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MASTER'S THESIS

REVERSE MENTORING IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE: A CASE OF AN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI   – Artificial intelligence

EU   – European Union

EU-28   – The 28 member countries of the EU

G20   – International forum for the governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union.

HR   – Human Resources

ICT   – Information and communication technologies

NCWIT   – National Center for Women & Information Technology

OECD   – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

U.S.   – United States

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the pace of the changes we are facing with has increased dramatically. Economic, environmental, social and technological changes, all have an impact and therefore call for an action to rethink some of the old ways we are doing things. One of them is the way we do business. There is a constant pressure to reduce prices but maintain high quality, get access to scarce resources, stay ahead of competitors and attract and keep talented employees. This has encouraged companies to find creative ways to provide their products and services to successfully serve and compete on the markets. One of the hot topics that has been discussed on a large scale nowadays is the changes in the way jobs are performed and the importance of attracting and retaining skilled employees to keep the business running smoothly and successfully.

It is no secret that a company's success is highly dependent on its employees. Although in the past they seem to be neglected, nowadays satisfying the needs of the employees, even before the needs of the customers, seems to be a key focus of many employers. This should come as no surprise because the human capital is the most difficult one to imitate and therefore extremely valuable for the businesses. Since employees' satisfaction seems to be gaining importance amongst employers, they have been looking for creative ways to attract new, while at the same time retain the employees they already have. In addition, they are also looking for ways to improve the communication and collaboration between them. Lately, however, this has been a challenge for the organizations as the number of different generations in the workplace is increasing while at the same time, they become more and more diverse. To address employees' attraction, motivation, development and collaboration, a reverse mentoring program has been introduced in many workplaces (Baily, 2009; Deshwal, 2015).

According to Murphy (2012, p. 549), reverse mentoring is a novel way to encourage learning and promote cross-generational relationships in the workplace. It is a formal mentoring program in which a young, junior employee with something to teach is partnered with a senior manager who has something to learn (Deshwal, 2015, p. 3621). Although it could be done with employees across different generations, it's not age dependent. What is more important is to acknowledge that the less experienced or new members in the organization have knowledge to share and are willing to do so with more experienced employees (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012, p. 57). The purpose of this relationship is to encourage mutual knowledge and experience sharing, especially for the different generational perspectives (Deshwal, 2015; Murphy, 2012). In addition, it provides opportunities for growth and development and can improve communication and collaboration between colleagues from different generations. Although in the past reverse mentoring was primarily used to share technical knowledge from junior to senior employees, nowadays reverse mentoring has widened its scope. Companies like KPMG, IBM and Procter & Gamble, to name a few, are using reverse mentoring to improve cross-gender communication, dissolve stereotype issues,

increase cultural awareness and build inclusive culture (Leh, 2005; NCWIT 2012 Summit - Workshop Slides, Reverse Mentoring Programs, 2012; Skoulding, 2018).

This master's thesis will investigate the reverse mentoring phenomenon in the organizational context. The purpose is to contribute to a better understanding of what reverse mentoring is and how it can be used to enhance cross-generational relationships and knowledge transfer. Organizations have been undergoing drastic changes over the years but one thing that remains a constant is the people in them. Therefore, it is of huge importance for the people to continue developing and adapting together with the organization and reverse mentoring can be used as a tool to achieve exactly that. To be able to explore how reverse mentoring works in practice, an example of how it was implemented and used in an international organization called Danfoss Trata is going to be presented in the upcoming chapters. The research questions that are going to be addressed are as follows:

- What is reverse mentoring?
- In what way reverse mentoring has been implemented in a chosen company?
- What are the perceived benefits of reverse mentoring through the lenses of the employees?

The goal is to understand the reverse mentoring phenomenon in an organizational context which will provide a chance to identify and suggest recommendations for further improvement. To address the abovementioned challenges, a qualitative research is undertaken. The strategy chosen for doing this research is an exploratory single case study.

The master's thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter 1 starts with a discussion about the future of work. It provides an overview of some of the most important trends and how their connectedness has an impact on the work, the workplace and the workforce. Chapter 2 shortly describes each generation and the imposed challenges of having multiple generations in the workplace. Chapter 3 identifies mentoring as one possible way to foster relationships between different generations in the workplace and shortly describes different types of mentoring. Then, it recognizes reverse mentoring as a specific mentoring type. It gives an overview of its benefits and functions compared to the traditional mentoring and describes successful reverse mentoring programs from world's practice. Chapter 4 describes the underlying methodology for this master's thesis, the organization where the study is undertaken and analysis of the data. In addition, it delivers the results of the study, identifies its limitation and provides a discussion of the obtained findings. Finally, a conclusion is presented.

1 FUTURE OF WORK

"Work is universal. But, how, why, where and when we work has never been so open to interpretation" (Gratton, 2010, p. 16). This is how Linda Gratton, a professor of Management

Practice at the London Business School and an extensive researcher in the field of people and organizations, describes the current situation and challenges we are facing when talking about the future of work (Biography, n.d.).

Many researches, leaders and managers have been talking about what the future will bring and how different global trends will have an effect and therefore reshape the way we work. But the truth is, the future is already here and the work as we knew it 20 years ago has been drastically changed. Globalization, demographic changes, digitalization and advancement in the technology, just to name a few, have made a tremendous impact on the world and therefore, on the work. Working from nine to five has been replaced with flexible working hours. Being 'tied' to an office to some extent has been replaced with working remotely. This can be done practically anywhere as long as wireless Internet connection is provided. Knowing and seeing colleagues daily has been replaced with virtual teams that are dispersed around the globe and establishing contact is often done through online conference calls rather than having face to face communication.

Some of the concerns connected with the future of work revolve around planning for 50 to 60 years long careers, managing employees from different generations under the same roof and the split of work between people and machines (Schwartz, Hatfield, Jones, & Anderson, 2019). The challenges imposed open a door to a lot of new opportunities but only if people and companies can grasp the new perspectives and adapt to the changes. Those companies unable to adapt or neglect the inevitable change will probably lose the battle for talents and therefore struggle to keep up with the competition and stay in business. For the people, it means dedicating to lifelong learning if to be able to keep up with new jobs' requirements.

Changing the way we work is a by-product of specific interconnected forces or trends. Gratton (2010) recognizes five such crucial forces that she believes will have a tremendous impact on the way work is done by 2025. The forces she identifies are globalization, technological developments, demographic changes, societal trends and low-carbon developments. However, for the purpose of this master's thesis the first three megatrends will be further discussed.

1.1 Global trends influencing work

1.1.1 Globalization

Globalization has been described as a phenomenon that enables for the integration of all countries into a single economic global system (Dominelli, 2010). Another way to describe globalization is to think of it as the removal of economic and financial borders that allows for an increased movement of people, goods, services and capital between nations. Consequently, this leads to the connection and creation of a global marketplace and internationally present organizations that are the ones that move the people, capital and

goods across borders. Such movement is highly dependent and facilitated by the extensive use of the Internet and advanced information and communication technologies (hereinafter: ICT) (Blair-Loy & Jacobs, 2003; Wilpert, 2009). The combination of globalization and increased use of ICT gives an opportunity for companies to offshore some of its business functions to low labor cost countries such as China, India, Mexico, Brazil, South Korea and others. Business functions that were mainly relocated to these countries in the past were manufacturing work, call centers, claims processing and alike. However, recent developments show that cost savings are not the only rationale behind the offshoring anymore. The new emerging economies besides being able to provide products and services at a lower cost, are nowadays becoming the new talent pools offering engineers, computer scientists and other highly skilled technical people needed for the knowledge economy. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the educational landscape has changed in the past ten years.

Figure 1: Share of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary degree across OECD and G20 countries (2000, 2010, 2020)
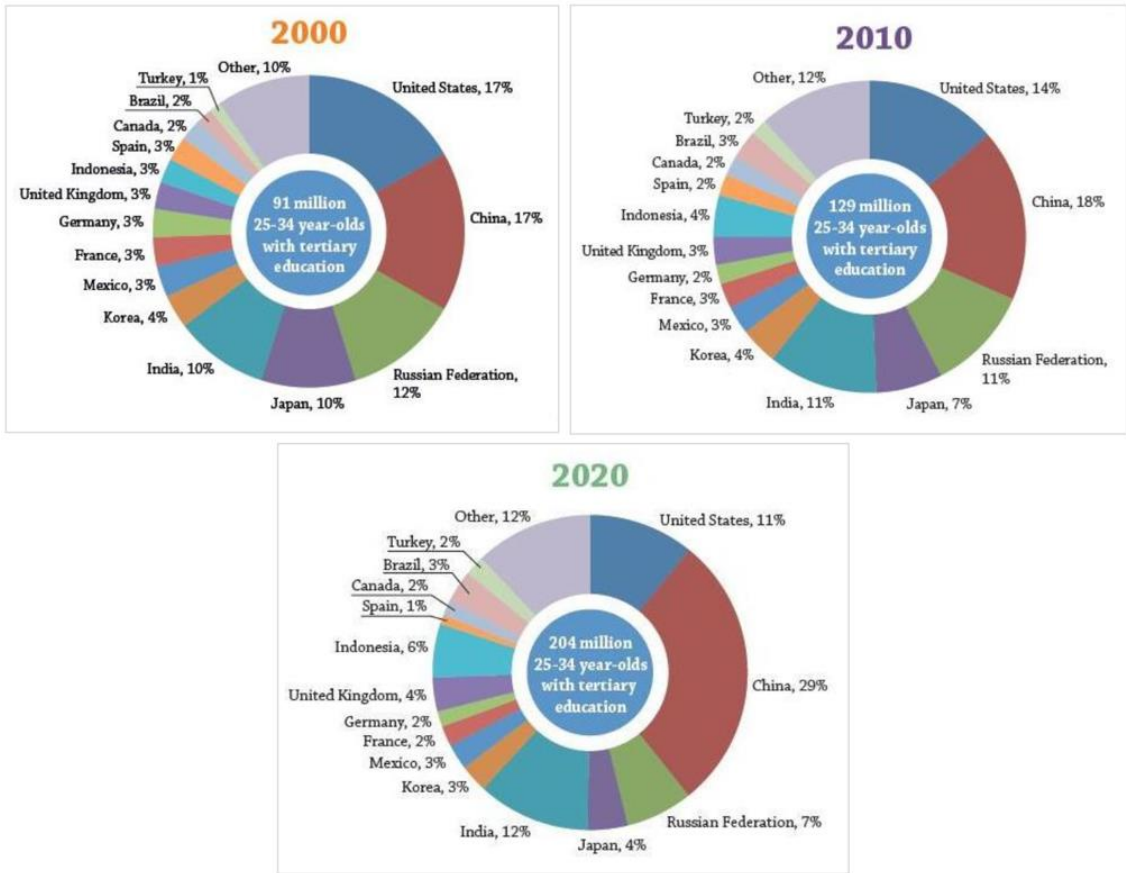
Source: ICEF Monitor (2012).

The graphs show an overall increase in population age between 25 to 34 years old that has obtained high education, from 91 million in 2000 to 204 million predicted by 2020 year. Moreover, the origin of the young people that have obtained high education is changing. By

2020, countries that will account for 40 % of the supply of highly educated young people will be China with 29 %, India with 12 % and United States (hereinafter: U.S.) with 11 %. In the past, U.S. and China had the same percent of people that have obtained high education, 17 %, with a change shown in 2010 where a decrease has been noticed in the supply from U.S. and increase in China. In the forecast for 2020, the numbers significantly differ, and China takes over U.S. for 18 % (ICEF Monitor, 2012). This trend is drastically changing the talent pool map and making economic activity widely dispersed. Companies are willing to relocate some of its core functions and departments such as accounting, research and development, product design and alike in countries where talents that can do these jobs can be found (Couto, Mani, Lewin, & Peeters, 2006; Gratton, 2010; Institute for the Future, 2011).

In addition, as a result of the globalization there is an increase in labour migration. Suárez-Orozco (2001) describes how in the past anthropologists were going to specific countries to explore people's culture, customs and habits. But nowadays, Mexican communities for example can be found in the middle of New York or Turkish ones in the middle of Frankfurt. Immigrants in the U.S. for example, mostly come from non-European and non-English speaking countries, which are also referred to as "developing countries". His study shows that because of their diversity it's difficult to make general conclusions about them. On one hand, there are highly educated and skilled immigrants interested in the knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy and a lot of them are attracted by positions offered in the Silicon Valley. Most of them come from Asia determined to thrive in their positions and are considered amongst the best educated or skilled people in the U.S. In addition, they are slightly more likely to have a better education than the native-born ones. This fact is consistent with Figure 1, where it's clearly shown that the number of educated people originating from Asian continues growing over the past 10 years. Similar evidences are found in the Eurostat report (2018, p. 26) where negative net migration (the difference between the number of immigrants and the number of emigrants during a period of time) is reported in the period between 2010 and 2015 year in China, India, Mexico and Indonesia. On the other hand, immigrants with poor education and skills are also coming to U.S. mostly from Latin America taking low paid jobs. Their opportunities are usually limited as they tend to settle in poor ethnically divided neighborhoods, are lacking proper documentation, insurance and basic safeties.

To sum up, globalization has an impact on creating highly dependent and interconnected diverse companies, communities and countries. This trend will inevitably continue influencing the way work and the workplace is organized and seek for new ways to address future needs of the employees and the employers.

1.1.2 Technological developments

It seems that technology plays the biggest role in the change of what, how and who is doing the work today as well as who is going to perform the work tomorrow. With the rapid technological advancements, huge concern is rising over people being replaced by robots or machines and the loss of thousands of jobs. Barry Swartz, a prominent professor of Psychology states: "Machines replaced the human hands, and computers may replace the human mind, but nothing will replace the human heart." (European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies, 2018, p. 9). But would companies put people before their profits? Technology has brought about an increase in productivity, decrease in errors and therefore savings which are the reasons why more and more companies are automatizing or digitalizing their tasks. Tasks or jobs that have the biggest potential to be automatized or performed by machines or robots rather than humans are repetitive and predictive tasks performed in controlled environment mainly but not limited to production sites, retail trade, customer support services, data collection and processing (Manyika, et al., 2017).

However, according to the World Economic Forum report (2018), the number of new jobs created as a result of new technology will offset the loss of the jobs because of technology. There is and will be reduction in some job positions but at the same time new ones will be created. Still, this does not come without a price. Joint effort coming from companies that will support the reskilling and upskilling of the employees, government institutions that will create an enabling environment and transformations in education while at the same time a willing workforce to commit to lifelong learning is what it will take for transforming millions of employees to take upon new job positions and challenges. To be able to respond to the challenges posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and ensure a workforce that will be able to cooperate with the technology and drive business growth, companies will have to create a long-term strategy for the development of their employees. Those who fail to do so, will face with talent shortages as there will be lack of people able to cope and work with the new technologies.

According to World Economic Forum (2018), four technological advancements will dominate in the upcoming period: widespread use of high-speed mobile internet, increased usage of big data analytics, artificial intelligence (hereinafter: AI) and cloud technology. All of them are expected to have a positive impact on business growth.

1.1.3 Demographic changes

The world is facing significant demographic fluctuations that are affecting the workforce at a large scale. The challenges brought by the demographic changes are numerous and involve addressing the shortage of workforce, planning for longer working careers, lifelong learning and questioning the sustainability of the pension and insurance systems, to name a few.

One of the biggest concerns is aging of the population as a result of the increased life expectancy and decrease in birth rates (Eurostat, 2018, p. 21). Furthermore, as the retirement age of the employees that comprise the generation called Baby Boomers is approaching, vast concern about the workforce gap is rising. The problem seems that there isn't enough active labor force to replace them. Baby Boomers are considered the largest generation in the U.S. (Collins, 2003, p. 145; Winkelmann-Gleed, 2009, p. 29). Despite the effort policymakers put in trying to promote the employment of the older workers, companies still seem reluctant to do so. In the EU, those between the age of 55 and 64 seem to have lower employment rate either because of an early retirement or due to the difficulty of finding another career opportunity at that age (Eurostat, 2018, p. 58). Companies are still more inclined to hire younger people despite of the older being more experienced (Pinto, da Silva Ramosc, & Nunes, 2015). Some of their concerns revolve around the higher salaries that come with the experience and productivity loss due to higher probability of sick leaves as a result of their age (Dixon, 2003; Winkelmann-Gleed, 2009, p. 34). With the retirement of this generation a lot of tacit knowledge will be lost. To address this issue, Human Resource (hereinafter: HR) departments should come up with strategies to capture their knowledge and experience and transfer to the younger generations. If they fail to do so, a lot of senior leadership positions will be hard to fill in in the upcoming years.

