

“Retaining Talent during Organisational Change: A Case Study on the perceptions of the effectiveness of Leadership and Talent Management in Tata Steel UK”

Key Research Question:

How do employees at Tata Steel UK perceive the effectiveness of leadership and talent management initiatives throughout the recent organisational restructure?

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Declarations

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: (candidate)

Date: 8th May 2025

Statement 1

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Statement 2

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates how employees at Tata Steel UK (TSUK) perceive the effectiveness of leadership and talent management (TM) initiatives during a significant organisational restructure. The study aims to identify key factors influencing talent retention, assess the importance of leadership styles and TM on employee retention, and formulate recommendations for improvement. Using a qualitative approach, including semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires, the research highlights mixed emotions among employees, with many feeling demotivated and undervalued. The findings reveal inconsistencies in leadership communication and a perceived lack of transparency, as well as ineffective TM practices. Recommendations include implementing a cultural change programme and relaunching the talent boards (TB) to enhance career progression and development opportunities. The study underscores the importance of effective leadership, authentic communication, and strategic TM in retaining top talent during periods of organisational change.

Certain content has been redacted from the report to preserve the anonymity of participants and to protect commercially sensitive information.

Introduction

Research Aim, Objectives and Phenomenology

In order to address the research question, the following objectives have been developed to structure the study:

1. Identify the primary factors that influence talent retention and understand what motivates individuals to remain with an organisation throughout a major change period, through a critical review of existing literature.
2. Assess the importance of leadership styles and talent management initiatives on retaining talent, specifically through periods of change, through a critical review of existing literature.
3. Conduct primary research to assess the effectiveness of talent management initiatives and leadership in relation to talent retention at Tata Steel UK from both employee and management perspectives using qualitative research methods.
4. Formulate a series of recommended improvements to Tata Steel UK in retaining talent during organisational change.

With TBs suspended in Operations during the change period, this study focuses on perspectives from Commercial and Functions (C&F) where TBs have continued.

In order to explore the lived experiences of employees and account for their complexities, this research will adopt an interpretative phenomenology, focusing on how questionnaire respondents and interview participants made sense of their experiences throughout the period of organisational change (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

Background and Context

In 2024, the UK Steel Industry contributed £1.7 billion to the economy, producing 0.3% of the world's crude steel compared to China's 54% (Jozepa, 2025). Strong international competition, excess capacity, and high operational costs have driven steel prices down, putting the UK industry in a difficult position (Jozepa, 2025).

Additionally, the industry faces pressure to reduce carbon emissions to achieve net zero (Jozepa, 2025). On 15th September 2023 TSUK announced their investment in an electric arc furnace, proposed to be operational in 2027/2028 (Tata Steel, 2023).

Subsequently, and as a result of the poor financial position, in January 2024 the company announced the early closure of the Heavy End Operations at Port Talbot and the associated restructuring of the UK wide-business, resulting in 2800 job losses over the period of September 2024 – September 2025 (Tata Steel, 2024).

Headcount reductions were phased, starting with asset closures and followed by streamlining and automation. All departing TSUK employees received three months notice, irrespective of their contractual terms.

TSUK enhanced redundancy terms to 2.8 weeks pay per year of service, 1.3 weeks above statutory pay for those aged 41+, with a minimum redundancy of £15,000 and potential of a £5,000 attendance bonus (Acas, 2024). While this minimised compulsory redundancies it also resulted in 'Talent', leaving the organisation (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014).

As an Area Human Resources Manager in TSUK, the author has a professional and academic interest in how leadership and TM impacts retention. While once infrequent events, restructurings and downsizing of workforce are becoming increasingly common in organisations (Marks and Meuse, 2005; Bergstrom, 2007;

Chhinzer, 2024). In parallel there are increasing retention challenges across organisations (CIPD, 2024b). Thus, making this research beneficial on a wider academical basis and the business world.

When making headcount reductions, organisations look to limit compulsory redundancy by utilising voluntary redundancy (VR). In the C&F portfolio there were a significantly large number of volunteers, which can be taken as a positive when dealing with redundancies. However many of these individuals were declined VR, which in itself poses a risk as these individuals will likely experience demotivation and a lack of commitment following the change (Taylor, 2022). Whilst the organisation restructures, the existing knowledge and skills remain essential for the organisation's future success. Studies found that even downsizing a workforce by 1% results in a 31% increase in voluntary turnover the following year (Sucher and Gupta, 2018), given TSUK are making reductions to the sum of approximately 35%, this presents a huge risk to the business in retention of those remaining.

Between 1st March 2024 and 31st March 2025, TSUK saw 1979 employees leave the business (Tata Steel UK, 2025a). While this figure may seem expected due to restructuring and redundancies, 42.5% of these departures were not via redundancy routes (Tata Steel UK, 2025a). More concerning is that over 15% of TB members left without redundancy (Tata Steel UK, 2025b), posing a critical risk to the company's long-term capability and succession planning. The key problem facing TSUK is the loss of essential talent with future-critical skills and knowledge during the transition, whether through VR or natural attrition.

This paper looks to examine what retention strategies TSUK have deployed in relation to leadership and TM as well as exploring individual perspectives on how well these strategies have been deployed.

Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity, several key terms used throughout this dissertation are defined below:

Talent

There is limited academic consensus on the concept of 'talent,' leading to varied interpretations (Tobon and Luna-Nemecio, 2020). A key debate is whether organisations should adopt an inclusive approach, viewing all employees as talent, or an exclusive approach, focusing on high performers or those with high potential (Gallardo-Gallardo, 2018; Tobon and Luna-Nemecio, 2020; Kaliannan, *et al.*, 2023).

In line with the working definition used at Tata Steel UK, this study will adopt an exclusive definition of talent of: *“individuals who can make a significant difference to organisational performance, either through their immediate contribution or by reaching their potential.”* (CIPD, 2024b). In the specific context of TSUK, this has been understood as individuals recognised on the company TB.

Leadership

Leadership is a contested and multifaceted concept, with significant variation in how it is defined and understood (Benmira and Agboola, 2021; Wilson, 2022). A key distinction lies between the concept of leadership, how it is enacted in practice, and the conception of leadership, which concerns its underlying purpose and intent (Wilson, 2022). This study adopts a definition that considers both dimensions,

focusing on not only how leadership is exercised but also why it is pursued within the context of organisational change. Adopting definitions provided by both the CIPD (2024c) and McKinsey & Company (2024), this study considers leadership as the process of identifying and understanding what drives individual's motivations to align efforts towards shared goals, enabling flexibility in response to changing environments.

Talent Management

Despite its growing prominence in literature over the past 10 to 15 years, TM remains a contested and evolving concept, with no adequate and agreed definition (Collings, Mellahi and Cascio, 2017; Collings, Scullion and Caligiuri, 2019). Central to this ambiguity is how organisations define 'talent', whether they adopt an inclusive or an exclusive approach, as defined explained in the definition of talent. While this study focuses on an exclusive view of talent, the TM definition used is neutral and adaptable, suitable for both inclusive and exclusive approaches. This study adopts the definitions provided by the CIPD (2024e) and McKinsey & Company (2023a), this research refers to TM as: the ways in which organisations attract, identify, engage, and retain individuals, fostering their development to enhance productivity while aligning with broader strategic goals.

Structure of Report

This dissertation is structured chapter-by-chapter in line with the progression of the study. The literature review addresses, discusses, compares and evaluates existing literature, models and research findings on the key topic areas. The methodology chapter sets out the process and detail behind the primary research and its

interpretation. For the purposes of this study, the data analysis and discussions are presented in one chapter, to best interpret and present the qualitative findings. The final chapter synthesises the key findings in the form of a conclusion chapter, which also presents recommended improvements to TSUK in enhancing its approach to retaining talent during organisational change.

Literature Review

This literature review serves as a critical foundation for addressing the research objectives outlined in this study, it will support Objective 1: *Identify the primary factors that influence talent retention and understand what motivates individuals to remain with an organisation throughout a major change period*; by critically examining existing theory and research in these areas. The review will establish a clear understanding of the key drivers behind employee retention, particularly in the context of organisational change. In addition, this literature review will inform Objective 2: *Assess the importance of leadership styles and talent management initiatives on retaining talent, specifically through periods of change*, through a thorough exploration of leadership theory and TM practice to understand how these elements impact talent retention during organisational change. The review will build a strong foundation of knowledge to apply to the new insights from primary research, enabling the researcher to fulfil Objective 3 and Objective 4.

In order to focus the literature review to allow for a comprehensive understanding of existing literature, the author will focus on 4 key areas of literature: Organisational Change; Talent Retention; Leadership; and Talent Management. There is currently limited focused research examining the specific relationship between talent retention and organisational change. This study addresses this gap by providing new insights into how leadership and TM practices influence employee retention during periods of significant transformation.

Due to the broad nature of the research question which spans multiple key topics, the author has completed a thematic literature review. This will allow each key topic

to be addressed, discussed, compared and evaluated adequately (Fisher, 2010).

The focus on organisational change, talent retention, leadership and TM within the literature review is both deliberate and necessary given the interconnected nature of these themes. Reviewing these topics collectively enables a comprehensive understanding of the human factors that underpin successful change management, offering valuable insights into how organisations can better support and retain talent through periods of change. For this dissertation, key search terms included combinations of 'talent retention', 'organisational change', 'leadership effectiveness', 'talent management' and 'employee perceptions', using Boolean operators to refine results (Badami, Benatallah and Baez, 2023). Inclusion criteria required relevance to organisational change, leadership and talent retention while exclusion criteria filtered out studies focused solely on recruitment rather than retention and literature focused purely on small start-ups.

Understanding Organisational Change: Theories, Models and Approaches

There are several ways to determine a 'type' of organisational change. Academics have categorised organisational change by many means: the extent of the change – strategic or non-strategic; whether the organisation fosters or resists change – morphogenic or morphstatic; its origin – planned or emergent; and whether its incremental or radical (Aravopoulou, 2015). Michael Armstrong (2016) considers three types of change: transformational, strategic and operational.

Transformational change involves radical changes away from current processes, culture or practice (Henderson, 2002; Lewis, 2011). These changes are usually on a large-scale and enacted over a period of time, a common example of

transformational change is implementing new technology (Mullins, 2019). Strategic change is similar to transformational change in the fact it usually involves changes to processes, practices and culture but it also requires a shift in an organisation's strategic direction (Balogun, Hailey and Gustafsson, 2015). Another key difference in strategic change is that it is broad, involving change across an entire organisation (Armstrong, 2016). Netflix's shift from DVD rentals to online streaming is a prime example of strategic change, fundamentally altering its direction and operations (Au-Yong-Oliveira, Marinheiro and Costa Tavares, 2020). Operational change is usually smaller scale than Transformational or Strategic change as it is focused to a specific part of the organisation (Armstrong, 2016). Operational change usually involves changes to systems, procedures or technology (Armstrong, 2016), an example of such change in TSUK would be the introduction of a digital system for customers to place orders. This change impacts the Commercial Services team but also benefits customers, the supply chain, and commercial planning.

The current organisational change that TSUK are progressing would be considered as Transformational. The change can be separated into two parts: the movement to the reroller model - impacting how the organisation works and the processes undertaken, and the rationalisation of C&F. Despite the downsizing affecting all sites and departments and altering the organisational model, the core purpose of the business remains unchanged.

Transformational change poses a big risk to organisations, even when implemented smoothly, significant changes in an organisation can often cause employees to re-evaluate their careers and find external opportunities. We often see that when organisations go through transformational change, there is a decrease in employee engagement and morale, employees often focus on 'how things have always been

done' and find new ways of working to be a threat to their value and knowledge (Napier, Amborski and Pesek, 2017). This frequently results in resistance from employees which can be detrimental to the success of the change and can present productivity and financial risks to an organisation (Davis-Adesegha, 2025).

Downsizing has been particularly prevalent in manufacturing organisations given increasing competition with foreign competitors and innovation and technology developments (Alnahedh and Alrashdan, 2021). With extensive downsizing experience in the sector, findings suggest organisations should focus on clear, honest communication, support for all employees, enhanced training opportunities, and effective management support. (Mujtaba and Senathip, 2020; Taylor, 2022; Mendy, 2022; Institute for Employment Studies, no date).

Despite its risks, change is essential for competitiveness in a volatile market and to be successful requires effective planning and full implementation (Odor, 2018).

Researchers have developed various change management models to support organisational change by clarifying change dynamics and best practices (Smith, 2011; Errida and Lotfi, 2021).

Kurt Lewin's 1947 'Three Step Model of Change' is a seminal model which laid the foundation of many theories and models that have been developed since (Cummings, Bridgman and Brown, 2016; Errida and Lotfi, 2021). One fundamental development is John Kotter's 8-step Change Model, introduced in 1995, which emphasises each stage of Lewin's Unfreeze-Transition-Refreeze model by dividing them into further steps (Adelman-Mullally, *et al.*, 2024). Whilst both models are prominent in change management literature, along with a lot of other models such as Bob Doppelt's 'Seven-point- Wheel of Change' and Dr Williams Edwards Deming's

'Deming Cycle', they approach organisational processes and activities and fail to address the individual impact (Smith, 2011; Dudin, *et al.*, 2014; Walker, 2017).

The ADKAR model, published by Jeff Hiatt in 2006, is particularly relevant to this paper given its focus on how individuals experience change, similarly to the focus of this study (Hiatt, 2006). Another noteworthy model when considering individuals' reactions to change is Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' Change Curve model (Corr, 2020).

While the ADKAR model is a processual model which sets out five phases of managing change: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement (Ali, *et al.*, 2021; Errida and Lotfi, 2021), the Change Curve is a conceptual framework that helps organisations predict, understand and respond to the reactions of the workforce during change (Chavan and Bhattacharya, 2022; Prosci, 2025).

