

The benefits of codevelopment for talent management: A case study in the banking sector

Les bénéfices du codéveloppement pour la gestion des talents : une étude de cas dans le secteur bancaire

Los beneficios del codesarrollo para la gestión del talento: un estudio de caso en el sector bancario

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Article abstract

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ABSTRACT

Talent management is crucial for companies in the current business context, and yet, one of its components, talent development, remains largely under-researched. In this paper, we explore the relevance of an experiential learning method, namely codevelopment, as a novel talent development practice. Codevelopment aims to improve one's own professional practice by helping peers to enhance their own practice in turn. Based on a case study in a multinational bank, our results show codevelopment to be a parallel resourcing space that offsets certain organizational pressures, thereby offering valuable individual, group and organizational benefits. As an original talent development practice, codevelopment can also contribute to counterbalancing some of the downsides to talent management.

Keywords: codevelopment, talent management, talent development, experiential learning, experts

Résumé

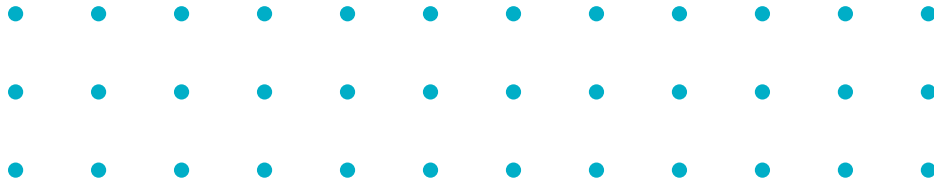
La gestion des talents est cruciale pour les organisations, et pourtant, l'une de ses composantes, le développement des talents, reste sous-étudiée. Nous explorons la pertinence d'une méthode d'apprentissage expérientiel, à savoir le codéveloppement, en tant que nouvelle pratique de développement des talents. Le codéveloppement vise à améliorer sa pratique professionnelle en aidant ses pairs à améliorer leur propre pratique. Sur la base d'une étude de cas dans une banque multinationale, nos résultats montrent que le codéveloppement constitue un espace de ressourcement qui compense certaines pressions organisationnelles, offrant ainsi des avantages pour l'individu, le groupe et l'organisation. En tant que pratique originale de développement des talents, le codéveloppement peut également contribuer à contrebalancer certains effets négatifs de la gestion des talents.

Mots-clés : codéveloppement, gestion des talents, développement des talents, apprentissage expérientiel, experts

Resumen

La gestión del talento es crucial para las organizaciones, y sin embargo, uno de sus componentes, el desarrollo del talento, sigue estando poco estudiado. Exploramos la relevancia de un método de aprendizaje experiencial, el codesarrollo, como nueva práctica de desarrollo del talento. El codesarrollo pretende mejorar la propia práctica profesional ayudando a su vez a compañeros a mejorar la suya. Basándonos en un estudio de caso en un banco multinacional, nuestros resultados muestran que el codesarrollo proporciona un espacio paralelo de renovación que permite compensar ciertas presiones organizativas, ofreciendo beneficios individuales, grupales y organizativos. Como práctica original de desarrollo del talento, el codesarrollo también puede ayudar a contrarrestar algunos de los efectos negativos de la gestión del talento.

Palabras clave: codesarrollo, gestión del talento, desarrollo del talento, aprendizaje experiencial, expertos



For over 20 years, and even more so in turbulent times, talent management (TM) has been a major preoccupation for multinational companies (MNCs) (Deloitte, 2021) as a source of competitive advantage (Ashton & Morton, 2005). TM refers to those organizational activities that aim to attract, identify and develop the best employees in strategic roles (Scullion & Collings, 2011). TM seeks to strengthen the positive attitudes and behaviors of these employees, which increases their individual performance (Khoreva *et al.*, 2017), and in turn contributes to organizational performance (Bethke-Langenegger *et al.*, 2011). Talents remain scarce, and competition for their recruitment and retention is fierce, especially in the knowledge economy (Dries, 2013b). Our paper focuses on exclusive TM, which targets those employees who are supposed to bring extra value to the organization and make a better contribution to competitive advantage (Collings & Mellahi, 2009), in comparison with other employees.

Talents benefit from a set of differentiated HR practices which reinforce their motivation, commitment and development (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). As a consequence, to be identified as a talent can be seen as a blessing (Daubner-Siva *et al.*, 2018). Beyond this idyllic view of TM, recent research has focused on the “dark side” of TM, namely its possible negative effects. To be identified as a talent may end up being a burden for individuals (Kamoche & Leigh, 2022) and can have adverse consequences for talents (Daubner-Siva *et al.*, 2018). Such effects might be compensated by talent development, but this approach remains under-researched (Garavan *et al.*, 2012). In this paper, we therefore concentrate on exploring codevelopment as an innovative talent development practice.

Codevelopment is a practice that has emerged in the last 20 years (Champagne, 2021; Payette & Champagne, 1997). With its origins in Quebec and having developed in French-speaking countries (Paquet *et al.*, 2022), it is a learning approach that aims to improve one’s own professional practice by helping peers to enhance theirs. As a reflective practice, it fosters among others individual and collective learning as well as participants’ self-awareness, autonomy and efficiency (Champagne, 2021). Despite its growing success, codevelopment is still under-researched from an academic perspective. More specifically, there is to the best of our knowledge no research on such groups as a part of TM. There may be two reasons for this. Firstly, codevelopment has a powerful collective dimension, whereas TM tends to focus mainly on individual practices (Oltra & Vivas-López, 2013). Secondly, codevelopment is more widespread in French-speaking countries (Paquet *et al.*, 2022) whereas TM is more common in Anglo-Saxon business contexts (Dries, 2013a).

Building on the tradition of TM as a phenomenon-driven field (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015), we adopt an inductive approach to explore codevelopment as a novel talent development practice. In doing this, we seek to answer the following research question:

How can codevelopment contribute to talent management?

We selected the TM program of an MNC in the banking sector, where such programs are widely developed, given that banks generate value through their unique human capital (Farndale *et al.*, 2014). Most research in TM having focused on managerial talent (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2020), expert talents have traditionally been given less importance (Dries & Pepermans, 2008). However, expert talents are crucial in sustaining organizations’ competitive advantage as they “possess organization-specific knowledge and skills that are very difficult to replace” (Dries & Pepermans, 2008, p. 103). We aim to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on a development program targeting expert talents.