Furthermore, despite of having a decrease in mortality rates and increase in life expectancy, countries are experience workforce shortages due to migration. With the free movement of people within the European area, a lot of countries are struggling to keep their talents within their borders. Strey, Fajth, Dubow, & Siegel (2018) explore the reasons behind the migration of people within the EU. What they found out is that the primary reasons for it are job opportunities and personal relationships. Significant movement are registered from Poland to United Kingdom and Romania to Italy. Germany and Sweden were also listed as attractive destinations due to their numerous job opportunities, working conditions and high wages. Besides people from the EU, people that were third country nationals and afterwards acquired EU citizenship via another country also decided to move within the EU and explore work opportunities. Another interesting fact is the movement of Britons to Spain most probably for the lifestyle and good weather. Besides employment opportunities, Sweden seems to be of interest to people who seek to migrate due to asylum.

While in the past older workers retired in order to leave job positions for younger generations, it seems that nowadays a reverse exercise needs to be done to fill in the workforce gap (Collins, 2003). As life expectancy increases due to various interrelated factors such as having better medical care, stability, security, improved living conditions and quality of live, career plans need to be revised. According to the Eurostat (2018), numbers recorded in 2015 show that life expectancy in Japan reached 84 years and Australia, South Korea, Canada and the EU-28 are right behind with citizens reaching or passing 80 years of life. Since there is shortage of workforce ready to replace those that are about to retire, hence the longer life, HR needs to come up with ways to engage older workers in the workplace that will commit to lifelong learning. A percussion needs to be taken in order to maintain

stability of the pension systems which in most countries work on solidarity principles. This means that the active workforce provides pension funds for the retired employees. The math is simple, if there isn't enough actively employed people, the whole payment system will collapse.

The demographic challenges described that result in workforce shortage pose concerns for countries, communities and companies. The way work is organized has an influence on macroeconomic performance, international competitiveness, social wellbeing, standard of living and if not managed properly, can have a negative impact despite of efforts in technological developments to maintain and increase productivity (Pinto, da Silva Ramosc, & Nunes, 2015; Winkelmann-Gleed, 2009).

1.2   Changes following the future of work trends

As a result of the abovementioned phenomena, the future of work will have an impact and therefore make changes in three different ways: the work, the workforce and the workplaces (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Changes affected by the future of work: work, the workforce and the workplace
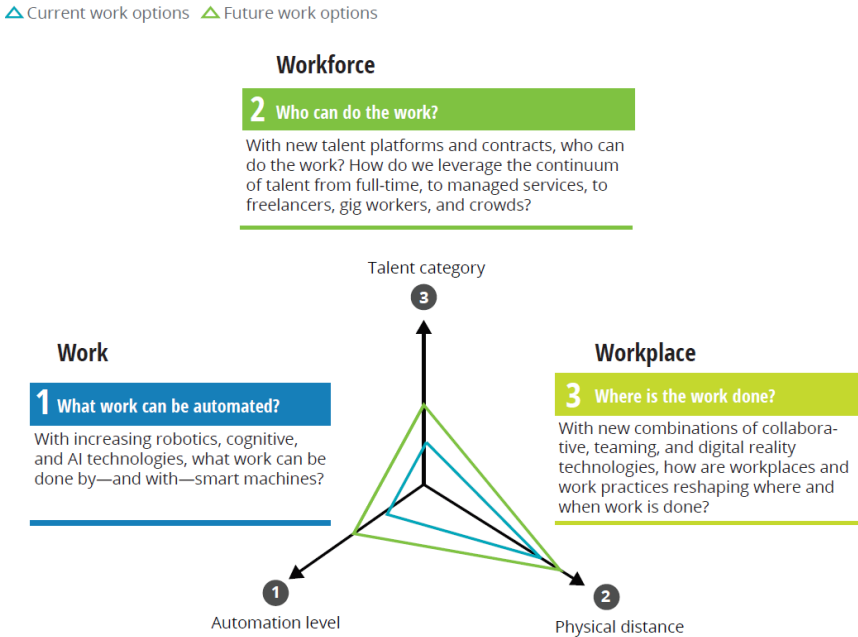
Source: Schwartz, Hatfield, Jones, & Anderson (2019).

To begin with, the first area that is undergoing changes is the work itself. Certainly, this is not the first time the work is transforming. In the past, carpenters for example, were the ones getting wood, shaping it into a specific product like a table or a chair and then selling it to the customers. The whole process from production to delivery was their own responsibility. Another example is a tailor. They created a design, took measures from the client, made the outfit and sold it. The whole process was usually dependent on one person. However, later

on with the industrial revolution, as some of the products could be manufactured in a faster pace the work was redefined. It was divided into specific smaller repeatable tasks some of which were performed by machines faster and cheaper and people together with machines were working to achieve an outcome, a product.

Nowadays, work is once again evolving. With the introduction of smart technology and AI there's a need to rethink what tasks can be performed my people and which ones are better left to the machines (Schwartz, Hatfield, Jones, & Anderson, 2019). With the new technologies, companies are seeking to increase their productivity, respond faster to customer demands and successfully compete globally. This brings about the concern of jobs performed by employees being replaced by machines. However, World Economic Forum (2018) ensures that although a lot of jobs will be indeed lost, at the same time new jobs will be created. Figure 3 shows two graphs where the share of stable, redundant and new roles are presented as of 2018 and projected in 2022.

Figure 3: Share of stable, new and redundant roles, 2018 vs. 2022 (projected)
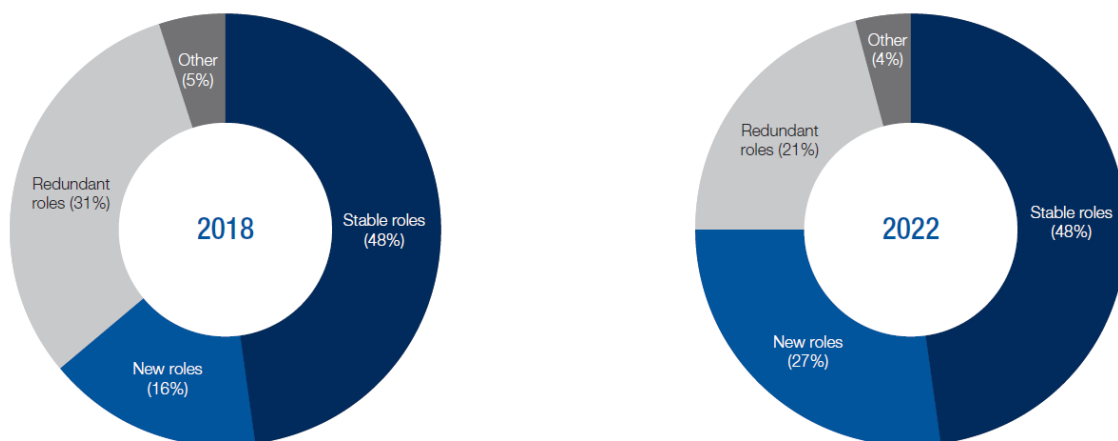
Source: World Economic Forum (2018).

According to the information presented in the graphs, the share of stable jobs stays the same both in 2018 and in 2022 year. Furthermore, the redundant roles will actually decrease in 2020 by 10 %, a number which will be offset by creation of approximately same percentage of new roles. In Table 1, examples of the abovementioned roles are shown. Some examples of the stable roles are management and executive positions, HR specialists, different types of engineers, higher education teachers and other. When talking about new roles, an increase in demand will follow for Innovation Professionals, Social Media Specialists, People and Culture Managers, Organizational Development Specialist. In addition, a demand for those able to cope with the adaptation of the new technology such as Digital Transformation Specialists, AI and Machine learning Experts, Blockchain Specialists, Information Security Analysts, Robotics Engineers and other will continue.

Table 1: Examples of stable, new and redundant roles, all industries

Stable Roles	New Roles	Redundant Roles
Managing Directors and Chief Executives	Data Analysts and Scientists*	Data Entry Clerks
General and Operations Managers*	AI and Machine Learning Specialists	Accounting, Bookkeeping and Payroll Clerks
Software and Applications Developers and Analysts*	General and Operations Managers*	Administrative and Executive Secretaries
Data Analysts and Scientists*	Big Data Specialists	Assembly and Factory Workers
Sales and Marketing Professionals*	Digital Transformation Specialists	Client Information and Customer Service Workers*
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific Products	Sales and Marketing Professionals*	Business Services and Administration Managers
Human Resources Specialists	New Technology Specialists	Accountants and Auditors
Financial and Investment Advisers	Organizational Development Specialists*	Material-Recording and Stock-Keeping Clerks
Database and Network Professionals	Software and Applications Developers and Analysts*	General and Operations Managers*
Supply Chain and Logistics Specialists	Information Technology Services	Postal Service Clerks
Risk Management Specialists	Process Automation Specialists	Financial Analysts
Information Security Analysts*	Innovation Professionals	Cashiers and Ticket Clerks
Management and Organization Analysts	Information Security Analysts*	Mechanics and Machinery Repairers
Electrotechnology Engineers	Ecommerce and Social Media Specialists	Telemarketers
Organizational Development Specialists*	User Experience and Human-Machine Interaction Designers	Electronics and Telecommunications Installers and Repairers
Chemical Processing Plant Operators	Training and Development Specialists	Bank Tellers and Related Clerks
University and Higher Education Teachers	Robotics Specialists and Engineers	Car, Van and Motorcycle Drivers
Compliance Officers	People and Culture Specialists	Sales and Purchasing Agents and Brokers
Energy and Petroleum Engineers	Client Information and Customer Service Workers*	Door-To-Door Sales Workers, News and Street Vendors, and Related Workers
Robotics Specialists and Engineers	Service and Solutions Designers	Statistical, Finance and Insurance Clerks
Petroleum and Natural Gas Refining Plant Operators	Digital Marketing and Strategy Specialists	Lawyers

Note: Roles marked with * appear across multiple columns. This reflects the fact that they might be seeing stable or declining demand across one industry but be in demand in another.

Source: World Economic Forum (2018).

Finally, roles that are most likely to become redundant in the upcoming years due to restructuring of the work itself or being performed by machines are: Data Entry Clerks, factory workers, Accountants, Payroll Clerks and alike (World Economic Forum, 2018, p. 9). The challenge posed by the loss and creation of the new job lies in the ability of people to reskill themselves to perform the new jobs, with the help of companies and governments. As already discussed, joint efforts are needed to overcome the threat posed by the technological developments. The benefits would suit all, the employees, the companies and the society. If people are unable to take up the new roles and responsibilities due to lack of skills, companies will suffer from lose of productivity and competitiveness which will ultimately lead to slowdown in the economic activity.

Furthermore, as previously shown in Figure 2, the second area that is transforming is the workforce. As already mentioned in the previous section, the structure of the workforce is changing. A lot of old and experienced people are about to retire taking with them the much-appreciated experience, knowledge and know-how. At the same time, new generations are entering the workforce. They are somehow different than the previous ones and seek for more than a job but a value and meaning in what they do. In addition, because of migration the workplace is becoming more and more diverse uniting people from all over the world. Some of them in the office others through the virtual networks. This poses a test to the organization to find ways to make people from different countries, cultures and backgrounds able to work together either under the same roof or virtually. On top of that, workforce sourcing is open to many options. Besides the traditional full-time jobs, businesses are now

able to source their employees in various ways such as through outsourcing, special contracts, crowdsourcing and similar. In this way, companies can reach and have their work done by tapping into the wide pool of worldwide talents, regardless of where they physically are. Once they finish the agreed job, they can again look for specific talents in other fields. The possibilities are limitless (World Economic Forum, 2018).

Finally, the whole concept of a workplace or going to work is altered. In the past, work was considered going to a specific location where colleagues meet to perform specific tasks, or basically to do their job. Nowadays, work can be done from literally everywhere, as long as a portable device such as laptop or tablet and Internet connection is provided. In addition, as business are more likely to operate and serve global markets, what happens very often is that they have various location worldwide where teams from different countries, cultures and backgrounds work together to achieve companies' goals. However, companies are responsible for making the connection between its employees happen by managing their culture (World Economic Forum, 2018).

The future holds a lot of opportunities for rethinking and redesigning the work, workforce and the workplace to achieve maximum efficiency and efficacy while at the same time bringing value for all. However, this might seem easier said than done. Companies must be careful when making changes in one dimension because that will inevitably have an impact in the other two. To be able to tap the full potential of the future, companies must take a closer look into their people. As previously stated, employees have the power to make a business success or a failure. In the upcoming sections this master's thesis will try to provide a short analysis of the people in the workplace and how can their diversity be used at the companies' advantage.

2   GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

A generation represents a cohort, a group of people that are born and live within a specific time period and share experiences, social and economic shifts, scientific and technological developments which have an impact on their values, beliefs, behavior and the way they perceive things (Clark, 2017). It is common to think that people who went through the same historical events would have to some extent the same characteristics that comprise a specific generational cohort. It is believed that such social experiences in a way shape people's character, view of the world and the values they hold (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008). There isn't a mutual agreement about the exact range of years by which one generation differs from another and they may vary between authors. Besides differences between generation, variance within a generation might exist as well (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008). People who fall into a specific generation might not exhibit all its characteristics. It might happen that they are closer in character with the preceding or the next generation depending on their birth year. In this sense, it is important to mention the differences generations pose known in theory as generation gap (Clark, 2017).

Generation gap in a way points out how one generation distinguish itself from another in terms of their values, opinions, political views and way of life. An example for a generation gap is the differences between grandparents, parents and children which in fact represent different generation within the same family. This phenomenon was for the first time mentioned in the 1960s when the generation known as Baby Boomers showed drastically change in the way they think and behave compared to the previous generation, their parents (Subramanian, 2017). In the same way, a workplace consists of different generations working together each bringing their own strengths and weaknesses. The challenge is how those can be managed for the company's benefit, now more than ever when for the first time in history five generations will be working under the same roof (Knight, 2014).

2.1   Generations overview

People fall into different generation based on their birth year. To be able to examine the ways in which they differ, a short overview of all generations is presented in Figure 4. The following five generations are widely known: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. Since boundaries between generations are not uniformly set and timeframes differ between researchers, this study will use the timeframe defined in Schullery (2013).

Figure 4: Generations defined and their age in 2019

Traditionalists 1925 – 1945	Baby Boomers 1946 – 1964	Generation X 1965 – 1981	Generation Y 1982 – 1999	Generation Z 2000 – onwards
Ages 94 – 74	Ages 73 – 55	Ages 54 – 38	Ages 37 – 20	Ages 19 –
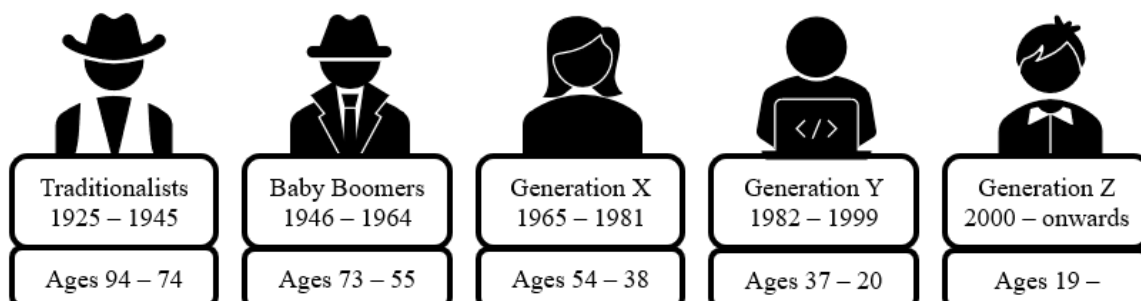
Source: Schullery (2013).

People that were born between 1925 and 1945, fall into the **Traditionalists** generation, also known as Veterans, Silent Generation or Greatest Generation. The important historical events that shaped their lives are the World War II and the Great Depression. For that reason, they are considered great patriots. As employees, they are described as having a strong work ethic, being loyal and expecting loyalty in return which is why they usually start their career and retire within the same company. They respect authority, hierarchy and working by the rules (Kane, 2018; Schullery, 2013; Tanner, 2019). This generation represents more white men than women in the workplace. Concurrently, saw women entering in the workforce for the first time mostly because men were out fighting wars and women had to take care for the family in the meantime. When it comes to using new technology and ways of

communication, as one might expect, they are traditionalists in the true sense. They have hard time adopting to the new technological advancements, prefer face to face communication and are used to sending letters via post. Today, they represent very low percentage of the workforce as almost all are retired. Some of them keep close relationships with their former employer and come back to work as advisors on specific cases where their expertise is appreciated (Kane, 2018) while others can be often seen as presidents or members of the board of directors.

Baby Boomers are considered the people born between 1946 and 1964. Some of the social and economic events that had an influence and therefore shaped them are the post-World War II optimism about the days to come, the hippie, Civil Rights and Woman's liberation movements. With that, they witnessed an increasing number of women entering the workforce. The higher education they hold compared to the previous generation gave them to opportunities to earn more. They are the biggest consumers of the traditional media such as television, newspapers and magazines and the usage of phones however some of them also own a Facebook account. They prefer face to face communication but are also comfortable with sending an e-mail. They are hard-working and often perceived as "workaholics" that seek recognition for the work they've done. Status symbols such as big office, prestigious title and dedicated parking space are some of the things that motivate them. In today's workplace, they hold senior positions and some of them are about to retire (Rampton, 2017; Tanner, 2019). However due to an increased life expectancy, this generation will enjoy their retirement years longer than the previous generation. The Traditionalists usually died five to seven years after they have retired while Baby Boomers are estimated to live ten to twenty-five years after their retirement (Kenton, 2019).

