to be a significant determinant in the adoption of many activities in this organisation, particularly with respect adopting mentoring, which was used in his church, and applied to the organisation. With regard to the owner-manager of the third case study, he had graduated with a Master's degree in computer science from the USA and his educational background appeared to affect how he viewed the development of employees. As such, he tended to adopt and apply Western concepts into his organisation, such as theories of modern administration and management and

HRD practices. Although he followed Buddhism, his religion did not appear to influence his work practices, unlike the owner-manager in the first case study.

Interestingly, from the interview, it was apparent that all three owner-managers asserted that the human resource was the most important asset of their organisation and that the HR strategy was strongly linked to their organisational success. Indeed, their beliefs ensured that both time and resources were allocated in support of HRD activities, although their focus on developing employees differed, depending on each owner-manager's personal characteristics.

## **7.2 Cross-case Analysis of Three Case-Study Themes**

In this section, four themes are focused, with the three case studies being compared, in order to highlight the similarities and differences that existed between them.

### **7.2.1 Theme One: Perception of Talent**

The first theme relates to the perception of talent, from both the employer's and employees' perspective.

From the employer's perspective, the owner-managers in Case-study Two and Case-study Three held a similar perception and argued that 'talent' refers specifically to someone who is 'dominant', with talented employees being treated differently, in terms of both time and financial investment. Conversely, in Case-study One, talent was considered to include everyone, so as to protect them from jealousy (Table 7.2.)

**Table 7.2 Employer's perception of talent**

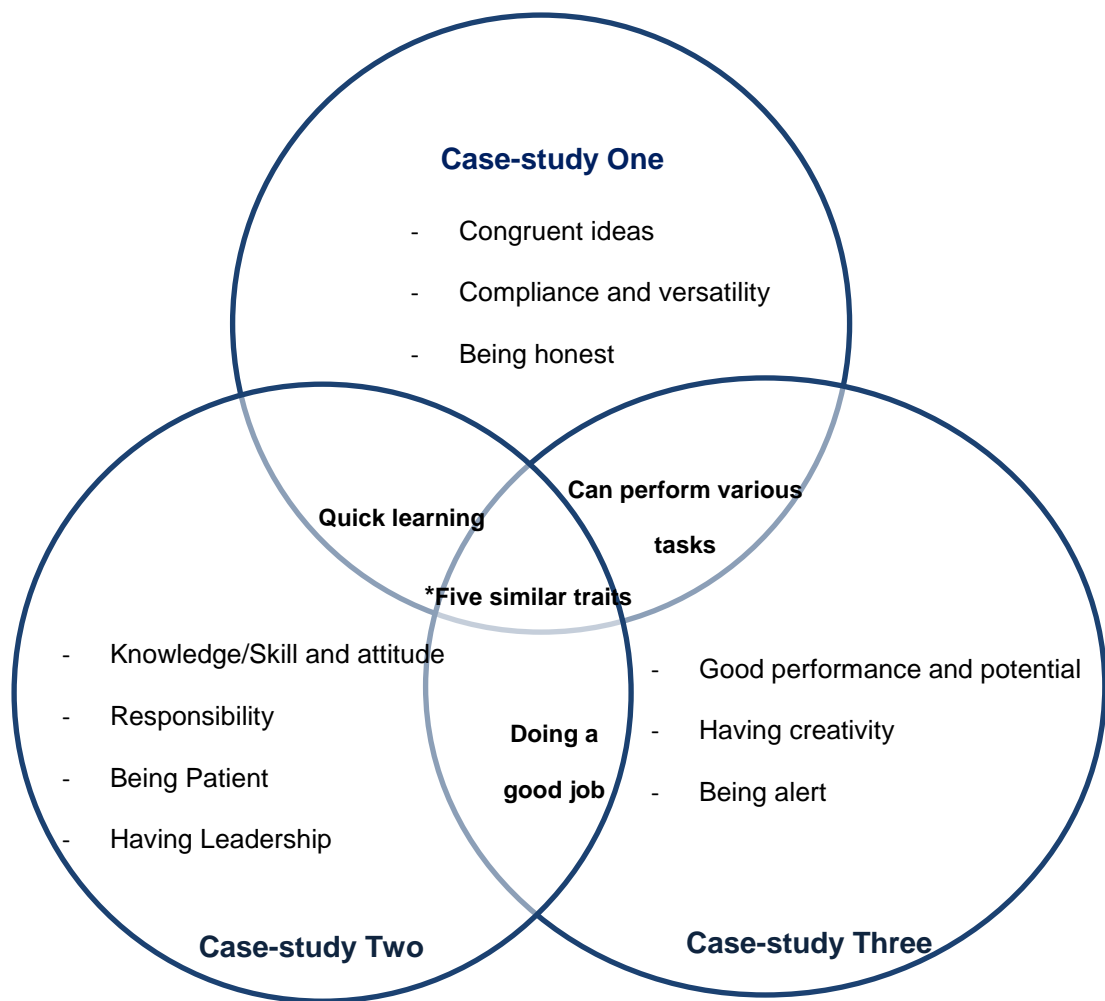
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Description
<b>Case-study One:</b> Talented employees are <i>everyone</i> in his organisation
<b>Case-study Two:</b> Talented employees are <i>some people</i> in his organisation
<b>Case-study Three:</b> Talented employees are <i>some people</i> in his organisation

---

From the employees' perspective, five similar dominant attributes of talent were presented, which relate to: can be relied on to work instead of being managed; being able to develop themselves; are devoted to the organisation; are positive thinkers; and have good human relations.

These characteristics of talent, from the three case studies, can be demonstrated in a Venn diagram, which highlights the inter-related nature of the attributes of talent. The five dominant traits of talent, outlined above, have general agreement across the three cases and are placed in the centre of the Venn diagram. The areas where the circles overlap represent a shared perception of talent that is common amongst the cases (Figure 7.1).



**Figure 7.1 Attributes of Talent – three case studies**

The different characteristics of the owner-managers, along with the employer’s and employee’s perspective of talent, serve to influence employee development and coaching practices similarly and differently. This, information provides an opportunity to see how each case develops its talented employee and it is the comparison of similarities and differences that are the focus of the next theme.

## 7.2.2 Theme Two: Human Resource Development (HRD)

The second theme refers to HRD, with each of the three case-study organisations, demonstrating similarities and differences for developing their employees (Table 7.3.).

**Table 7.3 Similarities and Differences – employee development in three cases**

Similarities	Differences
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training (three cases)</li> <li>2. Mentoring (two Cases)</li> <li>3. Happy Workplace(two Cases)</li> </ol>	<p>Each case has a different focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case-study One focused on being a family-run business, and using the Buddhist approach to develop the employees.</li> <li>• Case-study Two focused on leadership development, ownership quotient and organisational awareness.</li> <li>• Case-study Three focused on self-learning, learning from experienced persons and intruding special projects to develop employees.</li> </ul>

**Similarities:** there are three similar concepts of employee development, with the first referring to Training.

### **Training**

First, all three case studies had a similar on-the job training approach in adopting this as the key employee development method. However, the adopted style of off-the job training varied across the case studies. For



example, Case-study One had adopted the least formal process of the three cases, with there being no formal documents and no advanced design for off-the-job training. Thus, the training occurred informally, although when a new employee arrived, he or she was sent to his or her department to learn all that was needed to know, for their role. The Case-study Two approach to off-the-job training was more formal than Case-study One. Indeed, it was the main training method for the organisation, although some variations existed in relation to the level of management. For example, the middle and lower management levels used on-the-job training for around eighty per cent of the time.

The most formal the off-the job training of the three cases was found in Case-study Three, which had formal documents to support the training system, including items such as job profiles and individual development plans.

### ***Mentoring Programme***

Case-study Two and Case-study Three were similar, in that their mentoring programmes were systematic and formalised. They both had handbooks and other material to support what they claimed was the success of their programme. Mentoring in Case-study Two was related to the concept of mentoring in church, which coincided with the owner-manager's religious beliefs. Meanwhile, mentoring in Case-study Three followed a more formalised system than in Case-study Two with, for example, the duties of a mentor forming up to five per cent of their performance management plan (PMP), which is related to their annual performance appraisal review. Moreover, the

qualifications for becoming a mentor in both cases were different. For example, in Case-study Two, the mentor was required to work in the same department, but should not be the direct supervisor, except in certain exceptional circumstances. In practice, from the interview data, it was found that some managers were both mentor and direct supervisor. Similarly, in Case-study Three, the mentor needed to come from a different department and not be the mentees direct line manager. Meanwhile, Case-study One did not have a formally recognised mentoring programme in place.