Theoretical background

Talent development

Talent development is a crucial component of TM (Stahl *et al.*, 2007), particularly for companies seeking to fill strategic positions internally (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2014) and whose philosophy is that talent is rare and can be developed (Meyers *et al.*, 2020). Talent development seeks to ensure the right supply of talent to meet strategic objectives (Garavan *et al.*, 2012). Despite its increasing popularity, talent development “is an ambiguous term and its boundaries and scope is not clear” (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016, p. 263). It can be divided into three main types of initiatives: 1) structured learning, 2) “developmental relationships” and 3) experiential learning (Day & O’Connor, 2017). Structured learning includes formal in-class training such as MBAs or soft skills training (Stahl *et al.*, 2007), which are often part of a program with a specific timeline (Bonneton *et al.*, 2022). Developmental relationships, which could also be referred to as relational learning, include initiatives such as coaching and mentoring (Day & O’Connor, 2017). Finally, experiential learning may include among others stretch assignments and global job rotations (*ibid.*). According to the aforementioned authors, this experiential dimension is crucial, as the more “hands on” these initiatives are and the more they force talents to move out of their comfort zone, the greater their potential developmental impact will be. Other talent development initiatives include assessment tools such as 360-degree feedback (*ibid.*) and informal developmental activities (Garavan *et al.*, 2012).

Although being identified as a talent can seem to be a blessing (Daubner-Siva *et al.*, 2018), a more recent stream in the TM literature underlines its possible negative effects on talents. TM proposes a utilitarian view of employees, focusing only on results (Painter-Morland *et al.*, 2019). Talents can suffer from isolation and loneliness (Kamoche & Leigh, 2022) and are likely to be put in the “firing line”, in the “spot light” (Daubner-Siva *et al.*, 2018) or under scrutiny (Sumelius *et al.*, 2020), which leads to them experiencing high levels of pressure. On the contrary, talent development can help talents cope with the performance pressure and competing priorities they face (Day & O’Connor, 2017). It can also help talents in managing stressful situations, the pressures of work and the

increasing ambiguity and uncertainty of the contexts they face (Garavan *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, talent development encourages collective and relational learning (Day & O'Connor, 2017). For these reasons, talent development could help counter some of the negative effects of TM. Despite this potential, there is currently a poor understanding of talent development due to the surprisingly little amount of research available on the topic (Crane & Hartwell, 2019; Garavan *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, more empirical research on talent development is needed, with close attention paid to the context in which these initiatives take place (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016). Moreover, the impact of specific talent development practices on individuals has been underexplored in the literature. We aim to address this gap by studying the effects of actual experiential talent development practices. More specifically, we will explore the potential of codevelopment groups as a novel talent development practice.

Codevelopment groups

Definition, actors and steps

Payette & Champagne (1997) define codevelopment as a learning approach or method seeking to improve one's own professional practice by helping peers to enhance their own practice. This reflective approach aims to offer a secure space for individual and collective learning allowing participants to become more aware, more autonomous and more efficient in their work (Champagne, 2021).

There are three distinct roles in codevelopment: 1) the "client", who suggests the topic for a given session, 2) the "consultants", who support the *client's* progress, and finally, 3) a group facilitator. Payette and Champagne (1997) refer to the learning cycle (Kolb, 2014) to present the structured process of codevelopment in six steps: the *client* presents a problematic situation (step 1), *consultants* ask clarifying questions (step 2) which help the *client* to "reframe" their challenge (step 3). *Consultants* then share their thoughts and recommendations (step 4), based upon which the *client* draws up and briefly presents an action plan (step 5). Finally, all participants share what they learned from the session (step 6). While a majority of sources agree on this same 6-step process (e.g., St-Onge & Prost, 2018), others include a preparation of the topic and the *client* (step 0) as well as feedback on the evolution of the previous *client's* topic (step 7) (Sabourin & Lefebvre, 2017). These groups usually meet once or twice a month for a period going from six months to one year (Payette & Champagne, 1997). The ideal number of participants tends to be between six and seven, excluding the *facilitator* (Champagne, 2021; Lafranchise *et al.*, 2019; Paquet *et al.*, 2017). Payette and Champagne (1997) originally wanted codevelopment to remain flexible and adaptative. As a consequence, many variants exist (Giraud *et al.*, 2016). Codevelopment was imagined by its creators in a face-to-face format, but it can also take place remotely, as was the case during the Covid-19 lockdown (Paquet *et al.*, 2022).

Theoretical foundations

Codevelopment takes its roots in a number of theoretical currents. The first one is reflective practice. Schön (1983) advocates instilling reflection into professionals' activities as a unique source of learning based on a better understanding of their own work. This "reflection-in-action", or "learning by doing" serves "to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation" (Schön, 1983, p. 68) nourishing practitioners' learning as "reflective being" (Knowles, 1998). TM literature

also refers to the importance of "honest self-reflection" (Painter-Morland *et al.*, 2019) and highlights that both talent development workshops and reflective writing allow individuals to reflect on their experience as talents, therefore mitigating the downsides and tensions of this status (Daubner-Siva *et al.*, 2018).

The second source of codevelopment is experiential learning (Kolb, 2014), based on life experience in which "the emphasis is often on direct sense experience and in-context action as the primary source of learning, often down-playing a role for thinking, analysis, and academic knowledge" (p. xviii). Building on Lewin's theory (1943), Kolb's model highlights that learning is a dynamic process encompassing concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, driven by the resolution of the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Experiential learning is both self-initiated and evaluated by the learner and helps them build meaning into their whole experience (Knowles, 1998). Applied to TM, experiential "on-the-job" learning reinforces talents' performance and potential (Garavan *et al.*, 2012).

The third theory inspiring codevelopment is action learning (Brook *et al.*, 2012; Revans, 1982), sometimes seen as a subcategory of experiential learning (Day & O'Connor, 2017; Kolb, 2014). It involves working in small groups -that both support and challenge each individual- on resolving actual organizational problems, while learning during what is a reflective process (Brook *et al.*, 2012). Action learning therefore fosters multidisciplinary collaboration and reflection time, which helps develop participants' emotional intelligence and leadership (James, 2018). Action learning is often used in organizations for TM purposes as safe learning environments helping talents to develop skills through real life problems (Marquardt & Yeo, 2012). More generally, research also underlines the critical importance played by emotions in the process of learning, decision making and social interactions (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007).