Born between 1965 and 1981 are people known as **Generation X** or alternatively Post-Boomers and Xers. Some of the cultural and political events that define them as a group are the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the introduction of the first computer, the rise of the first mobile technology and the dot-com era. They have developed their independence as a result of having both their parents working and probably being "workaholics" or even divorced (Tanner, 2019). However, witnessing some of their parents losing their job, they are less loyal to the employer and would probably switch between jobs for the sake of their career. They appreciate work life balance and monetary rewards (Rampton, 2017). They don't have a problem using new technologies and feel comfortable using e-mails or texting (Russo, 2019).

Generation Y or more commonly known as Millennials are individuals born between 1982 and 1999 year. The key events shaping this generation is the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, the Great Recession, the wars in the Middle East, globalization, the rise of the Internet and social media. Some of them come from single-parent households, blended families or same-sex parent families. They have been raised around technology that has become their second nature (Subramanian, 2017). This generation has gained a lot of attention in the last decade mostly because of its size, the expected share in the workplace

and being the most diverse of all. A lot of research has been conducted to find out who they are and what they want in the workplace. However, that gave a rise to misconceptions, stereotypes and often unfunded generalizations (Clark, 2017). Being the most educated generation so far and heavily dependent on technology, they find information easily and effortlessly. With one click they start searching the Internet, attend online courses or download applications on their smart phones from which they can study at any time. This is what makes them a lifelong learner. Consequently, they don't see their managers as being experts but rather as someone who needs to fulfil the role of a mentor that cares for their development instead of taking a role of a supervisor. Their parents give them a lot of attention, support and feedback while growing up, so this generation continues to seek for the same in the workplace. They are known for constantly looking for reassurance and feedback from their immediate managers and their loyalty and retention are largely dependent on the relationship developed between them (Brack & Kelly, 2014; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). In addition, they have survived the 2008 economic crises where they saw their hardworking parents losing their jobs so disloyalty should come as no surprise. Moreover, being socially conscious they would rather choose a job that pays great attention to corporate social responsibility than one that provides a higher paycheck (Brack & Kelly, 2014). According to Thompson & Gregory (2012), Millennials don't see the job as a place where they should go to but rather as a thing to do. Moreover, through their job they are hoping to connect to a larger purpose which brings them the satisfaction they are craving for (Meister & Willyerd, 2010).

The largest generational cohort and latest generation entering the labor force is **Generation Z**, youngsters born after year 2000. Since this generation is relatively new, there's still a lot of research that needs to be done regarding its traits. Many of them come from biracial and multiracial families. They have a lot of things in common with their preceding generation, Generation Y, especially when it comes to being technology natives. Since they don't know how to live a life without the Internet, they are used to communicating and being connected nonstop (Turner, 2015). The games they played in the childhood were on their parents' mobile phones or tables and therefore, they still spend a huge portion of their time on their smart phones. Despite this, they prefer face-to-face communication in the workplace. Contrary to Generation Y that are perceived as being idealistic, they are pragmatic. Some of them are already doing summer jobs and internships. What is known so far about this generation in terms of their work preferences, although limited, is that they are seeking for financial stability and security (Desjardins, 2019). Same as Generation Y, they would choose flexible work-life balance over money (Bennett, 2017).

2.2 Managing generations in the workplace

A survey done by PwC (2011) predicts that by the time we reach 2020, 50 % of the global labor force will consists of Generation Y. However, a more recent data presented by Statista Research Department (2016) demonstrated in Figure 5, shows that both Generation Y and Z

together will comprise 59 % of the total global workforce by 2020. Generation X and Y will hold the same share of employees (35 %), while drastic decrease is noted in the share of Baby Boomers with only 6 % of them left in the companies out of the total active workforce. Having these numbers in mind, there is no wonder so much attention and research is being done on how the new generations differ from the previous ones and how their needs and wants are going to reshape the workplace behavior. Gaining basic understanding about generations' traits, where they come from and what is important to them gives managers the opportunity to find a way to accommodate the differences and turn them into a competitive advantage. There is a need to create a place where generations would understand their differences but more importantly, would look at them as a benefit rather than as a constrain. The differences come from the specific characteristics each generation holds. Yet, diverse teams can achieve a lot more if they work in an environment where variety and knowledge sharing is promoted (Clark, 2017). Unlike new software that comes with user's guide new generations do not and managers and HR practitioners need to look for creative ways to make working together fruitful (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

Figure 5: Global workforce by 2020, by generation
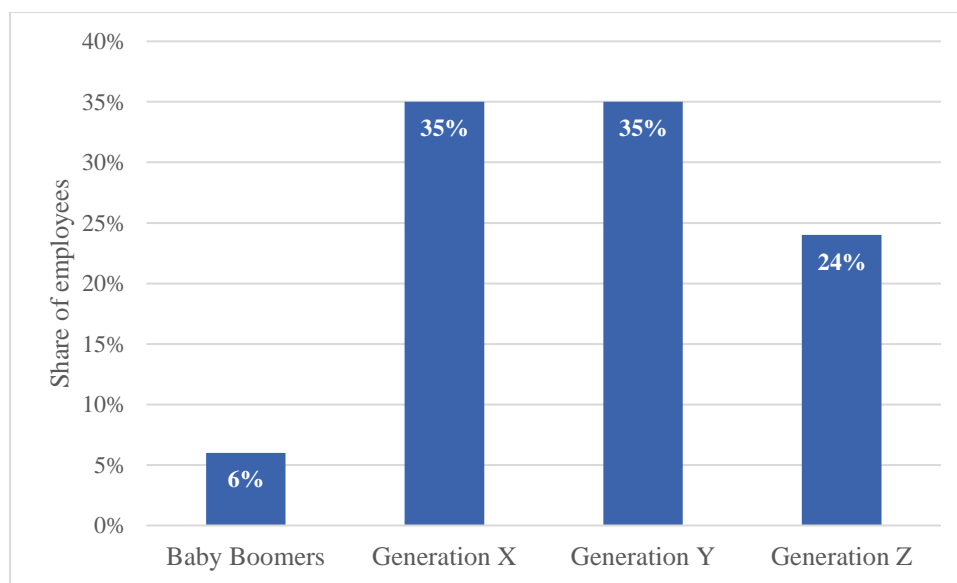
Source: Statista Research Department (2016).

In the upcoming chapters, Generation Z is intentionally left out of the discussion as research about its specific job preferences and motivators are yet to be done. This generation is still young and it's either just entering or about to enter the workforce in the upcoming years.

According to Brack & Kelly (2014), some of the differences between Baby Boomers and Generation X from one side and Generation Y on the other side are presented in Table 2. Since Generation Y has spent a lot of their childhood being part of a team or doing group activities, teamwork comes naturally to them and they prefer to collaborate with others when doing their tasks and projects. Contrary to that, Generation X is perceived as being

individualistic (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). That probably comes from getting less attention from their parents compared to the attention Generation Y got while growing up (Berkup, 2014). Furthermore, Baby Boomers and Generation X like secure jobs and structure while Generation Y looks for employability and flexibility. In addition, Generation Y seeks to find fulfilment and meaning through the work they do. Baby Boomers and Generation X are used to command and control management style, while Generation Y seeks for active and involved leadership as they do believe that they have something to bring to the table regardless of their age. Finally, Baby Boomers and Generation X seek to influence through their position while Generation Y is heavily connected and gains its influence through the communities and networks which builds easily, especially through social media usage (Brack & Kelly, 2014).

Table 2: Baby Boomers and Generation X vs Generation Y: Workplace Expectations

Baby Boomers and Generation X	Generation Y
Command and control management style	Active, involved leadership
Individually focused work	Collaborative, teamwork
Managed flow of information	Unstructured flow of information
Job security	Employability
Work = income	Work = income and personal enrichment
Structure	No structure, flexibility is highly valued
Inward looking	Outward looking
Influence through organization, position	Influence through networks, communities

Source: Brack & Kelly (2014).

Contrary to some of the findings that talk about the differences between generations and their work preferences, Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth (2008) and Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon (2008) talk about the lack of empirical evidence to confirm that. In their research they argue that the differences might come from the age rather than generations and that managers should pay attention to individual needs and careers rather than making decisions based on whole generations. Their results show little support for the stereotypes popular within media and managerial literature. They argue that employees regardless of which generation they represent, have different needs, wants and therefore motivators based on the different stage in life they are. For instance, at the beginning of their career they might seek for more trainings and development while as they start building families and houses, job security would be more of a priority.

Nevertheless, some of the facts remain true. Younger generations are inevitably increasing their share in the workplace. With the vast amount of Generation Y and Generation Z, relatively small in size Generation X and the retirement of the Baby Boomers, businesses will certainly face labor shortage, especially for senior and leadership roles (Brack & Kelly, 2014; Legas & Sims, 2011). Employers need to pay attention to the fact that with early

dismissal or retirement of the older generations, valuable knowledge, expertise and skills will leave the company (Žnidaršič & Dimovski, 2009). Examples where younger employees are managing senior ones already exist. This situation might be tricky for both parties for the following reason. On one hand, senior employees do not trust being guided by someone with lack of experience while on the other hand younger generations have trouble, feel insecure and doubtful of how they can do it as they indeed lack leadership experience (Legas & Sims, 2011; Subramanian, 2017). The generations in the workplace have different learning, communicating and working styles. In addition, competition between employees from different generation might exists as it seems that younger generations advance their careers faster than for example Baby Boomers did. This can cause frustration, misconception and intolerance between generations in the workplace that might further restrain them from collaborating and building strong relationships with each other. That is way it's necessary for organizations to find ways to address the differences and manage the relationships between employees successfully (Legas & Sims, 2011).

One of the ways many research studies propose to tackle the challenge of knowledge sharing, collaboration and overcoming the stereotypes generations hold about each other in the workplace is through effective mentoring programs (Brack & Kelly, 2014; Legas & Sims, 2011; Subramanian, 2017). Berkup (2014) in his study says that 75 % of Generation Y's employees said they want a mentor in the workplace while at the same time Clark (2017) states that retention, decrease in employee turnover and increased motivation can be achieved through mentoring (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Thompson & Gregory (2012) emphasize that the relationship between the immediate manager, which is usually a Baby Boomer or Generation Xer and the Generation Y employee, as being crucial for Generation Y's commitment at work. In the upcoming chapters, the benefits of mentoring in the workplace will be explored and presented.

3   MENTORING AND REVERSE MENTORING

In a short interview for an online website Gregory Nagy, a prominent American professor of Classics at the Harvard University, talks about the importance and implications of a mentor throughout the ages. The term "mentor" dates back from the Greek mythology. More specifically, it was first mention in the epic poem called "Odyssey" written by the legendary author Homer. One of the characters in this poem, Telemachus, the son of Odyssey, has been put in charge of the kingdom of Ithaka in the absence of his father. During these times, the goddess Athena materializes to Telemachus in the form of Mentor which is an old friend of the family. As a goddess of intelligence, wisdom, strength and war, Athena appears in his life to provide guidance and a sense of direction when Telemachus is experiencing difficulties and uncertainty while ruling his father's kingdom. However, what professor Nagy likes to point out in his interview is that Athena is trying to in some way install *menos* in Telemachus which means heroic and/or mental strength. In this sense he is also making a connection between the terms *menos* – mental strength and *mentor* – someone who provides

you with it. The interview concludes with two predisposition professor Nagy indicates as a must for a mentor and a mentoring relationship to exist: nobility and good intentions (O'Donnell, 2017). Throughout the years, the term mentor has gained a lot of importance. When we talk about a mentor, what we usually have in mind is an older individual with a lot of wisdom and experience that provides inspiration, guidance, advice and shares knowledge with a younger one. They can come in different forms such as a parent, teacher, manager or simply a friend. However, for the purpose of this thesis we will concentrate on exploring the concept of a mentor and mentoring relationship within the organizational context.

There are numerous definitions about what mentoring is. Essentially, all definitions come down to the similar points. It is a powerful career development tool. It involves a dyadic, hierarchical relationship at work between a colleague that has a lot of experience and/or holds a senior position within a company. This individual takes up the role of a mentor and a junior colleague or professional at the beginning of their career takes up the role of a mentee. This is what is referred to as mentoring in the traditional sense (Deshwal, 2015; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). What lies behind the mentoring relationship which is developed organically is one directional transfer of knowledge, experience and skills from the mentor to the mentee through their interaction (Ramalho, 2014). The mentor usually already possesses the qualities the mentee would like to acquire (Kanaskie, 2006). In addition, this relationship has the potential to transfer tacit or implicit knowledge (Murphy, 2012).

Mentoring in the workplace has proven to have abundant benefits for the mentor, mentee and the organization as whole, and on top of all it does not come at an additional cost. However, the quality of the relationship developed between the mentor and mentee dictates the outcomes. If managed properly, it will exhibit some of the benefits pointed out in the research studies. For the mentee, it provides career and psychological support, an increase in job satisfaction as well as exposure in the company (Chen, 2014; Grima, Paillé, Mejia, & Prud'homme, 2014). Studies have also showed that employees who are mentored show better work performance and therefore are more likely to get promoted (Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001). For the mentor, development of their leadership skills (Burdett, 2014), recognition for developing talents and feeling personal satisfaction of doing so (Kanaskie, 2006; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Organizations can benefit from having engaged, more competent and capable employees (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007). These benefits have been recognized by a lot of Fortune 500 companies that have already have the program installed in their workplace. In addition, Hezlett & Gibson (2007) claim that having a mentoring program makes a company more attractive from the young graduates' point of view. Goal oriented individuals who are seeking to enter the labor market and are in search of a job would choose a company with a mentoring program over a one that does not have one in its practice. In this way, companies can also benefit from being able to attract young and talented people without any additional effort.

There are two theories that support mentoring relationships in the workplace: self-determination theory and socio-emotional selection theory. Self-determination theory, a

theory of human motivation, proposes that people have three basic psychological needs. The first one, autonomy, is about the feeling of psychological freedom when a person interacts within the working environment. The second one, competence, is about feeling effective at the workplace. The third one, relatedness, is about feeling connected and having close relationships at work. It is said that these are the basic needs necessary for a person to function psychologically which consequently has an impact on the one's well-being, engagement and performance (Burmeister, Wang, & Hirschi, in press, p. 6).

Socio-emotional selectivity theory is a life span theory which argues that people choose to prioritize different things in life based on their perception about the time left in life (Sullivan-Singh, Stanton, & Low, 2015). Based on this theory, younger people perceive that they have a lot of time ahead in their lives and therefore prioritize knowledge-related goals, building social relationships and other future-oriented goals that will help them acquire information, knowledge and expand their horizons. But, when they get older and their perception of time changes into more limited or constrained, their goals change accordingly. People in their later years prioritize present-oriented goals, positive socio-emotional experiences like shaping future generations through sharing their knowledge (Burmeister, Wang, & Hirschi, in press; Doverspike, Flores, & VanderLeest, 2019). Taking an age-specific motivational perspective provides an opportunity for the HR practitioners within the organizations to better understand the needs of the employees in different points of their life and therefore find ways to successfully satisfy them.

A mentoring relationship between older and more experienced colleagues and younger ones at the beginning of their career, has the potential to satisfy the needs proposed in both motivational theories. The process of knowledge transfer can have a positive motivational impact for both parties involved. In accordance with the socio-emotional selectivity theory, the younger employees get the possibility to acquire knowledge while the older ones get satisfaction from the positive social experiences and the knowledge sharing. Apart from the opportunity to gain knowledge from older employees, not limited to specific tasks but also to the functioning of the organization and the relationships in it, the younger employees have also the possibility to increase the competences, as one of the basic needs pointed out in the self-determination theory. The increased competences would likewise mean that they would be able to respond better to tasks and challenges by which they can exhibit more autonomy at work. Being able to contribute to younger employees' knowledge and therefore shaping the future generations, yields an opportunity for the older colleagues to experience psychological freedom and enact autonomy at work. In addition, it is likely that the older employees would feel more competent by utilizing their existing skill sets and transferring them to younger colleagues. Eventually, both the younger and the older employees can satisfy their need for relatedness at work by establishing a close mentoring relationship and feeling connected (Burmeister, Wang, & Hirschi, in press, pp. 8-9).

3.1 Types of mentoring relationships

According to Zachary (2011), mentoring relationships can fall into four categories:

1. One-to-one mentoring
   a. Supervisory mentoring
   b. Peer mentoring
   c. Reverse mentoring
2. Group mentoring
   a. Facilitated group mentoring
   b. Peer mentoring group
   c. Team mentoring
3. Distance mentoring and
4. Cross-cultural mentoring.