### ***Happy Workplace***

The happy workplace project is supported by Government agencies and Case-study Two and Case-study Three had incorporated this into the workplace for over two years. The initiative was led by both owner-managers, who ensured that time and budget were allocated, to help ensure that their employees were happy at work. Case-study Two was more dominant than Case-study Three. Indeed, during the interviews, most participants and the owner-manager of Case-study Two highlighted the success of the happy workplace project and the many activities that have occurred continuously. The owner-manager confirmed that he felt that the happy workplace project had assisted in a low turnover rate and a 'liveable' workplace. Although at Case-study One no formal happy workplace project was in place, unlike Case-study Two and Three, happiness was raised as a key goal in the organisation. For Case-study One, happiness was achieved through informal activities, such as the 'making merit' project. Further, in business-wide terms, employee happiness came from the

owner-manager's belief in treating and supporting his employees as if they were his own relatives.

### ***Differences***

It was apparent that each case study had its own distinctive methods for developing employees. The family-run business, with a strong Buddhist approach, was identified in Case-study One and here the owner-managers paternal attitude strongly supported employee development and HR policies. Indeed, the portrayal of Buddhism has engendered a tight-knit family relationship, with employees holding a deep desire to support and value each other. The drive radiated from the owner-manager whose personal characteristics ensured that he was perceived as a good role model. His character transmitted positive messages, which led to many employees to trust, love and have faith in him; a process that equally made them feel warm about themselves and be more committed to each other. Coaching and development activities were organised informally by the owner-manager and, with all employees being treated as equals, the rhetoric was that everyone was considered 'talented'. However, in practice, there were suggestions of 'hidden' talent development, with some employees receiving favourable treatment.

In contrast, in the second case study, 'talent' referred specifically to certain individuals who had had time and finance invested in them, with these individuals often operating at managerial level. In the owner-manager's view, his managers provided leadership and the key to future success, thus, investment in them enhanced the business prospects. Although the managers

were involved in ongoing personal development, the owner-manager expected them to cascade their learning and expertise to the lower levels. A perception existed that the owner-manager built talent as would a 'warlord', so that they would undertake the bulk of running the organisation. That being said, the owner-manager cultivated the impression of genuinely caring for all employees, such that, again, the majority of them 'loved' him and felt engaged with his organisation.

The third case study provided outstanding employee development; using systematic process and clear HRD documents that outlined processes. There were numerous internal and external HRD projects that provided all employees with opportunities for knowledge sharing and engaging in the company club. Self-learning, along with learning from experienced colleagues, comprised the key learning processes in this case, with all learning being facilitated by the allocation of financial and time resources. Whilst development opportunities were open to all, the owner-manager identified a special group, of around ten per cent, of 'talented' employees, for whom he provided a higher level of training than those in general employment.

Whilst different methods for developing employees existed in each case, a common focus amongst all the SMEs was the strong commitment that the owner-managers had towards HR. Human resources were perceived by all to be critical to business success and they were willing to invest resources in developing their employees. Indeed, two of the case-study organisations had established their own HRD function, one as long as ten years ago, which were

directly responsible for developing the employees (Table 7.4). As well as facilitating employee development the HRD functions provided documents to aid learning, with it being observed that Case-study Three had the more established systems and processes.

**Table 7.4 Comparing HRD function in all three case studies**

Case-study One	Case-study Two	Case-study Three
No HRD Department or officer. HR function was assigned to admin department	Hired a HRD officer in 2015	HRD department has been established for more than 10 years

### **7.2.3 Theme Three: Coaching Practices**

The third theme is coaching practices, which is divided into four sub-themes as follows:

#### ***Coaching Approaches***

With respect to coaching practice, none of the three case studies operated a formal coaching system, although there was evidence of informal coaching. Within the tight-knit communities, informal coaching was apparent, with managers acting as coaches. Learning was transferred through the close relationship that existed between coaches and coachees, with the process being reported as ‘friendly coaching’. This style of informal ‘friendly’ coaching was evident in all three organisations, with there being little inter-organisational differences. One minor difference was that two of the study SMEs had hired

external coaches, although they reported that the initiative was not successful and quickly reverted to using internal managers as coaches.

**Table 7.5 Similarities in Coaching Approaches – all three cases**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal coaching</li> <li>• Internal coaching using the manager as coach</li> <li>• Friendly coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two SMES had hired external coaches in the past, which was an unsuccessful venture</li> </ul>

**Coaching Techniques**

With respect to coaching techniques, three approaches were apparent in all the study SMEs. First, the manager-coaches in all three organisations provided what were perceived as challenging tasks for their coaches. Also, within the organisational context, they gave their coaches the freedom to work creatively, with the manager-coaches being required to act as exemplary role models in how they conducted themselves. Despite agreement on these three areas, different coaching techniques emerged within each study organisation, which included a special investment in people; using specific reasons to coach, case studies, and group discussions (Table 7.6.)

**Table 7.6 Similarities and Differences – coaching techniques; all three cases**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing challenging tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special investment</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving them freedom to create work</li> <li>• Acting as a good role model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using reasons to coach them</li> <li>• Using case studies and group discussions</li> </ul>
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### ***Coaching Evaluation***

Given the pressures on SMEs in general, it is not surprising that all three case-study SMEs were results orientated. Although informal, the key method for evaluating employee performance, including coaching practice, was results orientated. The establishing of pre-set KPIs, along with a checklist of goals for each employee, was the preferred mode in two of the organisations. However, all three organisations equally invited informal feedback from coachees, with this often being sought during informal activities such as after-work parties; with this being considered acceptable within the ‘family’ culture the existed in the organisations. Case-study Three alone used a Gallup employee engagement survey to evaluate employee satisfaction and to obtain feedback that would help improve coaching practice.

***Table 7.7 Similarities and Differences – coaching evaluation; all three cases***

<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Result-oriented <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Using KPIs</li> <li>➤ Informal activities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee Engagement Survey by Gallup</li> </ul>

### ***Coaching Issues***

Similar coaching issues existed in all of the study SMEs. The first concern, which related to all cases, referred to communication problems, in particular poor listening, inadequate skills and an inability to understand. The three organisations also agreed that a high turnover impacted negatively, although the situation was worse in Case-study One and Two. A third common area concerned some talented individuals expressing a fear in excelling at work, due to a worry that colleagues would feel envious of them, which shows a high level of social consciousness. In addition to the common issues, each organisation faced other issues that arose differently, with the availability of time and individual ability being two prominent concerns (Table 7.8.).

***Table 7.8 Similarities and Differences – coaching issues; all three cases***

<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communication issues</li><li>• Recruiting and retaining talented employees</li><li>• Fearing to excel because of other peoples' envy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not having enough time to coach</li><li>• Pretentious and disobedient employees</li><li>• New generations are not patient</li><li>• Have no supervisory skills</li><li>• Do not like to train outside</li><li>• Do not understand how to coach</li><li>• Lacking good trainers</li></ul>

#### **7.2.4 Theme Four: Coaching Perspectives**

Six sub-themes emerged in relation to the perspective on coaching, with there being both variation and similarities across the study SMEs.



### ***Effective Coaching***

To illustrate the perceived effectiveness of coaching, the views of the owner-manager and those of employees are presented separately. Taking the employers' viewpoint, each owner-manager had a different perspective on what effective coaching meant to them.

*Case-study One:* Business success is the most important factor to support the effectiveness of coaching.

*Case-study Two:* The manager as coach is the most effective way of coaching.

*Case-study Three:* Being result-oriented is the first priority for effective coaching.

Whilst the employers' views differ, each concept lends support to the others. Indeed, the views can be integrated in such a way as to focus on business success as the foundation, although views differ as to whether effectiveness facilitates this, or was a product of it.

From the employees' perspective, most key participants agreed that effective coaching related to goals being achieved, with the least amount of errors. Positive views were also held, with mention of enhanced skills development, working in practice and being trusted to complete work. Where employees were able to coach another person, this brought a sense of pride, although the process of inter-employee coaching also emerged as an effective coaching initiative. Understandably, different views were held on what constituted

effectiveness in coaching, with positive views emerging, such as receiving compliments or gaining the ability to solve problems (Table 7.9).

**Table 7.9 Similarities and differences in effective coaching in three cases**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goals achieved/productivity</li> <li>• The least amount of errors</li> <li>• Enhanced skills development</li> <li>• Trusted to work unsupervised</li> <li>• Coaching to work in practice</li> <li>• Being able to coach another person</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing work together</li> <li>• Believe and follow</li> <li>• Being able to solve problems</li> <li>• Receiving compliments</li> <li>• Completed all processes of coaching</li> <li>• Self-thinking</li> <li>• Making difficult tasks easier</li> </ul>

**Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coach**

A total of fifteen characteristics of a ‘good’ coach were identified across the three SMEs, with personal attributes emerging, such as being open-minded, trusting, calm and thinking positively. In addition to characteristics that were common across all cases, different existed, with the characteristics of sincerity and discreteness emerging (Table 7.10).