The above-mentioned sources are complementary and interconnected as both experiential and action learning rely on participant's reflection to transform experiences into learning. This theoretical background is not exhaustive, as stated by Champagne (2021), and codevelopment is also inspired by other sources (e.g., the Socratic dialogue). Codevelopment is a very recent construct and can be considered as a phenomenon-based concept, i.e. based on the study of a recent phenomenon relevant to management science (von Krogh *et al.*, 2012).

Benefits, limitations and success factors

Codevelopment groups constitute a "learning community" built on mutual respect and aid, whose success depends on the diversity of profiles and points of view of its participants (Farmer *et al.*, 2021). Thanks to their collective intelligence, these groups find solutions to real life problems and situations while developing the competencies of their members. For these reasons, this innovative "off-the-job" training method helps organizations build creative and transformative spaces in which "participants focus on collaborating, learning, reflecting and transferring what they have learned into action" (Paquet *et al.*, 2022, p.2). Codevelopment therefore allows participants to mute the din of the "implacable logic of efficiency" (Farmer *et al.*, 2021), and reflection helps participants give meaning to their professional practice both individually and collectively (Giraud *et al.*, 2016). Codevelopment groups share some characteristics with communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). However, Champagne (2021) highlights that they are different

in the sense that codevelopment groups are aimed at smaller groups, with an inquiry process centered on the individual activity of each participant to the benefit of the other members of the group.

Other individual benefits of codevelopment include allowing participants to consolidate their professional identity, to learn to help and to be helped as well as to enjoy the pleasure of learning (Payette & Champagne, 1997). These groups also contribute to reinforcing participants' self-knowledge as well as their perception of self-efficacy, including aspects such as team work and problem solving (Paquet *et al.*, 2021). Efficacy is reinforced by taking participants' emotions into account (Paquet & Lafranchise, 2020). Codevelopment can also contribute to participant well-being, for example by addressing their deepest and most legitimate concerns (Farmer *et al.*, 2021). Besides, these groups also foster mutual aid, respect and active listening among participants, which contributes to their increased perception of social support (Paquet *et al.*, 2021). Research even shows that managers trained in codevelopment contribute to improving the well-being of their employees (Giraud *et al.*, 2016). On top of following its methodology, the success of codevelopment relies on a number of factors including participant selection and commitment, compatibility with the organizational culture (Payette & Champagne, 1997), and voluntary participation in the groups (Farmer *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, supporting the development of facilitators is crucial (Lafranchise *et al.*, 2019), for example through training and coaching (Sabourin & Lefebvre, 2017). Management support is also central to the success of codevelopment groups (Champagne, 2021; Sabourin & Lefebvre, 2017). Possible limiting factors arise from a non-respect of these conditions, as well as other aspects such as excessive group homogeneity or specific time restrictions linked to the codevelopment format (Champagne, 2021).

In our research, we explore whether codevelopment can be both relevant and beneficial as a talent development practice. Hence our research question: **How can codevelopment contribute to talent management?**

Methodology

To answer our research question, we use a qualitative methodology in order to help us understand a social process that underlies an HR practice (Gephart Jr., 2004). More precisely, we chose an exploratory single case study research design (Yin, 2013), as our main concern was to untangle the mechanisms of a specific TM practice and, consequently, to answer a "how" question and understand a complex phenomenon (Pratt, 2009). For this study, we took a forensic approach by investigating codevelopment groups that are integrated into a broader TM program. We focused on an MNC, as this type of organization traditionally has more resources to devote to TM programs (Festing *et al.*, 2013). More specifically, we decided to study the case of a bank, as banks frequently provide TM programs for their employees (Bonneton, 2023), and the management of global talents is even more crucial in environments where highly specialized employee knowledge is key, such as financial services (Farndale *et al.*, 2014).

Description of the case

Our research explores a French financial institution with over 100,000 employees and clients located in more than 50 countries across the continents. Its diversified business model includes a number of independent business units assisted by central support functions.

With TM being more common in Anglo-Saxon contexts (Dries, 2013b) and codevelopment more widespread in French-speaking organizations (Paquet *et al.*, 2022), it made sense to base our case study on an organization combining both of these cultures. Indeed, over the last ten years, the selected institution had implemented sophisticated TM policies as well as a well-established codevelopment practice with hundreds of groups having taken place. Codevelopment is carried out in French and English-speaking groups and facilitation is run by dozens of employees having been trained according to the methodology developed by Payette and Champagne (1997).

More specifically, we chose to concentrate on the only TM program run by the organization that systematically included a codevelopment component. This program targets professionals identified as "expert talents" by the organization with a minimum of 15 years of experience. This category of talent includes technical profiles in parallel to more classical managerial talents. Participants are selected based on their technical excellence, their very high performance and potential, as well as a number of soft skills including collaboration and the ability to develop younger early-career experts. The aim of the program is to develop and retain this category of employee while reinforcing their impact on, and visibility in, the organization. Although codevelopment is usually an autonomous initiative, we studied it as part of a broader development program, as this was the only way to explore its impact on talents in the selected company.

The program starts with a five-day training seminar covering subjects such as influence, personal branding and emotional intelligence. After this initial seminar, a codevelopment approach is deployed to maintain the momentum of the program and allow experts to better apply over time the learning acquired during the training course. Each program cohort has 24 participants, divided into three codevelopment groups of eight experts. Groups are diverse, as participants come from various departments within the organization. In general, participants did not know other group members before the training seminar began. The first codevelopment session takes place during the seminar, after which each group meets once a month for approximately nine months so that each participant can be the *client* at least once. Each monthly session lasts between one and a half and two hours and deals with the subject of one *client*. Most groups meet face-to-face, with the exception of groups including participants from different countries, which are run as remote sessions. In general, participants had not heard about codevelopment before joining the program. The challenges faced by participants and the skills they want to develop through codevelopment are diverse. Examples include increasing their influence as experts or developing cooperation across departments.