To be begin with, **one-to-one mentoring** relationships are usually the traditional ones, described at the beginning of this chapter, where a senior employee takes the role of mentor and provides guidance and shares experience with a junior colleague to enhance his or hers career development (Deshwal, 2015). Alternately, when a company does not have enough resources in terms of experienced employees that might take the role of a mentor it might assign one senior employee to mentor several junior ones. This is called **group mentoring** (Zachary, 2011). This is a great opportunity for the mentor to reach out to more employees with which he/she can share his/hers expertise. This makes a lot of sense nowadays as the number of Baby Boomers decreases and the number of new generations in the workplace that need the mentoring increases. Another reason why this might be a good option is to avoid perceived favoritism when there are more mentees than there are available mentors (Zachary, 2019). Furthermore, with the development of more and more sophisticated ICT and their usage in the workplace, **distance mentoring** has been made more easier than ever. While in the past this kind of mentoring was limited to writing letters or having conversations over the phone, parties involved can nowadays interact via Skype or other teleconferencing technologies without having their distance affect their relationship. This is especially important for companies operating globally that want to have their experts able to share their know-how with colleagues in different locations. However, for such mentoring to be successful, it's critical to establish good communication between the partners as maintaining such relationship can be trickier than one with face-to-face communication. **Cross-cultural mentoring** seems crucial for the way businesses are operating nowadays. As workplace diversity increases and businesses are operating globally, it's important to have such mentoring programs that will promote inclusion in the workplace. In addition, it creates opportunities to increase understanding and tolerance between employees with different ethnical or cultural background. Finally, it is important to mention that these mentoring relationships are not mutually exclusive. They can in fact overlap. For instance, easily all the other types can fall under the distance mentoring if the mentor and mentee maintain a

relationship from different locations. In the same way, cross-cultural mentoring relationships can be one-to-one, group or even a distant one (Zachary, 2011).

What is of interests for this master's thesis is to take a closer look of the one-to-one mentoring relations, summarized in Table 3. In addition, the table provides strategies to ensure successful mentoring relationships in the workplace.

Table 3: One-to-one mentoring types

Mentoring Description Model	Description	Strategies for Supporting Success
Supervisory mentoring	Formal or informal mentoring job and performance-related relationships between a supervisor and a direct report.	• Provide mentoring training for supervisors to prevent role confusion.
Peer mentoring	Peers at the same level of experience, expertise, organizational status, age cohort, etc., form a mentoring relationship; this is appropriate for achievement of some goals and not for others.	• If formal, be explicit about the outcomes. • Be alert to the fact that this type of mentoring works better when peers have differing kinds and levels of experience or expertise. For example, someone who is brand new to the organization should not be mentoring someone about the organizational culture.
Reverse mentoring	Employee with specific technological knowledge shares that know-how with a senior executive to facilitate the speed with which the individual gains technological knowledge or skill. Relationship bridges the hierarchical structure.	• Put safety net in place to protect senior executive from looking and feeling stupid. • Prepare "younger" people so they have confidence and feel ready to engage in this type of relationship.

Source: Zachary (2011).

Supervisory mentoring occurs between a supervisor and a direct reportee. It can be connected to the employee's development targets, regular learning and feedback (Zachary, 2011). According to Green & Bauer (1995), reportees involved in such a mentoring experience show increased performance, higher involvement with the company and therefore, promotion rates. But, to be able to fully grasp the benefits of such mentoring arrangement, some measures need to be taken. Firstly, it is important for the mentor which at the same time holds the role of a supervisor, to be able to successfully switch from one

role to another when needed. Second, it might be difficult for the mentee to have an honest and open conversation with his/hers mentor. The reason why is because they might be held accountable for what they say and do, and at the end of the day, their mentor will be the one evaluating their performance, tasks and bonuses. This has the potential to make them reluctant to sharing their honest opinion on things that matter. Finally, if a supervisor has more than one mentee that directly report to them, he/she should take care of the time and attention given to each as misconceptions about favoritism might easily arise. However, with nurturing a proper mentoring culture in the organization, careful planning and trainings, these problems can be easily avoided (Zachary, 2011).

The second type of one-to-one mentoring relationship is the **peer mentoring**. It involves two colleagues – peers in a mentoring arrangement. They can be either at the same level within the organizational hierarchy or they might hold the same position within different departments in the organization. In addition, they also might be from the same generation. This mentoring relationship is assumed to be more relaxing and easier to establish than the one that involves employees with different power and status within the organization. It can go both ways, one peer being the mentor and the other mentee or for both to change their role in different points in time (Zachary, 2011). Peer mentoring is an effective way of sharing job related knowledge, experience and expertise for colleagues that encounter similar situations while executing their tasks in the workplace (Deshwal, 2015). Alternatively, a new member in the organization can be assigned a colleague that has been working longer to be their peer mentor and familiarize them with the organization's culture, values and functioning (Zachary, 2011).

As stated in the previous chapters, the workplace is constantly changing and nowadays it seems more than ever. Having Generation Y already on the labor market and Generation Z joining soon, the structure of the employees in the companies is shifting and diversity is increasing. What makes Generation Y and Z unique compared to previous generations is the knowledge they bring to the workplace. Being extremely technologically literate and able to find every information possible on the Internet, gives Generation Y and Z competitive advantage over the other generations in the workplace. But the knowledge and expertise possessed by Baby Boomers should not be taken for granted. And the fact that only 6 % of them will remain in the global workforce by 2020 puts a lot of challenges for the companies (Statista Research Department, 2016). On one side, they need to find a way to transfer the knowledge Baby Boomers possess to the younger generations while on the other hand they need to find a way to motivate Baby Boomers to continue learning and accepting new challenges until they retire. Some companies have already started to look for ways to make a benefit from this situation and use it at their advantage. As one possibility to encourage knowledge sharing among generations within the company and support cross-generational relationships is through **reverse mentoring** (Deshwal, 2015).

3.2   Reverse mentoring

Reverse mentoring was for the first time introduced in 1999 at General Electric. The appointed Chief Executive Officer at the time Jack Welch, ordered 500 of his top executives to approach colleagues in their 20s or 30s to become their mentors. What he wanted to achieve with this idea was for the young employees to teach its executives more about the Internet and new technologies as he understood that young generations are experts on these matters. What was also so great about it, is that it does not include any additional cost to do it. With that, its executives took the role of a mentee and the younger colleagues of a mentor (Deshwal, 2015). This for certain was not a practice known before and for many came as a surprise. Although the initial idea was to share technology related knowledge, soon it spread out into other areas as well. For example, companies like KPMG and IBM are nowadays using reverse mentoring to raise awareness about the challenges employees from diverse cultural and racial background are facing to those working at more senior management level (NCWIT 2012 Summit - Workshop Slides, Reverse Mentoring Programs, 2012; Skoulding, 2018). With the introduction of reverse mentoring in the workplace, the rules of the game have changed; being a mentor is not limited to holding a senior position nor having a lot of years of experience in the company. Now, both parties have equal power in the relationship and co-learning can be focus and an outcome of the relationship (Burdett, 2014, p. 13).

3.2.1   Functions of mentoring and reverse mentoring

Murphy (2012, p. 555) assigns the following attributes to the reverse mentoring relationship: unequal status of the mentor and mentee, where in contrast to the traditional mentoring, the junior employee takes the role of a mentor while the seasoned employee takes the role of a mentee; transferring technical expertise and generational viewpoints from the young mentor to the mentee; development of professional and leadership skills of the mentors; and dedication to a common goal and joint learning. Table 4 provides an overview of the key functions of traditional and reverse mentoring. Functions are divided into three categories: career support, psychological support and role modelling.

For starters, when it comes to the career support, both provide coaching, exposure and visibility. But on top of that, reverse mentoring provides knowledge sharing which for the mentee includes the transfer of technical, social media knowledge and generational standpoints. This is also how skills development function is achieved. For the mentor, it provides a career planning opportunity and understanding of the bigger organizational picture which in a way corresponds with the coaching function provided in the traditional mentoring where the older employee offers the mentee organizational insights. Exposure and visibility it's given for both types of mentoring as usually the pairing is done in such way that the mentor and mentee would probably not get in contact if it wasn't for the relationship. Protection and challenging assignments are not part of the reverse mentoring functions due to the junior level of the mentor. Networking opportunities rise for both mentor and mentee

as they provide each other with "access" to generations that they might not have a lot of contact with within the organization. In addition, the extensive usage of social networks by the mentors might also increase its usage by the mentees for the purpose of developing relationships online. Finally, although the exposure, building a trusting and open relationship with the mentee might be beneficial for the mentor's career development and progress and the mentee might be able to advocate for it within the organization, still this is not the purpose of the reverse mentoring and therefore should not be anticipated *(Murphy, 2012)*.

Table 4: Comparison between traditional and reverse mentoring

Reverse Mentoring Exchange	Reverse Mentoring Functions	Traditional Mentoring Functions	Traditional Mentoring Exchange (Kram, 1985)
	Career Support	Career Support	
• Shares technical or content expertise and enhances understanding of generational trends • Provides guidance and feedback on training and mastery of new skills and knowledge • Collaboration on projects and research that create contact with each other's colleagues • Demonstrates technology savvy and identifies opportunities to apply knowledge • Generates new approaches to problems and suggestions for implementing solutions • Teaches about social networking sites and social media; introduces to peers/colleagues to increase social integration and social capital	• **Knowledge sharing** • Coaching* • Exposure and visibility • **Skill development*** • **Challenging ideas** • Networking*	• Sponsorship • Coaching • Exposure and visibility • Protection • Challenging assignments	• Public support for advancement in the organization • Enhances knowledge and understanding of how to navigate effectively in the corporate world • Create opportunities to demonstrate competence through contact with other senior managers • Shields mentee from untimely or potentially damaging contacts with other senior managers • Assigning challenging work, supported with training and ongoing performance feedback
	Psychosocial Support	Psychosocial Support	
• Provides support for learning and feedback on new knowledge and skill acquisition • Provides support and encouragement that enables mentee/mentor to experiment with new behaviors • Mutual liking and sharing of life events through informal exchange; connecting friends across levels or divisions in the organization • Openly discuss developmental needs and encourage career and personal development	• **Support and feedback** • Acceptance and confirmation • Friendship • **Affirmation and encouragement***	• Role modeling • Acceptance and confirmation • Friendship • Counseling	• Attitudes, values, and behavior provide a model for mentee to emulate • Provides support and encouragement that enables mentee to experiment with new behaviors • Social interaction characterized by mutual liking, understanding, and informal exchanges about work and nonwork experiences • Enables mentee to explore personal concerns that may interfere with a positive sense of self in the organization; talk openly about anxieties/fears
	Role Modeling		
• Offers fresh perspective on the organization and its business(es) • Demonstrates openness to new ideas, innovation, and a global perspective • Shares willingness to learn	• **New perspective*** • Behavior to emulate • Identifying with values		
*Reverse mentoring functions that differ from traditional mentoring are in bold. Asterisks indicate overlap with alternative mentoring functions			

Source: Murphy (2012).

The psychological support comes from the development of open and trusting relationship which provides a solid foundation for building a friendship. The communication between the mentor and mentee as employees who come from different generations offers numerous opportunities for gaining an understanding for their similarities, differences and viewpoints. In addition, the proximity between different organizational levels decreases and understanding across departments or management levels is reached (Murphy, 2012).

While in the traditional mentoring role modelling is considered a part of the psychological support, in reverse mentoring it's identified as a new function. As the junior employee is in a role of a mentor and therefore expert in fields for which the mentee although senior has less experience in, it gives a possibility for both to identify positive aspects in each other behavior and model that behavior in their future actions. Junior mentors give their fresh standpoints on the way they understand they think, solve problems and generate ideas while

the experienced mentees represent role models for professional behavior, communication skills and dedication to lifelong learning (Murphy, 2012).

3.2.2 Prerequisites for a successful reverse mentoring program

A good reverse mentoring program and consequently a relationship developed between the mentor and the mentee does not happen by accident. According to Murphy (2012, p. 566), predeterminants are the principles of respect and reciprocity. When building a successful reverse mentoring program few things need to be taken into consideration.

Firstly, the program itself must be supported by the top management in the company. Active participation of the employees from the higher management gives the program credibility and importance. If the company fails to ensure their time and support, the rest of the employees won't commit themselves to participate either.

Furthermore, preparing the participant for such experience is crucial. Guidelines for their respective roles and responsibilities should be provided. For both participants this can be first such experience and it's pivotal to give them some indications of how they can start and develop their relationship. It might be hard for the experienced employee to be in the role of a listener and a mentee. At the same time, for the younger employee to be in the shoes of a mentor when lacking such previous experience.

The matching process must be done based on the data coming from the participants. Their different motivations, backgrounds and goals must be taken into consideration for the right people to be matched. This can be done either through filling out a questionnaire or doing an interview where they will state what they expect and would like to get from the program (Murphy, 2012). Another way to understand the motivations of the participants is to examine them through the age-specific motivational perspectives, as described at the beginning of chapter 3. Alignment between participant's age and the role in the knowledge-sharing process can provide motivational benefits for both partners in the relationship (Burmeister, Wang, & Hirschi, in press).

In addition, diversity plays a great role as it allows for different points of view to be examined which will lead to finding new ways of approaching and solving organizational challenges. Diversity can be expressed in the different age, gender, position within the company as well as geographical location. Furthermore, it is important to make sure that the reverse mentoring program is established in an environment that is free of judgment and it's trustworthy. This means that sharing different points of view are welcomed and that it is also "safe" to talk openly about different topics without the fear that conversations between parties would be shared outside the relationship. What is also important to mention is to separate this kind of program from the performance-related systems so that participants would feel comfortable to acknowledge that they might be missing a skill or knowledge and they would like to learn about it by being part of the program.

Finally, balancing between giving enough freedom of choice regarding topics to discuss or skills to be learned for those that enter in the reverse mentoring relationship with a clear goal in mind and at the same time providing some possibilities about topics to discuss for those unsure of the desired outcome is important to meet the expectations of both types of participants (Deshwal, 2015).

3.2.3 Examples of successfully implemented reverse mentoring programs

Since it was first introduced in 1999, companies like IBM, Unilever, Dell, Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, Deloitte & Touche, just to name a few, have made a paradigm shift and started introducing reverse mentoring programs in their workplace (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012; Chen, 2014). This section describes some of the ways in which reverse mentoring is implemented within companies to achieve organizational goals by encouraging development of cross-generational relationships and knowledge sharing.

For instance, at Microsoft reverse mentoring was for the first time introduced in 2014 in their Austrian office. From then on it was slowly implemented to other European locations. In their office in Norway, one of the junior employees was matched with a General Manager to do a reverse mentoring with. In an article from the Microsoft reporter (2015), an experience from colleagues involved in a mentoring relationship it is describe. What they said about reverse mentoring is that it provides them with the opportunity to bridge the gap between different generations, expand their views and share technical knowledge. The General Manager, a person with an extensive experience, said that in the case of reverse mentoring with his colleague who is just 28 years old he feels that he has a lot of new things to learn. Topic that his young colleague was able to provide him insights on were new digital communication tools, what are the workplace trends and an understanding of how young people see the organization and what are their expectations. Topics that are important for an organization to stay an attractive employer on the market and be able to attract talents were also discussed. For the young colleague, this was a great opportunity to learn about leadership and understand the "big organizational picture". Besides benefits for both partners, the HR lead of Microsoft explains that the organization benefits from such reverse mentoring program as well. It empowered Generation Y to speak up about concerns they have regarding the workplace and at the same time improve the communication in the organization. In addition, she states that it is a great way for the organization to learn about the behaviors and engagement of Generation Y and Z which form their new client segment. Because of it, the company can better target and satisfy their needs (Microsoft reporter, 2015).

Furthermore, employees at IBM have embraced this practice too. But there they had a bit of different idea and goal in mind. They have chosen ten Senior Executives and asked them to choose a culture they wanted to learn about. Following their answer, they were matched with a non-executive woman from that culture to be their mentor and discuss about cultural

differences. The aim was to improve understanding and knowledge around cultural sensitivity and adaptability, promote better global collaboration, dissolve stereotype issues and increase cultural awareness. One of their Senior Vice President Legal and Regulatory Affairs and General Counsel said that the reverse mentoring has given him an opportunity to get to know a person with which he would never get the chance to talk to simply because their paths do not come across. His mentor said that it gave her an opportunity to talk about the challenges she is facing in her environment, provide the mentee with perspectives about different geographical regions and therefore increase the support for the developing countries. Other participants said that they were able to share advices concerning cultural differences, for example during the hiring process, social media differences between countries and generational perspectives. However, according to the reflections of women mentors, experiences were divided. Some reported that it seemed mentees lacked the understanding that they should make culture part of their discussion, they didn't acquire any tangible benefits or didn't spend enough time in the program. Others said that they were happy to be part of this learning experience, discuss about career paths and meet new colleagues. Nevertheless, the program itself is a good starting point to increase awareness about the need to address cultural differences and stereotypes in the workplace. For the Senior, it provides an understanding of how business is done in different cultural settings. And for women in the workplace, an opportunity to develop through mentoring relationships and boost their leadership skills (NCWIT 2012 Summit - Workshop Slides, Reverse Mentoring Programs, 2012).