**Table 7.10 Similarities and Differences – characteristics of a ‘good’ coach; all three cases**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the coachees</li> <li>• Open-minded and prepared to listen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being sincere and candid</li> <li>• Discretion and prudence</li> <li>• Motivational</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting as a role model</li> <li>• Having technique and psychology</li> <li>• Being patient and calm</li> <li>• Being a good person</li> <li>• Being friendly</li> <li>• Positive thinker</li> <li>• Using reason</li> <li>• Having high levels of knowledge</li> <li>• Having trust and being open to positive opportunities</li> <li>• Having leadership</li> <li>• Leading by example</li> <li>• Following the results</li> <li>• Good mentor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaches from the heart</li> </ul>
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It is apparent from the characteristics identified that there were a number of shared perceptions of what comprises a good coach. It is interesting that Case-study Two and Case-study Three mutually agreed that a good coach equated to being a good mentor, which is probably due to both organisations having a mentoring programme. There was also a common perception that coaching and mentoring are the same thing, which may be due to the informal way in which coaching is conducted in the study organisations; this topic will be returned to in the next chapter.

***Characteristics of a ‘Good’ Coachee***

In reviewing the commonly held perceptions of a good coachee, it was apparent that communication was once again an important element. For example, being open-minded, interacting and listening well, were all evident of

communication, as was ‘daring to ask’, although confidence crept in here. Being an alert positive thinker was equally valued in a good coachee. Other characteristics varied across the case-study organisations, but the idea of a calm, sincere and polite person conveyed a positive image (Table 7.11.).

**Table 7.11 Similarities and Differences – Characteristics of ‘Good’ Coachees; all three cases**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-minded and pays attention</li> <li>• Good listener, interactive and dares to ask</li> <li>• Being alert</li> <li>• Positive thinker</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calm person</li> <li>• Being sincere</li> <li>• Believing in what is taught and having discretion</li> <li>• Ready to adjust oneself</li> <li>• Organisational understanding</li> <li>• Polite</li> <li>• Taking notes during sessions</li> </ul>

### ***Benefits of Coaching***

All three case studies revealed areas that they perceived as benefits that arose from coaching. Some common areas referred to organisational benefits, such as increasing productivity or sharing the workload. Benefits were equally seen in individual case studies, such as helping growth, providing direction, providing a learning cultural organisation and reducing turnover. Personal aspects were also apparent, with key examples being, learning more speedily and the mutual understanding that the process bought. The benefits of effective coaching were clearly presented across all three study SMEs (Table 7.12.).

**Table 7.12 Similarities and Differences – Benefits of Coaching; all three cases**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning quickly, helping share the workload and increasing productivity</li> <li>• Being able to coach others successfully</li> <li>• The managers and employees improve mutual understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to work</li> <li>• Helping support the organisation’s growth</li> <li>• Learning cultural organisation</li> <li>• Being good people</li> <li>• Leadership development</li> <li>• Low turnover rate</li> <li>• Being reliable to work</li> <li>• Developing each other</li> <li>• Being happy to work</li> <li>• Clear direction</li> <li>• The growth of ability and EQ</li> </ul>

***Negative Effects of Coaching***

Most of the participants agreed that there were few, if any, negative effects associated with coaching, although some initial resistance was apparent when the process started, or with new employees. Some participants reported that the process was ‘boring’. One concern raised was associated with ‘trial and error in practice’, and the making of small mistakes, which they felt uncomfortable with, although overall, the process was perceived as beneficial (7.13.).

**Table 7.13 Similarities and differences in negative effects of coaching**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Negative effects of coaching</li> <li>• Making small mistakes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistant in the beginning to working</li> <li>• Boring and they do not want to do it</li> <li>• Negative attitude of new employees</li> </ul>

***Considerations for Coaching***

In seeking to improve coaching in their organisations, the participants focused on both the system and the development of individuals within it. A common theme related to ensuring that the HRD system was fully effective and this was communicated effectively amongst the employees ('telling the HRD story'), and with a stronger 'voice' being given to front line employees. A second key area the participants raised related to the training and development of those who coached, with improved skills and ability being highlighted. Finally, the issue of mentor was raised, although there appears some confusion as to the exact role (Table 7.14.)

**Table 7.14 Similarities and Differences – Considerations for Coaching**

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having an effective system in organisation such as management system, HRD system, communication,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee training by the managers</li> <li>• The voice on the line</li> <li>• Telling the story to HRD</li> </ul>

<p>organisational culture, talent management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing ideas and helping each other</li> <li>• Having a good mentor for employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good trainers</li> <li>• Developing skills of coaches to transfer knowledge</li> <li>• Ensuring that organisation is successful</li> </ul>
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## Summary

In this chapter the participants' perceptions of HRD and coaching in their organisations were drawn together, with various aspects being compared across the study SMEs. Whilst inter-organisational differences were apparent, three distinct themes arose from evidenced data.

The perception of talent: This first themed concept referred to which employees were valued in an organisation, with there being variation in the outcome. For Case-study One all employees were perceived as being treated as equal and thus, all were referred to as talented; although in practice this might not have not been totally the case. In the other two organisations a more limited view existed and whilst all were valued as people, a group of 'talented' individuals, as low as ten per cent, were selected for additional, specialist coaching.

Human Resource Development: HRD was perceived in a positive light with the idea of training and development being welcomed, although the approaches varied between organisations. Two of the SMEs had established a HRD section or appointed a HRD officer, whilst in Case-study One the development role was assigned to managers. The method for developing employees also

varied; with the Buddhist approach being used to build people, or having an ownership quotient, or placing a focus on project assignment. All of these approaches were conducted within what participants reported as a 'happy workplace', or with Case-study One a 'family' setting.

Coaching practices and perspectives: Within this third theme, there are two elements: practice and perspective. With respect to practice there was little difference, particular in that none of the study SMEs evidenced a formal approach to coaching, although this is not unusual in smaller organisations. Through an informal coaching approach the managers acted as internal coaches to cascade their knowledge down to employees, although it is noted that in Case-study One a close and tight-knit relationship existed between coach and coachee, which led to the practice being termed 'friendly coaching'.

With regards to coaching perspective, employers perceived the effectiveness of coaching differently, although there was a degree of interdependence, with three common areas emerging. The owner-managers placed a strong focus on business success, the setting of goals and, lastly, on using managers as coaches and these can be integrated as the foundation to drive successful coaching forward.

Finally, an important finding of this chapter is that, in all three SMEs, the owner-managers played a significant and central role in determining the direction and importance of coaching practices; it is they who were the key drivers of HRD and organisational success.



## **CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

This final chapter draws together the main discussions and provides a contrasting with the conceptual framework and the existing literature, from which it was derived. In doing so, the broad aim of the study is addressed, as are the three research questions that were outlined in the first chapter and which flowed from the literature review. First, the discussion refers to the perception of how talented employees are developed, which is followed by reference to and discussion of, how human resource development approaches are perceived. The final area of discussion relates to the third research question and the perceived effectiveness of the coaching practices that existed in the case-study organisations. Having discussed the key areas, a framework is presented that illuminates the key outcomes in a diagrammatic form and which is unique to the current study. The framework leads to the next section, which presents the key contributions to theoretical knowledge that the study has made. The theoretical contribution is followed by the contribution to practice, following which areas of future research and the study's limitation are outlined, before moving on to the concluding section.

### **8.1 Discussion on Findings**

The initial conceptual framework for the investigation into the HRD coaching activities of three case-study SMEs in Thailand was drawn from gaps in the literature. Of particular interest was an in-depth investigation into the Human Resource Development (HRD) practice of coaching for talent, which has not

been studied previously within the Thai situation. Drawing on in-depth interviews, document analysis and non-participant observations, the three research questions were identified.

**Research Question 1:** In what ways are talented employees identified within three critical case-study organisations and what are the implications for how talented employees are perceived?

**Research Question 2:** To what extent and how, do three critical case-study organisations develop their own talented employees and for what purpose?