The ADKAR model helps assess readiness for change and guides each stage of the process, enabling effective action plans and reducing the risk of unsuccessful change (Kazmi and Naarananoja, 2013). When using the ADKAR model in opening a new state-of-the-art medical centre, Wolters Kluwer Health found it particularly useful in working through complexities of the large-scale change (Wong, *et al.*, 2019), this is comparable to the large-scale transformation that TSUK are undertaking. The company also used the ADKAR model to plan and review the change, leading to weekly meetings with impacted employees to reinforce benefits and ensure success (Wong, *et al.*, 2019). Though Wolters Kluwer Health took the initiative to use the ADKAR model to review their change, unlike other models (such as Kotter's 8-Step Change Model) continuous organisational improvement is noticeably absent from the ADKAR model (Massie, 2022).

Although the reasons for change at Wolters Kluwer Health differed from TSUK's, both involve a new, state-of-the-art way of working.

In his seminal book, introducing the ADKAR model, Jeff Hiatt (2006) suggests each stage of the model must be completed before progressing. Rigidly following this linear process can hinder an organisation's ability to adapt to a turbulent and complex environment (Le Grand and Deneckere, 2019). On the other hand, the Change Curve is more agile. In her book 'On Death and Dying', Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) recognises that individuals experience change differently, suggesting the model should be applied flexibly accounting for the cyclical nature of the emotional journey (Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation, 2024).

This has been further supported by academics, Gerhardt and Puchkov's (2023) qualitative study also found that individuals' experiences to change are not linear. The results of their study showed that some individuals experienced the stages of the Change Curve; Shock & Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance, out of order, with some stages skipped entirely (Gerhardt and Puchkov, 2023).

Originally introduced to analyse the grieving process, the Change Curve has been broadly applied to understand the psychological journey of organisational change (Jones-Evans, 2025). It is particularly useful in downsizings, as the acute emotions from redundancy can be traumatic (De Klerk, 2019). Marquitz, Badding and Chermack (2016) and Kearney (2013) have further concluded that it is not only those who see significant impact that experience the acute emotions but also those who remain. Yet due to the nature of the model's origin, other academics criticise the model's application to organisational change, stating it is too emotionally deep for the context (Kazmi and Naarananoja, 2013). The model has also come under criticism

for the lack of longitudinal evidence of individuals following the stages of the model (Corr, 2018; Briner, 2024). Grey literature reveals attempts to create a more practical change model for organisational use. Practitioners have adopted the DREC model—Denial, Resistance, Exploration, and Commitment—based on Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's work, though evidence of its practical implementation is limited (Platt, 2015; Kew and Stredwick, 2016; Cervoni, 2020; Brewerton, 2023).

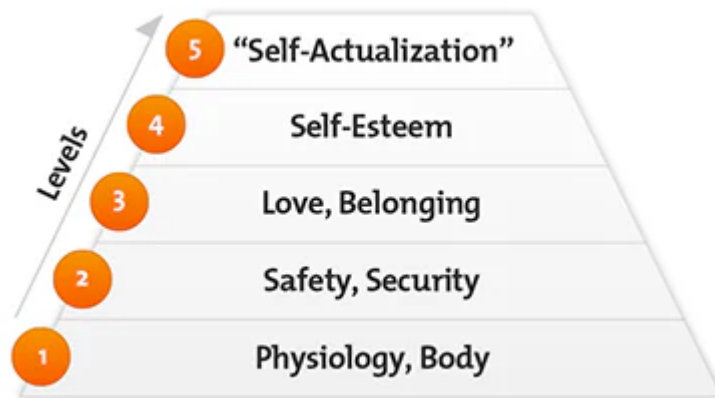
In summary, Transformational change like that of TSUK's current change, involves radical, large-scale shifts in processes, culture, or practices. Such changes pose risks, including decreased employee engagement and resistance. Models like ADKAR and the Change Curve offer frameworks for understanding and managing change. What is evident from the literature review is that for change to be successful, it requires clear communication, enhanced TM initiatives, and effective leadership, if there is a lack of focus on these areas, organisations risk losing their talent.

Talent Retention: Drivers, Theoretical Perspectives, and Organisational Impact

Talent is vital for an organisation's competitive advantage, and developing and retaining talent improves business performance and market survival (Hongal and Kinange, 2020; Mazlan and Jambulingam, 2023). Despite the growing focus on talent retention, it remains a significant challenge, with 71% of organisations reporting increased difficulty in retaining talent (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen and Scullion, 2020; CIPD, 2024a).

Loss of key talent can result in many challenges for organisations including loss of specialised skills and organisational knowledge; reduced productivity and impact on

organisational performance; and negative impacts on wider employee retention (Oladapo, 2014; Keller and Meaney, 2017; Ott, Tolentino and Michailova, 2018).



Understanding why employees leave involves considering push and pull factors. Push factors, like lack of recognition, development opportunities, and a negative work culture, drive employees away whilst pull factors, such as job security,

flexibility, and better compensation, attract them to other organisations (Mutanga *et al.*, 2021; Taylor, 2022). During downsizings, there will be a significant pull factor of job security and push factor of role ambiguity (Chun-Yu and Chung-Kai, 2021).

Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs Theory' (Figure 1) refers to a number of human needs in order of importance and suggests you cannot reach the higher levels before satisfying those below (Pichere, 2015; Wietrak, Rousseau and Barends, 2021). The second level is safety-security, relating to an individual's general safety, job and financial security (Taormina and Gao, 2013). Without job security, employees are unlikely to reach self-actualisation and are truly engaged with the organisation (MindTools, no date). TSUK made the restructuring announcement in January 2024, still in 2025 there are individuals who do not have clarity on their roles, this period of uncertainty will heighten the push factor of role ambiguity and pull factor of job security. Exit Interview data for the period of January 2024- April 2025 shows the main reasons employees left TSUK was due to job insecurity (Tata Steel UK, 2025c). Throughout this period, employees at TSUK are

likely to have remained on the second level of the hierarchy for a sustained period, increasing demotivation and disengagement as well as decreasing tolerance to ambiguity (Rojas, Mendez and Watkins-Fassler, 2023; Sumathi and Thangaiah, 2023). However, Maslow's Theory has come subject to criticism of being too constrained, academics argue that individuals prioritise needs differently based on factors such as gender, culture, and income (Dar and Sakthivel, 2022; Yurdakul and Arar, 2023; Ghaleb, 2024). Whilst Maslow recognised this it is easy for professionals to interpret the hierarchy too rigidly. Though, academics have determined that Maslow's Theory can still be applicable in today's culture so long as it's cautioned with balance and flexibility (Dar and Sakthivel, 2022; Yurdakul and Arar, 2023; Ghaleb, 2024).

While it is clear job security significantly influences motivation and engagement, likely affecting talent retention at TSUK. Other factors include career growth, wellbeing, work-life balance, and leadership and communication (Hongal and Kinange, 2020; Mazlan and Jambulingam, 2023). Managing these aspects is challenging in stable times and even more so during periods of change.

Career Growth and Development Opportunities

An ADP survey found that 61% of employees with career growth investments planned to stay, compared to 38% without such investments (Clemo, 2025). This is visible at TSUK, our Apprentice Programme, which includes further education, had a 88% retention rate in 2020, while our Graduate Programme, lacking specific education investments, had a 38% retention rate. While market demand for skills may explain some differences, the significant disparity in organisational commitment is evident. Investing in learning, training, and structured career development was a

key recommendation in the CIPD's 2024 Resourcing and Talent Planning Report (CIPD, 2024a). The CIPD (2024a) suggested that by investing in individual development which aligns with the organisational mission and strategy, employees would feel increased loyalty to the organisation.

There is little research into the impact of how Career Growth and Development Opportunities impacts survivors of downsizing, though one insightful piece of research was from Dlouhy and Casper (2021), who conducted two longitudinal studies through interviews with members of the German public, the first with 3865 participants and the second with 3290 participants. This research did not have a direct focus on manufacturing however covered a broad range of occupations and organisations within the German economy and so could be relevant to compare to the entire organisation of TSUK. Both studies found that downsizing reduced growth and development opportunities for employees, reducing their level of engagement with their organisation (Dlouhy and Casper, 2021). The research by Dlouhy and Casper (2021) found career growth and development opportunities to be a factor that could mediate between downsizing and employee engagement.

Workplace Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance

It is often common practice for individuals to have high workloads requiring them to work longer hours. Overtime, these pressures can result in workplace stress leading employees to a state of 'burnout' where they are emotionally exhausted; have negative feelings towards their job and become less productive (World Health Organization, 2019). A survey completed in the US showed that employees experiencing burnout are three times more likely to be actively looking for another job (Gonzales, 2024). This is exacerbated during downsizings as there are less

employees, leaving the survivors with increased workloads, creating a cycle of additional burden on remaining staff, increased absenteeism, and increased turnover (Shahzad, *et al.*, 2024). There have already been examples of this in TSUK within a small customer services team, the team saw a reduction through the organisational restructure which resulted in increased workload on the remaining team, one team member subsequently went on sick leave due to work related stress, increasing the pressures further on the those left (Tata Steel UK, 2025a).

There is further research to suggest survivors experience additional levels of stress in comparison to victims of downsizing and that uncertainty of possibly losing your job is more harmful than actually being made redundant (Kriz, Jolly, and Shoss, 2021). In addition to increased workload, survivors do not receive the same support packages as those who leave (Gandolfi, 2008). At TSUK, only departing employees receive training, outplacement support, and generous financial packages.

Meanwhile, remaining employees haven't had a pay raise in three years, despite a 20% increase in consumer prices (Clark, 2025). This underscores the lack of reward and remuneration, impacting employees' financial circumstances. Research suggests that to support employee wellbeing during change, management should provide sufficient support, ensure survivors feel valued, maintain open communication, and offer strong leadership (Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018).

While many believe employees leave their line managers rather than organisations, support from senior leadership also boosts commitment and loyalty (Allen and Bryant, 2012; People Management, 2022; Bajorek, 2023). Erickson and Blecha (2007) found senior leadership impacts retention more than line managers. This is further supported by the CIPD's (2022) Good Work Index which revealed 30% of

workers left their jobs due to senior leadership. This underscores the importance of leadership, justifying its exploration in the TSUK case study.

What is clear from reviewing literature is that employees considered as 'talent' are crucial for an organisation's competitive advantage, and their development and retention can enhance business performance in a competitive market. Despite the growing focus on talent retention, it remains a significant challenge, with 71% of organisations reporting increased difficulty in retaining talent. Effective talent retention strategies include career growth opportunities, wellbeing, work-life balance, and strong leadership and communication.

The Role of Leadership in Navigating Change and Retaining Talent

Theorists have identified various 'types' of leadership based on behaviours, individual traits, and outcomes. (Holten, Hancock and Bollingtoft, 2020). What theorists generally agree on is that leadership is characterised through communicating vision, setting direction and inspiring and empowering the workforce (Pardey, 2007; Holten, Hancock and Bollingtoft, 2020; CIPD, 2024c). In their paper exploring employee commitment and retention, Abraham, *et al.* (2023) found leaders' motivation and influence to be critical in the retention of talent. The study found that leaders who provide a focus on belonging, communication and interpersonal relationships truly foster organisational commitment (Abraham, *et al.*, 2023). This study remains relevant due to its use of qualitative research and the adoption of the exclusive definition of talent however, it is important to take into account that the study was focused on SMEs within Malaysia and as such, the findings may not be directly applicable in the context of TSUK.

A pioneering leadership theory is Kurt Lewin's 1939 Leadership Theory which acknowledges three fundamental leadership styles: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire, despite being introduced several years ago, Lewin's theory remains influential and has inspired many recent developments (Crosby, G, 2020; Bell and Jackson, no date). Lewin's theory influenced the theory of the 'transformational leader', thought to be the best leadership style during organisational change (Farnham, 2015). Not only is it the best leadership style for managing change but is also considered a key factor in whether change is considered to be successful. Throughout his time providing consultancy services to large private sector organisations, Paul Turner found transformational leadership to be the key driver in strategic change and realised the necessity of leadership in engaging employees, ensuring their commitment to the organisation (Turner, 2019). A longitudinal survey of two Danish organisations found that leadership style influences employee change appraisal both immediately and over time and transactional leaders, who focus on structure and short-term goals, negatively affected employees' perceptions of change (Holten and Brenner, 2015). Conversely, transformational leaders had a positive impact, suggesting that leaders should adopt transformational leadership behaviours and values (Holten and Brenner, 2015).

Transformational leaders enhance employee awareness and commitment to the organisation's strategic goals, improving performance (Mills, Dye and Mills, 2009; Donald, 2019; Mendy, 2022). This is crucial during change, as employees must trust their leaders to engage with the process (Islam, Furuoka and Idris, 2020). While transformational leadership is widely applied in change management, the theory lacks clarity on specific tasks and processes required during major organisational change (Yukl, 2020). As such, Armstrong (2016) suggests that after developing a

vision with the workforce, transformational leaders should implement it through incremental steps and celebrate small successes.

While transformational leaders are often successful in managing change, research indicates that various qualities are needed (Holten, Hancock and Bollingtoft, 2020). Some suggest that leadership characteristics should vary throughout the change process (Cameron and Green, 2020). Leadership styles can be linked to the Kubler-Ross Curve, where different attitudes are required at various stages. For example, clear communication is essential during denial, while emotional support is crucial during depression. This aligns with Situational Leadership Theory, which adapts to the dynamics of the situation (Daniels, Hondeghem and Dochy, 2019).

As previously discussed, leaders play a crucial role in shaping employees' experiences of organisational change. Abraham, *et al.* (2023) found that employees are less likely to leave an organisation when they develop a psychological attachment and commitment to it. This sense of commitment can be fostered through leadership practices that build trust, exhibit fairness and demonstrate long-term investment in employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014). One significant way leaders can reinforce their commitment is through well-structured TM practices, which will be explored in the following section of this literature review.

To summarise, all theorists agree that effective leadership involves communicating vision, setting direction, and inspiring and empowering the workforce.