At KPMG, the reverse mentoring program is an opportunity for those at more senior levels to truly understand the challenges colleagues from diverse backgrounds face in the workplace, especially those with black heritage. The aim is to improve diversity within the whole organization and build more inclusive culture. They have realized that some of their diverse colleagues don't have as much direct exposure to partners on a day to day basis because of the nature of the work they do. With the reverse mentoring program, on one hand, junior employees have a chance to understand what does being a partner in the organization means. Many of them said that the work that they do is nothing like they have imagined. On the other hand, senior partners raised their awareness about things that they have never considered, being a white middle-class man in the organization. Things like the fact that when a black heritage junior employee goes into a meeting room, they might be the only person of black heritage in there. As a result of the reverse mentoring relationship, junior partners reported an increase in the sense of belongingness to the organization and satisfaction in terms of having their voices heard. For the senior partners, it gave a chance to understand the experience junior employees are going through as it quite often distinguishes from the one they have, being in the organization for many years. In addition, it gave them insights regarding the culture which must be continuously reviewed (Skoulding, 2018).

In Turkey it seems that reverse mentoring is especially popular within the banking sector. Tayşir & Ülgen (2017, p. 315) provide research insights into the reverse mentoring programs at three Turkish banks: Akbank, Garanti Bank and Denizbank. Their approaches were

somehow similar, and they all provided pairs with topics to choose from for their discussion. Some of the proposed ones were about social media usage and personal branding, mobile applications, digitalization, new age banking, leadership for new generations and expectations. Besides those, they could choose a topic on their own. While Tayşir & Ülgen (2017) provide understanding of the implementation process of the reverse mentoring program in the abovementioned banks, Güğerçin (2017) provides details on the participants' experiences specifically in Denizbank. The benefits he had identified connected to the concrete case study of Denizbank and ones through a literature review are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Benefits from reverse mentoring

For the Mentor	For the Mentee	For the Organization
Self-confidence	Ability to adapt to change	Open communication
Personal and career development	Lifetime learning	Learning organization
Contribution to decision making	Positive image management, participative management	A path to a flattening organization
Gaining experience in leadership	Leadership development (especially for Generation Y)	Productive organization, organizational image management
Decision-making ability based on knowledge	Learn to gain support of employees	Organization citizenship, strengthen psychological contract
Innovation and creativity skills	Innovation and creativity skills	Attract and retain talent
Decreasing generational conflict	Decreasing generational conflict	Positive psychology, motivated employees
Data-driven decision making concerning different customers	Understanding expectations of Generation Y consumers	Customer-oriented organization

Source: Güğerçin (2017).

On one hand, reverse mentoring gives less experienced employees in the position of a mentor a chance to develop their leadership skills. This is of huge importance in correlation with the increased retainment of the Baby Boomers and the shortage of employees capable of taking up their leadership roles. Moreover, it gives them the chance to fast track their careers. By pairing them with senior manager or an executive, their talent is being exposed on a larger scale within the company and they get to talk to people with whom otherwise they might not be able to reach out to. Ultimately but not necessarily, it might lead to a career advancement and promotions. By talking to someone with a vast experience, they have the chance to

understand the bigger picture of how the business world functions and learn more about decision making. Besides this, they are also benefiting from listening career advices and getting the feedback they are craving for. This way the learning becomes two sided (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). On a personal level, their self-confidence is also affected in positive ways (Güğerçin, 2017). They do possess technological knowledge that they could easily transfer to older generations that do not feel so comfortable using it, but what they can gain is some help in developing their critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills (Gibson & Sodeman, 2014).

On the other hand, the seasoned executives and managers in the role of a mentee get a chance to first-hand understand a different generational perspective. This should potentially lead to decrease in conflict and dissolve the stereotypes they hold for young generations. Moreover, technology has become a vital part of every organization's operations. The digitalization and the usage of social media as means of communication between the organization and its clients and other external stakeholders has made it a must for mentees to keep up to date with the latest technologies and social media communication tools. Through the reverse mentoring program, these specific knowledge and skills can be easily and cost-free transferred from the mentors to the mentees. They can understand how technological advancements and social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook or Instagram can be successfully applied for their professional and personal use (Deshwal, 2015; Güğerçin, 2017).

Finally, the organization can benefit from having productive and motivated employees that are willing to learn and share best practices among themselves. Other benefits identified are positive working environment and culture, strong employee bond, open communication and customer-oriented organization (Güğerçin, 2017). Reverse mentoring has proven to be an effective way for bridging a gap between employees from different generations that at the same time promotes diversity (Baily, 2009). It provides a way to establish a relationship from which both parties can learn and satisfy different needs (Deshwal, 2015).

4 REVERSE MENTORING IN PRACTICE – EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS WITHIN A CHOSEN ORGANIZATION

The purpose of this master thesis is to contribute to a better understanding of what reverse mentoring is within the organizational context and how it can be used to enhance cross-generational relationships and knowledge transfer. For this reason, a literature review has been carried out and presented in the previous chapters. In addition to that, an investigating of how it was implemented within a chosen organization will be presented in the upcoming chapters. More particularly, an emphasis is put on how employees within the chosen organization see reverse mentoring and what are the benefits expressed by them. After gaining enough understanding of the meaning and how the process is conveyed,

recommendations for improvement can be drawn. To tackle these challenges the following research questions need to be addressed:

- What is reverse mentoring?
- In what way reverse mentoring has been implemented in a chosen company?
- What are the perceived benefits of reverse mentoring through the lenses of the employees?

The goal is to understand reverse mentoring in the organizational context that would give an opportunity to identify and suggest recommendations for improvement that are going to further enhance the success of the program.

4.1   Research methodology and sample

To address the abovementioned challenges, a qualitative research is undertaken. The strategy chosen for doing this research is an exploratory single case study. The reason behind this choice lies in the possibility for an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon, which in this case is reverse mentoring (Güğerçin, 2017; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

The case study is carried out in an international organization called Danfoss Trata which is part of the Danfoss Group. The reason why this specific organization is selected is because of the direct involvement between the author of the thesis and the organization as well as the author's participation in the Reverse mentoring program within the organization.

Data is obtained through both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with twenty-two participants in the Reverse mentoring program. Semi-structured interviews are ones in which the interviewer has predefined questions and topic he/she wishes to go through during the interview, however they may not all be asked or asked in the same sequence based on the context and the specific respondent. The technique used for selecting the sample is non-probability purposive sampling. This sampling technique provides a possibility to interview "information-rich cases" (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009, p. 239). Respondents are chosen in such way that will cover differences in gender, generation, nationality, educational background, position they hold within the organization as well as first time versus multiple times participants in the program. Details about the sample are presented in Table 6. Twenty-two respondents took participation in the interview process for this case study. Both genders are equally represented. Most of them are Slovenes (86 %) as the company is based in Slovenia but participants from other nationalities are also interviewed to capture cultural differences. Participants are divided into three generational cohorts according to the timeframe presented in Figure 4 in the second chapter: Baby Boomers (5 %), Generation X (27 %), and the biggest share of the respondents represent Generation Y (68 %). All of them have at least a Bachelor's degree and a significant number even a Master's degree. Four of the participants

with a Bachelor's degree are in the process of obtaining a Master's degree. Most of the respondents participated twice in the Reverse mentoring program.

Table 6: Sample's characteristics

Number of participants in the interview process: 22			
Gender:			
Female 50 %		Male 50 %	
Senior partners 9 %	Junior partners 41 %	Senior partners 14 %	Junior partners 36 %
Nationality:			
Slovenes 86 %		Other 14 %	
Generation:			
Baby Boomers 5 %	Generation X 27 %		Generation Y 68 %
Education level:			
Bachelor's degree 55 %	Master's degree 41 %		Doctor's degree 5 %
Number of times participating in the Reverse mentoring program:			
One 36 %	Two 45 %	Three 14 %	Four 5 %

Source: Own work.

As suggested in Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill (2009, p. 234), data is collected in this way until data saturation was achieved meaning no new insights were gained with each additional interview. In addition to conducting interviews with the participants of the Reverse mentoring program, an interview with the HR Business Partner is carried out to understand why the program is introduced in the organization in the first place. Secondary data is collected through surveys that Danfoss Trata has already carried out at the end of the reverse mentoring cycles. To be more specific, at the end of three out of four cycles of the Reverse mentoring program, a survey was sent to the participants to gain a feedback and an understanding of their experience. In one cycle feedback was not collected due to lack of time in the organization to create and distribute the survey. Additional material is also gathered through internal resources used for promoting the program within the organization, presentations and company's annual reports.

The data collected allows to describe the way the program is implemented and the benefits perceived by the employees. In the end, it will be used to compare the theory and the practice and suggest improvements. By undertaking this research, the author hopes to give recommendations for improvement and highlight how reverse mentoring can be beneficial for companies which face various challenges pertaining to the flow of knowledge between generations and the impact it could possibly have on the 'future of work'.

**4.2   General information about the chosen organization**

The Danfoss Group was founded by Mads Clausen in 1933 in Nordborg, Denmark during the Great Depression. It was initially named Køleautomatik og Apparatfabrik and it was renamed to Danfoss around 13 years later in 1946. He started the business at a farmhouse owned by his parents with the vision to produce and sell expansion valves, products that at those times were only available from the U.S. With his entrepreneurial spirit, dedication to producing and selling high quality products and constantly innovating to satisfy changing clients' needs, Mads Clausen was able to transform his farmhouse business to an international organization with global presence (Danfoss, n.d.-a; Danfoss, n.d.-b). Danfoss today employs more than 27.000 people which are committed to engineering products that help people and businesses build better tomorrow. The company owns 71 production sites in 20 countries and sell state-of-the-art products to more than 100 countries worldwide. Danfoss has a wide portfolio of products and provides solutions for heating, cooling, refrigerating and off-highway machinery. In addition, it offers solutions suitable for renewable energy and district energy infrastructure for cities. The business is divided into four different segments: Danfoss Heating, Danfoss Cooling, Danfoss Drives and Danfoss Power Solutions (Danfoss A/S, 2019a). Year over year Danfoss continues to grow. In 2018 its sales reached 6,1 billion-euro, 7 % growth expressed in local currency and 10,6 % EBIT margin. To this date, the organization remains in the ownership of the Clausen family (Danfoss A/S, 2019a, p. 5).

Within the Danfoss Heating segment operates Danfoss Trata, one of the group's factories based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Danfoss Trata was initially a company called Kovinolivarna Franc Smole founded in 1937. The company was working in the field of casting and machining of cast iron products for industrial and communal use. During the years, it has grown its product portfolio to include electronic regulators and valves. It has significantly expanded its market share and became the market leader in the territory of Yugoslavia during the '90s in the field of district heating and air conditioning regulation. Consequently, in 1995 the company was acquired by the Danfoss Group and transformed into a competence center for the development of district heating components. To date, Danfoss Trata has proven to be a successful investment. It continuously shows growth, outstanding results which have led to expansion of the production capacities and opening an additional factory in Kamnik, Slovenia (Danfoss Trata d.o.o., n.d.).

People play a vital role in the Danfoss Group and consequently at Danfoss Trata. The company recognizes that its success is largely dependent on the employees it hires. That is why a special attention is paid into attracting and developing talents and leaders of tomorrow. At the same time, Danfoss promotes high-performing diverse teams and it's proud to have more than 100 nationalities under its roof. Those are the backbone of their strategy that aims for further growth and development of the Group (Danfoss A/S, 2019a; Danfoss A/S, 2019b). Besides being employee diverse in terms of nationality, different generations also take part in the company. More specifically, 32 % of Danfoss' employees come from

Generation Y and Z while only 13 % of the Baby Boomers are left in the company (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Age distribution at the Danfoss Group

Legend:
- 15-24 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55+ years

5%
13%
25%
27%
30%
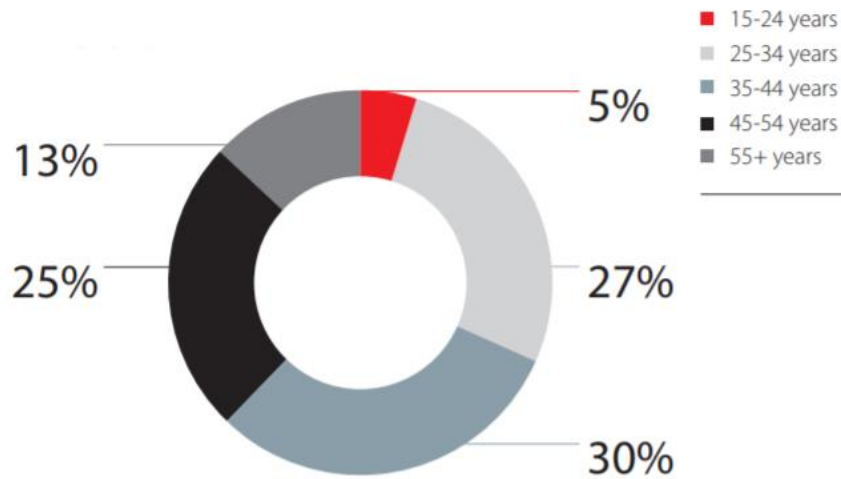
Source: Danfoss A/S (2019b).

The company puts special emphasis on developing the leaderships skills of the people managers as they have a direct influence and are held responsible for further spotting and developing talents within their teams. This precaution seems justified if we take into account the decreasing numbers of Baby Boomers within the company and increasing number of new generations that lack the experience and expertise that the older generations possess (Danfoss A/S, 2019b).

Figure 7: Age distribution at Danfoss Trata

Legend:
- 15-24 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55+ years

9%
17%
3%
34%
37%
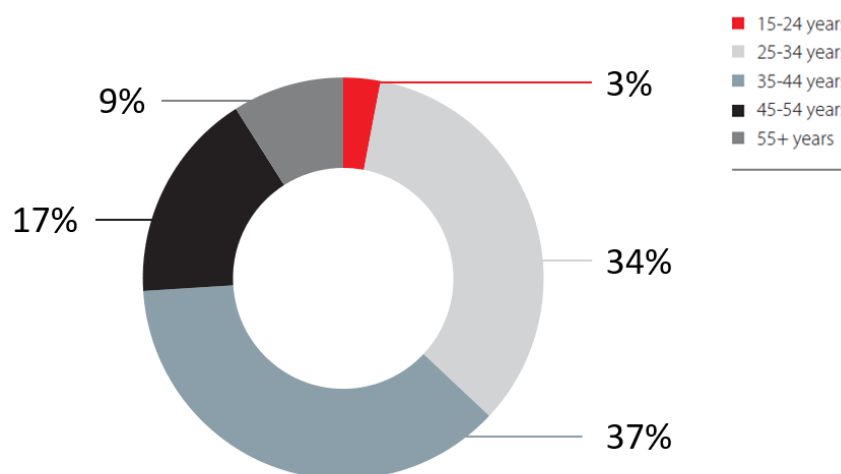
Source: Own work.

At the end of 2018, Danfoss Trata employed 502 people and their age structure is presented in Figure 7 (Danfoss Trata d.o.o., 2019). However, the data presented shows only those that are permanently employed. To be more concrete, besides them, Danfoss Trata has additional 169 employees that are hired through an external agency. Those represent around 25 % of the total Danfoss Trata's workforce. Employees hired through an external agency are mostly students and therefore part of the younger generations and blue-collar workers that come from various generations. When employees are not directly hired through the company, they are not required to share their personal data such as birthdate and therefore the company itself lacks this information in its database. Nevertheless, 75 % of the total employees are presented in Figure 7 which gives at least a rough overview of the generations working at Danfoss Trata. Generation Y and Z form 37 % of the company's workforce and it is expected that this number will increase in the future. On the other hand, 9 % of the Baby Boomers are still actively working in the company. As previously mentioned, the Danfoss Group pays a lot of attention to developing its employees. Some of the activities undertaken to achieve that include the Talent Hackathon and the Global Mentoring program.

The Talent hackathon is an event where 40 participants from across the organization, coming from different job positions, nationalities and seniority are supposed to within 24 hours brainstorm on new ways to develop talents. Afterwards, the ideas are pitched and presented to a board of senior leaders that decide which one is going be pursued. Steps toward implementations are taken accordingly (Danfoss A/S, 2019b).

The Global mentoring program brings together handpicked managers that have shown impeccable potential to lead and take new challenges. This is a traditional mentoring program in which they are paired with a senior mentor with whom they meet regularly in the course of a year. The outcome of this program is to promote the growth of mentees into higher leadership positions because on average, more than half of the future leaders come from within Danfoss (Danfoss A/S, 2019b).