Facilitators are company employees having volunteered to be trained according to the six-step methodology developed by Payette and Champagne (1997). The codevelopment experience of the facilitators we interviewed ranged from one to 15 years, with an average of five years. Most of them had tested the approach as participants before becoming facilitators.

Data collection

Our research is based on 30 semi-structured interviews with "expert talents" participants (n=14) and facilitators (n=16) having participated in codevelopment groups. The pool is composed of 15 female and 15 male interviewees. Participants are 44 years old on average (from 39 to 50 years old), seniority in their current position is 5.5 years on

average (from 3 to 10 years) and seniority tenure in the organization is 11 years on average (from 4 to 19 years). Concerning facilitators, they are 47 years old on average (from 39 to 54 years old), seniority in their current position is 6,5 years on average (from 3 to 20 years) and seniority in the organization is 12 years on average (from 4 to 20 years). Interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours, carried out via videoconference between June 2020 and March 2022 in order to adapt to the ongoing Covid-19 health crisis. Interviews were conducted in French and were recorded. Both authors attended all the interviews in order to acquire an in-depth knowledge of the data, which is subsequently helpful in the coding phase (Saldaña, 2015). We started the coding phase while still collecting data, following an iterative process (Eisenhardt, 1989). We stopped the interviews once data saturation was reached (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Interviewees were selected to achieve a balance between codevelopment participants and facilitators. Participants allowed us to access first-hand impressions of what it was like being part of such groups, while facilitators' views and experience helped us to gain a deeper understanding and perspective. Once we had the agreement of the person in charge of the program, they identified a list of participants and facilitators who agreed to be interviewed. The participants represented 15% of the "expert talents" having already attended the TM program. Some of the identified participants had recently finished codevelopment sessions while others had completed them between one and two years before the interviews. None of the interviewed participants knew about codevelopment before experiencing it during the TM program. All facilitators except one were employees of the case company. In parallel to their main activity, codevelopment facilitation represented only a small portion of their professional time, on a voluntary basis. Most of the facilitators worked in HR, including in TM. All the interviewees were executives, and most were qualified to Master's level or equivalent. A summary of the interviewee sample (participants and facilitators) is presented in Table 1 below.

The interview guide included questions about interviewees' careers, their participation in the expert talent program, their knowledge of codevelopment prior to the program, the competencies they acquired, the impact on their professional network, and more broadly the perceived strengths and limitations of this approach. Our research concentrated mainly on the data covering the benefits of codevelopment as perceived by interviewees.

Our aim was to analyze the emergence of common shared patterns (Patton, 1990). For the sake of triangulation, which allows multiple sources of evidence to reinforce converging lines of research (Yin, 2013), data collection from interviews was enriched with secondary data concerning the company's use of codevelopment as well as non-participant observation. This type of observation took place initially during nine codevelopment sessions (three sessions of three different groups of the studied program). Secondly, we observed two final debriefing sessions that took place at the end of the last codevelopment session of two different groups. These two sessions were run by facilitators, in presence of the person in charge of the expert talent development program. The objective of these sessions was to invite participants to reflect on their learning throughout the codevelopment sessions scheme.

Data analysis

The data was coded with the help of the NVivo 11 software solution. We coded the transcribed interviews in French and then translated the citations used for the purposes of this paper.

TABLE 1

Description of the interviewed codevelopment participants (P) and facilitators (F)

	Expertise field/ Activity	Age	Gender	Tenure in function (in years)	Tenure in organization (in years)	Experience in Codev. (in years)
P1	Cloud computing	50	M	10	19	-
P2	Data science	48	M	4	4	-
P3	Legal advisor	41	F	9	12	-
P4	Banking regulation	43	F	3	9	-
P5	Risk management	42	M	4	9	-
P6	Financial markets	44	F	6	16	-
P7	IT development	43	F	7	15	-
P8	Cybersecurity	48	M	6	14	-
P9	Cloud computing	42	M	4	4	-
P10	Banking operations	45	F	7	13	-
P11	Banking operations	39	M	4	7	-
P12	IT architecture	46	M	5	18	-
P13	IT architecture	47	M	5	5	-
P14	IT development	39	M	4	8	-
F1	Talent manager	40	M	8	19	6
F2	Internal consultant	48	F	4	20	5
F3	Executive coach (internal)	49	M	12	15	9
F4	Executive coach (external)	54	F	20	-	15
F5	Talent manager	51	F	3	18	8
F6	Talent manager	49	F	5	7	3
F7	Talent manager	54	F	6	17	7
F8	Executive coach (internal)	48	F	5	15	4
F9	Executive coach (internal)	53	F	7	7	6
F10	Internal consultant	39	F	4	7	5
F11	Talent manager	42	F	4	4	4
F12	HR team manager	46	M	5	18	2
F13	Talent manager	47	F	5	5	1
F14	Talent manager	39	F	4	8	3
F15	Training manager	43	M	5	16	4
F16	Talent manager	52	F	6	18	3

We followed the three-step coding phases as depicted by Gioia *et al.* (2013). We started with a coding phase, during which we used the interviewees actual words and coded according to the actual meaning of the information in the data (Miles *et al.*, 2019) to make first-order concepts emerge. Secondly, we grouped the first-order concepts into second-order themes. Whereas the first-order concepts were informant-centric, the second-order analysis relied on our analysis and were therefore researcher-centric. In this phase, we already started to describe and explain the phenomena that we were observing (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). Finally, we identified the aggregate dimensions corresponding to the second-order themes.

The concepts, themes and dimensions emerged as part of an iterative process since we started to reflect on the coding tree while collecting the data, as advised by Gioia *et al.* (2013). For example, the freedom of expression and of thought as well as the absence of hierarchy and politics in these groups were often mentioned by respondents. We consolidated these two ideas in a second order code that we have called “a space of freedom without politics” to which 80% of the respondents referred to during the interviews. Both authors developed the coding tree and compared their coding. We continued the data collection until we reached data saturation and had explored each category in-depth (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This data structure is presented in Figure 1.

In a second phase, we conducted a “content analysis” of our data in order to identify the importance of certain categories in the discourse of the interviewees (Blanc *et al.*, 2014). Table 2 will therefore include the percentage of interviews in which a mention of each category occurred.