**Research Question 3:** What coaching practices are used and how are these perceived by both employers and employees?

Chapter Four, Five, Six and Seven have illuminated these research questions, along with the associated concepts and, through an in-depth investigation into the case-study organisations, have surfaced areas of interest. Further discussion was provided in Chapter Seven, where the cross-case analysis identified three key themes, with the third being sub-divided: ‘Perception of talent’; ‘Human Resource Development’; ‘Coaching practices’ and ‘Coaching perspectives’ (Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1 Three Key Themes**

Details of theme	Case-study One	Case-study Two	Case-study Three
<b>Theme 1:</b> The perceptions of talent	Everyone has talent	Some people have talent	

<b>Theme 2:</b> Human Resource Development (HRD)	The owner-manager is the key driver for developing employees through different dominant methods in each case:		
	Buddhist approach and informal activities	Happy workplace and semi-formal activities	Many HRD projects and formal activities
<b>Theme 3a:</b> Coaching practices	Informal coaching through internal coaching using the managers as coaches under 'friendly coaching'		
<b>Theme 3b:</b> Coaching perspectives	Business success is the key to effective coaching	The manager as coach is the most effective way of coaching	Being result-oriented is the first priority for effective coaching

Source: Author's Construct

### 8.1.1 Perception of Talent

*Research Question 1: In what ways are talented employees identified within three critical case-study organisations and what are the implications for how talented employees are perceived?*

Within the literature, it is apparent that talent can be defined from different perspectives and within different contexts, along with the cultural elements in which it is situated. Given the variation, it was important to explore how 'talent' is perceived in a SME context. This approach enabled a critical understanding of who SMEs regard as talented, along with how SMEs develop and coach talented employees. From a discussion of the research findings, it can be concluded that two case studies shared a similar perception, in that perceived talent refers to those people who are dominant, perform well and have high

potential. Accordingly, people who are perceived as being talented are developed differently to other employees, both in terms of the time and money invested in them, although differences in style existed between the case studies. Conversely, one case-study organisation viewed talent as including everyone in the organisation, with it being claimed that all staff were treated as equals. This conceptual thinking is supported in the literature, with Elegbe (2016), Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), Swailes et al. (2014), Ingham (2006) stating that talent can be classified through different approaches, such as the inclusive or exclusive, or objective or subjective approaches. The approach to talent that is selected invariably depends on the business strategy, the competitive environment and the type of organisation involved. When investigating the concept of coaching for talent within Thai society, there was an element of cultural influence, which 'grounded' the actors' perceptions within cultural boundaries.

When considered in the context of SMEs in the current study, in practice it would be difficult for the organisations to treat all employees equally, without some segmentation, as there are financial limitations as to how much can be invested in training and developing their employees. Wilcox (2016) argues that the concept of perceiving everyone as a talent is laudable, with a further suggestion being that, it is possible for small businesses to fill many positions, including senior ones, by drawing talent from within (Swailes, et al., 2014). The valuing of everyone as 'talent' may relate to SMEs having a small number of employees, thus, they are more able to invest in all employees, viewing them all as talented. Again, as highlighted in the literature, the variations in

organisations make it difficult to specify universal definitions of talent, with factors such as culture impacting on the outcome. It is of particular note that the concept of 'talent' is new to Thai business, with an additional complication being that there is no clear understanding of the concept within the Thai language or society. Nonetheless, in the current case studies, the role of owner-managers was found to be a key factor in defining and developing what they perceive as talent, within a Thai culture.

One example in the current study, is seen in the owner-manager of Case-study One, whose strong Buddhist beliefs led him to believe that the classifying people is likely to raise jealousies, whereby treating all employees' as talented avoids this. In addition to treating all employees as equal, the owner-manager considered his employees as being part of an extended family, of which he cares for. This idea of family supports the thinking that SME businesses have unique characteristics that differentiate them from larger organisations (Beaver and Jennings, 2000, Hill and McGowan, 1999, Storey, 1994) and highlights that owner-managers have a strong influence on numerous organisational activities, including the development of employees (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). It is also concluded that the owner-manager's perspective of talent has impacted differently on employee development and coaching practices. This is especially the case within the context of Thailand, which has a different culture than that which exists in the dominant Western literature on talent management. Indeed, the influence of religious beliefs, both Buddhism and Christianity and the social context, make the situation unique. Thus, before they can develop talented employees in a particular way, it is necessary for

SMEs to be clear as to how they perceive talent within the organisation, adopting either an inclusive or exclusive perspective. It is from within the perception of these coaching development methods, viewed through a cultural lens, that the 'good' practices associated with HRD emerged.

### **8.1.2 Human Resource Development**

*Research Question Two: To what extent and how, do three critical case-study organisations develop their own talented employees and for what purpose?*

The literature suggests that many SMEs prefer to adopt informal activities, incidental learning and a high degree of unplanned and short-term development for their employees (Marsick, 2009, Ellinger and Cseh, 2007, Saru, 2007, Tam and Gray, 2016, Stewart and Beaver, 2004). In exploring Theme Two of the current study, it is not surprising that, among the three case-study organisations, at least one of them employed similar practices to those described in the literature. Indeed, Case-study One (TradingSME) did not have an annual HR training plan, neither did formulate plans in advance, or invest time and money in training. The organisation preferred to adopt informal activities, led by the owner-manager, who was the key decision maker in all aspects, including with regard to employee development. The organisation had no distinct HRD function, with this area being the responsibilities of an administrative manager, who, among many other duties, developed employees in line with the owner-manager's directions. This is consistent with Hill and Stewart (2000, p.8) argument that small firms 'do not do HRD', as they often have little HRD expertise. In the specific context of Case-study One the

owner-manager provided himself as a good role model, particularly with respect to his positive characteristics and Buddhist belief. Indeed, his personal qualities helped his employees to trust him, feel warm and believe they were bound up together in the business. Further, he used the Buddhist approach, often through religious activities, to focus on the development of all employees, with an aim of making them 'good' people. His perspective that talented employees included everyone in his organisation, provided a distinct and unique approach within his organisation, and again, illustrates the influence of owner-managers in SMEs.

The other two case-study organisations did not hold similar views to the illustration above, in that they had introduced a formal Human Resource Development system, similar to those in larger organisations (Tam and Gray, 2016). In particular, Case-study Three (ServiceSME) provided an outstanding example of HRD, in that it adopted a systematic process to developing its employees. The organisation had established a HRD department more than 10 years ago, whilst the owner-manager of Case-study Two (ProductSME) had employed a HRD officer who held direct responsibility for developing employees. As these approaches differ from parts of the literature, it suggests that small businesses may characteristically adopt informal HRM practices (Down, 2010) and that they generally do not hire HRM specialists (Gilbert and Jones, 2000), although there was one incident of this happening.

Despite all case-study organisations not employing a HR professional, an important and common characteristic was that they all highly valued their

human resources. They dedicated ample resources to developing employees, in different ways, with this being led by the owner-managers' policies. There are indications in their development actions that suggest that they are deserved winners of Thailand's national SME award, which in itself identifies them as 'high-performing' organisations, particularly with regard to HR practices. The results from the 2012 Global Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS), supports the idea that when HR is strong, it plays a crucial role in organisational performance and development (Ulrich et al., 2012).

Within the case-study organisations, the portrayal of Buddhist and Christian philosophies engendered a strong feeling of belonging within a 'family' atmosphere. Further, within the Buddhist tradition, an ethos existed to support others, which emerged as a key element of organisational learning. A particular example was Case One, where everyone was perceived as 'talent'; a process that sought to protect employees from jealousy or envy, with it being noted that envy is one of the five 'poisons' in Buddhism (Smith, Merlone, and Duffy, 2016). Indeed, this pervasive oneness resulted in the employees not perceiving coaching as a separate entity, with it being embraced within the notion of providing support within the business 'family'. In Case-study Two, it was equally apparent that the Western concept of coaching had been modified to fit the organisational and cultural ethos. This realigning of concepts placed a greater focus on understanding actions and concepts in a specific situation, rather than striving for globalised models or solutions. This is particularly the case within a SME organisation, where the idiosyncratic nature of the owner-manager seems to 'ground' the learning within the organisation's ethos.



In brief, with regard to perceptions of HRD within the context of Thai SMEs, the single most important point is that owner-managers develop the organisation's talent and build mutual trust between themselves and their employees. Their aim was to create 'a friendly atmosphere' within the organisation, which flows from a recognition of the importance of human resource development. At the same time, HRD functions have been established practically in two cases, with a view to improving employee and organisational performance, through a diverse range of activities.