Transformational leadership, which emphasises motivation and influence, is particularly effective during organisational change, fostering employee commitment and engagement. Research shows transformational leaders positively impact employee perceptions of change, enhancing organisational performance. However,

leadership styles may need to be adapted throughout the change process, aligning with employees' emotional stages. Building trust, fairness, and long-term investment in employees through leadership practices is crucial for retaining key talent and ensuring successful change implementation.

Talent Management in a Changing Landscape: Strategies and Challenges

Research indicates that TM strategies aligned with an organisation's vision are crucial for retaining top talent and maintaining employee engagement (Amushila and Bussin, 2021). TM requires focus on career paths, development opportunities and building a strong psychological contract (Baqutayan, 2014). Initiatives like talent pools, succession planning, career management, and performance management are essential, often requiring multiple approaches for optimal results and effective management of talented employees, who seek recognition and opportunities, is vital for retention (Torrington *et al.*, 2014, CIPD, 2024b). This is supported by a quantitative study in the steel industry which supported two hypotheses: TM practices positively impact both employee retention and engagement (Barik, Mishra and Mallia, 2024).

Effective human resource management practices, including TM, are crucial during organisational change (Jackson, Schuler and Jiang, 2014). They enhance employee flexibility and adaptability, strengthening the organisation's agility and ability to meet evolving market demands (Jackson, Schuler and Jiang, 2014).

TM in manufacturing is complex due to the shift from traditional heavy industry to technology-driven approaches in Industry 4.0, impacting processes and skill requirements (Singh and Sankhi, 2016). The transition from traditional blast furnaces

to Electric Arc Furnace technology at TSUK exemplifies this. A quantitative study on employee retention in cable companies, with an 88% response rate, revealed that TM policies have lost their impact in retaining key talent due to a lack of adaptation to newer generations' needs (Johara, Yahya and Tehseen, 2018).

Research indicates that Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) prioritise job security and financial compensation, while Millennials (born 1981-1996) and Generation Z (born 1997-2012) seek flexibility, development opportunities, and corporate social responsibility (Gomez, Mawhinney and Betts, no date; Festing and Schafer, 2014; Poisat, Mey and Sharp, 2018; Pandita, 2022). With six generations in the workforce, employers must address diverse needs meaning TM strategies should be adaptable and tailored to individuals (Pearce, 2024; Droste, 2025). Critics argue that generational segmentation can be stereotypical and discriminatory, suggesting differences may stem from age and perspective rather than birth cohort (Austen and Waligora, 2019; Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). Despite this, considering generational distinctions in people management practices remains relevant and the distinctions should be taken into consideration.

Organisations increasingly recognise generational differences in employee expectations, leading many to adopt more flexible working arrangements, especially post-Covid-19. (CIPD, 2023). The CIPD (2023) found that 65% of employers provided some level of flexibility to their workforce. However, it remains clear that during periods of change, too many companies rely on financial incentives to retain talent – often with limited success (Cosack, Guthridge and Lawson, 2010; Guadangni, 2022).

Literature shows TM initiatives are vital for retaining talent, developing employees, establishing succession plans, and maximising potential. However, effective communication is essential to engage those involved. (Sonnenberg, Zijdeveld and Brinks, 2014). The success of TM efforts depends on employees' perceptions, if viewed negatively, their impact may be diminished (Boonbumroongsuk and Rungruang, 2022).

In summary, research indicates that aligning TM strategies with an organisation's vision is essential for employee engagement and retention. Effective TM involves career development, building a strong psychological contract, and utilising initiatives like talent pools, succession planning, and performance management. These practices positively impact employee retention and engagement, especially during organisational change.

Drawing together the findings from each section of this literature review, it is evident that effective leadership and TM are crucial for organisational success, particularly during periods of change. Transformational leaders, who communicate vision and inspire their workforce, play a key role in fostering employee commitment and engagement. Aligning TM strategies with the organisation's vision enhances retention and performance, especially in competitive markets. However, managing talent is complex, requiring adaptable approaches to meet diverse generational expectations and evolving industry demands. Successful change management and talent retention depend on clear communication, strong leadership, and a focus on employee development. By integrating these practices, organisations can navigate change more effectively.

Research Methodology

This study will contribute to the breadth of knowledge in the area of talent retention during times of organisational change, specifically during times of downsizing. This chapter outlines the research design and methods used to investigate the key primary research objective in assessing the effectiveness of TM initiatives and leadership in relation to talent retention at Tata Steel UK.

The structural layers of the Research Design

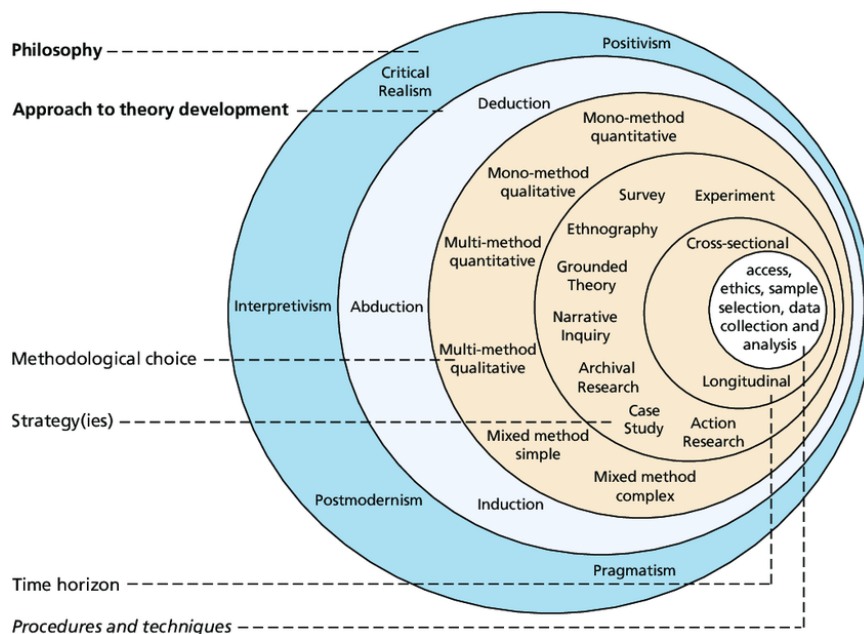


Figure 2 – The ‘research onion’ (Saunders, 2023)

To ensure a systematic and well-structured approach to research design, this study adopts the most recent development of the Research Onion (Figure 2) by Mark Saunders (Saunders,

Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The research onion depicts a multilayered model of methodological decision-making which guides researchers in making key methodological choices and examining the critical issues and assumptions underpinning each methodological choice, reinforcing the validity and reliability of the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The following section of the paper

will explore each layer of the research onion, progressing from the outermost layer inward.

Research Philosophy refers to the underlying set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature and development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

Within the research onion framework, five main philosophical approaches are identified: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism.

This study adopts an interpretivist philosophy, which serves as the foundational lens through which the research is conducted. Interpretivism is particularly well suited to this study as it acknowledges the complexity and subjectivity of human experience (Collis and Hussey, 2013; Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). Given the varied circumstances employees face during TSUK's organisational change, an interpretivist approach provides a deeper understanding of their unique perspectives, which is essential for constructing theory and knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2013; Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). This research will account for the complexity of human experiences by focusing on employees' lived experiences through their recollections and interpretations, this is commonly known as interpretative phenomenology (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The researcher will aid this approach through helping participants narrate their experiences and perceptions and working with them to make sense of them (Adu and Miles, 2024).

The research will be undertaken with an inductive approach to research development as the author will be conducting primary research to obtain a better understanding of the nature of the problem and use this to formulate a more generalised theory in response (Adams, *et al.*, 2007). An inductive approach lends itself to interpretivist research as it allows for data to be gathered and analysed before determining theory (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). In order to explore

individual lived experiences, the researcher has chosen a multi-method qualitative methodological choice. Interpretivism and inductivism are in their nature more closely aligned to qualitative data collection methods (Collis and Hussey, 2013 and Yin, 2015). Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth understanding of employees' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes allowing the researched to capture the complexities of leadership and TM effectiveness in a way that quantitative data alone cannot (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). Through semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires, this approach facilitates rich insights into the subjective and nuanced factors that influence employee retention during change (Omolola, *et al.*, 2021). By prioritising personal narratives and lived experiences, qualitative research ensures that the findings reflect the realities of those directly affected by the organisational change, ultimately providing a more comprehensive and actionable understanding for TSUK.

As illustrated in Figure 2, there are various methodological approaches through which one can align their philosophical stance with their chosen methods for data collection and analysis (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). A case study research strategy will be deployed in this study to enable an in-depth investigation of talent retention within a real-life context (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). In this study the 'case' refers specifically to individuals recognised through the TBs at TSUK. Employing a case study strategy allows for the detailed exploration of the case's characteristics, enabling readers to gain a deeper understanding of the case, identify its unique features and draw comparisons with other cases (Adu and Miles, 2024).

Whilst a longitudinal study would allow for the researcher to study the change in perceptions throughout the organisational change period at TSUK, a cross-sectional time horizon will be utilised due to time availability (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Using a cross-sectional time horizon will involve taking one sample of data from the sample population at one point in time (Gratton and Jones, 2010), thus allowing for analysis of patterns and comparisons against individual responses (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024).

Access

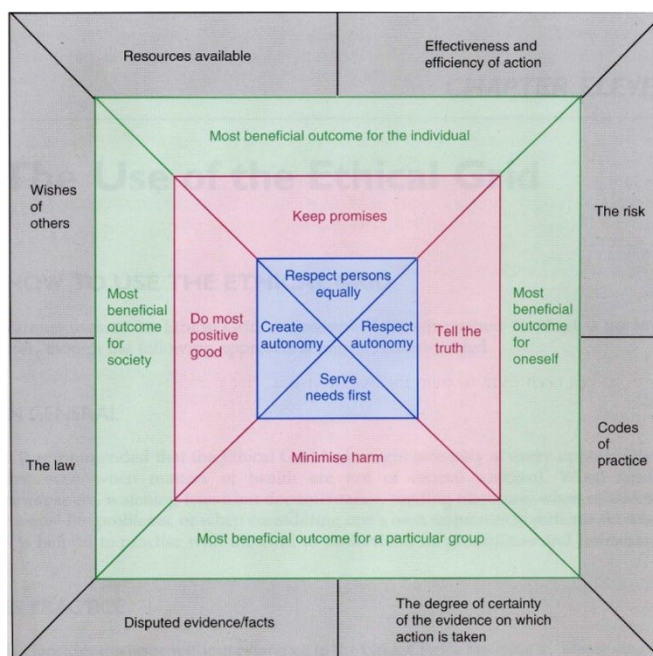


Figure 3 – Seedhouse's Ethical Framework (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009)

To collect primary data, the researcher will utilise internet-mediated methods, conducting virtual interviews via Microsoft Teams and distributing questionnaires through Microsoft Forms (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). As the case study focuses exclusively on TSUK, access to a single organisation is sufficient for the purposes of this research (Saunders, Lewis and

Thornhill, 2023). To facilitate this, the researcher engaged in negotiations with TSUK's Senior Human Resources Business Partner for C&F to obtain necessary permissions for virtual access to the selected sample group (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

Ethics

With any research there could be potential ethical issues which arise but more so in case study designs where there is direct involvement with human participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The researcher uses Seedhouse' Grid as an ethical tool to prompt different styles of thinking and to allow for methodical analysis of the ethical considerations for the research (Pakunwanich, 2020). Seedhouse's ethical framework sets out four layers representing aspects of ethical analysis, the outer layer refers to external issues (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009); for the purposes of this research the main law to consider is General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The author will ensure that the data collected is specific, explicit and for a legitimate purpose (Clarke, *et al.*, 2019), in doing so the primary research will only look to retrieve the information required. The aim of the research and its purpose of serving as evidence in a dissertation will be made explicit to those engaging in the research. The consequential, second layer, makes importance of the consequences of any possible outcomes (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). A consequence of such primary research could be adverse treatment to participants if they provide negative comments. To prevent this, the 'talent' sample population will be anonymised. The third layer, deontological considerations, covers the way in which the research is completed (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). The research methods will be set out to participants before agreeing to their involvement. Due to the emotional sensitivities of the research and possible individual impact of the restructuring process, the author will look to prevent harm throughout the research process and will signpost mental health resources following the surveys and interviews. The inner layer respects the individual and their autonomy, as discussed in the consequential layer,

all survey and interview responses will be anonymised for those in the 'talent' sample group (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009).

Sample Selection

The researcher provided a definition of 'talent' in the introduction chapter, specifically in relation to the scope of this study. Based on this definition, the sample group was initially identified as individuals on the TBs at TSUK, these individuals have been nominated to the TBs by local management with support from senior sponsors and HR. The latest number of individuals on the TBs across TSUK is 185 employees, however, throughout the organisational restructure, the TBs have been suspended in all areas other than C&F. To ensure relevant data is gathered, the researcher has chosen to focus the study on individuals still identified as talent, ensuring their ongoing involvement in the TB process during the period of research. Therefore, the sample population will consist of individuals on the TBs in C&F, which accounts for 105 employees.

The sample size represents a large proportion of grades in the C&F organisation and reflects the majority of grades within these areas with 29.5% of the sample group being Directors, Senior Leaders or Senior Manager; 69.5% of the sample group at Band D or Band E level; and less than 1% of graduates. The sample group does not consist of any Chiefs, due to their absence from the TBs, any F-J band staff or any FEPs, as they are not heavily present in the C&F area. The sample group also gives a diverse range of locations with employees from 12 different sites invited to participate. As the sample size is already manageable the researcher did not further define the sample group to a target population. The qualitative questionnaire was

administered to all individuals in the sample group, however the researcher used stratified purposeful sampling to identify the participants for the interviews. This method of sampling allowed the researcher to intentionally target individuals from a range of departments, grades and locations ensuring a diverse and representative sample (Nyimbili and Nyimbili, 2024).