Results

In this section, we discuss the results that emerged from the analysis of the interviewees’ perception of codevelopment benefits in their organization. Codevelopment emerges as a parallel space offsetting a number of organizational pressures and drawbacks that talents face. The presentation of our results is divided into the three identified categories of codevelopment benefits, namely individual, group and organizational.

Individual benefits

A space for well-being and to slow down

Codevelopment reinforces participants’ well-being and “...relieves the tension. An hour and a half per month during which we do ourselves some good, that has value” (P7). Other participants highlight the rarity of these benefits: “a breath of fresh air, a bubble of comfort I can’t find elsewhere in the company” (P8). Indeed, codevelopment allows participants to slow-down from the hectic pace of their working lives, to open up a “fertile vacuum” where things “just happen at a very different pace” (P11) and through which “the world shines differently” (P8). Some interviewees refer to medical analogies: “I found answers, I took some medicine, I got it fixed, I felt better afterwards” (P8). Words such as “pleasure” and “joy” were also used by interviewees during two non-participant observation sessions.

A space for exploration without any pressure

Contrary to a utilitarian view of employees, codevelopment offers a space for exploration and emergence without any pressure on expected results, and that “can create rich and unexpected outcomes through serendipity” (P9). Indeed, in these groups “we are carried away by an evolving reflection, we don’t hold on to anything [...] we don’t know where we’re going” (F3). This “rare alchemy established” (P6) is particularly different from a working environment characterized by a “strong pressure on performance” in which “the unknown is rare, we always stick to the same ways of thinking” (P3).

A space of safety and reassurance

Codevelopment is also a safe place for kindness and trust, in which participants can share their emotions as well as “difficult subjects that we can’t necessarily broach with our line managers or our team” (P5). The absence of judgement in these groups seems very different to what participants experience on a day-to-day basis: “we’re in an

environment where we aren’t allowed to be weak but here, sharing our weaknesses makes us a little bit stronger together” (P6). Indeed, “that is the difference between our daily work and what we find in codevelopment: security” (P5). This contributes to reassuring participants and reinforcing their self-confidence: “it helped me feel capable and dare to address new challenges” (P5). Finally, codevelopment can also contribute to preventing the occurrence of psychosocial risks in organizations: “being able to share difficult problems can prevent people breaking down and can help detect worrying difficulties” (F4).

A space of freedom without politics

Freedom being deeply embedded in the philosophy of this approach, it is often mentioned by interviewees: “we have the freedom to express ourselves, to open up. Frankly, it is one of the main advantages of codev” (P12). The diversity of participants across the organization also contributes to this: “paradoxically, you speak much more freely than with colleagues” (P14), which reinforces the relevance of the approach: “sharing a problem with this degree of freedom already provides part of the answer” (P12). This feeling is reinforced by the fact that participants can totally leave out politics from the groups: “as we are among peers, there is no hierarchy and so, there is no politics. Things move more quickly and it also feels good” (P11).

A space to reflect and self-reconnect

Codevelopment offers a space for the natural discovery of reflective practices: “introspection through a concrete business issue is very smooth” (F1). It also contributes to bringing objectivity to the participants’ reflection on their behavior at work: “it’s not about them; it’s about their relation to their professional context” (P9). This helps employees reconnect with their values and beliefs and reinforce their self-awareness and self-knowledge, therefore “truly being yourself, fully” (P11) and becoming “more of a friend with yourself” (F13). This reinforces participants’ ability to step back and “own back our life, to make sure we are aligned with it, as opposed to just having to endure or cope with it” (P10).

A space to humbly challenge one’s own practice

Codevelopment is also a space for participants to challenge their own practice: “a participant once said: ‘I’ve tried everything: what else can you recommend?’” (F7). This humility can also lead to positive surprises for participants: “he knew nothing about my business. And this is why he suggested an idea I’d never thought of” (P13). Codevelopment also contributes to talents reconsidering their own assumptions and identifying blind spots: “a great way of realizing that you don’t know what you don’t know” (P2). Furthermore, participants sometimes apply this approach and the skills they have learned beyond the sessions: “I tried that with him [a subordinate], because he wanted to, and we made another colleague a happier person, so he works better” (P9). Codevelopment therefore also supports the development of participants’ autonomy in their own work.