### **8.1.3 Coaching Practices and Perspective**

*Research Question Three: What coaching for talent practices are used and how are these perceived by both employers and employees?*

Within the third theme, coaching practices and perspectives provided answers to the third research question. However, whilst the three cases provided a variety of learning opportunities, actioned through HR activities and practices, these may not be sufficient to meet the full development of employees. The current study found that coaching practices were often adopted informally, spontaneously and subconsciously, through on-the-job training, with little understanding of the real concept behind coaching. The added complication exists that within a Thai business culture the concept of coaching is invariably associated with 'teaching', with the two terms often being used interchangeably. Elsewhere, coaching has emerged almost as a mantra, with authors arguing that it can be applied in numerous situations (Bono et al., 2009, Ellinger et al., 2003, Hamlin et al., 2008, Passmore, 2010). Indeed,

coaching is considered to be a key element in the success of individual and organisational growth (Bueno, 2010, Ellinger and Kim, 2014, Lane, 2010, Neale, Spencer-Arnell, and Wilson, 2009, Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012). In one respect, all three cases adopted a similar coaching practice, with the manager acting as coach, or teacher. This result is in line with the literature, where the cost of coaching programmes carries a high commercial price, particularly if external executive coaches are hired. According to Peel (2008), the financial aspect forms a considerable barrier to coaching practices being used in SMEs. Similarly, there is a lack of evidence that demonstrates a return on investment, which cautions SME owner-managers, especially with regard to the cost disadvantage associated with external coaching. St John-Brooks (2013) and Frisch (2001) argue that many organisations adopt internal coaching, due to its lower cost and the coaches having a greater familiarity with the organisation and its culture. Thus, the concept of a manager-coach matches the SME situation and is evident in the current study for three key reasons. First, the SMEs have some constraints, especially their limited budget overall. Second, when two out of the three cases explored the hiring of external coaches, they were either unsuccessful or it was considered to be an expensive exercise. Finally, all cases preferred to use the manager as coach, because they understood both the individuals and organisational culture. Importantly, the owner-managers held the perception that it was easier to develop their employees on a continuous basis, rather than hiring external coaches for short periods.

Coaching is one of the most important methods to develop talent (Berger and Berger, 2004) and the current research illuminated a key issue associated with coaching. All three organisations found that their understanding and use of the term 'coaching' overlapped with the use of training, teaching and development. In addition, coaching and mentoring were often used interchangeably, which is not necessarily consistent with all authors. One explanation is that the managers, including those who coached, had not been trained in coaching philosophy or techniques, even though they acted as coaches. However, whilst they did not fully understand the formal concept of coaching, they carried out their work in a subconscious way, drawing on general life skills. In contrast to the unstructured coaching taking place, the mentoring programme functioned as a more formalised system. It was also apparent that coaching and mentoring were sometimes used interchangeably, with the mentor and coach being the same person, yet with little clarity of the differences involved. The conceptual confusion meant that some employees did not receive sufficient knowledge to benefit from either the coaching or their mentor.

There is a clear need for SME practitioners to more fully understand the roles separately and to employ them in a beneficial way. It would also be advantageous if an organisation clearly differentiated between the role of the coach and mentor, and employ these correctly, so as to make clear the benefits that each can add to developing employees effectively. The managers, acting as coaches of talent, are in a position to assist an employee in learning about his or her job, to improve awareness and set achievable goals, so as to improve job performance. On the other hand, the mentoring

approach can assist employees in learning and acquiring knowledge that is not directly relevant to his or her job, such as organisational culture and a positive attitude, which help to shape the individual's beliefs and values at work, in a positive way. Thus, whilst the coaching and mentoring activities are supportive of each other, the ideal would be to allocate each role separately, in order to increase the overall benefit. An example is seen in Case-study Three (ServiceSME), which had a distinctive approach, whereby the mentor was separate from the coaching activity, although in small SMEs the low number of managers this might not be possible.

Overall, an outstanding finding relates to the friendly atmosphere in which coaching for talent was undertaken, in all three case studies. The consensus perception was that the owner-managers possessed the positive characteristics that were capable of creating an effective and happy work environment. The owner-manager contributed to the positive atmosphere by building 'love and trust' in the minds of their employees, auctioning this through religious, often Buddhist, beliefs and by being perceived as a strong role model. In addition, love, care, organisational awareness, leadership development and appropriate rewards were all perceived to be beneficial. The organisations committed both time and financial resources to building talented employees, and creating a supportive environment, which fostered a 'close and tight-knit relationship' within their organisations. This caring approach is in line with Anderson et al., (2009), who found that a strong organisational culture is beneficial and worth the investment, as it helps drive an organisation

forward. There are, however, many drivers that influence the coaching culture and the growth of organisational coaching (Jarvis et al., 2006).

The situation in Thailand shows some parallels with the literature, for example, there is a generally agreed view that coaching in the case-study SMEs, broadly operates within a less formal sphere of learning (Ceranic and Popovic, 2009, Hill and Stewart, 2000, Westhead and Storey, 1996). In addition, the characteristics of owner-managers are invariably a key factor in determining a SMEs growth (Sarwoko and Frisdiantara, 2016, Sarwoko, Surachman, and Hadiwidjojo, 2013). There are equally extensive reports in the literature that the managers play a significant role as the facilitator of learning, and as coaches (Beattie et al., 2014). However, there is the view that HRD occurs “through the job as part of normal work and problem-solving routines” (Hill and Stewart, 2000, p. 12), with it not being consciously perceived as HRD. Indeed, the process may be seen in ‘spoken about’ terms by owner-managers, who accept the process as ‘business as usual’, rather than HRD (*Ibid*). In this respect, practitioners in SMEs may strive to better understand coaching as a discrete approach to developing employee potential, although in a practical way, if the passing of knowledge leads to improved performance, then the absence of theoretical concepts might not be so important for SMEs.

The effectiveness of coaching practices was surfaced as a central issue by both the employers and employees. In general, publications that are concerned with coaching have increased over the years, with the concept emerging as a core development intervention that can enhance both individual

talent and organisational success (Whybrow and Lancaster, 2012). Yet, within the context of SMEs, there is a lack of literature that refers specifically to this type of organisation (Ellinger and Kim, 2014). In the current research, both the employers' and employees' perspectives were explored with regard to the effectiveness of coaching practices.

Whilst the three owner-managers talked about different approaches, their thinking can be combined into a single concept. The key message was that effective coaching begins with conducting the business successfully, with it being argued that this provides an essential foundation for employee development and coaching practices. The manager-as-coach was equally perceived as an effective way of developing talent, particularly when managers are result-oriented and evaluate coaching goals in line with those of the organisation.

Recognising that SME processes may differ from the perceived wisdom presented in the literature, the views surfaced by the employees, into effective coaching are of equal importance. In line with their owner-managers, they welcomed the assistance provided in helping them to attain their goals, with the least amount of errors. The efforts to enhance the employees' skills development, led to a feeling of pride, in that they felt trusted to be able to complete tasks. In addition, employees felt valued and increased their self-esteem, as they reached a position when they were able to assist and informally coach those around them.

Before moving on to the framework for coaching practice, a table is presented that outlines, in a schematic way, the synthesis between emergent themes, research questions and key concepts (Table 8.2).

**Table 8.2 Relationship between Key Themes, Research Questions and the Conceptual Framework**

<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Indicative Research Question</b>	<b>Indicative Concepts</b>
<b>Theme 1:</b> The perceptions of talent	<b>RQ 1:</b> In what ways are talented employees identified and what are the implications?	Talented employees – definitions, perception, perceived criteria
<b>Theme 2:</b> Human Resource Development (HRD)	<b>RQ 2:</b> To what extent and how are talented employees developed?	HRD – managers as coaches for talent, ‘good’ coaches, cascading learning
<b>Theme 3a:</b> Coaching for talent practices	<b>RQ 3:</b> What coaching for talent practices are used and how are these perceived by both employers and employees?	Coaching as practice – method, role of managers, informal/formal, external options, on-the-job and internal training
<b>Theme 3b:</b> Coaching for talent perspectives	<b>RQ 3:</b> What coaching for talent practices are used and how are these perceived by both employers and employees?	Coaching as practice – perceptions of effectiveness, environmental fit