Whilst recommended sample sizes vary between academists, Daniela Mocanasu (2020) makes reference to research suggesting a sample size of 30 when completing a master's degree when conducting qualitative research. The guidelines provided by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David suggest that the sample size for interviews should be around 15 individuals and questionnaires should have a sample size of no less than 40. As this study involves both qualitative questionnaires and semi structured interviews, the researched initially planned to conduct 10 semi-structured interviews however data saturation was reached after the ninth interview. At this point, the researcher observed that recurring themes had emerged, and no new insights were forthcoming, indicating that further interviews would not significantly contribute additional information (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024).

Data Collection

This section outlines the data collection methods employed in the study, focusing on two qualitative approaches: semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

Questionnaires were selected to get a varied and broader understanding of individual's perception of the effectiveness of leadership and TM initiatives throughout the recent organisational restructure at TSUK. The researcher also chose to conduct semi-structured interviews to probe responses further and allow the researcher to try and make sense of participants perceptions. This approach allowed

for detailed insights into participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to them. Both research methods consisted of open-ended questions to gather relative responses whilst allowing participants to express their thoughts in their own words (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). Together through conducting both interviews and questionnaires, the researcher could develop a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the topic (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

i) Interviews

The researcher employed interviews as a data collection method for a portion of the sample, recognising the personal and sensitive nature of the research topic, it was deemed that questionnaires alone might not fully capture the depth and complexity of participant's responses (Parrish and Shaikh, 2023; Adu and Miles, 2024). Although interviews are time consuming, they allow interviewees to feel at ease and open up about their experiences throughout the organisational change, thus providing more in-depth and valuable data (Parrish and Shaikh, 2023).

Due to the researcher's role in the organisation, existing relationships with many individuals in the sample group were beneficial in creating a trusting environment where the participants felt comfortable sharing their feelings and thoughts (Badache, Kimber and Maertens, 2023). However, during deep discussions where there is an established trust, it can be challenging for the interviewer to avoid any biases and refrain from offering personal opinions (Adu and Miles, 2024). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were useful as they allowed for follow-up questions and further prompts while maintaining a structured focus on the topic at hand (Adu and Miles, 2024) (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). This structure was further reinforced by using an interview protocol. Additionally, semi-structured interviews enabled the recording

of multiple answers to the same question, facilitating the identification of trends and drawing conclusions (Parrish and Shaikh, 2023).

The interviews were conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams, a popular means of conducting interviews that allows participation from various locations without incurring travel costs and provides greater flexibility (Badache, Kimber, and Maertens, 2023). However, online interviews can reduce the sense of intimacy and make it more difficult for the researcher to fully observe and interpret participants' body language and non-verbal cues (Badache, Kimber, and Maertens, 2023; Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2023). The effectiveness of online interviews also depends on a stable internet connection; technical issues can interrupt the flow of conversation and hinder the depth and continuity of the discussion (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2023). Research indicates that interviews can sometimes be more effective when participants remain off-camera, as this can make individuals more comfortable expressing themselves. Consequently, all participants were invited to turn their cameras off if they felt it would benefit them (Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour, 2014).

As online meetings have become a common daily practice at TSUK, the researcher had no concerns regarding the ability to navigate the necessary technology or engage comfortably in meaningful discussions within a virtual setting (Badache, Kimber, and Maertens, 2023). A single pilot interview was conducted to assess the suitability and clarity of the research questions, ensuring that participants could easily understand and engage with them (Adu and Miles, 2024). Additionally, the pilot helped the researcher estimate the practical duration of each interview and identify any necessary adjustments to the interview structure (Yin, 2015).

ii) Qualitative Questionnaires

The entire sample group was invited to complete a qualitative questionnaire (Appendix 8). Out of the sample of 105 individuals, 61 responses were received, giving a response rate of 58%. Although there is no universally established response rate required for quantitative questionnaires (Booker, Austin and Balasubramanian, 2021), research shows that the average response rate for an online survey is 44.1% (Wu, Zhao and Fils-Aime, 2022). Based on this benchmark, the researcher determined that a sufficient number of responses had been received. It must be noted that individuals in the original sample group had since left the organisation, and some were out of the office for reasons such as sickness and maternity leave.

Although this method of data collection does not allow for the measurement of variables or identification of statistical trends, the open-ended nature of the questions ensures that responses will be unique, reflecting the individual experiences throughout the organisational restructure (Ekinci, 2015).

Distributing the questionnaire online via Microsoft Forms offered several advantages; issues such as illegible handwriting was eliminated, and all data was automatically compiled into a single, organised output document (Parrish and Shaikh, 2022).

Additionally, this method allowed for access to participants without geographical limitations. The questionnaires allowed individuals to respond at their convenience, providing them with time to reflect before submitting their responses (Parrish and Shaikh, 2022).

To ensure validity and reliability of the data, a pilot questionnaire was distributed to three individuals. Reliability requires that data be collected consistently and therefore the questions must be clearly understood by respondents (Saunders, Lewis and

Thornhill, 2023). The pilot test served as an opportunity to identify any issues with the questionnaire, assess its face validity, and confirm its suitability for use in the wider research study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). A subject expert, with specific experience in designing and conducting questionnaires across the business, was also consulted for their opinion of the survey and its suitability for the wider population (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024).

Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher used thematic analysis as a method for analysing the qualitative data which involves identifying patterns or themes through coding, ready for further analysis (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Thematic analysis is particularly suited to phenomenology and valuable in interpretivist research as it emphasises the social, cultural and structural contexts that influence individuals' experiences allowing the researcher to formulate theory from lived experiences and social realities (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). One important consideration when conducting thematic analysis is the potential for the researcher's bias and personal experiences to influence how they interpret data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). To limit the extent of bias and implications on the validity of the results, the researcher used Braun and Clarke's 6 Stage Process to guide the thematic analysis (Roseveare, 2023). Braun and Clarke's model is a reflexive method of analysis which forces the researcher to reflect on their experiences and thoughts and therefore their own influence on the analysis (Roseveare, 2023).

Braun and Clarke's model outlines six stages of analysis. The first stage involved familiarisation with the data by reading through responses and summarising to

create a high-level overview (Byrne, 2022). In the second stage, the researcher generates initial codes to identify content relevant to the topic (Byrne, 2022; Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). From these codes, the researcher then develops initial themes and core concepts, examining similarities, patterns and connections (Byrne, 2022; Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). Once the themes are identified, the researcher reviews and refines them to ensure their relevance to the study (Byrne, 2022). In the final stages, the themes are clearly defined and named before proceeding to the narrative analysis and write-up (Byrne, 2022; Anderson and Fontinha, 2024).

Research Procedures/Process

The qualitative questionnaire was devised from the key discussions within existing literature. Following best practice, it comprised of ten core questions, along with demographic questions and additional comments and/or recommendations.

Participants also had the option to leave their email address if they were willing to be contacted for follow-up discussions. This gave the researcher the ability to seek clarification or explore responses in greater depth, if required.

The qualitative questionnaire was distributed to the entire sample group on Friday 7th March 2025. This specific timing was chosen as Fridays typically have fewer scheduled meetings, increasing the likelihood that participants would have the time to complete the questionnaire immediately. The questionnaire was sent via the researcher's work email address to ensure recipients recognised the source of questionnaire. The launch email included an overview of the study, confirmation of participant anonymity, and links to mental health resources for support in case the

questionnaire elicited any negative emotions. Participants were given a one-week deadline, with a requested completion date of Friday 14th March 2025. To encourage participation, a follow-up reminder email was sent on Thursday 13th March 2025.

After sending the questionnaire launch email, the researcher contacted the interview participants. The email highlighted that participation was entirely voluntary and assured them that all responses would remain anonymous in the analysis. As and when responses were received, the researcher sent an Outlook invitation including the interview questions and a request to complete a consent form (Appendix 4).

Maintaining accurate records of interviews allows for the research to be replicated and the findings studied which is essential in bolstering the reliability and credibility of the research (Ahmed, 2024). In this study the researcher utilises recordings, digital transcripts, and written notes to comprehensively capture the interview data. Microsoft Teams offers the ability to easily record and transcribe meetings held in the application. The recordings will provide a verbatim account of the interview, preserving the exact wording and nuances of any statement which could be crucial when analysing the data. The transcription and recording will allow the researcher to be fully focused on the conversation and questioning allowing for a more natural and engaging dialogue (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). However, these methods of recording data cannot be completely relied upon due to their reliance on technology and so the researcher will also take written notes to document key points. To maintain structure, the interviewer will prepare a document with pre-populated questions ahead of the discussion (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). This approach will enhance the integrity of the primary research data as it allows further verification of findings and reduces the risk of misinterpretation.

Validity, reliability and transferability

By using methodological triangulation through different data collection methods, namely qualitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the findings consider a broader perspective (Bans-Akutey and Tiimub, 2021). In doing this, the dual approach in methods strengthens the validity and credibility of the research (Bans-Akutey and Tiimub, 2021).

To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher developed an interview protocol. This protocol included a document pre-populated with interview questions, along with space for notetaking (Appendix 3). It also featured prompts to verify completion of the consent form, confirm agreement for the interview to be recorded, and offer the option of turning off the camera. Additionally, the researcher provided an overview of the study and how the interviews would contribute to the research. This protocol ensured consistency to reduce any biases from the interviewer, helped to clarify the objectives of the interviews ensuring the data collected was relevant to the study and allows for the interviews to be used by other researchers enhancing the reproducibility of the findings (Braaten, *et al.*, 2020).

Overall, the research findings are both reliable and valid as they provide a comprehensive overview from a range of employee perspectives (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). The results draw from two reliable data sources, enhancing their potential for transferability to different contexts (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The research procedures outlined in this chapter demonstrate the dependability of the findings (Anderson and Fontinha, 2024). Throughout the study, the researcher has employed reflexive practices to identify and mitigate any personal

biases that could influence the data or its reliability (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

Limitations of Methods

As previously highlighted, the research fails to investigate perceptions of those outside of C&F, therefore, it is difficult to justify that the research is representative of TSUK as a whole. In a similar vein, the research fails to take account of perceptions of those in the lower operational and administrative grades which accounts for a large population of the workforce.

To summarise, this study adopted an interpretivist philosophy and an inductive approach, employing a multi-method qualitative strategy to explore talent retention during organisational change at TSUK. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires, focusing on individuals from the TBs within the C&F areas of the business. A case study strategy underpinned the research design, with virtual data collection conducted using Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Forms applications. Ethical considerations were rigorously addressed through Seedhouse's framework, ensuring participant confidentiality, data protection and informed consent. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-stage process, was used to systematically analyse the data. Methodological triangulation further strengthened the study's validity and reliability, though limitations such as the exclusion of operational staff and the cross-sectional nature of the study are acknowledged. Overall, the methodology enabled a comprehensive exploration of employee experiences throughout the organisational change period at TSUK.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the perceptions of those defined as 'Talent' in the organisation. The primary research will delve into their lived experiences throughout the organisational change period and their opinions on the effectiveness of leadership and TM practices, with the aim of identifying any particular factors that may influence the retention of talent.

This chapter presents the findings of the study, outlining the key themes that emerged from the data analysis and offering insights into the way in which the participants viewed the period of change, specifically in relation to the management of the change, leadership behaviours, efforts of communication and effectiveness of TM initiatives.

As previously referred to in the Methodology chapter, this study utilised both semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires. The data collection phase was carried out over the period of 7th March 2025 to 20th March 2025.

The questionnaires were distributed via Microsoft Forms, allowing for anonymous and convenient participation from a wide group of employees (Regmi, *et al*, 2016; Dewaele, 2018). Though the questionnaires gave an opportunity for a broad response they lacked the depth that came through in the interviews (Parrish and Shaikh, 2023; Adu and Miles, 2024).

One important observation during the data collection process was the notable variation in employee experience based on location. As might have been expected, the site dynamics, local leadership and extent of impact clearly shaped individuals' experiences (Phillips and Klein, 2022).

Overall, the dual approach to data collection was pertinent to gaining a balanced picture of how leadership and TM were experienced during a critical period of transformation.

Participants

Table 1 – Demographics of Questionnaire Respondents

Demographics		% of Sample	The demographic profiles of participants from both the questionnaires and interviews are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. Participants represented a range of employee grades to ensure a balanced perspective across hierarchical levels. Age distribution ranged from early-careers professionals to those approaching
Age	Under 25	3%	
	25-34	33%	
	35-44	25%	
	45-54	36%	
	55 and above	3%	
Grade	Band D-E	56%	
	Band F-J	2%	
	Graduate	2%	
	Senior Leader	11%	
	Senior Manager	30%	
Location	Caerphilly	3%	
	Corby	7%	
	Home	11%	
	Llanwern	3%	
	Port Talbot	44%	
	Shotton (incl. BSUK)	10%	
	Steelpark or other Midlands	16%	
	Trostre	3%	
	Warwick	2%	
Length of Service	1-5 years	18%	
	5-10 years	25%	
	10-15 years	11%	
	15-20 years	15%	
	20+ years	31%	

retirement, capturing generational diversity within the workforce. Geographically, participants were based across multiple TSUK sites, reflecting the decentralised nature of the organisation. Length of service varied considerably, with some respondents having joined the company more recently and others possessing over three decades of service which added depth to the insights gathered.

Table 2 – Demographics of Interview Participants

Participant	Role Level	Location	Years of Service	Remains in Business (Y/N)	From this point forward, individuals who completed the questionnaires will be referred to as <i>respondents</i> , while those who took part in the
P1	Senior Leader	Llanwern	23	Y	
P2	Band E	Port Talbot	16	N	
P3	Band E	Catnic	3	Y	
P4	Band D	Port Talbot	9	Y	
P5	Band D	Port Talbot	2	N	
P6	Band D	Trostre	25	Y	
P7	Senior Manager	Corby	32	Y	
P8	Senior Manager	Steelpark	6	Y	
P9	Band E	Port Talbot	3	Y	

interviews will be referred to as *participants*. This distinction is maintained throughout the paper to clearly differentiate between the two data sources. Participant 2 and Participant 5 both left the organisation within the past year.