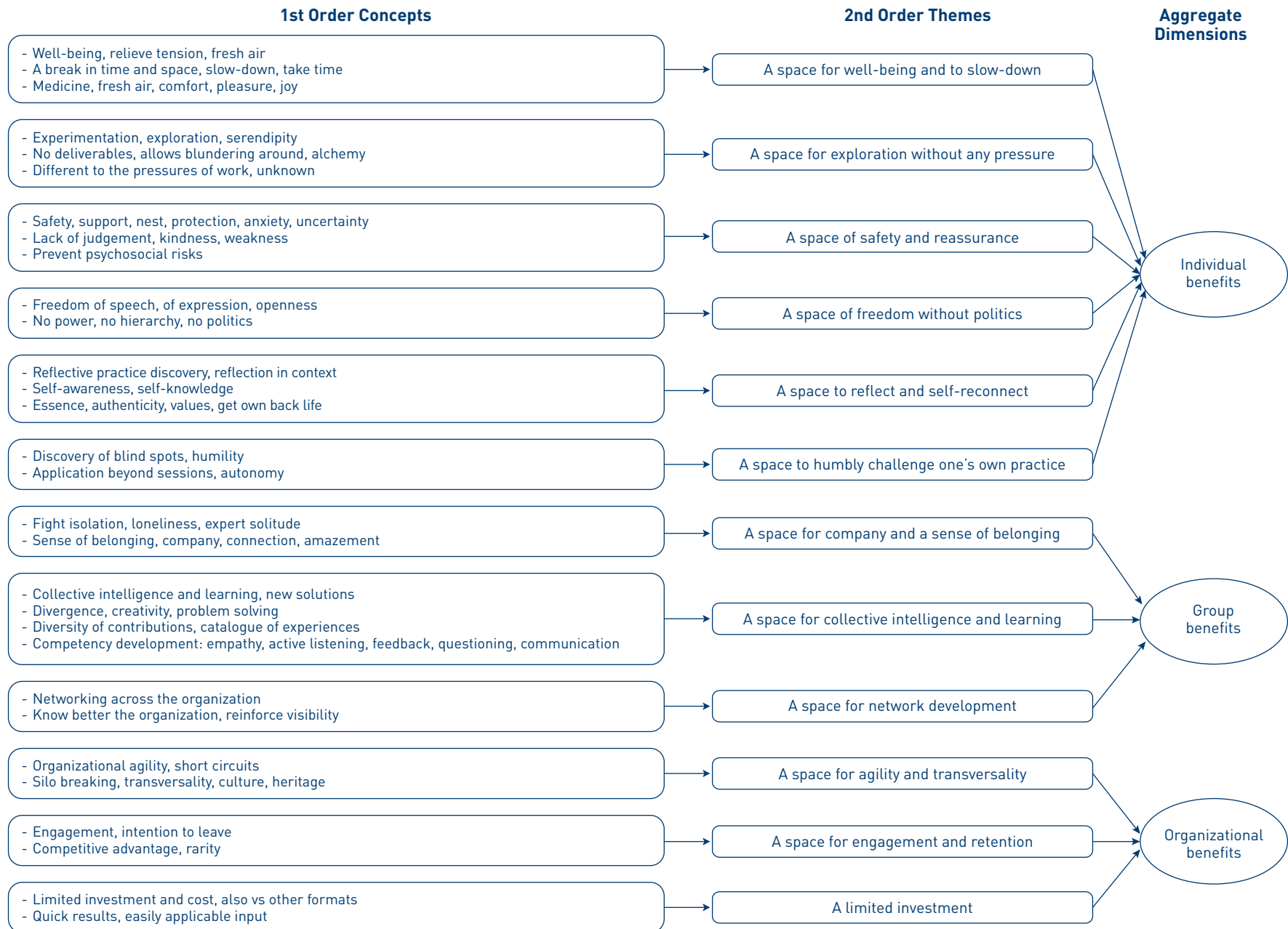
Group benefits

A space for company and a sense of belonging

Another benefit of codevelopment is that it creates a sense of belonging for professionals suffering from isolation: “it really helps remind you that you are not alone” (P7). For the participants in our study, codevelopment also offered unique support opportunities in their roles as experts, as expressed by P2 who saw codevelopment as “the only place where I could really share my difficulties as an expert”. Indeed, potential feelings of solitude

1. Some interviewees refer to codevelopment as “codev”.

FIGURE 1
Data structure



are counterbalanced by “a surprisingly strong sense of belonging” (P3) as well as “the amazement of feeling connected” (F6). Some participants also shared during a non-participant observation session that codevelopment helped them stay in contact with their peers during the Covid-19 lockdown, which helped make the period less difficult. Furthermore, during another non-participant observation session, a participant having just attended a funeral, preferred to silently reconnect with his group rather than going back to his desk.

A space for collective intelligence and learning

Codevelopment is also a space for collective intelligence that generates new solutions to unlock situations: “we find them and not external consultants. We put value back into individuals and the organization” (P7). The diversity of participants tends to reinforce divergent thinking and creative problem solving proving “that one plus one is always more than two” (P4). Participants therefore develop a “catalogue of experiences” which is “precious because the more we make it grow, the better equipped we are in our professional career” (P9). Other competences learnt include active listening, giving and receiving feedback, questioning skills, emotional intelligence as well as verbal and non-verbal communication, which is relevant for experts as “they don’t always know how to make a message accessible to all audiences” (P1).

A space for network development

Codevelopment also enables participants to develop a “a quality network” (P14) across the organization composed of “people I would have never met otherwise” (P5). And this network can be further nurtured after the sessions: “you can knock on the right doors much faster [...] actually, I get on better with them than with my colleagues” (P4). During non-participant observation sessions, other participants explained that this network helped them to know the organization better (mentioned in two sessions) and reinforce their visibility in it (mentioned in one session). However, for some participants, “network development is weaker in remote codevelopment” (P11) compared to in-person sessions.

Organizational benefits

A space for agility and transversality

Codevelopment helps organizations to create “networks outside of traditional channels” and “bypass or short-circuit a certain structure, in the best possible sense” (P1). These groups thereby “reinforce organizational agility and transversality” (P13), which also contributes to silo breaking: “being able to get out of these silos, of this organization, simply feels good [...] and makes it possible to create cohesion outside the traditional hierarchical structure” (P1). Consequently, in the long term, codevelopment could even impact organizational culture, as it “fosters cooperation and slips into the culture inviting in a culture of cooperation” (F9). Furthermore, one facilitator mentioned that “since we increasingly use it, it’s becoming part of our cultural heritage” (F7).

A space for engagement and retention

Codevelopment can also sometimes reinforce employee engagement: “being fully heard when we suggest new solutions is very engaging” (P7). It also contributes to retention. A person who was planning to leave the company when they discovered codevelopment, explained: “I somehow changed my mind and stayed. I started having a better image of a company that invests in such initiatives for its employees” (P2). Considering that “other

companies just don’t have codevelopment” (F7), these groups can also “contribute to an organization’s competitive advantage” (F1).

A limited investment considering its benefits

While this study did not allow us to explore the return on investment of codevelopment *per se*, respondents did emphasize the limited investment involved: “the return is very high, as investment is low, and we get so many things out of it” (P12). In the case organization for example, “facilitators are mainly internal, and this makes it really interesting” (F1), as there is no specific cost other than the cumulated employee time spent on it. Some interviewees highlighted codevelopment’s quick and easily applicable results: “in just one or two hours we can achieve something that would normally take months, if not years” (P9). This limited investment makes codevelopment stand out when compared to other talent development initiatives such as training or coaching: “I don’t know any other practice that is so inexpensive with so much impact. [...] Find me another model that is as virtuous, I don’t know any” (F9). We propose in Table 2 a summary of our results, including their relative importance in terms of respondents.

Discussion

This single-case study reveals interesting results that confirm the relevance of codevelopment groups as part of TM initiatives. Indeed, the identified benefits corroborate that experiential learning can have a powerful development impact on talents (Day & O’Connor, 2017), therefore reinforcing their motivation and commitment (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Our research is also an answer to the need to further explore talent development (Garavan *et al.*, 2012; Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016). More generally, the three categories of results identified (individual, group and organizational) match the ontological levels studied in other works exploring how learning takes place in TM (Oltra & Vivas-López, 2013). Taking into account that our investigation concentrated on expert talents, the results also confirm that experts’ high and steady learning-orientation (Muratbekova-Touron & Galindo, 2018) can be naturally put into practice by this category of participants in codevelopment groups.