Besides taking part into activities performed on a global level, Danfoss Trata has recognized the challenges that the future of work brings and for that reason decided to seek for alternative ways to address them. Therefore, in 2014 a group of passionate people within the organization willing to co-create the workspace and make it more attractive for future employees, came together under the name Future of Work. This group of self-motivated and proactive employees came up with several ideas about how to align the company with the future of work trends. One of the activities undertaken by the team was a development of a reverse mentoring program.

4.3   Data analysis

Reverse mentoring at Danfoss Trata was first introduced in 2015 and since then it has been successfully occurring for four years in a sequence (Kiar, 2017). In an interview with the HR Business partner and employees involved in the process of establishing the program, insights

about the process of deployment were gained. The idea followed the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Danfoss Trata. They already started talking about the future megatrends thinking what they can do to bridge the gap between where the company is now and where it should be 20 years forward, in 2035. In addition, one of the employee involved in the development of the program from the very beginning explained the following: *"...we were like ok we want to change our company we want to change this big dinosaur to something more agile, to something more entrepreneur, that Generation Y and Z and the one who are coming would be much more willing and motivated to work in this big company."* The result of this thought process was the development and implementation of a reverse mentoring program. When asked what the expectations from the program are and what are they trying to achieve with it, the HR Business partner answered the following: *"Exchanging experiences from Juniors to Seniors and vice versa, connecting different generations, making you know understanding how one generation is thinking and working and how is the other working and thinking, networking, competence building."* (K. Petronijevič, interview, May 31, 2019).

The program was for the first time established in November 2015. From that time to date, four reverse mentoring cycles occurred which had a total of 40 Senior and 99 Junior partners taking participation in it. More details about the number of applications, Senior and Junior partners participating in the program year over year are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Reverse mentoring cycles at Danfoss Trata
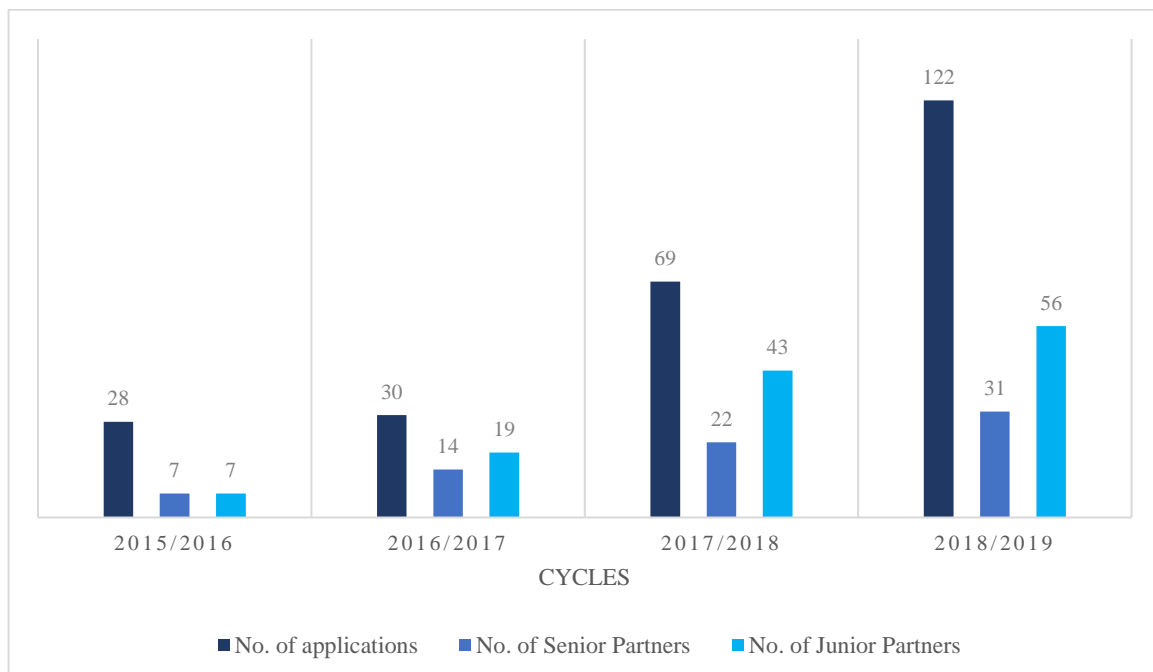
Source: Own work.

The first cycle occurred between November 2015 and June 2016. Seven senior top management employees were chosen to take up the role of Senior partners. Rest of the

35

employees were encouraged to apply. Out of 28 applicants only seven were matched with one due to the limited number of Senior partners. As the program turned out to be a success, an increased number of employees showed interest in participating. The following 2016 year, the company decided to increase the number of Senior partners to respond to the demand and interest of the Junior partners. For that reason, employees that were directly reporting to the senior management were asked to take up the role of a Senior partners as well. In this cycle, the number of Senior partners increased from seven to fourteen and the number of Junior partners reached nineteen as some Senior partners decided to take more than on Junior partner. Total number of applications reached 30. In the third cycle in 2017, the number of applications grew for more than double, from 30 to 69, as a response to the increased number of Senior partners available to apply to. In this round, all line managers with at least three years of people's management experience were invited to participate in the program as Senior partners making them 22 in total. They were matched with 43 Junior partners. Finally, in the latest cycle in 2018, there was a record number of applications, 122 and 56 Junior partners were matched with 31 Senior partners.

Danfoss Trata has a special SharePoint webpage that is dedicated to the Reverse mentoring program. It contains all the relevant information employees need in order to find out about what the program is and how they can apply (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Reverse mentoring webpage

Source: Danfoss Trata (n.d.).

In the beginning, Senior partners create their profiles containing information about their job position within the company, what knowledge or expertise they can offer from one side, an what they expect from their Junior partners on the other side. When this part is done, an e-

mail is sent out to all the employees at Danfoss Trata announcing the start of the new reverse mentoring cycle. Figure 10 portraits a reverse mentoring cycle at Danfoss Tarta from the beginning to the end. For the blue-collar workers that don't use work e-mails, there's a person responsible for a certain point in the production which is also responsible for communicating and promoting reverse mentoring amongst the employees in the production. In addition, employees from the HR department also explain the whole process to the workers and encourage them to apply. The application process lasts two to three weeks. During this period employees can choose up to three Senior partners to which they can apply to. They are advised to apply to more than one Senior partner to increase their chances of being paired because of the imbalance between the number of applicants and the number of available Senior partners.

Figure 10: Reverse mentoring cycle at Danfoss Trata
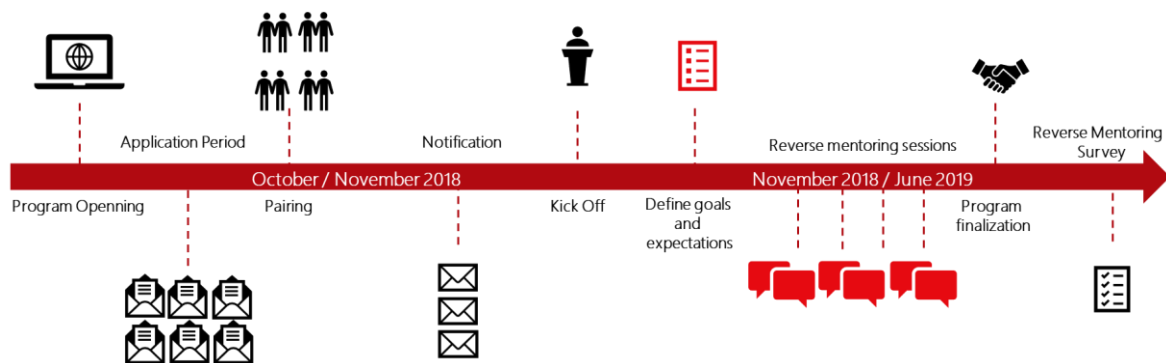
Source: Danfoss Trata (2018).

The application consists of seven different questions. The first two questions are general ones, asking about employee's name and position they hold within the company. The next five questions are about who they would like to choose as their Senior partner, why are they interested in the selected Senior partner, three questions they would like to ask the Senior partner and what they can offer to them if selected. At the end of the application they need to rank the chosen partner based on their preference, one being the most preferred one, three being the least preferred one. Employees in the production fill out a paper form which is collected by the HR and processed with the rest of the applications. Once the application process is closed, applications are sent to the respective Senior partner to choose their Junior partners. Based on their available time and preference, Senior Partners choose up to three Junior partners. In some cases, they take more than three Junior partners but that is not recommended due to time constrains. When pairs are finalized, Junior partners are informed vie e-mail regarding the outcome of the application process. Those paired with a Senior partner are invited to a Kick-off event which is organized for the selected participants. Those that were not paired with a Senior partner are encouraged to apply again in the next cycle. During the Kick-off event, usually the HR Business partner explains some key points to be taken into consideration to facilitate and maximize the experience for both Senior and Junior partners. Things discussed are the different generations in the workplace and how these

generations amongst various other things, have their own communication style. The point is to stress that the way employees are learning is also different. Furthermore, the difference between mentoring in the traditional sense and reverse mentoring is explained. In the traditional mentoring a senior employee guides and shares knowledge with a less experienced one while the reverse mentoring concept is conveyed in a way that it's a mutual exchange of knowledge, skills and points of view that both participants can learn from. To the question why employees should participate in the program, they list the following benefits: development opportunities, closing the gap between generational differences, encouraging cross-generational relationships and networking, knowledge and experience sharing and building trust (Danfoss Trata, 2018). Some tips for successful reverse mentoring are also shared to ensure that the participants are getting the most out of the experience. For example, they advise them to keep an open mind to the experience, different points of view and communication style. They should not concentrate on the differences in the hierarchical position, power or status they are holding within the company. They are also advised to make a time plan and establish and communicate openly a goal and expectation of their relationship, be patient and listen to one another. At the end of the presentation pairs are announced. After the official presentation is over, Senior and Junior partners establish their first official contact as a pair. Senior partners are the ones that are advised to steer the relationship in a sense that it's their responsibility to establish the first one-to-one session and to schedule the next meetings. Their meetings can be in the office but also outside the office in a place both parties find suitable. The program is intended to last for six months. Nevertheless, pairs are encouraged to continue their relationship after the official Reverse mentoring program is over if both agree to that.

At the end of the reverse mentoring cycle, all participants are asked to fill out a survey with questions about their experience. They need to write what are the three main benefits from participating as a Junior/Senior Partner in the Reverse mentoring program that they would like to point out (personally and professionally); what they think it could be improved regarding the process, program, ways of collaboration and how; would they recommend the program to a colleague and if so, why. In the first cycle, the survey was answered by two Senior and five Junior partners. Unfortunately, for the second cycle feedback was not collected due to lack of time to distribute the survey. In the third cycle, seventeen Junior and seven Senior partners filled out the survey. Finally, in the fourth cycle twenty-three Junior and eleven Senior partners provided their feedback and opinion about the participation in the Reverse mentoring program.

In addition to the data collected through the surveys, twenty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees to get a more comprehensive understanding about their experiences from participating in the Reverse mentoring program. As previously mentioned, during the four reverse mentoring cycles 40 employees took the role of Senior Partners whereas 99 employees took the role of Junior partners in the program. Out of those, seventeen of the interviews were carried out with Junior Partners while five were conducted with Senior Partners. The discrepancy in number of interviews between Senior and Junior

partners corresponds with the smaller in size number of Senior partners compared to the overall Junior partners. In addition, getting an appointment for an interview to be carried out with a Senior Partner was significantly more challenging compared to the Junior partners due to their busy schedule and nature of work. The respondents were chosen in such way that could cover variety in terms of age, gender, nationality, educational background, department, position and work experience in the company. The questions asked during the interview process are the following:

- What does reverse mentoring mean to you?
- How many times have you participate in the program?
- How did you choose your Senior/Junior partner?
- Did you have any trouble in terms of what would you offer to the Senior partner? (this was a question addressed only to Junior Partners)
- Do you think the relationship with your partner was more like mentoring in the traditional sense or reverse mentoring?
- Do you think it helped you in any way with your career or doing your job better, directly or indirectly?
- What are the things you like about the program in terms of benefits?
- What in your opinion are the potential obstacles for successful reverse mentoring to happen?
- Do you think that reverse mentoring can have any negative outcomes/effects?
- What are the things you don't like about the program or you think it can be improved?

The answers to the abovementioned questions were audio recorded and afterwards transcribed. Before the interview started, participants were asked if they felt comfortable having their answers recorded. Only one participant asked for its answers to be written down rather than recorded. The rest twenty-one respondents gave a consent to it. In order to keep their identity private, a number to each participant was assigned corresponding with the total number of respondents. Names that were mentioned during the interview which were referring to other employees in the organization were also substituted and referred to as Person and assigned a number to it. The sequence of the questions differed from participant to participant. Each interview was unique in a way that they would start answering one question and their answer was somehow dictating the next logical question to ask. Some of the questions were not formally asked as participants already responded to them while answering other related questions. The duration of the interviews varied from five to approximately thirty minutes, depending on how much the respondent was willing to share. Some were right on point while others wanted to give more background to their answers. Another factor that might have an influence on how much respondents were willing to talk was the fact that the interviews were carried out in English and none of the participants are native English speakers. But since the official language in the company is English this is not expected to have a big impact on their abilities to respond to the questions. Those

respondents that were participating in more than one cycle had the opportunity to compare and contrast their experience with different partners.

4.4 Research results

4.4.1 Response examples with the excerpts from the interviews

The participants in the interview process have been asked to provide an answer to ten different questions. Besides getting an understanding of their perceived benefits from the reverse mentoring program, the aim was also to get a broader understanding and insights into their overall reverse mentoring experience at work.

When asked what Reverse mentoring means to them, the Senior partners gave the following answers:

Senior partner 1: *"For me this is a wonderful program where you expand your network with other Junior partners, in a great exchange of knowledge, experience, you know you get to learn something new, you get to hear the other side because often in my position you get a lot of information but they are very very one way information. And I really enjoy having discussions with Junior partners at certain very concrete initiatives or programs or things that they heard that we do, and how they see it, how they would like to improve it, I really like to learn from you know what they do and how they do, how they work and for me Reverse mentoring is really all about exchanging knowledge and experience and ideas, yeah."*

Senior partner 2: *"Sharing, couching, finding out about new things, like you said exploring potential in others that is not so visible to everyone at first sight, but yeah mostly is this giving hope, motivating young guys to do more... you can see that they would like to do something more, but they don't know how to achieve this. And I think that the main motivation or example you could give to them is that you really emphasize that by learning, by studying, by taking an extra effort is actually the way how to improve and how to grow. And I think this may be awareness is what they, I try to give them this just by you know telling about my experience."*

On the other hand, this is how Junior partners see the Reverse mentoring program:

Junior partner 1*:"...I see Reverse mentoring as an opportunity to learn, to learn from someone who has more experience and someone who has who has been through many different scenarios which you as a new person don't even have the chance to go through, so they have been through many economical changes, reorganizational changes they also have their own different experience maybe from different companies and they can share this with you and it's a perfect opportunity which is in a way unique opportunity. And then on the other hand you have a chance to get to know someone who you are seeing only on the meetings and only as a formal you have only a formal contact and you get a chance to*

become friends with them which is also unique opportunity. And then you also start thinking what should I offer this person so it's not only that he's taking the time to teach me something but I should also bring some value here so you start also to brainstorm yourself how you can contribute what this person can learn from you and this is also self-growing experience in my opinion because you start to think about what I know…"

Junior partner 3: *"... easier route to kind of to contact or to get quite a few hours with someone you look up to, with someone that you believe has some knowledge that could be helpful for you, and then basically kind of lead or get the knowledge that you are looking for from them in exchange for whatever knowledge that they believe you can offer to them. ...an enabler for the organization to kind of to have connections between departments…"*

Junior partner 4: *"It means to have someone at the other side who I can really talk deeply about my career path about my challenges at my job to have someone whom I can rely on, that not just relay on but who motivates me to continue growing."*

Junior partner 8: *"Reverse mentoring is sharing knowledge not just from the Senior partner to the Junior but vice versa, sharing the experiences. When you have someone who is on a very high position in a company they usually don't know the issues you are going through on a lower level and you can share this experience with them and they can maybe influence it from the top down and the other way around. A lot of things that we don't know in the company that is decided very high level, that it doesn't make sense to us for instance the reorganization or this kind of cases or when some decisions are made again on a vey high level that doesn't make sense to us it's good to have someone that can explain it from different point of view. And it's also sharing the different type of knowledge, we know that we Millennials think a little bit differently about what the leadership is, about what we expect from our management, we are more digitalized, maybe we have some different point of view that we can share with the top management and whoever is on the other side. And again, they can share their point of view and how they see things. It's good to exchange knowledge, it's good to get the broader picture how different people in the different levels of the organization see things, and basically to share knowledge on all levels."*

According to the answers of both Senior and Junior partners, it seems that the Reverse mentoring program it's a great opportunity for both sides to come to the same page. As mentioned in some of the answers, when they have a different view of the organization or organizational changes that are inevitably happening, it gives them an opportunity to discuss them and get the same understanding. Also, it allows for information to flow in both directions and gives the opportunity for the Junior partners to express how they see things in the organization and for the Senior partners to understand their point of view. Another really important thing, especially for the Generation Y is the need to be heard and this program gives them a chance exactly for that. In addition, the communication and exchange of experience between partners provides an opportunity for both parties to grow. This has an even greater benefit for Generation Y because they have a chance to fast tract their career

and prepare for taking up higher positions in the future by having someone to learn from first-hand.