As referred to in the methodology, Braun and Clarke's 6 Stage Process was used as a framework to thematically analyse the primary data. After familiarisation with the data, 8 initial codes were generated: Rationale for Change; Management of Change; Emotional Impact; Communication; Leadership; Talent Management; Retention; and Suggestions. These were then synthesised into 3 core themes: Navigating Organisational Change: The Employee Experience; Experiencing Change: Employee Insights on Leadership and Communication; and Cultivating and Retaining Organisational Talent.

Navigating Organisational Change: The Employee Experience

This theme explores the employee perceptions on the organisational transformation at TSUK, focusing on how individuals made sense of the change, were emotionally impacted by the change, and perceived the management of the change.

Generally, most participants understood the rationale for organisational change, citing financial and operational pressures to create a sustainable business for implementing the Electric Arc Furnace in 2-3 years. However, many, especially non-senior staff, focused on immediate changes for the Electric Arc Furnace, overlooking the need for a stable interim re-roller business. This suggests a lack of clarity and communication about the current changes. Reflecting on this, the workforce may not have fully progressed through the 'Awareness' stage of the ADKAR model, indicating insufficient communication about the change rationale (Bangura, 2025). There is a risk that if employees do not understand the underlying cause of the change, they may resist its implementation and disengage with the process (Chkheidze, 2025).

Both positive and negative feelings were expressed in the questionnaires and interviews. Many recognised the positive impacts of the change, specifically the path to sustainability for the business, and shared feelings of optimism about the future of steelmaking in Wales. For example, Respondent 45 described feeling '*excited*' about the changes. This suggests that employees are motivated by a desire for the business and industry to succeed and appear optimistic and forward-looking.

While there were positive comments about understanding, emotional impact, and management of the change, the majority of responses were negative. A Senior Leader, with over 20 years' service shared:

This has been the worst reorg I have seen in 26 years, the "non" announcement in Sept/Oct 23 through to now, where everything is still not resolved has been crazy... – Respondent 1

This is further recognised by other responders who have described the change as *'chaotic, complex and difficult to navigate'* (Respondent 51). What is particularly worrying is the impact that the organisational change has had on individuals' satisfaction at work, responders made reference to feelings of being *'unmotivated'* and *'less valued'* (Respondent 15). When employees feel involved in the change, they are more likely to engage willingly (Chychun, *et al.*, 2023). The emotional responses fed back through the interviews and questionnaires suggest a lack of *desire* (stage 2 of the ADKAR model) to participate in or support the change (Prosci, 2025). There were a number of comments in the questionnaire responses that said the way in which the change has been managed has negatively affected morale. Respondent 29, a Senior Manager who has been with the organisation for between 10 and 15 years said:

Morale is at rock bottom – Respondent 29

But it is also clear from both the questionnaire responses and interviews that whilst individuals in Commercial Asset Areas had opinions on some aspects of the change

period, interview participants from Catnic and Steelpark, respectively, stated the below:

I do feel removed from it – Participant 3

It is definitely different being in a downstream operation, it doesn't feel like the change directly impacts us – Participant 8

The two quotes highlight a silo mentality within the organisation, suggesting that employees do not feel a strong sense of unity across the UK business. They also indicate, yet again, a lack of understanding around the rationale for the changes. While the concentration of redundancies has been in Port Talbot due to asset closures, the entire company has been asked to rationalise and reduce headcount. The comments regarding silo mentalities across sites were further expanded upon by Participant 6, who noted a '*disconnect between commercial and operations*' (Participant 6). This suggests a deeper cultural issue within the organisation – namely, a lack of collaboration, learning and shared goals across sites and functions (Molek, de Jager and Pucelj, 2023). Such disconnects can hinder alignment on strategic priorities, reduce efficiency and often cause inter-organisational politics between different sites and functions (de Waal, *et al.*, 2019). All of which can lead to organisational dysfunction and have negative impacts on productivity, the working environment and ultimately lead to increased attrition (de Waal, *et al.*, 2019).

Some individuals had mixed emotions about the organisational change and whilst they were initially positive, the way in which they feel has changed as time progressed.

Very enthusiastic in the beginning but lost momentum in how it is being progressed – Respondent 25

This quote is pivotal because it shows that at least some of the workforce were bought into the vision and were initially engaged with the transition, suggesting that it is the management of the change that is viewed to be negative as opposed to the change itself. When asked of their thoughts on how the change was managed there were multiple comments about the process taking too long and one interview participant even described the process as being '*shambolic*' (Participant B). In a recent study by Ana Silva and Rosa Rodrigues, it was found that ambiguity and uncertainty, result more often than not, in frustration, demotivation and dissatisfaction in role leading to increased employee turnover (Kriz, Jolly and Shoss, 2021; Silva and Rodrigues, 2024). Research shows that this is further negatively impacted by a lack of information in relation to any change (Sabeti, *et al.*, 2023). The questionnaire responses revealed that employees did not see the change as being structured and clear but felt as though the company were '*making it up as we go along*' (Respondent 6). Planning is fundamental to the success of organisational change and without a clear, detailed plan that is closely monitored, employees and key stakeholders are less likely to buy-in to the change (Errida and Lotfi, 2021).

Those remaining in the organisation definitely see a disparity in how they have been treated, one employee stated:

A lot of time and money has gone into supporting people being made redundant while the staff remaining have been left to somewhat self-organise. – Respondent

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This quote is significant because it highlights that ‘survivors’ of the change are feeling undervalued and underappreciated, which as discussed in the literature review, can have detrimental impacts on employees’ wellbeing (Gandolfi, 2008; Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018).

In summary, this theme reveals that in most cases the recent organisational re-structure at TSUK was emotionally charged. Whilst some employees demonstrated resilience and optimism, particularly in recognising the future organisational model, others have expressed deep frustration, demotivation and a diminished sense of value. The disconnect between change management and employee perception suggests that change initiatives have not been effective. It is also important to note the different perceptions and experiences within the sample group between seniors and non-senior employees. This theme highlights that unclear rationale, inconsistent experiences across sites and inadequate support for those remaining post-restructure significantly influence employees’ motivation and engagement. This summary highlights that TSUK’s change management lacked clarity, emotional support, consistent communication, all of which are critical components of the ADKAR model (Wong, *et al.*, 2019). The strongest misalignments identified through the research are the Awareness and Desire stages. In failing to meet these stages,

TSUK may see continued demotivation and lower productivity from the workforce; and increased attrition due to a disconnect with the workforce and their diminished sense of value, all of which will build resistance and increase the risk of the change failing (Chung-Yu and Chung-Kai, 2021; Dempsey, *et al.*, 2021).

Experiencing Change: Employee Insights on Leadership and Communication

This theme presents insights into how communication strategies and leadership actions shaped the employee experience throughout the organisational change. It was noted that 10% of questionnaire responders did not share their opinion of the effectiveness of the UK Leadership Team (UKLT) throughout the change, suggesting a lack of trust and psychological safety, with some potentially fearing retaliation (McKinsey & Company, 2023b; CIPD, 2024d; Smith, J., 2025). However, whilst this interpretation is based on the absence of comments in the questionnaire it is important to acknowledge that there may be an influence of the researcher's own bias.

A lot of the positive comments around communication were reflective of individuals' line managers and local communications however, some responses did acknowledge that the UKLT '*did their best*' (Respondent 13). There were positive references to the CEO email communications as a source of information regarding the organisational changes. Respondent 11 stated:

I think the regular updates via email from CEO were clear and concise and appreciated by most staff as an update on the transition. – Respondent 11

In addition, there were encouraging comments in relation to the central Communications team with both Participant 6 and Participant 4 stating, '*central comms do a fantastic job*' and that they '*add an edge*', respectively.

Whilst the communications satisfied some respondents, others described them as '*vague and infrequent*' (Respondent 22) and lacking in transparency. In isolation, this could be considered as a reflection of an individual's unique personal circumstances, but it was further supported by other negative comments including the communications being '*opaque*' (Respondent 51), '*leaving people in the dark*' (Respondent 53) and '*sparse*' (Participant 3). In illustrating that communication felt '*last minute*', '*misaligned*' and '*impersonal*' (Participant 4), Participant 4 also stated:

Tata's favourite thing to do is to leave you at 3pm on a Friday with a lovely piece of news to digest over the weekend. – Participant 4

Communication is one of the most important factors to take into account when managing change, and the content and process of communication must be taken into account at all stages to ensure employees are timely informed of any required information (McCalman, Paton and Siebert, 2016; Yue, Men and Ferguson, 2019). This not only engages employees and puts them at ease but also nullifies the impact of the rumour mill (McCalman, Paton and Siebert, 2016). What is also vital when considering change, which evidently has not been taken into account in TSUK's case, is the feedback loop, by sending communications on a Friday afternoon, you are leaving individuals to digest information without the ability to discuss and ask questions, possibly inducing further insecurity and stress on those involved (McCalman, Paton and Siebert, 2016; Bennett, Saundry and Fisher, 2020).

What was evident from both the questionnaires and interviews is that senior employees had a different experience in terms of communication from the UKLT, with the majority of senior respondents and participants saying they felt informed through the UK Performance Call, a monthly meeting with all senior members of the organisation. Participant 1, a senior leader, discussed the monthly calls and the more frequent senior calls that were arranged around times of heightened organisational activity. During the interview, Participant 1 reflected on this and recognised that their team members, who are not invited to said calls, would have more of a '*pessimistic view*' (Participant 1). For change to be effective, it requires transparent, inclusive, and consistent engagement across all levels of the organisation, unequal experiences of change can severely impact the morale of the organisation (Zondi and Mutambara, 2016; Harney, Fu and Freeney, 2018).

It is clear that the UKLT made efforts to enhance communication with the wider workforce as in October 2024 they began holding town halls in each UK site. They have currently visited 3 out of 8 main sites, Catnic, Shotton and Trostre. Participant 3 recognised this and that the town halls gave employees an opportunity to ask questions. However, they went on to say that the town hall seemed '*delayed*' (Participant 3) and in starting with Catnic, the leadership team chose the '*easy way out*' (Participant 3) due to the limited impact across the site. As 73% of the workforce are based in sites where a town hall hasn't yet been held, it is understandable that there were comments highlighting the need for more face-to-face communications. This is consistent with the output from a 2015 survey focused on communications where respondents reported that their preference was for communication from leadership to be face-to-face which was also linked to increased clarity; positive perceptions of leadership; and increased job satisfaction (Braun, *et al.*, 2019).

One recurring matter in the questionnaire responses was frustration around rumours and key information being leaked by Trade Unions or reported in the news before communication from the company. This often diminished the impact of the message, leaving employees feeling disappointed. Trust is eroded when employees perceive they are not the first to know about changes that directly affect them, especially when such information is perceived to be 'leaked' or mishandled (Kitz, Barclay and Breitsohl, 2023; Smith, L., 2025). As well as creating confusion and anxiety amongst the workforce mishandled information can also damage the organisation's credibility (Smith, L., 2025). One striking comment on this topic was from Respondent 46 who stated:

People just want to be updated and not have to hear about their own future through a rumour mill – Respondent 46

This quote is particularly powerful as it highlights the sense of feeling undervalued and unrecognised.

There is no doubt that employees recognised the '*immense pressure*' (Participant 24) the UKLT were under. However, despite this understanding, questionnaire respondents used terms such as '*evasive*' (Respondent 6), '*distant*' (Respondent 21) and '*transactional*' (Respondent 51) to describe the UKLT. These findings contrast with the principles of transformational leadership outlined in the literature review. Transformational leadership theory advocates for leaders to be influential, motivational and considerate (Costa, Padua and Moreria, 2023). This was not

reflected in employees' experiences, with Participant 4 summarising their thoughts on the UKLT as:

You need visionary people, and you need charismatic people with the ability to convince and motivate, sometimes I think we've struggled with that... You need leaders who are bold and powerful and put themselves out there. We don't have that... – Participant 4

One response referred to the '*broken trust*' (Participant 11) between employees and the organisation. This is a significant quote as it suggests the psychological contract, an intangible contract based on mutual expectations and beliefs, between the organisation and workforce could be broken, which impacts both job satisfaction and employee retention (Sunanda, Debasish and Srikanta, 2021; CIPD, 2025).

In conclusion, this theme highlights the pivotal role that leadership communication plays in shaping employee perceptions and experiences during organisational change. While some respondents acknowledged efforts made by the UKLT and praised local and central communications, the broader employee experience was marked by inconsistencies, perceived opacity, and a lack of timely, two-way engagement. These insights point to a critical disconnect between leadership intentions and the employee experience. The mixed responses underscore that effective leadership is not only about managing the day-to-day operations but also about visibility, emotional intelligence, and building trust through consistent and transparent dialogue (Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Watkin, 2023). As John P. Kotter (2012) reminds us, '*without credible communication, and a*

lot of it, employee hearts and minds are never captured' (p.15). This observation resonates deeply with the current findings, which suggest that gaps in communication contributed to broke trust and a weakened psychological contract – factors that significantly undermine talent retention (Topa, Aranda-Carmena and De-Maria, 2022).

Cultivating and Retaining Organisational Talent

This theme delves into the perceptions of TM practices and how talent is retained within TSUK. When discussing general TM, Participants 4, 8 and 9 all made reference to the mature approach that TSUK takes in moving people between departments without the necessary qualification or experience, opening up wider opportunities for promotion and sideways progression. However, there remains significant room for improvement in the organisation's overall approach to TM. Questionnaire responses revealed a strong desire among employees for more visible career progression and development pathways. Additionally, respondents expressed concern over the suspension of the performance review process, noting it undermines motivation and progression. Whilst some participants acknowledged the availability of internal projects and engaging work opportunities, there were frequent references to a lack of access to external training and qualifications, suggesting current talent development efforts may be insufficiently aligned with employees' long-term professional growth. As discussed in the literature review, younger generations are looking for training opportunities and professional growth in their employers so this is something that TSUK will need to provide a greater focus on (Kulkarni and Rai, 2023). These perceptions are further supported by internal data which show that

only 12% of TB members have benefited from Further or Higher Education (Tata Steel UK, 2025b).