Beyond the relevance of codevelopment as a talent development practice, the individual, group and organizational benefits we have illustrated, suggest that this approach may also help to counterbalance some of the negative effects of TM highlighted in recent literature. Firstly, codevelopment offers a number of individual benefits that offset some of the organizational pressures that talents face. These include the pressure on performance and outputs derived from a utilitarian view of employees (Painter-Morland *et al.*, 2019) reinforced by the pressure to prove that they deserve their status as ‘talent’ (Sumelius *et al.*, 2020). This may lead to increased stress, loss of work-life balance (Tansley & Tietze, 2013), workaholism and burnout (Dries & De Gieter, 2014). In contrast, our results highlight that codevelopment can be a space for well-being where participants can slow-down and explore without feeling under any pressure, and which may also contribute to the prevention of psychosocial risks. As well-being may have been overlooked in TM (Dries, 2013a), a greater focus on well-being on TM programs can be positive both for talents themselves and for organizational performance (Guest, 2017). This can be highly relevant in the case of experts, as these employees have been found to be particularly exposed and subject to stress (Teece, 2015). The literature also outlines the

TABLE 2
Summary of results

Codevelopment results	Verbatim	% Participants	% Facilitators	% Total
Individual benefits				
A space for well-being and to slow down	<i>"Relieves the tension. An hour and a half per month during which we do ourselves some good, that has value" (P7)</i>	79%	94%	87%
A space for exploration without any pressure	<i>"Can create rich and unexpected outcomes through serendipity" (P9)</i>	79%	69%	73%
A space of safety and reassurance	<i>"Here, sharing our weaknesses makes us a little bit stronger together" (P6)</i>	93%	88%	90%
A space of freedom without politics	<i>"Sharing a problem with this degree of freedom already provides part of the answer" (P12)</i>	93%	69%	80%
A space to reflect and self-reconnect	<i>"Own back our life, to make sure we are aligned with it, as opposed to just having to endure or cope with it" (P10)</i>	100%	88%	93%
A space to humbly challenge one's own practice	<i>"A great way of realizing that you don't know what you don't know" (P2)</i>	79%	63%	70%
Group benefits				
A space for company and a sense of belonging	<i>"It really helps remind you that you are not alone" (P7)</i>	79%	100%	90%
A space for collective intelligence and learning	<i>"Catalogue of experiences": "The more we make it grow, the better equipped we are in our professional career" (P9)</i>	100%	88%	93%
A space for network development	<i>"You can knock on the right doors much faster" (P4)</i>	86%	81%	83%
Organizational benefits				
A space for agility and transversality	<i>"Bypass or short-circuit a certain structure, in the best possible sense" (P1)</i>	79%	81%	80%
A space for engagement and retention	<i>"I started having a better image of a company that invests in such initiatives for its employees" (P2)</i>	79%	75%	77%
A limited investment considering its benefits	<i>"In just one or two hours we can achieve something that would normally take months, if not years" (P9)</i>	79%	81%	80%

risk of feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy among talents (Kamoche & Leigh, 2022), uncertainty when communication about TM programs is not transparent (Dries & De Gieter, 2014) and the impression of being unable to control their careers (Meyers, 2020). Contrary to this, codevelopment may be a safe space that reinforces participants' self-confidence and reassurance. Furthermore, talents can be particularly exposed to organizational political maneuvers and highly dependent on the will of their line manager (Daubner-Siva *et al.*, 2018), the annual appraisal being a commonly-used tool for assessing them (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2010). Codevelopment may therefore allow talents to find a space of freedom away from the usual organizational politics. Moreover, talents sometimes suffer from pressure to identify with the existing organizational values and identity, which can challenge their own ethics and identity (Painter-Morland *et al.*, 2019; Sumelius *et al.*, 2020). In contrast, codevelopment may reinforce reflection and self-reconnection with one's own values and beliefs, which *"could give talent management its ethical force"* (Painter-Morland *et al.*, 2019, p. 144). Finally, while TM may make talents complacent and self-satisfied (Dries & De Gieter, 2014; Ehrnrooth *et al.*, 2018), codevelopment can invite them to humbly challenge and develop their practice.

Secondly, whereas exclusive TM segmentation can lead to loneliness, isolation and a feeling of abandonment (Kamoche & Leigh, 2022), codevelopment may offer group benefits of critical importance, such as company and a sense of belonging to a group, as well as the development of a valuable professional network. These elements should contribute to the reinforced perception of social support that participants find in these groups (Paquet *et al.*, 2021). In our case, such benefits may be especially important for expert talents, who can feel lonely and receive less consideration than managerial talents (Dries *et al.*, 2012), even though their competencies are key to the company's competitive advantage (Boxall & Steeneveld, 1999). Furthermore, other benefits such as the collective intelligence and learning that happens in such groups challenges current mainstream individualistic views of TM (Oltra & Vivas-López, 2013).

Finally, from an organizational perspective, codevelopment may compensate those TM practices that involve functional or geographical silos (Schiemann, 2014) by contributing to organizational agility and transversality, and which is consistent with the research of Harsch and Festing (2020). Furthermore, codevelopment may contribute to participants' engagement and retention, thus mitigating the risk of loss of motivation and high turnover of talents (Dries & De Gieter, 2014), as well as the disengagement and disappointment created by the low continuity of TM practices in the long run (Bonneton *et al.*, 2022). Codevelopment also supposes limited investment considering its benefits, especially when compared to classical TM initiatives, which tend to be too expensive (van den Broek *et al.*, 2018). The contribution of codevelopment as a response to some of the negative effects of TM is summarized in Table 3.

Beyond TM, our research is consistent with the growing literature on codevelopment, concerning for example the importance of providing participants with a safe place to explore in these groups (e.g., Champagne, 2021), or their impact on participant well-being and pleasure at work (Farmer *et al.*, 2021). This confirms that the TM context is relevant and fully compatible with the codevelopment practices for populations of experts.

We contribute to the codevelopment literature by identifying some aspects that might have been underexplored so far. Firstly, in our research codevelopment emerges as a fully apolitical space as opposed to the political pressure present in organizations.