What was an interesting to understand is on one hand how do Junior partners decide to which Senior partner to apply to. On the other hand, how Senior partners that receive more than one application choose which Junior partner(s) to build a reverse mentoring relationship with. From the answers collected, it seems like both decide in a similar way. They are looking for a person with which they do not have a contact with daily or someone that is complete opposite personality wise or work in another area from which they are usually involved with. More specifically for the Junior partners, someone they look up to or would like to develop their career path in the area of responsibility of the Senior partner. Another interesting answer was a partner from a different country, in this case Denmark, as most of the employees are Slovene while the company is Danish. When the Senior partners are making the decision, they are also choosing people which are looking for the skills and knowledge they are able to offer or are experts in. In general, with this question an insight of their thought process was also gained as some took the time to provide details and a background about their decision-making process.

Senior partner 1: *"I try to make them as diverse as possible, to get insight into different areas of the organization. So I don't want three people from the same organizational unit. I usually would select the ones that I feel it would be easiest for me to have a conversation with because once you get an application you can already read you know what kind of questions they're asking you, what they have to offer and for me I try to make it as spread around as possible."*

Senior partner 2: *"Yeah, I think the one that I didn't decide to go for was I knew him maybe from the old days and I was really looking for somebody that I didn't know. So that was maybe the first, somebody that I can meet for the first time and also I think the ones that expressed more interest into this what I am doing regarding the digital."*

Senior partner 3: *"... there were more and then I have chosen the one that I was on the first priority or something or it was more in line with the competences I have that I can give to the person."*

Senior partner 4: *"I in one year I have a bit more of the candidates so at that time what I ok set the limit so I so many I can handle I cannot handle more than I don't know three or two and then I choose by you know when you are in the reverse mentoring you know as a manager I can get the insight you know from the different areas in the organization. So then I pick up the ones from where I wanted to get this. It's more informal it's more yeah in this way. This is the one and yeah then it's also what I can contribute and that if we have something in common you know to discuss it's a it's a in a way it's a business but you know it's not only strictly business, it's a bit more to get a deeper insight to also the personality you know so if I found many interesting and yeah let's yeah in this way."*

Junior partner 2: *"...and basically I also wanted to have let's say a persona a mentor that's coming from different country, that's foreign. This was for me very important to get an insight of their way of thinking their culture and so on and so on because this is a Danish company, it's good to know the company's culture."*

Junior partner 3: *"Ok so, the first I went through was which positions or which kind of departments would be interesting for me. And then, then I kind of filtered through that and then I kind of had a five or whatever that I found interesting in terms of they are also their descriptions and then I kinda went to bit of what kind of personality that I think would suit me because I think that you can get a lot more from a person if you kinda have chemistry. Even though you know it's it also works if it's a very structured person and they are happy to mentor. It could also work if you just go there and have that as a task. But I think the point of reverse mentoring is also to kind of gain some contact that is further than just as a task so that you just kind of enjoy the company of that person that they kind of enjoy it back. So you are kind of looking at, that's how I look at it. So then also usually for me the cover letters or the inspiration, motivation letters are a very good way of finding out how much you actually want the thing you are applying for and how much you think you actually can offer to the thing that you are applying for. So, the last kind of buffer was because after the five I kind of reduced it to three and I wanted to apply for three but when I was applying for those three I found that for the third one I was struggling to write down the cover letter, the motivation letter in terms of what I wanted to get in terms of what I wanted to give and I found out that in the end I am not even sure that I sent it out the third one because it felt like halfhearted, yeah. So I kind of then realized that it was kind of a self-confirmation that ok this two I actually really have something to offer and I really want and that was kind of the last filtering process and then was just the case of deciding which of the two is my first pick and the second and that was a final thing."*

Junior partner 4: *"Well, for so far I wanted to have you know not local mindset because I am here in Trata employed like more than ten years and with this having Person 1 and Person 2, this was a great opportunity to to because I am dreaming also to you know to also go abroad maybe someday maybe to work whatever or just this flights that I am lucky to have you know to go to different Danfoss locations and to be with other people this is something that motivates me. And with Person 1 and Person 2 I have this kind of something someone else who is thinking differently… To explore and exchange and to you know grow my my perspectives."*

Junior partner 8: *"I wanted to choose someone who is a complete opposite of me or seems a complete opposite of me, because in a workplace I think you tend to connect with people who are quite similar and that maybe does not push you enough out of your comfort zone or gives you the very wide way of thinking. So with Person 3 I always thought he was different from the other management team, in a way that he is very relaxed, you could easily connect to him, I think he kinds of gets his.. I don't know he kind of finds a way to get to his goal and I was really impressed by that or at least I had the feeling that that was the case and yeah. So*

first reason was definitely that he is a complete opposite from me, he is very talkative, very you know his presence in his room is… we all know Person 3, and that he is working in a department that is that was for me the only department I wanted to work apart from the product management, so this is project management office, I was most interested in that, I wanted to hear how he sat up the whole department, because kind of only few people has an experience to kind of set up the department from scratch and I was really interested how he did it, which challenges he is facing and on the other hand I also wanted to hear his experience from procurement, as in product management you have a very big connection with the procurement team, at least in the labelled products for which I was in charge of, and he was before strategic purchaser for labelled products so I wanted to challenge him also in this side and to see and also for me maybe to see the broader picture and give a better contribution in my department. So it was a mix of those but yeah."

Junior partner 9: *"I looked at the list… and I was like who can I choose and then I was looking there and oh Person 3, I was like who I mean who is like the cool guy here that you can maybe see yourself maybe in his position or let's say you who would you rather be the most on this list."*

Junior partner 11: *"… I for sure choose it in a way how this Senior partner can help me with my daily business here not because I want to hang with it but because firstly because of the business but also in this way… I wanted to get deeper understanding about production, about the people in production, how they are feeling what are they complaining about, what is good what is bad because I am also responsible for internal communication and this is very important that I understand how people in production are living, feeling and communicating."*

Junior partner 15: *"First of all, I was choosing towards the how good or how much do I appreciate the Seniors and in which areas of work they're doing and that it was similar to mine or in that case that I could gain some really strength from their side."*

Junior partner 17: *"Based on the functional area. I am in the business I am in a very specific area and I would like to get to know more about cross-functional areas and there would be two options: finance and HR and I went to HR."*

Another thought-provoking insight was that five out of seventeen Junior partners acknowledged having trouble figuring out what they could offer to the Senior partner they were applying to. This might be a challenge that has to do with their lack of experience but as well as pressure when it comes to having reverse mentoring relationship with the Senior management team. However, finding the courage to apply and build a relationship with a Senior partner, helps in overcoming an obstacle which contributes to Junior partners' growth and development. This can be an extremely important benefit from the Reverse mentoring program.

Junior partner 1: *"My concerns were that I didn't have enough knowledge to offer and experience and I also learned that everyone is applying for my reverse mentor so it was him and my previous manager who had mostly the biggest number of applicants so you know you have this opinion ok I am just a student, I just started, I don't know him, I just say hi to him and that's it and yeah I just finished my faculty and I don't have financial background experience I have a background from school but this is not enough for me but yeah I put some nice answers, I took my time and I said ok I am going to do my best even if he does not choose me…"*

Junior partner 5: *"Yes yes of course. Yes of course and that I was, yeah that is some kind of point that that maybe the reverse mentoring could give us some kind of method how how you could show your talents to the Senior partner you know."*

Junior partner 8: *"Yeah, yeah I mean the first reverse mentorship was when I was really I think at the beginning of my product manager career, so I was still learning a lot, but yeah when you grow up you know your value and you know that you can share things. So, that's why I had my issues to apply here…"*

Junior partner 14: *"Well yes of course but I just went along. I still don't know if I am offering anything. But I mean I to put it this way to be more reverse mentoring than mentoring I just simply asking questions like what does he do, what kind of skills that he are necessary to be able to do the work that he is doing and besides that it's more like mentoring because really as I said I am a student I am not an engineer I am basically lawyer in an engineering world so you know I was really surprised basically what I get Senior really I didn't expect this at all."*

Junior partner 15: *"At the beginning ja but afterwards that I was checking who are Senior partners I think that you just click you see like ok I can offer to this one and I can get back."*

To the question whether their experience in the program was more like mentoring in the traditional sense or reverse mentoring, answers were divided. Some of them said that they are more in the role of a listener and they feel like having a traditional mentoring relationship with their Senior partner. Others said that the sharing of knowledge and experience was mutual. Although at the beginning it seemed that a conclusion can be made that a specific Senior partner always position themselves in the role of a mentor and provides little space for the Junior partner to contribute to the relationship, after enough feedback was gathered from the interviews, findings did not prove the initial thought. To be more concrete, when doing interviews with several Junior partners that had the same Senior partner either in the latest cycle or in the previous ones, their answers showed how that Senior partner developed a unique relationship with each of them. With some he/she would act more like a mentor while with others he/she would be more in the role of a listener than talker. This insight reviles that Senior partners adapt to the needs of the Junior partner. The type of relationship developed between the Junior and Senior partner also depends on how well prepared and

what does the Junior partner wants to get at the end of the reverse mentoring, if they have a clear goal in mind or they will let the discussion flow freely. However, each relationship developed between partners is unique and highly dependent on both of their personalities, aspirations and goals. The answers below give a proof exactly of that conclusion.

Senior partner 1: *"It goes both ways. I try to get something out of each Junior partner. They often have they often come with much more questions than I initially have but this is why let's say I have every Junior partner needs to prepare for me exactly what they do, a PowerPoint I want them to show me if they're working with the products, I want them to show me the products, I want them to show me how they do certain things so it definitely in my case, hopefully goes both ways. But definitely you know I it's difficult for me to step out of HR shoes, so I would always look at my Junior partners as people I would try to search for the potential in them and I would also try to guide them to certain you know direction or way how to develop."*

Senior partner 2: *"I truly believe that I don't position myself never as one that is you know experience and has nothing to learn from them and I think that this was the part they enjoy ever more because it seems that they really have this need to be listened to, to express themselves, to present, and maybe not in the way that we are used to, through monitors, through PowerPoints, but just to have somebody to listen to them."*

Senior partner 4: *"Yeah, it depends. I had yeah mostly or at least by all is some at least some of reverse mentoring, not only mentoring but in some cases there is a more of this reverse than only mentoring."*

Junior partner 2: *"But when it comes to my current mentor, is very visible that he is coming from the Danish culture and they are trying really not to have everything hierarchically set. And it's really, I mean at least from my point of view he gave me the opportunity to speak and he wanted to be more in the role of a listener then the talker. Which was at the beginning quite strange because it was like an interview right but then I also started asking questions and now it's like a general conversation. So from this point of view yeah, yeah it's reverse mentorship I mean I learned a lot from him and I also imagine that he also learned a lot from me. Because he uses this now that basically on his presentations, regular talks and so on and so on. He can see actually the complexity of my work and he knows what to ask in order to get some questions from me."*

Junior partner 4: *"No, it was Reverse mentoring. Yes because I gave I am giving my knowledge as well and I am listening and you know with my experiences I because these guys all from the top they have this challenges as well and with the listening and you know giving your opinion I am sure I am helping as well, not just helping but giving them different opinion different way of thinking, the motivation you know and so on so it's a really reverse thing."*

Junior partner 5: *"Let's say in theory it's Reverse mentoring but in practical way it's mentoring yeah. I think maybe, maybe it would be good that to find the way or method when you can as a young person let's say show the this Senior partner what are your ideas or maybe let's say to to give them your thinking you know."*

Junior partner 7: "*I think it's a Reverse mentoring especially with Person 4 we had a really structured approach so we at the first meeting agreed he said ok what he expects from me or what he wants to hear from me and I said ok this is what I am interested in and we actually stated the themes, the topics for the six meetings and three was that he prepared and talks and three were that I prepared and talked. So three were in a way that he was talking about Leadership and stuff like this from my side and then from what he expected from me was a little bit about digital so I showed him a little bit of analytics, how young people see Trata, and one more and I cannot remember so we both prepared in advanced."*

Junior partner 8: *"No, in my case I think it was reverse, Person 3 got really engaged, he asked me for opinions, he was preparing the strategy for the project management office, he wanted my feedback, he called me also in the meantime of all the meetings with his team, he called me in the office and said 'Hey Junior partner 8 can you maybe look at it from your point of view' so I think from in this case was, it was both ways. But again, I think here the mentee needs to be the one who insists that the mentor actually listens to him, so they need to try to challenge him a little bit, but I know that this is challenging in some cases that I get it from other people. But I think this needs to be maybe this is also something that can be prepared for the mentors in the beginning of the Reverse mentorship so they can so it is clearly said to them that yes they share the experience but they need to listen to this person also so maybe that's I am offering I don't know, because I don't know how you prepare the mentors from the beginning."*

Junior partner 14: *"Oh he does listens to me of course but there is very little things or maybe nothing that I could teach him. Because my role is from the production, he knows everything and yes so basically there is more mentoring than reverse mentoring, but I like it anyway…"*

When asked if participating in the Reverse mentoring program helped them in any way with the way they are doing their job or their career, indirectly, respondents said that they find the program beneficial. First of all, it helps them build relationships with someone they can turn to and ask for an advice at any time, get an insight into to work of another colleague, an opportunity to discuss activities undertaken by the company and understand how all of them have a different view on things. What is even more interesting for the Junior partners, is that they get an exposure to the Senior partners and therefore the Senior management. It gives them an opportunity to present themselves, who they are and what they do, a chance that it might be hard to get if it wasn't for the Reverse mentoring program. This of course does not mean a career boost by default but as mentioned in one of the respondent's answer, it can have long-term benefits for the Junior partner's career path. Respondent answers are below:

Senior partner 1: *"I mean it's definitely I don't know about my career but it's definitely increasing my competences in a way that I learned how other people are working and I learned what kind of problems they are facing I learned also the .. how is it called… the blind spots they have about the organization and you know it gives me a lot of insight onto also what we as management need to do more or differently because you see when you talk to the Junior partners what kind of different views they actually have of an activity that was actually intended in one way and how it actually translates to somebody else. And for me this seeing, this gap is extremely valuable. So I really appreciate this so much."*

Senior partner 2: *"Yes, for sure. You know I think it gives as I said, I mean it helps you that you take a look out of your ordinary area that you usually or daily area that you really each day involved with so you look outside of this boundaries and then you simply try to put in the shoes of somebody else and I think this is always good for your own development you that are not just sitting in the space in the space you are used to so I would actually next time again pick someone totally you know out of the... so this with production was very good experience."*

Senior partner 5: *"Being better person and a colleague."*

Junior partner 3: *"Long term, it's always good for people in different positions and in different departments in the company to know who you are and to know of you I am sure of that but it's not like a direct kind of like and also indirect additional help is that you get insight in some thought processes of people that you respect a lot because well that's one of the main criteria I guess, the beginning one that is kind of like subconscious you look for people that you really respect and you look up to in a way, so you know to get how they got there to get the information on that and to kind of get feedback from them what they see in you to improve and also you know share with you their way of working or their thoughts or some of their tasks you know cross checking what they are preparing for their department or whatever. That would definitely in a way help you with your soft skills or also some of the technical skills depending on how technical the person you are speaking with it is."*

Junior partner 4: *"Yes. Absolutely. It give me motivation it give me you know confirmation it give me but it all depends what you take you know from it and what are your motives you know."*

Junior partner 5: *"Actually it is. We had what I really liked it's that you connect with that person on a deep level you know. That it's not just oh how are you how are you doing but I came once to him and I said ok I have everybody has pros and cons and so on so and everybody is interested to make the cons to pros you know and I said ok Person 3 can you advise me here I am trying to do that and that and I don't know what what to do here, can you give advice and he gave me advice what to do maybe where to focus because you know where once you are deep dived into let's say one thing you don't have or it's hard to have this quite big picture you see just your level because you are so focused on this and you don't*

see around and that is good actually that we came on that level that you can talked about ok man you must do that and that you should try this one and bla bla bla and yeah that was I actually really liked this and I like that it's not ok you have a con and this is a really big disadvantage and bla bla you know but everything can be improved so it's not judgy or something it's on that level ok let's try to develop this thing."