Participant 5 said personal and career development '*went out of the window*' during the change period. We know from prior research that though difficult during times of downsizing, organisations need to have effective strategies for retaining talented employees throughout the change period to remain competitive and retain staff (Jackson, Schuler and Jiang, 2014; Smith, 2020).

In response to more targeted questions about the TBs, employees provided particularly positive feedback in their effectiveness in identifying and assigning mentors to individuals on the boards. For example, Respondent 26 said '*The biggest advantage I've had from the talent management process is [REDACTED] being my mentor.*' (Respondent 26).

Another positive note that emerged from the research was the perceived value of the One Tata Steel session held in Port Talbot with Dr Raghu Krishnamoorthy. Participant 8, reflected on the opportunity to engage in dialogue around the business change and shared their views:

I think that was quite a good insight I suppose and that session itself did give me a lot more confidence about the business plans. – Participant 8

Whilst respondents said the TBs were initially deployed well, they also said:

it was nice to be acknowledged and thought of as 'talent' but as time went on it feels like it has dwindled, and it doesn't feel like it means anything now.

– Respondent 23

Several comments highlighted the perceived need for '*hunting*' (Participant 10) development opportunities, with many suggesting that progression relies heavily on personal initiative rather than structured support. This implies that the TBs may be ineffective in facilitating talent development, shifting the responsibility onto employees' own initiative. Such dynamics may signal a lack of investment in employee development and growth. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, self-actualisation, achieved through opportunities for personal and professional development is a key motivator, if these needs go unmet, the risk of attrition increases (D'Souza and Gurin, 2017; King, 2021). The need for TSUK to provide additional focus on career progression is further supported by internal exit interview data which reveals 'Career Progression' is the second most common reason for leaving, after job security, from January 2024 to April 2025 (Tata Steel UK, 2025c). Despite a low completion rate of 15%, this data offers valuable insights into the broader workforce's views (Tata Steel UK, 2025c). The concern over the effectiveness of the TBs is further supported by responses to a more targeted question specifically addressing perceptions of the TBs.

In response to the question, '*How effective have the Talent Boards been in your development?*', the overwhelming sentiment was that the TBs are effectively '*non-existent*' (Participant 10), with most respondents reporting little to no impact on their development. In contrary to this, internal data shows that 37% of TB nominees had

seen a promotion or role change in the period of July 2023-2024 (Tata Steel UK, 2025b). Whilst this may suggest that the promotions and role movements individuals have seen are down to their self-initiative as highlighted in the previous paragraph, it could also point towards wider communication issues around the process and how it impacts these successes. In support of this comment, a recurring trouble for respondents and participants was the lack of communication surrounding the TBs; many individuals stated they had never received any discussion or feedback from the TB. More concerningly, both questionnaire respondents and interview participants expressed uncertainty about whether they were still on the TBs at all. They described feeling disconcerted and unsettled, with one individual noting they felt they had '*been shelved*' (Respondent 61), highlighting a perceived disconnect between recognition and meaningful follow-up and communication.

This strongly reinforces the credibility of concerns that TBs raise expectation but ultimately fail to deliver, with some individuals suggesting they have the '*opposite impact*' (Respondent 35). When recognition is not followed by clear communication or tangible development opportunities, it can lead to disengagement and feelings of being undervalued (Sonnenberg, Zijderveld and Brinks, 2014). The risk is that, rather than motivating high-potential employees, the TBs may undermine morale, potentially resulting in reduced retention of key talent and a loss of confidence in TSUK's commitment to development (Boonbumroongsuk and Rungruang, 2022).

In addition to the perceived lack of effective TM and limited positive experiences with the TBs, individuals were particularly forthcoming about the 'push factors' currently influencing their engagement and retention. Salary and benefits emerge as

consistent and prominent concerns across both data sets. Notably, two interview participants cited salary as the primary reason for their departure from the organisation, while another participant attributed the loss of several team members directly to pay related dissatisfaction. These insights suggest that compensation is a critical factor in employee retention at TSUK. Whilst this finding contradicts existing literature suggesting younger generations are less focused on pay, it is important to contextualise the internal salary situation at TSUK. The organisation is now entering its third consecutive year without a formal pay review, despite significant increases in both market salary benchmarks and the overall cost of living, with consumer prices increasing by over 20% in the last three years (Clark, 2025). For example, Participant 4 shared that their partner recently left the TSUK for a similarly sized organisation, taking on an identical role with a £20,000 increase in salary. Pay has clearly emerged as a prominent push factor, contributing to the departure of several individuals (Mutanga, *et al.*, 2021; Taylor, 2022). Moreover, this prolonged stagnation in compensation may now be preventing some employees from reaching the second level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – financial security – thereby undermining their overall sense of stability and wellbeing within the organisation (Taormina and Gao, 2013; Rojas, Mendez and Watkins-Frassler, 2023; Sumathi and Thangaiah, 2023).

Despite the negative feedback, there were some positive and reassuring comments from both the questionnaires and interviews regarding why individuals choose to stay with TSUK. Many respondents highlighted the importance of relationships – such as friendships, teammates, colleagues and line management – as key factors. Additionally, several individuals expressed enthusiasm for '*exciting projects*' (Respondent 5), their interest in the work they do and the opportunities to learn new

skills. With the shift to an EAF model, these opportunities are expected to grow, to further enhance employee engagement it is crucial that TSUK makes these opportunities clear for those considered and use them as a development and retention tool (Tambay, 2024).

What was also evident through the research, especially in the interviews, was the passion for the industry, with a sense of hope and excitement not only for the TSUK but for the future of steelmaking. Participant 4 stated:

I want to see a green transition...I want to be able to be part of that journey because it aligns to my values – Participant 4

As we know millennials and Generation Z place high value on corporate responsibility, sustainability, and ethical practices (Festing and Schafer, 2014; Pandita, 2022; Gomez, Mawhinney and Betts, no date). These generations are driven by a desire to contribute to positive change and are increasingly looking for employers who align with their values (Festing and Schafer, 2014; Pandita, 2022; Gomez, Mawhinney and Betts, no date). TSUK needs to create positive discussions and actively showcase the transition, highlighting its benefits, in order to retain talent. On the whole, while there were isolated examples of effective development initiatives, such as mentoring through the TBs and engagement sessions like the One Tata Steel event, the overarching sentiment among employees suggest a disconnect between the intentions of TSUK and lived experiences for employees. Those on the TBs expressed a strong desire for structured career pathways, transparent communication, and investment in their development – factors shown to

be critical for talent retention (Baqutayan, 2014; Festing and Schafer, 2014; Pandita, 2022). The positive perceptions of engaging projects and a shared passion for the industry reflect a committed workforce, yet this is at risk of being undermined by a lack of development opportunities, a lack of external training and prolonged stagnation in pay. The recurring narrative of having to hunt for opportunities underscores a broader concern that TM is reactive rather than strategic, with the TBs perceived as symbolic rather than impactful. This is powerfully summarised by Participant A, who stated:

One of my biggest issues with the company is that we are constantly squeezing people down and because of that we're seeing a lack of talent coming through the organisation because we're not investing in people and not investing in the future...Who is going to be left to run the business? – Participant A.

This insight directly aligns with the research question and objectives, highlighting that talent initiatives at TSUK, while well-intentioned, have not consistently met employee expectations nor contribute to a sustainable talent pipeline.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of Key Findings

This study set out to examine how factors, particularly leadership and TM, have impacted talent retention at TSUK during a period of significant organisational change. Through qualitative research, using both qualitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the study explored the perceptions of the 'Talent' pool with regards to leadership and TM approaches and initiatives. This chapter reflects on TSUK's performance in managing talent through change, summarises the key findings, and considers the broader implications for both internal and external contexts. In addition, it offers targeted recommendations to support TSUK in strengthening their approach to 'Talent' and moving forward from the change period in a more positive light.

In identifying the primary factors that influence talent retention, the research revealed that employees are strongly motivated by career progression, personal development opportunities and access to external training. In addition to this, there is a clear sense of commitment to the steel industry not only due to its history but also the future potential of the industry. Many employees place significant value on corporate responsibility and TSUK's ongoing decarbonisation journey to move to greener steel, resonates deeply with their personal values. The alignment between personal goals and individual values and beliefs not only encourages individuals to remain with the organisation during the change period but also strengthens their commitment to contributing to its long-term success. Though this is not enough on its own.

Leadership and TM initiatives are undoubtedly an important factor when considering talent retention but are even more important during times of organisational change

(Jackson, Schuler and Jiang, 2014). Transformational leadership fosters trust and commitment and acts as a key driver in ensuring employee commitment and retention during periods of change both in the immediate and long-term (Holten and Brenner, 2015; Turner, 2019; Abraham, *et al.*, 2023). How leaders communicate determines whether the workforce understand and are brought into the reason for change, ultimately impacting their motivation and willingness to contribute to the organisation. This paper recognises the difficulties and complexities of managing talent in an ever-changing industry such as the steel industry but also highlights the crucial role it plays retaining talent and enhancing employee flexibility and willingness to adapt to change (Jackson, Schuler and Jiang, 2014; Singh and Sankhi, 2016).

In assessing the effectiveness of TM initiatives and leadership in relation to talent retention at TSUK, this study gathered perspectives from both employees and management. The findings indicate that in this particular instance of change, negative perceptions significantly outweighed the positive ones. While certain element such as leadership communication through central channels may have addressed some immediate informational gaps, there remains a clear need for improvement. To build trust and foster commitment, the UKLT must adopt a more visible and personal approach, with increased face-to-face engagement to demonstrate authenticity and transparency, qualities currently perceived as lacking. Furthermore, communication should be more timely and enable genuine two-way dialogue across all levels of the organisation. Regarding TM processes, positive feedback was limited. While some individuals valued the support of career mentors, the overall perception of TSUK's TM framework, particularly the TBs, was largely negative. To summarise the output of the research, the TBs were deemed ineffective

and, in some cases, having the reverse effects with individuals feeling demotivated by the lack of engagement and communication thus signalling a need for a more transparent and engaging approach.

This study has reinforced the importance of having a structured approach to organisational change with many employees at TSUK experiencing a disconnect from the extended change management and undergoing a range of emotions which for the most part go unsupported and unrecognised. The researcher failed to identify any existing change models which took into account the necessary elements and as such proposes an adaption to the Kubler-Ross Change Curve and the ADKAR model, called the C.A.D.K.A.T.E.S model (Figure 4), a model more relevant for organisations undergoing large-scale changes over an extended time period. The model, in its main, follows the same process as ADKAR but introduces an initial ‘collaboration’ step to ensure that employees are presented with the problem statement and asked for their input before a set path is determined. This allows for employees to be more engaged in the change and feel a sense of responsibility and ownership for its success. The model introduces another element – Time. This is to ensure change leaders are conscious of and take into account change fatigue, building in clear phases and incremental steps in order to celebrate small successes - an element highlighted in Kotter’s 8 Step Change Model - throughout the change period (Armstrong, 2016; Adelman-Mullally, *et al.*, 2024). Whilst the content of the original ‘Reinforce’ stage from ADKAR models stands, this is referred to as ‘Embed’ for the purposes of the anagram. Underneath each stage of the model there is a constant action of ‘Support’, taking into account Kubler-Ross’ focus on emotional

experience but recognising that individuals experience each stage at different points of the change programme.

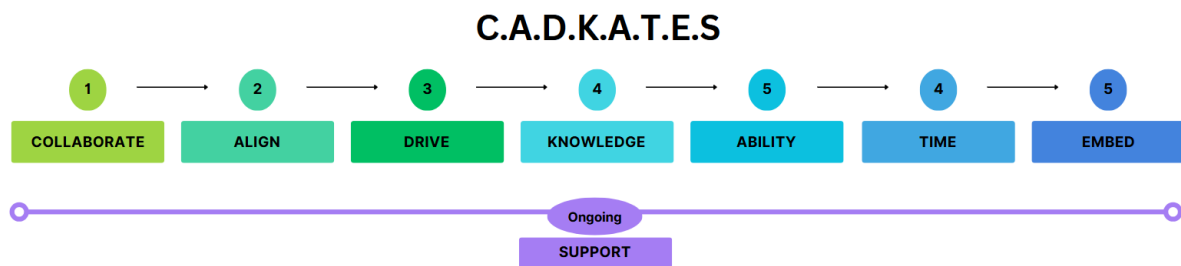


Figure 4 - C.A.D.K.A.T.E.S Model

Review of the Success in Meeting the Aims and Objectives of the Study

The researcher has been largely successful in achieving the stated aims and objectives of the study, which explored employee perceptions of leadership and TM effectiveness during TSUK's recent organisational restructure. Objective 1 was comprehensively addressed through an in-depth literature review and analysis of existing research, which identified several key factors influencing talent retention during change, including career growth and development opportunities, workplace wellbeing, work-life balance, leadership and communication. Objective 2 was also met through the literature review, highlighting the critical role of leadership and TM during organisational change. However, the research acknowledged a potential gap in the study regarding the specific influence of line management, suggesting an area for further exploration. Objective 3 was achieved through qualitative questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which provided rich insights into employees' lived experiences. The findings raised concerns about the perceived effectiveness of leadership during the change process, with concerning feedback and limited positive sentiment towards specific initiatives such as TBs. Finally, Objective 4 was fulfilled

through the formulation of two forward-looking recommendations. While these suggestions were more future-oriented than reflective, they offer practical guidance on how TSUK might improve talent retention moving forward. Overall, the research successfully aligned with its aim, combining academic grounding with meaningful employee perspective to generate relevant and actional insights.