TABLE 3
Discussion of results: Codevelopment as a response to negative effects of TM

Codevelopment results	"Dark side" of TM that codevelopment could counter
Individual benefits	
A space for well-being and to slow down	Stress: Loss of work-life balance, risk of workaholism and burnout (Tansley & Tietze, 2013, Dries & De Gieter, 2014)
A space for exploration without any pressure	Results and time pressure: utilitarian view of employees, valuing only their output (Painter-Morland <i>et al.</i> , 2019), pressure to perform and to increase workload to prove they deserve talent status (Sumelius <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
A space of safety and reassurance	Sense of insecurity: self-doubt, inadequacy, rudderless (Kamoche & Leigh, 2022), uncertainty and uncontrollability, confusion, frustration (Meyers, 2020, Dries & De Gieter, 2014)
A space of freedom without politics	Political pressure: dependency on manager and exposure to organizational politics (Daubner-Siva <i>et al.</i> , 2018)
A space to reflect and self-reconnect	Risk of challenging values, morality and identity: (Painter-Morland <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Sumelius <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
A space to humbly challenge one's own practice	Self-satisfaction: complacency, arrogance (Dries & De Gieter, 2014; Ehrnrooth <i>et al.</i> , 2018)
Group benefits	
A space for company and a sense of belonging A space for network development	Loneliness: isolation, abandonment (Kamoche & Leigh, 2022)
A space for collective intelligence and learning	Individual TM: focus on single individuals (Oltra & Vivas-López, 2013)
Organizational benefits	
A space for agility and transversality	TM organized in silos (Schiemann, 2014)
A space for engagement and retention	Disengagement of talents due to low continuity of TM practices (Bonneton <i>et al.</i> , 2022) Risk of turnover and loss of motivation (Dries & De Gieter, 2014)
A limited investment considering benefits	High cost of TM (van den Broek <i>et al.</i> , 2018)

Secondly, these groups allow participants to naturally discover reflective practices and to develop a useful "repertoire" (Schön, 1983) of experiences. Furthermore, codevelopment helps participants to reconnect with their values and beliefs, therefore helping them find a deeper meaning to their activities (Giraud *et al.*, 2016). In addition, participants can replicate aspects of codevelopment in their daily activities, which reinforces their autonomy. Our work also confirms some of the organizational benefits of codevelopment briefly mentioned by Champagne (2021), and which have thus far been less studied in the literature than individual benefits. For example, codevelopment can have a highly positive impact on silo-breaking and organizational agility. Codevelopment groups can also support organizational culture transformation, therefore nurturing a culture of change (Giraud *et al.*, 2016). Finally, we contribute to the codevelopment literature by highlighting some

possible differences between these groups and contexts characterized by performance pressure, such as the case we studied. This dichotomy is summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Differences between codevelopment and the organizational context of the case study

Codevelopment characteristics	Studied organizational context characteristics
Well-being and pleasure	Stress and pressure on performance
A space to slow-down and reflect	Time shortages and management of emergencies
Safe place, free of judgement, welcoming vulnerability	Fear of judgement, need to "be strong"
Experimentation	Problem solving
Human-oriented	Results-oriented
Horizontal collective intelligence, silo breaking, no politics	Individual performance based on hierarchy and presence of silos and politics

Limitations and avenues for future research

Despite the contribution of our research to the codevelopment literature and practice, our work has several limitations. Firstly, as a single case study carried out in an MNC, our results may not be generalizable to other contexts (Eisenhardt, 1991). Here, we propose a contextualized empirical study, which is highly needed in the TM field (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2020). However, the banking environment is highly specific and particularly turbulent (Bikker & Haaf, 2002), which may accentuate the differences between codevelopment and its external context described in our results. Consequently, future research could be extended to other industries to understand whether the dichotomy between codevelopment and its context is as salient as in our case. Furthermore, we explored codevelopment as part of an expert talent program in a multinational bank, which enabled us to study an extreme case, to untangle mechanisms that were made more observable and to gain insights that would not be accessible otherwise (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Although the impact of codevelopment is likely to be the same on individuals other than talents, future research could also study whether the identified benefits are also present with other populations.

Interviewees' opinions highlight that codevelopment could help counter some of the negative effects of TM. Future research could therefore focus on this phenomenon in order to explore whether what we exposed in the discussion section of this article are confirmed in a more in-depth study of the topic. Furthermore, future studies could also seek to investigate and measure the actual impact of codevelopment in countering the negative effects of TM, explicitly interviewing HR managers and TM practitioners on this point.

Future research could investigate whether our results still apply to categories of employees that are different from expert talents. Finally, considering that codevelopment exists mainly in French-speaking contexts (Paquet *et al.*, 2022), future studies could explore this practice in English-speaking countries and organizations. However, there may have been studies in other contexts on practices that are similar to codevelopment and derived from action learning or experiential learning. Despite these limitations, our research highlights codevelopment as a valuable and original talent development practice.

Theoretical and practical implications

Our research has two main theoretical contributions, adding insights to TM and codevelopment research. We contribute to the TM literature by showing the impact of codevelopment as a single talent development practice on individuals, a topic that has been insufficiently studied. We also contribute by highlighting how a specific practice can help counterbalance the negative effects of TM. Finally, we add to the growing body of codevelopment literature by studying its benefits within a context of talent development while highlighting some thus far underexplored aspects of the approach.

Our results also have strong managerial implications. We provide a rich overview of codevelopment benefits in TM, which may guide HR practitioners in the use of this approach as an innovative and value-adding talent development practice. Furthermore, our results could also allow HR practitioners to leverage codevelopment as an original solution for counterbalancing the possible existing negative effects of TM. Moreover, our research also shows that codevelopment can reinforce employee retention and engagement, which is a people management imperative for all organizations. Based on the benefits identified in our study, organizations could therefore explore the integration of codevelopment not only in TM, but in their HRM system as whole (Giraud *et al.*, 2016). This may be particularly useful considering that codevelopment is more relevant than ever in the current work context (Paquet *et al.*, 2022). Finally, as codevelopment is still only rarely offered by organizations, especially in non-French-speaking contexts, it could also become a factor of competitive advantage for employers in the future.

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