Source: Author’s Construct

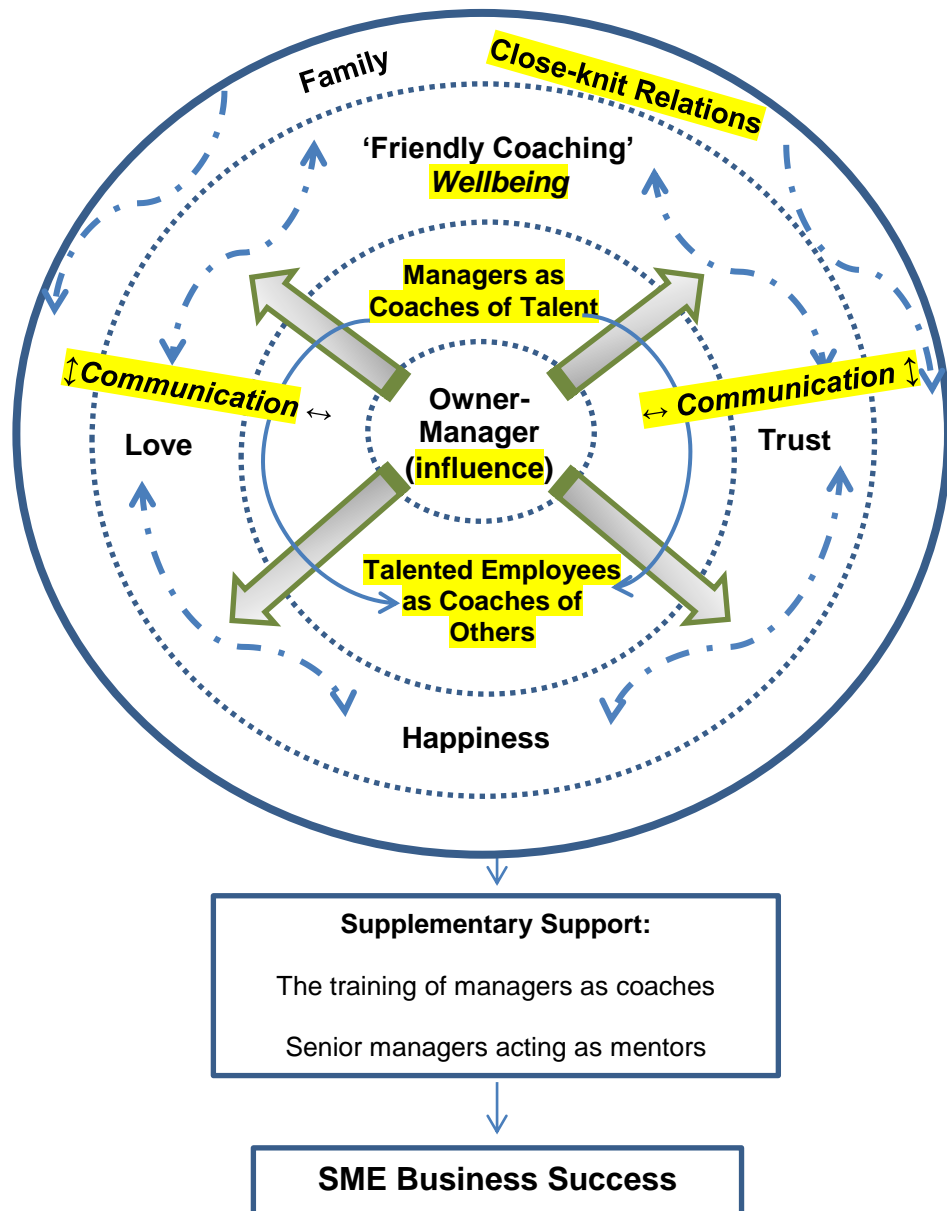
#### **8.1.4 Framework for Coaching Practices for Talent**

Accompanying the broad aim of the current study, in Chapter One, was a statement that particular attention would be paid to developing a coaching framework for talent. Having explored the various talked-about perceptions on coaching for talent, it is apparent that there were differences, both within and across the study SMEs. Nonetheless, it is possible to illuminate some positive coaching for talent outcomes and these are now presented in a unique illustrative coaching framework.

Human Resource Development, coaching for talent and talent itself are strongly associated with a human process (Cox et al., 2014). However, the coaching practice of talent is equally important to the overall business strategy (Bennett and Bush, 2009) and it is with this in mind that the current study provided a further subsidiary aim, which referred to the enhancement of employee and organisational performance. Coaching offers an effective way of building trust and performance (Passimore, 2015) and it is with this in mind that a unique illustrative coaching for talent framework is presented, with the ideal of 'Business Success' being the culmination of the framework (Figure 8.1).

As well as highlighting the key outcomes of the study, the framework may act as a thought-provoking stimulant for other SMEs in Thailand and beyond.





Source: Author's Construct

**Figure 8.1 Circles of coaching practice for talent in SMEs**

Before moving on to explain the different components of the framework, it is positioned within a wider setting. The main conceptual focus within the 'Circles of coaching practice for talent' framework is contained within a series of concentric circles, with the outer two rings embracing the 'wellbeing' nature of

the practices. Within Western thinking of workplace relations the idea is often put forward that antagonism exists between management and workers, which can evolve into actions that are damaging for both parties (Bingham, 2016). Within an Asian workplace, particularly one where employees follow the Buddhist faith, there is a tendency for the Eastern philosophy to more influence the wellbeing of workplace relations. One particular concept relates to the Chinese philosophy of Ying and Yang (Baxter and Sagart, 2014). The central philosophy addresses how seemingly contradictory forces can indeed operate as in a complementary and interdependent way, which follows a form of mutual dependence. Thus, as well as providing guidelines for medicine, martial arts and exercise (Ames, 2002), the principles of harmony can equally be allied to the workplace.

The outer circle of the framework represents a key finding from the current study, in that the organisation was perceived as a 'family', with individuals being valued and developed within 'close-knit relationships'. Variations existed amongst the case-study organisations, with it being apparent that Case-study One provided the strongest family environment. Embraced within the family and flowing from it, are the elements of 'friendly coaching', 'trust', 'love' and 'happiness'. Indeed, the latter symbolises the flow of harmony that can exist within an organisation. Whilst the flow of energy is suggested by the arrows being in a circulating motion, the hatched lines indicate that the harmony elements can move inward, to embrace the core of the coaching for talent practices. For the coaching to be effective and improve competence and performance (Beattie et al., 2014), a high degree of open and honest

communication is required, which flows horizontally and vertically. Operating within the outer circles, managers act as coaches of talent and, in a positive way develop their employees. An organisation will need to determine what form of coaching is appropriate for their circumstances, with the pattern in the current case studies varying between the adoption of a formal to the more informal approach, with the latter tending to fit more closely with a relaxed family atmosphere. Similarly, as Case-study One recognised all employees as 'talent', the rhetoric was that coaching was given to everyone, which it was argued helped avoid any notion of favouritism within the family.

Sitting in a complementary position to the 'Managers as coaches of talent' is the 'Talented employees as coaches of others'. Here, to achieve greater individual and organisation success, once coachees have discovered their own knowledge and skills, the endeavour would be to become 'advisers' themselves (Passmore, 2015) and cascade their learning outwards. Indeed, respondents outlined the benefits of inter-employee coaching in terms of the 'recycling' of talent amongst the wider organisation.

At the centre of framework lies the owner-manager, with the current study having illuminated the importance of this person, in particular to creating a learning and development ethos within an SME. In placing the owner-manager at the centre of the framework it emphasises their importance and illustrates that their influence expands throughout the whole organisation, in particular their role in driving effective coaching for talent. In the current research, some owner-managers were guided by their religion, with the principles of their belief

governing much of what happened in the organisation, including their approach to coaching for talent. In addition, their central position illustrates that the owner-manager, through their personal qualities, provides a role model for the rest of the organisational 'family'. The study revealed that the owner-managers had the ability, through their personal characteristics, to not only champion coaching for talent, but to create love, trust and happiness within the organisational setting.

As has been suggested in the literature and from the perceptions gathered during the current study, coaching alone may not be sufficient to achieve organisational success in SMEs. Thus, 'Supplementary Support' is included within the framework, with the first element being the training of managers as coaches for talent. There is a danger that an over formalisation of the coaching process may distract from the family atmosphere, but, on the positive side, it would lead to greater effectiveness in employee development. Within the Thai context the Government offers support to SMEs, with the Office of SME Promotion (OSMEP) providing training programmes that address the 'manager as coach' issue. Inviting senior managers to act as mentors is put forward as another 'Supplementary Support', although the small numbers within a SME may make it difficult to source enough mentors who are not line managers. If insufficient numbers of mentors exist, the decision of whether to breach the mentoring principle or to just concentrate on coaching will rest with the individual SME.

## **8.2 Research Contributions**

In drawing the discussion together and in answering the research aim, this section provides the theoretical and practical contributions that have emerged from the current study. The outcomes relate to the original conceptual framework presented in Chapter One and the summary Table 8.2, earlier in this chapter.

### **8.2.1 Theoretical Contribution to Knowledge**

Following a detailed exploration of how coaching for talent is perceived with in three Thai SMEs, the current study has made four significant contributions to theoretical knowledge.