Research Contribution

This research offers a contribution to the academic and practical understanding of talent retention during organisational change. Its theoretical contribution lies in its integration and adaption of the Kubler-Ross Change Curve and the ADKAR model into a more employee-centric change framework. This adapted model places greater emphasis on collaboration, the time period of change and emotional engagement to address gaps in current models which overlook change fatigue and the importance of involving employees early in the change period to ensure their engagement. This study also addresses gaps in existing literature, where there fails to be a focus on retaining key talent during organisational change but specifically during times of downsizing. Additionally, the findings support the literature on transformational leadership, reinforcing its importance in managing organisational change and role in cultivating trust and commitment with employees.

The practical implications of this research will follow in the form of tangible opportunities for improvement in TSUK's leadership communication and TM strategy.

The qualitative nature of this study allowed for deep insights that may otherwise have been missed through quantitative research and offers a replicable framework for future studies in the manufacturing industry.

Limitations of the research

As with any research, this study is subject to certain limitations that may have influenced the scope and depths of the findings and should be acknowledged when interpreting the results. It is important to consider that whilst this is a case study on TSUK, the research only looks to a proportion of TB individuals, namely those within C&F and does not account for those in Operational areas of the business. Thus, the findings may not be representative of the entire population of the organisation.

In addition, this study is cross-sectional, capturing perspectives at only one point in time. According to Kubler-Ross's Change Curve, employee emotions and perceptions evolve throughout the change period. Therefore, a longitudinal study exploring employee perceptions over the entire change process would be a valuable improvement.

Finally, this research primarily reflects the views of current employees, as access to former employees was limited. A more balanced sample, including more former employees, could have provided more diverse insights.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, a series of recommendations are proposed to support TSUK in enhancing its approach to retaining talent during organisational change. Whilst the focus of this research has been mainly reflective of the organisational change, the recommendations will act as a catalyst for ongoing improvement as opposed to suggestions of areas of improvement that cannot be implemented at this stage of the change process.

Recommendation 1: Implement a Cultural Change Programme

In order to address the breakdown in trust and perceived authenticity between leadership and employees which suggests the psychological contract has begun to, if not has already broken down. To address this, it is recommended that TSUK introduce a cultural change programme focused on re-establishing shared values, missions and goals and rebuilding trust and resilience across the organisation (Warrick, 2017; CIPD, 2018; Naveed, *et al.*, 2022). Table 3 shows the components which should be included along with the relevant timeframe and costs:

Table 3 – Recommendation 1: Cultural Change Programme Timescales & Costs

Component		Time-frame	Cost
Employee Voice Engagement Sessions with UKLT (CIPD, 2018; Vu Hong, <i>et al.</i> , 2025)	Gather employee feedback on organisational culture and improvement suggestions. Involve employees in the change program to reduce resistance and ensure buy-in.	6 months	The only costs incurred will be UKLT travel expenses, considered standard business travel, and the cost of their time. This important cost cannot be quantified due to lack of salary data access.
	2 'drop-in' sessions to take place at each small-medium site: Catnic; Steelpark; Shotton; Hartlepool, Trostre, Corby, Llanwern		
	3 'drop-in' sessions to take place at larger sites: Port Talbot		
	3 'drop-in' online sessions to accommodate homeworkers <i>Total number of sessions: 20</i>		
Leadership Training (CIPD, 2018; Bagga, Gera and Haque, 2023; McHarris, 2024)	Equip managers to recognise and respond to employees' emotions and behaviours, fostering trust and a supportive work environment.	12 months	Total cost = £37,500
	Face-to-face training for 176 senior leaders will be provided by Treehouse, focusing on emotional reactions, healthy relationships, and identifying non-typical emotions (Treehouse, no date). Virtual training sessions may be suitable for regular business needs, but full-day face-to-face training is recommended for the change programme.		Based on a quote of £2500 for one full day of face-to-face delivery (cohort of 12 delegates)

Implement specific actions identified from employee engagement sessions	Create and implement a detailed plan addressing employee-raised changes. Communicate each step clearly and keep employees updated. Appoint change agents in each business area to facilitate the programme and provide local support.	12-18 months	This will be dependent on suggestions raised and taken forward.
Introduce Employee/Leadership Feedback Loops (Vu Hong, <i>et al.</i> , 2025)	Maintain ongoing two-way dialogue between leadership and employees on ongoing matters. This can be done through a series of methods - town halls, virtual business updates, employee voice forums, pulse surveys.	On-going	Cost will only arise if leadership are required to travel to sites for town halls

To maintain focus on culture and employee experience, a further recommendation is to appoint a Culture and Employee Experience Manager. This role will lead engagement and wellbeing initiatives, drive employee voice forums, support DEI strategies, facilitate organisational change, and promote open communication. The annual cost for this position averages £43,719 in the UK (Glassdoor, 2025).

Recommendation 2: Relaunch the Talent Boards

Each business should establish clear career paths for key disciplines and specialisms, providing employees with visibility of potential development opportunities (Baqutayan, 2014). This transparency should inform robust succession planning, ensuring individuals are supported with the right experiences and training to prepare them for future roles (Siambi, 2022). These elements should be brought together within a comprehensive development plan that addresses both short-term actions and long-term career aspirations.

To signal a meaningful shift in the way TBs are run, a full relaunch is recommended. Each business area should streamline the number of individuals on the board to focus on those making significant contributions. A face-to-face event with UKLT

members should be held to demonstrate recognition and appreciation of top talent (Braun *et al.*, 2019). Going forward, after annual and bi-annual reviews, individuals should meet with relevant TB members for discussions on their strengths, areas for improvement, future opportunities, and development gaps (Nikolic, Peric and Bovan, 2020).

Whilst the majority of this recommendation consists of ongoing actions and ways of working, costs will occur when arranging the 'Relaunch event', see Table 4 for the detail:

Table 4 – Recommendation 2: Talent Board 'Relaunch' Event Costs

Component		Cost
Venue	Use a TSUK venue to limit costs	
	South Wales venue to accommodate the majority and limit travel costs	n/a
Catering	Tea & Coffee for morning and afternoon break provided by onsite contractors: £5/person	£1,250
	Buffet Lunch: £7.50/person (standard local provider)	(£12.50 x 100)
Travel Support	Following the rationalisation of those on the TBs, assume that 60% of TB nominees are South Wales based and do not require travel support.	£2000
	For the remaining 40% (40 attendees) subsidise travel average of £50/person	(£50 x 40)
Accommodation	1 night stay for a maximum of 40 attendees, though individuals travelling from the Midlands are likely not to stay over.	£2520
	£63 per/night (including company discount)	(£63 x 40)

Final Thoughts

In navigating the intricacies of talent retention during organisational change in the Steel Industry, this study has highlighted the importance of effective leadership, authentic communication and meaningful TM initiatives. While TSUK's legacy lays a foundation on which employees feel a sense of pride, passion and loyalty, this alone is not sufficient in retaining top talent, specifically when undergoing prolonged periods of change. As TSUK moves forward in its decarbonisation journey, the findings and recommendations in this report remain pertinent in retaining talent and future proofing the organisation for an ever-evolving climate.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Questions for Participants remaining in the business

Introduction

- Talk to me about your experience with the company, how long have you been employed by TSUK?
- Have you experienced any major organisational change prior to this during your time with the organisation? – if so did this impact you directly? Did you change role?

Organisational Change

- What are your views about the current ongoing organisational change?
- Has your role changed or been proposed to change as part of the reorganisation? If so, how do you feel this role is aligned to your aspirations/development?
- How do you feel the change has been managed? Do you think the change has been planned, structured and executed in a timely manner?

Leadership

- How would you describe the leadership (specifically from the UKMT) since the initial announcement in September 2023?
- What are your thoughts on the communication throughout this process? Do you feel this has been effective, timely and providing adequate communication?

Talent Management

- As an individual recognised through the company talent board, how do you feel you have been treated throughout the change period? Do you think those not identified as talent would have had a different experience?
- What do you think about the career development opportunities in Tata Steel UK?

Retention

- Talk to me about your personal preferences through the transition. Did you want to remain in the organisation – why?
- What makes you stay with Tata Steel UK? Is there anything in particular that has influenced you to remain in the organisation?

Appendix 2 – Interview Questions for Participants that have already left the business

Introduction

- Talk to me about your experience with the company, how long have you been / were you employed by TSUK? When did you leave?
- Had you experienced any major organisational change prior to this during your time with the organisation? – if so did this impact you directly? Did you change role?

Organisational Change

- What are your views about the current ongoing organisational change?
- Had your role changed or been proposed to change as part of the reorganisation? If so, how do you feel this role is aligned to your aspirations/development?
- How do you feel the change was managed? Do you think the change has been planned, structured and executed in a timely manner?

Leadership

- How would you describe the leadership (specifically from the UKMT) since the initial announcement in September 2023?
- What are your thoughts on the communication throughout this process? Do you feel this has been effective, timely and providing adequate communication?

Talent Management

- As an individual recognised through the company talent board, how do you feel you have been treated throughout the change period? Do you think those not identified as talent would have had a different experience?
- What do you think about the career development opportunities in Tata Steel UK?

Retention

- Talk to me about your personal preferences through the transition. Did you want to remain in the organisation – yes/no/why?
- What made you leave Tata Steel UK? Is there anything in particular that has influenced you to leave the organisation?

Appendix 3 – Interview Protocol (excluding interview notes)

Participant	Date	Check individual has completed the consent form	Check individual is happy with the meeting being recorded	Provide an overview of the research	Explain to the individual that they are welcome to turn their camera off if they would be more comfortable
Participant A (Pilot)	12/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant B	14/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant C	14/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant D	18/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant E	19/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant F	19/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant G	19/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant H	19/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Happy with camera on
Participant I	20/03/2025	Y	Y	Y	Turned camera off

Appendix 4 – Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study as part of my Masters dissertation. This study aims to explore how employees at Tata Steel UK perceive the effectiveness of leadership and talent management initiatives throughout the recent organisational restructure.

If you have any questions regarding the content or purpose of this study please do not hesitate to contact me via email: hannah.ashton@tatasteeleurope.com.

1. Please confirm your full name

2. Please confirm that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without consequences.

- ☐ Yes, I understand
- ☐ No, I do not understand

3. Are you happy for the researcher to record and transcribe your interview to ensure all details are captured? Your data will be anonymised and your identity will not be disclosed. Your data will be securely stored and recordings will be deleted after the dissertation is completed and assessed.

- ☐ Yes, I am happy for my interview to be recorded
- ☐ No, I am not happy for my interview to be recorded

4. Finally, do you consent to participate in this study?

- ☐ Yes, I consent to participate in this study
- ☐ No, I do not consent to participate in this study (you will automatically be withdrawn from the study)

Appendix 5 – Interview Transcript Sample: Participant C

Ashton, Hannah

Talk to me about your experience with the company, how long have you been employed by TSUK?

Participant C

I joined in 2019 as a placement and spent the year in the casters as a project engineer. In Christmas 2021 they reached out to say there was a position in Catnic, the only thing that stopped be going back to Tata initially was distance because I was based in Port Talbot. In February 2022 I joined Catnic as an operational graduate and in October 2023 I was appointed as a Project Engineer.

Ashton, Hannah

Have you experienced any major organisational change prior to this during your time with the organisation? – if so did this impact you directly? Did you change role?

Participant C

No, I've only been here 3 years.

Ashton, Hannah

What are your views about the current ongoing organisational change?

Participant C

I'm fortunate Catnic hasn't been too deeply involved, everyone did their part but the impact has been minimal. I sympathise with other sites, it's a horrible thing to go through. I see it in a rationale view, we couldn't keep going as we were it wasn't sustainable. We need to run optimally now to be able to get to EAF.

Ashton, Hannah

Has your role changed or been proposed to change as part of the reorganisation? If so, how do you feel this role is aligned to your aspirations/development?

Participant C

No

Ashton, Hannah

How do you feel the change has been managed? Do you think the change has been planned, structured and executed in a timely manner?

Participant C

You see communications from the UKLT, it seems structured but I haven't been in any discussions. It seem sparse, as its not affecting me I'm not bothered but if I was affected then I'd say it's lacking in communication and in a timely manner of when it comes out, you find out about things from the news first, saying they try and get things out as soon as possible but always on the news first.

Ashton, Hannah

How would you describe the leadership (specifically from the UKMT) since the initial announcement in September 2023?

Participant C

They seem to be trying their best, it's a big thing. They are trying to balance keeping people informed and releasing information. The whole Management team came to Catnic to field questions from all levels of employees and explain clearly what's going on, that was a good thing but that was the end of 2024, so possibly delayed and starting with Catnic was an easy way out as we're not really affected.

Ashton, Hannah

What are your thoughts on the communication throughout this process? Do you feel this has been effective, timely and providing adequate communication?

Participant C

I know with some people there were discussions around VR, they don't think it's

been handled the best. There has been a lack of communication around it, the processes are taking too long and people aren't getting answers.

Ashton, Hannah

As an individual recognised through the company talent board, how do you feel you have been treated throughout the change period? Do you think those not identified as talent would have had a different experience?

Participant C

It's a bit of a funny one, the talent board pops into my head once a year, I don't feel it's something I recognise as a thing. I've had a lot of opportunities but don't see it come through the talent board. I've probably had 2 discussions in 2 years around it. I don't really know what it is to be honest, nothing comes of it.

Ashton, Hannah

What do you think about the career development opportunities in Tata Steel UK?

Participant C

It's been great for me, I've been very fortunate here. I came in on a graduate programme which was really good and structured. I managed to get lots of exposure to progress and turn my hand to things.

Ashton, Hannah

Talk to me about your personal preferences through the transition. Did you want to remain in the organisation – why?

Participant C

Yeah, I think so, if its staying here in Catnic yes, I'm not sure about other sites. I really like Catnic, there are lots more opportunities to have an impact. I wouldn't have been inclined to take the VR package. This is my first job so I've got no experience anywhere else to compare to.

Ashton, Hannah

What makes you stay with Tata Steel UK? Is there anything in particular that has influenced you to remain in the organisation?

Participant C

It's more Catnic than TSUK. In Catnic there are lots of opportunity, we are given lots of responsibility. I have exposure to management team. One positive from Talent Board is that [REDACTED] decided to be my mentor which gives me further exposure.

Ashton, Hannah

That's all of the questions. Is there anything else you think would be useful for me to know? Or anything specific that you experienced that would help the research?

Participant C

Not really, I do feel removed from it with Cantic being profitable and growing.

Appendix 6 – Interview Transcript Sample: Participant G

Ashton, Hannah

Firstly, can you talk to me about your experience with the company and how long you have been with the company?

Participant G

I started in 1992 on the Youth Training Scheme and became Team Leader in 1996 which was my first people management role. I then did a stint in [REDACTED] for 6 months and when I came back the organisation was restructuring and we were splitting up Account Management and Team Management. I decided to go down the Team Manager route and I was in that role until 2022/2023 when I was seconded to [REDACTED], a Senior Manager role. So all of my experience has been in customer services but I've worked across all sectors.

Ashton, Hannah

You've mentioned one already but have you experienced any major organisational change prior to this during your time with the organisation? – if so did this impact you directly? Did you change role?

Participant G

There have been a number of changes we've gone from British Steel to Corus to Tata and in each situation there's been a huge set of changes in terms of the way we are organised the work has been the same but the systems and customers change. It feels like Commercial has always been in a bit of a protective bubble. In Project Blue there were small impacts but nothing significant for me or my team.

Ashton, Hannah

What are your views about the current ongoing organisational change?

Participant G

It has been a lengthy process and much longer than people anticipated which has caused lots of apprehension. But I understand the complexity of all of this and how difficult it must be to put it all together. I think the comms itself has been reasonably good but the time taken to send it out has been a problem. I don't think people are aware that this isn't potentially the end of the changes and that there are a few more changes to come that haven't yet been communicated.

Ashton, Hannah

Has your role changed or been proposed to change as part of the reorganisation? If so, how do you feel this role is aligned to your aspirations/development?

Participant G

No

Ashton, Hannah

How do you feel the change has been managed? Do you think the change has been planned, structured and executed in a timely manner?

Participant G

Timely, no, that's been peoples biggest fear and it's added a lot of stress to people's lives. Lots of people are glad to have jobs but are still uncertain on how it's going to look. There were so many people desperate to go some and some are still disappointed that they didn't get VR, people are desperate for VR. In Commercial I think we communicated as best we can and as quickly as we can. I appreciate the union involvement was difficult and it felt very much one step forward two steps back.

Ashton, Hannah

How would you describe the leadership, and when I say leadership I'm referring to the UKLT, since the initial announcement in September 2023?

Participant G

They've been visible I suppose although their messages are vague but I get why. A lot of their communications don't answer the questions that people have.

Ashton, Hannah

You've touched on this already but what are your thoughts on the communication throughout this process? Do you feel this has been effective, timely and providing adequate communication?

Participant G

I think it's been as effective as possible for the leaderships teams ability but it hasn't been good enough for the masses or anyone that has been negatively impacted.

Ashton, Hannah

What do you think could have been done differently around communication?

Participant G

It felt like the business didn't anticipate the amount of opposition they would get to changes. There's a huge extent of work involved for this kind of change and they needed to set that expectation that it would take time at the start.

Ashton, Hannah

As I mentioned at the start, this research focuses on talent retention and those on the TBs. As an individual recognised through the company talent board, how do you feel you have been treated throughout the change period? Do you think those not identified as talent would have had a different experience?

Participant G

No, there's been nothing at all. I haven't even heard about the talent board other than 1 occasion and still don't think that was completely related to talent board. I was put on the Talent Board when I was a Team Manager and then nothing happened until I volunteered for the job at Corby. Since being in this role I've not heard anything at all about TBs and wasn't sure if I was still on it.

Ashton, Hannah

What do you think about the career development opportunities in Tata Steel UK?

Participant G

I think they are there for sure but you have to seek them out. A lot of it is also to do with your own management as they would be reluctant to open up opportunities for you as it would mean a role would be left empty in their team, so your development definitely depends on your manager. Up until Jamie Hillier came into the role it wasn't a focus, my previous manager wouldn't have pushed me to develop. Sometimes development is seen as being someone's favourite but also managers often move a problem person and then it looks like we are rewarding the wrong

behaviour. What I would say is there is not much scope for extracurricular activities, projects etc. Also I have asked for external education over the years but nothing has ever been forthcoming. There are very few talent left.

Ashton, Hannah

What were your personal preferences through the transition. Did you want to remain in the organisation, if so why?

Participant G

I thought about redundancy but I am a bit young and it would have meant I would need to make a life change. If I had been given my figures then maybe I would have made the choice but I wasn't given the option so didn't have to make a decision.

Ashton, Hannah

In general, regardless of the current change, what makes you stay with Tata Steel UK? Is there anything in particular that has influenced you to remain in the organisation?

Participant G

My history and pride in Tata. I love being a Tata employee and I'm proud of the company. I feel like there is loads to do, the job is interesting and extremely challenging. However, I don't think the reward good enough and whilst financial reward isn't everything, I can see how as an employer we're not as attractive as we used to be. Our calibre isn't as good as it could be and I do worry that we are losing our reputation as a good employer.

Ashton, Hannah

They are all of the questions, is there anything further you want to add that may be useful?

Participant G

I would suggest that the leadership team need to get engaged in retaining staff and , need to recognise that we are losing our place as a top employer in the UK. And that needs to happen sooner rather than later otherwise we are going to have an all signing all dancing operation but no staff to back it up.

Appendix 7 – Interview Transcript Sample: Participant H

Ashton, Hannah

Talk to me about your experience with the company, how long have you been employed by TSUK?

Participant H

I started with the company in 2018 as a Health and Safety facilitator and now I am a HS&E Manager. During the time I have been through a few restructures and promotions.

Ashton, Hannah

You've just briefly touched on it but have you experienced any major organisational change prior to this during your time with the organisation? – if so did this impact you directly? Did you change role?

Participant H

Yes, I first started as a H&S facilitator for the Auto Shed and a week after I started they announced a restructure and that there would be redundancies, they were rationalising 4 businesses into Steelpark. So as part of that I was put at risk, lost a team member and moved works area. There was another restructure after that where I took on the responsibilities for the role I was already seconded to, so I was just made permanent in my promoted position. The numbers in the team reduced but there were volunteers.

Ashton, Hannah

What are your views about the current ongoing organisational change?

Participant H

It is definitely different being in a downstream operation, it doesn't feel like the change directly impacts us. But I understand that we need to be sustainable, profitable and need to make the change for environmental purposes. Sometimes I do feel removed from the change but it does affect us in other ways for example in the resourcing of product and material. There definitely seems to be a lot more focus on distribution from central functions which we haven't had before. The uncertainty makes the short term difficult but I would like to think that it will be worth it in the long term.

Ashton, Hannah

I know you've said that you don't feel directly impacted by the change but to confirm, has your role changed or been proposed to change as part of the reorganisation?

Participant H

No my role hasn't changes as part of the proposals but we have been asked to rationalise where we can so that could potentially bring changes to my department, but not my role as it.

Ashton, Hannah

From your perspective as someone a bit more removed and less emotionally involved, how do you feel the change has been managed? Do you think the change has been planned, structured and executed in a timely manner?

Participant H

It's difficult to say as there's only so much information that can be shared at certain points and people have wanted to know more information that couldn't be shared. What I did notice was that things were breaking out in the news before they had been announced by the company, which wasn't good messaging. However I do believe they are trying to move things as quickly as they can.

Ashton, Hannah

The next section is discussing leadership and when I say leadership I'm referring to the UKLT as opposed to any local or line leadership. How would you describe the leadership since initial announcement in September 2023?

Participant H

I guess it's a bit like what I said before. I think they're probably doing what they can, when they can but I do think they've been quite broad with their comms.

Ashton, Hannah

What do you mean by that?

Participant H

A lot of the communications have been quite wide group calls or emails. I guess the problem I see is that those who have a computer can log in and join, but there's a lot of people that don't, so I don't know how well that then gets translated or passed down from that sense. I think from reading certain things like what the Union have said and a few other bits and bobs, I think there's probably some people that feel that the leadership team haven't been as forthcoming with information as they could have been, but I guess in my role I'll probably understand that they probably weren't able to. And also, if I'm honest a lot of it didn't have a direct impact on us as a site, so I didn't feel that close to it.

Ashton, Hannah

So we have touched on the next question a little bit but what are your thoughts on the communication throughout the process and do you think that it's been effective and providing adequate information?

Participant H

Yeah, I think like I mentioned before, I think there were a couple of times when people were getting more information from like news sources than they thought they were directly from the business. Again, that's not necessarily the business's fault. It's been OK for me because I've been able to join the senior Performance Review calls and I can read the emails from the communication Centre I've been. I was able to join quite a few of the teams calls and early on they were discussing the restructure and invited all of the UK seniors, the only thing with those forums its that people don't really ask questions unless they're quite confident too and I don't think that many people would type comments in the chat either. As someone that kind of sits in the middle between shop floor and the offices, I don't know how well, that gets translated to people in operational roles. I think that's always what I found, the difficulty with translating that and giving people out there the opportunities to ask questions or find out more information.

Ashton, Hannah

As an individual who is recognised through the TBs, do you feel you've been treated differently throughout this change period than someone who isn't recognised?

Participant H

I don't think I've necessarily been treated differently. I did obviously have the opportunity to go to Port Talbot and have that discussion on the business change and put thoughts forward in in that sense. I wouldn't say I'd necessarily been treated any differently, but I think that was quite a good insight I suppose and that session itself did give me a lot more confidence about the business plans.

Ashton, Hannah

What do you think about the career development opportunities in in Tata?

Participant H

On the whole I am genuinely quite positive about it. I've always found as a business we're really keen to promote from within, and try and go internally before we go externally. Obviously I've had a couple of promotions which has been nice. I do think a lot of the time it's kind of like what are we doing before that stage leading up to a promotion? Like your next job is this and you can have a promotion. What we don't focus much on is the individual development and the step before. So we sometimes outline, maybe in three to five years, this person could be ready for that role, but it's like, what are the short term steps we can slowly introduce that person to so they are ready to do that rather than just wait till it's a point of promoting them. I remember when I was trying to get ahead, I very much felt like it was me pushing for more responsibility and asking for more responsibility that kind of got me my first promotion. I felt like it came from me asking for that and pushing and demanding rather than the business letting me know that was a possibility and looking at a couple of people in my team that we've lost, they've started looking elsewhere because they just assumed there wasn't any progression opportunity for them. Whereas I think if we'd potentially discussed all the ways of progressing individuals in the short term, whether that be just personal development training. One of the things I asked for was to be a deputy so when somebody was off I could shadow that

person and step in for them. That's quite an early way of trying to develop talent and I don't think that we are very good at that from what I see in this area of the business. I know you have the training Academy but every time I look online and look at training courses on people, it's tends to be mostly Port Talbot based training. And obviously, everything sort of online now, isn't it so whether we could look at that.

Occasionally you hear on the grapevine that someone has booked training and they have a couple of places but there's never anyone central that's looking at things and offering them across the boards. It's peoples own initiatives

Ashton, Hannah

What has your personal preference been while we've been going through this transition, have you wanted to stay in the organisation?

Participant H

I have just personally for me it's not the right time for me to move. Judging on the fact that I'm quite new into this role, I've still got a lot of experience to develop. I can see why other people might have been a bit hesitant to look elsewhere just because of the uncertainty. But I guess just completely personally, I don't think it would have benefited me at this point in time to move somewhere else.

Ashton, Hannah

And last question, organisational change aside, what kind of makes you stay with Tata Steel? Is there anything particular that influences your decision to stay here?

Participant H

I do think that just generally the opportunity to progress is better here than you're going to get elsewhere. You know, we're not necessarily always linear as well. You know, if I look at people in quite senior roles here, they started in other departments. They moved from one to another. We don't put people in a box. If you want to progress and you want to get there, it will happen one way or another. Whether that means you have to move into a different area. But we're not the kind of company that will go 'Oh, you've never worked in this area before, so you aren't allowed to do

that' and I think that's a really positive thing. It means that you can kind of branch out rather than it just be a linear progression.

Ashton, Hannah

They are all of the questions I had, but is there anything that you think would be useful for me to add, any observations or comments that you think would be supportive of the research?

Participant H

It's one of those one of those age-old problems. But I think the biggest issue that we have at the minute with retention I think is salary. I've lost a couple of members of staff since I've come back and they've said if I could have matched the salary, they would have stayed but we just can't and I don't know why that is. I'm not sure why people don't believe the salaries aren't competitive sometimes, but I think some of the pushback you get is that we've benchmarked against competitors, but I guess that's one of the big issues here especially with retain and shop floor staff. It's not just about our industry like people see our business as sort of a dying trade, very manual and back in the day people used to pick careers, people used to pick industries. But people aren't really loyal to that anymore. So we're not just competing against our general steel competitors. We're competing against anybody local to us. And you look at like graduate programmes, training programmes, shop floor jobs, office jobs, people are going to look at what's in their local area. I don't think people are particularly loyal to a particular style of industry, so people here are saying why would I come and work on the shop floor doing a manual job when I can get more money stacking shelves in Sainsbury's. So I think the business really needs to look at salaries and benchmarking.

Do we do we ask questions on exit? Do we record reasons people have left as well and I don't know where we would stand with that. But you know, when someone's left, do we ever say this person left because they said it was down to money and they got this much more money elsewhere? Do we ever actually look at why people have left? Because that could that give us quite a big insight to the reasons people are leaving.

I had a team member who did look elsewhere and once she realised that she could get, I think it was like 6 or 7 grand more. That was too much to turn down. If it wasn't that much of a gap, she probably would have gone.