First, with respect to HRD as a broad concept, the study of how employers and employees perceive the process of development, along with the associated implications, adds to the wider body of HRD knowledge. Gaps exist in the literature with regards to a full understanding of the HRD function, particularly how it is perceived in SMEs. Specifically, very little analysis has been undertaken that considers the actors' perspective, with studies invariably focusing on larger organisations, within Western nations (Valverde et al., 2013). Thus, the current study makes a valuable theoretical contribution to individual learning and the development element of HRD. More specifically within the HRD field, the benefits associated with a 'happy workplace' and a caring family environment, are seen as conducive to the generation of talent. Similarly the notion of effective communication across the organisation, was found to create an environment where organisational learning developed. The study also contributes to the wider debate surrounding the transferability of

development models across cultures and illustrates that, even within one nation, notable variances exist.

Second, within the wider HRD field, the study embraced the concept of 'talent', which is under-researched (Wilcox, 2016), particularly in South East Asia (Chan, 2015). The findings, in stimulating thought on the organisational meaning of talent, as perceived by participants, add to the broader perspective of the phenomena. Of particular note in the Thai context, is that there is no direct translation for 'talent' in the Thai language and thus the perception rests more with the perceiver. However, the concept is contained within the harmonious relations enshrined within the Buddhist faith, which the majority of the nation follows (Ratanakul, 1999). Although coaching is addressed in the following section, the business perception of 'talent' is perceived as being more concerned with 'relationships' (Komin, 1995), rather than the Western view of it being a method of development; it is about the culturally complete person (Box et al., 1995; Thakur and Walsh, 2013).

Third, the specific area of coaching is under-researched, as is the concept of talent, particularly in SMEs (Malikeh et al., 2012). Further, in extending the study to Thai SMEs and in approaching the study from a qualitative perspective, this adds to the contribution, with no similar research having been identified in a Thai context. Of particular note is the cascading of talent, with coachees disseminating their learning on an inter-employee basis, which equally supports both the individual and business endeavour. In addition, a

unique framework comprising 'Circles of coaching practice for talent' is presented, which details the perceptions surrounding the coaching phenomenon within the Thai workplace. Incorporated within this original framework are the concepts that were found to be of importance to organisational success in Thai SMEs. It is of note that the strong Buddhist culture, with its focus on family orientated values (Thakur and Walsh, 2013), provides the setting for the framework, although it is anticipated that this might provoke thought in a wider aspect.

Fourth, to a lesser extent, a theoretical contribution is made to the wider SME literature, with the current study supporting the priority and importance of owner-managers within the SME environment. Further, within an Eastern organisational setting, the current study identified that the individual philosophy of the owner-managers plays a crucial role in organisational learning, particularly with respect to coaching for talent. As with the three other areas of knowledge contribution, an additional dimension that added to the study's impact is the qualitative nature of the enquiry, which is rare amongst studies both in SMEs and in Thailand (Kluaypa, 2013).

It is also of note that the current study contributed to a dearth of qualitative studies on organisational learning and coaching practices within SMEs, with the approach lending a voice to those small organisations that aspire to achieve results, within the complexity of conducting business in a rapidly emerging economy (Keskin et al., 2010).

Having highlighted where the current study addresses significant knowledge gaps in the existing literature, the next section outlines the contributions to practice.

### **8.2.2 Contributions to Practice**

The primary aim of the current study was to explore and build on the theoretical concepts associated with coaching for talent. However, in exploring employee perceptions of coaching for talent within an organisational context, it is clear that implications for coaching practices emerged, that might be of value to practitioners. Caution needs to be exercised in how the outcomes are interpreted, as the study was qualitative in nature and did not seek to generalise. Nonetheless, the three points outlined below may succeed in stimulating thought about the process of coaching for talent.

First, the unique framework ('Circles of coaching practice for talent') provides owner-managers of SMEs with a greater awareness of their overall influence and how they might codify the practice of supporting organisational learning and effectiveness. The three case studies were deemed 'high performance' organisations, having won the prodigious SME National Training Award and therefore may not be typical of SMEs in Thailand, or elsewhere. Nonetheless, for organisations wishing to shun Western management precepts and experiment with a Thai specific iteration, the framework may prove of value.

Second, the study raises awareness that a specific focus on core development interventions can engender a culture of learning support, where the resourcefulness of people predominates. More specifically, the study



outcomes provide a catalyst for thought on coaching practice itself. Organisations have a wide range of choices, relating to internal-external dilemmas, or the on or off-the-job approach and the perceptions of the current study participants might provide an avenue for fruitful debate. Similarly, the iterations concerning the characteristics of a 'good' coach, such as being open-minded, trusting and an effective communicator, might be worthy of further consideration.

Third, there is an apparent need to hold a flexible view of employee development. Variations existed in all three case studies as to what was perceived as good practice for employee development with, for example some organisations using the term coaching and mentoring interchangeably. In a similar vein, organisations would be advised to consider what 'talent' means for them and how coaching can facilitate its progress towards both individual and organisational effectiveness. The outcomes from the current study suggest that SMEs need to analyse the capacities of each approach to coaching for talent practice and, in order to develop employees effectively, select the best-fit practices from their organisations.

### **8.3 Avenues for Future Research**

The current work provided a niche in-depth study of individual SMEs in Thailand. A future avenue for research would be to continue the exploration of coaching for talent in SMEs, with parallel investigations being undertaken in both Thailand and further afield. For example the 'Circle of coaching practice for talent' could be investigated in other organisation to ascertain its suitability

and robustness. Researchers could determine which parts of the current study can be taken forward and surface appropriate research questions.

At the same time a greater clarification on the meaning of talent within various organisational contexts and across sectors could be sought, which would lead to a greater understanding of the concept.

One area of particular concern that the current study highlighted refers to the misunderstanding surrounding mentoring and coaching and this would provide a fruitful area of research. Indeed, all research that leads to a clearer perspective as to how employees are developed through coaching, would be desirable, particularly in relation to SME organisations. Such a study could involve the perceptions of mentoring, as opposed to following the iterations of the predominantly Western literature. Moreover, from the findings of current study, there are issues that should be of interest for developing talent, especially within SMEs'. Within the current study a close relationship between the owner-manager and the workforce was shown to assist employees in feeling 'happy' and in generating a desire for learning, thereby providing an avenue for further research that could contribute towards the learning process within SMEs.

#### **8.4 Study Limitations**

All research has its limitations and the current study is no exception. The aim of investigating the perceptions of coaching for talent in three Thai SMEs was to provide an in-depth study in a situational context. However, in line with many qualitative studies, the results lend themselves more to individual

interpretation, rather than any ability to generalise to a wider population. Thus, the results are valuable in that they add to theoretical knowledge, although, caution is needed in making any wider generalisations. Locating a study within a single nation can equally restrict those who seek a wider application and whilst this is acknowledged, the specific aim of the study was to gain a greater understanding of the individual perspective of coaching practice for talent.

## **8.5 Concluding Comments**

The current study was situated in Thailand, where SMEs play an important role in the nation's economy; accounting for 99 per cent of Thailand's enterprises. Whilst there are currently 2.7 million SMEs, only a small number are granted the SME National Award, which is in recognition of their high performance and their commitment to human resource practice. Three of these organisations were selected as 'critical case studies' for an in-depth study of how talented employees were developed and the implications associated with this. The case studies were located in the trading, manufacturing and service sectors, thus covering all of the sectors associated with Thai SMEs.

As the literature suggested, Thai SMEs have experienced difficulty in adopting Western concepts of HRD, with these 'best practices' not transferring easily across cultural divides, thus, the study provides a greater understanding of coaching practice for talent.

Important areas that surfaced from the study refer to successful organisations having a tendency to foster a 'family' atmosphere that supports coaching practice for talent. The study also highlighted the crucial role that owner-

managers play within SMEs in furthering organisational learning and coaching practice for talent. Overall, three predominant themes were surfaced in the study: 'perception of talent', 'Human Resource Development', 'coaching practices and perspective', all of which have made a valuable contribution to the perceived value of coaching practice for talent in Thailand's SMEs. The outcomes, including the 'Circle of coaching for talent practice', make a theoretical contribution to knowledge and it is envisaged that the study will stimulate thought and further questioning amongst practitioners, particularly those who seek to implement the Western view of HRD in an unthinking way.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I

#### Interview Questions

##### **No.1 Owner-managers:**

Interview questions will be further refined following the analysis of organisational documents.

Thank the owner-manager for allowing access to his organisation, relevant documents and coaches and coachees. Remind the owner-manager that he/she and the coaches and coachees can withdraw from the study at any time and remind him/her of the confidential nature of the interview.

- You organisation was awarded an SMEs National Award from OSMEP and you have allowed me access to your organisation to investigate the coaching practices within your organisation. Can you please tell me who is your talented employee, how to identify and how to develop them?
- Can you please tell me about your experiences of coaching and why you introduced coaching to this organisation?
- From your experience what are the main advantages of coaching talented employees?
- Have you experienced any disadvantages of coaching talented employees?
- How would you describe a 'good' coach and a 'good' coachee.
- Are there any recommendations you would like to suggest for coaching in your organisation?

##### **No. 2 Coach Perspective:**

Interview questions will be further refined following the analysis of organisational documents and the observation of the coaching session.

Thank the coach for allowing observation of the coaching session. Remind the coach that they can withdraw from the study at any time and remind them of the confidential nature of the interview.

- You have been identified by the owner-manager as a talented employee who receives coaching. Can you please tell me who is your talented employee, how to identify and how to develop them?

- Can you please tell me about your experiences of coaching?
- From your experience what are the main advantages of coaching talented employees.
- Have you experienced any disadvantages from your coaching experience?
- How would you describe a 'good' coach and a 'good' coachee.
- Are there any recommendations you would like to suggest for coaching in your organisation?

**No.3 Coachee Perspective:**

Interview questions will be further refined following the analysis of organisational documents and the observation of the coaching session.

Thank the coachee for allowing observation of the coaching session. Remind the coachee that they can withdraw from the study at any time and remind them of the confidential nature of the interview.

- You have been identified by the owner-manager as a talented employee who receives coaching. Can you please tell me about how to be developed?
- Can you please tell me about your experiences of coaching?
- From your experience what are the main advantages of coaching talented employees.
- Have you experienced any disadvantages from your coaching experience?
- How would you describe a 'good' coach and a 'good' coachee.
- Are there any recommendations you would like to suggest for coaching in your organisation?

## Template Analysis

### **1. The Initial Template**

The development of categories in the initial template was guided by the study's aims and the main study's three research questions.

#### **1. Employee Development for talent**

#### **2. Coaching Practices for talent**

- 1.1 Formal Coaching
- 1.2 Informal Coaching

#### **2. Perspective of Coaching for talent**

- 2.1 Employer Perspective
  - 2.1.1 the main advantages of coaching talented employees
  - 2.1.2 the main disadvantages of coaching talented employees
- 2.2 Employee Perspective
  - 2.2.1 the main advantages of coaching talented employees
  - 2.2.2 the main disadvantages of coaching talented employees

#### **3. The Good Characteristics**

- 3.1 The Characteristics of good coach
- 3.2 The Characteristics of good coachee

#### **4. Possible recommendations to suggest for coaching in SME**

## **The Final Template**

The final template was changed and developed by applying it to the full data set basing it on the conceptual framework and emerging issues.

### **1. The perception of talented employee**

### **2. Human Resource Development practices**

#### **3a. Coaching practices**

- 3.1 Coaching approaches
- 3.2 Coaching techniques
- 3.3 Appraisal and evaluation of coaching
- 3.4 Issues in coaching

#### **3b. Coaching perspective**

- 4.1 Effectiveness of Coaching
- 4.2 The characteristics of good coaches
- 4.3 The characteristics of good coaches
- 4.4 Benefits of coaching
- 4.5 Negative effect of coaching
- 4.6 Suggestions for coaching

**LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY**

**GATEKEEPER INFORMATION SHEET**

**Title of Project: Coaching Practices for Talent in Thai Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).**

**Name of Researcher and School/Faculty: Fuangfa Panya (Liverpool Business School)**

**Dear (name of the owner-manager/ main gatekeeper)**

Thank you for reading my letter. I am contacting you as your organisation received a National Award from OSMEP (state date); congratulations on your success. As you are aware the National Awards Competition selects the best SMEs in accordance with a set of criteria from the Thailand Quality Award (TQA). Therefore SMEs who achieve the award have provided evidence of good business results while maintaining a focus on Human Resources. I am interesting in researching award winning organisations like yours and would request your assistance with this study.

**Purpose of the study**

The study aims to investigate HR practices with a particular focus on coaching talented employees. The intention is to develop a coaching framework for talent in order to enhance employee and organisational performance.

**What am I asking you to do?**

- I am asking your permission to let me spend approximately one week in your organisation. I would ask you to identify relevant documents which address the aims of the study. For example: your application for the National Award; feedback from the assessors; policies on HR, in particular those which relate to coaching and developing talent.
- I would also ask you to identify staff who have responsibility for coaching (coaches) and staff that are receiving coaching (coachees).



- I would then like your permission and help to contact all coaches and coachees. I have attached a participant information sheet (coaches & coachees) which I would like to send. I would also like to interview you, as a key informant, and have produced a participant information sheet for you too.
- Finally, I would ask you to provide a space for me to conduct the research, a quiet room to undertake the interviews and analyse the documents.

**Why do I need access to some of your organisation documents and staff?**

This research will contribute to the academic knowledge on coaching for talented employees with the aim of making a theoretical and practice contribution. The future dissemination of the findings could provide valuable information for SMEs to develop the coaching practices for talented employees.

**How will I use the Information collected?**

The data collected in this study will be used for academic purposes and every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. Therefore no one will be named and no organisation will be named. I will use some of your words as quotes in my thesis and other academic publications. However, all quotes will be anonymised.

**If you are willing to assist in the study what happens next?**

If you are willing to take part in this research please sign and return the Gatekeeper Consent Form attached to this sheet.

This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee.

Should you have any comments or questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me, my academic supervisor or my academic adviser.

**Contact Details of Researcher:**

Fuangfa Panya

Lecturer: Naresuan University, Phitsanulok 65000, Thailand

PhD Student: Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool Business School, Liverpool, UK

F.Panya@2014.ljmu.ac.uk

**Contact Details of Academic Supervisor:**

Dr. Aileen Lawless

Senior Lecturer: Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool Business School, Liverpool, UK

A.Lawless@ljmu.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding your involvement in this research, please discuss these with me in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact [researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk) and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.

This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee (REC reference number and date of approval to be inserted)

**LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY**

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

**Title of Project: Coaching Practices for Talent in Thai Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).**

**Name of Researcher and School/Faculty: Fuangfa Panya (Liverpool Business School)**

**Dear (name of coach or coachee),**

Thank you for reading my letter. Your manager has given me your name as someone who coaches other employees / receives coaching (delete as appropriate). As you may be aware your organisation received a National Award from OSMEP (state date); congratulations on your success. The National Awards Competition selects the best SMEs in accordance with a set of criteria from the Thailand Quality Award (TQA). Therefore SMEs who achieve the award have provided evidence of good business results while maintaining a focus on Human Resources. I am interested in researching award winning organisations like yours and would request your assistance with this study.

Prior to your decision to participate, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like some more information. I would be very grateful if you could let me know your decision by (date included which will be two weeks from sending the invitation).

**Purpose of the study**

The study aims to investigate HR practices with a particular focus on coaching talented employees. The intention is to develop a coaching framework for talent in order to enhance employee and organisational performance.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation is voluntary and you are able to withdraw at any stage. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do, you will be given this information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw will not affect your rights. Your manager is aware of this and understands that your participation is voluntary.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

The research is in two stages. For the first stage you will be asked to take part in a one to one interview with me. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be in a quiet room in work. Your manager has given permission for you to be away from your work station. I will ask you questions about your experience of coaching and what you think works well and what you think could be improved. I have attached a list of questions to this information sheet. I will record the interview on a digital recorder. This recording will later be transcribed to allow me to analyse the data.

The second stage is an observation of one of your coaching sessions. If you agree to take part in the second stage, after the interview, we can agree the most suitable time and place with you and your coach/coachee involved (delete as appropriate). I will not take part in the coaching session. I will just observe and take notes.

### **Are there any risks / benefits involved?**

There should be no risks involved in this research as we will only discuss your experiences of coaching and what you say will remain confidential. However, discussing your experiences of coaching could help you and others improve your future coaching experiences.

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

The data collected in this study will be used for academic purposes and every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. Therefore no one will be named and no organisation will be named. I will use some of your words as quotes in my thesis and other academic publications. However, all quotes will be anonymised.

The interview recordings and my observation notes will be transferred to UK for analysis purposes. This data will be stored in a password protected computer and my written notes will be kept in a locked cabinet. All the data collected will be used during the period of this study and will be destroyed when the study is complete.

### **What will taking part involve? What should I do now?**

If you are willing to take part in this research please sign and return the Consent Form attached to this sheet.

If you have any concerns regarding your involvement in this research, please discuss these with me in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact [researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk) and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.

This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee (REC reference number and date of approval to be inserted).

Should you have any comments or questions regarding this research, please do not hesitate to contact me, my academic supervisor or my academic adviser.

### **Contact Details of Researcher:**

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