Junior partner 7: *"Yes, actually yes. With career I mean none of them have let's say direct influence on my career as such but I actually was really let's say with Person 4 really happy because I got a lot of nice comments on let's say my thinking, you know if I am going into the right direction, regarding the leadership, then I was just promoted, and he was actually then so some of his advice was actually really you know were good at that time. And with Person 5 also not on a career level but on a work level yes because there is some tips and tricks you know how can you optimize some things."*

Junior partner 8: *"...I think it can in a way that you basically you become visible. Because what we have problem I think in Danfoss we have a lot of talented people who are visible only as talented to their direct managers or one level above into the same department. And here we have the opportunity to talk and promote yourself in a way to people from completely different department, completely different level and of course if you prove yourself to be very good how do you say this corresponds and you challenge your mentor and you can show that you know how things are done in the organization and that you think analytically and that you prove yourself as someone who is interested in improving interested in learning of course this can benefit in your career path because you have another person who is basically on your side who sees your potential. And I think with Person 3 who is my mentor before I definitely felt that, I felt that I have now another person who can stand by me in the organization and promote a little bit because sometimes you need that. So yeah definitely it can help you with your career path in a way."*

Junior partner 11: *"For sure, with Person 6 is for sure I learned a lot because I was new in the organization and she helped me a lot regarding the business understanding and still I am asking Person 6 a lot of time now just I think two days ago I asked what does this mean you know it was something with one PL and I think it was with stations something and she was explaining oh yeah you know there is this and she was explaining to me. And now also with Person 7 I am just Person 7 is also telling me a lot about the people and he also told me now that I will be invited to one meeting and I will see this flow in the production is going with the people and how are there people like organized. And that's it. It helped me for sure."*

Junior partner 14: *"Well, yes. Regarding work really no, well yes and no because what I do is strictly operational but from the point of view it is because everything in this company is connected every department everything everything is connected and when someone like this explain it to you, you have a better view of what you know what are you doing what for you are doing and you know…"*

Regarding the perceived benefits from participating in the program, the answers were somehow repetitive. The most common answer amongst the respondents was knowledge and experience sharing, gaining different perspectives and getting to know people with whom they don't usually have a contact with on a daily basis.

Senior partner 1: *"Exchange of knowledge, exchange of experience, getting an insight into different parts of the organization, networking, you know getting to know people you may not know just by pure work and for me these are the biggest benefits from the Reverse mentoring."*

Senior partner 3: *"In terms of benefits it's a ... you can say it's it could be professional it could be personal, professional could be that you get better knowledge of the part of the organization that you are not operationally working and then you don't have this direct access to this. And when you have someone that you are let's say in this relationship then they tell you things that they will never tell to anyone else maybe so you get very deep insight. And then personally you can become friends, you can go out having common activities so lunch dinner or whatever. So... get to know the person that you have this relationship so I think it's ok."*

Senior partner 4: *"And actually maybe this is good point I like the program because I am usually more formal and organized and this is the program that pushes me you know to be, to work in more unformal way. So this is the stretching for me."*

Junior partner 2: *"...get to know a lot of new people get a lot of new insights new knowledge right, some new directions because from time to time you suggest or you are suggested where to I don't know look for some information who should you contact in some of the cases if you need something. It can also be a career boost right because you have a chance to present yourself, what do you do what are your focus and so on and so on. It also shows an opportunity that you make your job position like important and that they also connect your position or your tasks or your findings into their let's say work or presentations whatever. Yeah. So this. Yeah but knowledge sharing in particular this is what I like you know, that you can spend time with somebody that is not directly I don't know from your department are not obliged to work together but they are from the same company and you get an insight of their knowledge or their department on the way they work if they are from another country their culture their way of thinking. This is basically what I like."*

Junior partner 3: *"Well, it's partly what I have already touched upon the soft skills that come from finding out how different people that you respect that you look up to approach things you get insights into things that you wouldn't normally get into because it's usually when you choose, you choose someone from a very a department that you wouldn't normally work with in day to day basis. So that is also one of the criteria I should have probably mention in the beginning. So you get a broader picture of how the organization functions, how yeah how different people function and I think that's it something that is very important but*

doesn't really get mentioned but I think that's one of the most important ones. And yeah then of course the feeling, feeling a part of the company helps you kind of make contacts make different connections and it gives you kind of a way or a door that enables you to kind of pick and choose and then kind of approach people in a systematic way. It gives you an excuse and it gives you a chance to actually present your case why you think you are good for to kind of cooperate with the for a period of time which is I think much easier than having walk in to someone's office and make them or make them want to kind of spend some time out of their working day for kind of just discussions with you. So I think those things are important. It's not I don't think it's in a way you can work like reverse mentoring works and you can actually force it even without that program and you know I kind of worked with people that I would normally you know and kind of chosen my own tasks to an extent in some cases which was very similar to reverse mentoring but it takes a lot more effort and it takes a lot more kind of luck in a way that that tasks actually doesn't call of a certain other person and that kind of falls into your jurisdiction of tasks. So you need that. You can also do similar kind of things with the people that you are closer working with in a way, in the department that you are actually involved in. But in departments that you are not involved at all, that's the easiest way to do it I think."

Junior partner 4: *"...we just don't work work work but that we have someone to talk deeply about different topics. And these are all job-related topics or maybe you know how you deal with I don't know balancing job and family life and so on. So, all these different topics but you can really go into details into the core of it and I am I like these dialogs I like to think about that deeply and this reverse mentoring gives me some you know outside view."*

Junior partner 6: *"...we are also somehow building internal network by this so people know each other because in a big company I don't know you sit with somebody and you don't even know him. We are sharing experiences... And benefits for me personally, establishing connection and building my career path."*

Junior partner 7: *"The benefits... The benefits for me are mostly to get new perspective, to get new ideas, to get new knowledge that I can implement in my daily work but also a new way of thinking, you know that I can look from the other perspective and say ok maybe I can do this better, it might not be directly related but I can take it then and say ok maybe I can improve this at my work or this or somebody has a little bit really outside perspective on what you are doing because sometimes you are really just at your work and then you know maybe the solution is simple or the problem is not that big so for this part is the benefit and also that you have a mentor that actually if you have a problem you can go to them and say ok this time I have this issue maybe you can help me and then you can actually then with our mentor, he can couch you to find a solution."*

Junior partner 11: *"I would say gain new experience, gain new knowledge that I didn't have before, meet new people."*

Junior partner 15: *"Definitely to get to know person also outside of just the work that you are sharing."*

Besides the benefits of the Reverse mentoring program, a question about the potential obstacles for a successful reverse mentoring to happen was also asked to understand what can hinder the program's positive effects.

Senior partner 5: *"Well prepared mentee and having confidence that whatever you talk about will stay between the two of you."*

Junior partner 1: *"I see lack of time as main obstacle. Mainly due to overbooked calendars and senior mentor's position, this can be quite common challenge. In addition, miss-matched expectations and personality clashes can also limit the successful realization of the Reverse mentoring program."*

Junior partner 2: *"First of all, the time for sure, right? Because you have to insert this in the let's say regular workflow time, time flow... and the same time it really depends which kind of mentor you pick if he's really taken right, doesn't have time he or she of course then of course it's hard reaching them so of course this for sure would be an obstacle. Right? So for me this is for sure an obstacle. And at the same time you know, this is what I've noticed when I had the reverse mentoring is basically that during the process you actually really reveal yourself. It depends how far you wanna go, but it can for sure impact the view that this mentor or mentee has on you, right? And it can also impact your regular workflow I would say also your regular perception. I mean the perception of the mentor or the mentee about the other person like in a regular work process. This is for sure an obstacle."*

Junior partner 11: *"I think having too many Junior partners for sure can be an obstacle because they won't have enough time to dedicate to them. Time is always a challenge for the Senior partners and sometimes even for the Juniors. And also skills to be a Senior partner, how to communicate."*

Junior partner 17: *"So the conflicts I could say that I had it would mostly be regarding agendas. I was traveling a lot, Senior partners or directors are most of the time busy I would say this is the biggest and I won't say this is an improvement I say this is a risk it's commitment. I think that the persons that apply, that want to participate should be committed to do it and reserve time for it."*

In addition to the previous question, respondents were asked if they think that reverse mentoring can have any negative outcomes or effects. This and the previous question are crucial to get an understanding what might go wrong. Knowing that gives the opportunity to address some of the challenges in advance or at least try to avoid any negative outcomes.

Junior partner 1: *"Unfortunately yes. Inappropriate reverse mentoring realization could lead toward damaged personal and professional relations and mutual avoidance."*

Junior partner 2: *"Yes, I would definitely agree with that it can have, and that is really let's say not totally work related, right? It's basically going into your personality. Like per instance if you are discussing something like your future aspects because it always comes to these kinds of questions where do you see yourself per instance, then you reveal yourself right? Let's say also your personal objectives which cannot be totally connected to company's goals, right? Like you see yourself in one field it could also be outside of the company, right? And then you reveal yourself and you don't sign any contract right like per instance that all these data which is shared that should be of course not shared with others, right that it should stay within this circle. Then it can also impact your career, yeah and of course your personal relationship within the work, that you actually do besides that, so the regular work process. Yes, for sure it can have them. I mean I don't have it from my personal perspective right but I'm just saying like if you have a I don't know if you picked one mentor which is high on the management level and if you state that you don't see yourself in this position which is related to this management position, right but you are subordinate so somewhere on the lower level, and you say you don't see yourself here but you see yourself in other field or maybe if you don't get a good opportunity within some period of time depends on your personal goals then you maybe see yourself also outside of the company. Right, and of course this at least you know subconsciously can of course impact some decisions. Like per instance if a company has some reorganization at the time you know they would perceive you probably as a personal who doesn't see yourself here. And if this mentor for example has some any decisions right, he would definitely take this into considerations even if it shouldn't be but it's just being a human right? So for sure it can have. I mean I would definitely because I perceived reverse mentoring as being honest right? But I didn't have that kind of a feedback from my mentor. I mean he was let's say in both of the cases I would say I would just reflect on the last mentor that I had, in both cases they were higher on the management level, and at the same time they were really their communication was very business-like. Yeah whereas they basically demanded that I also take it personally communication wise. Yeah so I don't like this kind of approach. If it's open it's open for both parties."*

Junior partner 11: *"If the reverse mentoring experience is not good Junior partners might be disappointed and not apply again."*

When asked what they don't like about the program or think it can be improved, the respondents provided the following suggestions:

Senior partner 3: *"Can be improved I think general problem is lack of time that you have on top of everything also mentorship so you have to have people that you are confident that you will take aside this time for them and the yes this is I think this the biggest challenge so to find the time for this because it's not first priority very often very low priority but you still then would with good planning can find some time."*

Junior partner 5: *"Yeah, oh that it's actually good question I saw last time that this anketa … and then I was thinking about because I didn't have ideas what to write because you know you are ok this is I must fill that then you need additional time to think about it what was happening. I would say that is firstly lack of time. Because ok I know that you must let's say take the time and I perfectly understand that that you must prioritize this thing but it's quite hard on some days or weeks when you have filled with customer support when the at the end it's the customer first you know. I would be nice to have some kind of schedule you know, that you have approved from Danfoss that it's not a problem if you are missing for two hours or three let's say, you know. I think it would be good that you have let's say that filled in your working plan you know I think that would be a good idea and the that maybe maybe I don't know if that is easy to do not easy to do I think both of the options are here that maybe it's written some kind of semester of with this schedule ok after 3 weeks you have meeting with your Senior mentor, find the time etc if not you must let's say report that you have some thing that said to you that you must do it actually. You know when you have the other work and other stuff you must complete these tasks, these are the important ones you know. Don't understand me wrong it's important reverse mentoring but at the end from the organization level is this important."*

Junior partner 13: *"The organization was good I think but when then you are on your own and time flies and maybe it would be better that some meetings would be reserved in advance. But that's all."*

Senior partner 2: *"I don't think there is anything I don't like about the program. I really like that it's so up to you to find your own way and this is the beauty of this program. So that I think we should not structure it or do more if you can do the same with less. Sometimes we believe that we need to control things to be efficient but yeah, it's not always needed. So and I think we are also so much this control and planning most in our jobs so we just I think we need to get more of these things, I think it makes you much more efficient at the end, happy I think that this sharing, and talking, yeah simply taking time to explore new ways of working is something we should do more."*

Senior partner 3: *"I think it's a good initiative you know and that we should do this more often so that you know we because this is developing relationships, stronger relationship in the organization and when people are and can see if you just look at how people communicate you could track the Skype calls you know you could see some people just communicate to same channel to same people you know all the time, some they communicate very broadly and with this kind of system we encourage people communicate outside their current or just very narrow channels because then they really become narrow and they don't see the whole picture. So I think we need to communicate broader and this is good tool to get to people to start to think broader and communicate broader because you are not a lonely you know player here you are in a team and you need to know what is going on in the team so that we are all faster."*

Junior partner 1: *"There was always a dilemma between the fact should we define a more structure way how this reverse mentoring should be or to give free hands between people the Senior and the mentee how to develop their mentorship. And I don't know. If something can be changed is in this direction but I think that is some people you need to give them direction how they should define the reverse mentoring because otherwise they are not they forget that they are Senior mentors and they need to call for this meetings and so on. But at the end of the day you are choosing your mentor yourself so I think that this maybe should stay the same for now because it somehow works even though you don't have strict time frame timeline when to call for this meetings and milestones but it's informal way of learning so it's ok. Maybe yeah I don't know to share maybe the way of promoting reverse mentoring, there's always place for improvement"*

Junior partner 3: *"Kind of.. don't look at the program as something that I would want to criticize because I think that it's such a positive movement, it's such a positive approach to have it at all and the way it's going at the moment I think it's very good. Maybe the one thing that I see is that only for instance on the list of people that are Senior partners it's only restrictive to only people's managers I think at the moment and that is something I would kind of play with that is something that I would challenge in terms of like there is lot of people that aren't people's managers that are experts in their field that could also probably offer a lot to the program as senior mentors. And but that's pretty much where I think it ends it's basically I think it's a very well thought through program which I am sure that they will be able to improve it when they when ideas but I don't think there's something that stands out to be a part from what I have mentioned."*

Junior partner 4: *"Yes, probably it can be improved in that sense that now we have like people managers that are having this role of Senior partners. I think that I and people like me am also capable to mentor people from different levels. So I think that we should think how to also involve others to this role. And also maybe experts. You know.. Because there are many people for example Person 10, he is like you know he is a senior guy and he has a lot of knowledge and now he is a mentee you know or Junior partner, but he is also capable and very mature for being a mentor to someone and he can then transfer this knowledge he has to you know to younger generation and as an expert and many other people around me you know I see that these are the people who can give and transfer knowledge and they are capable and mature for being Senior, Senior partners."*

Junior partner 6: *"Yeah, so about improvement I wouldn't, I would like to include also this let's say somebody has a can be a mentor in finance, in project management or in technology you know, automatization or think so we would include also seniority in knowledge not only in a position this. What I would propose is also to have so we have a kick off meeting and then meeting at the end you know and nothing happens in between so because to some people the motivation some are really motivated and with some motivation goes you know and if you didn't call somebody for 2-3 months then you are ... yeah you know you even avoid it more. So it would be good to have one or two meetings in between just people I would say*

Junior partners for Junior partners just to to share. And until the group was smaller I would also or if the group would be smaller I would also like, like to see that let's say that you go with this group of 20 people now we are I don't know 150 it's hard but to go on a lunch or something together like you know Junior and Senior you know just to see each other."

Junior partner 7: *"I don't think that at least from my experience there are not a lot of things that can be improved or should be improved of course always there can be some things improved or you know a little bit, probably in some case a little bit more structure, not for me but also what I heard from others, but it also depends on the people and also with everything like this with also these initiatives is that you get out as much as you put in, you know. And if someone is not willing to put something in then he won't get much out and he will probably or she whatever will probably be also saying you know it doesn't make sense or whatever. I think as a person you need to be self-motivated and self-initiative in order for this to really work and yeah so I don't see a lot of improvement."*

Junior partner 8: *"I think the program really lets you define how you will actually correspond with your mentor, you can have it however you want, weekly, monthly meetings, you can define the goals with them and follow these goals you can have very general discussions with them does not define it which is good in a sense but on the other side I think a lot of people get lost in it, meaning they don't know where to start because it's quite..., if you have someone that you really admire on the other side so it's a little bit I think neuracking to define the goals of what would be the goal of the conversation you just wanna talk to them so I think it could be maybe more strucutized but I also know that Katarina shares some slides of where you can start with the conversations maybe that's not a room for improvement because she already did that I don't know how this… Maybe to find other way how to structurize these relationship work because I know this is not my experience but I know that a lot, that a few people had an issue of then actually getting the time from these managers who chose too much mentees or too many mentees and just didn't have time. So maybe that this would be I don't know if this but aligned with the mentors in advance that you meet to have this and this amount of time which is a minimum and maybe yeah, I don't know, that maybe yeah in this way that we can help them structure this meeting at least from the beginning a little bit more and then they can be open and then they can be, they can be yeah transformed based on their time."*

Junior partner 11: *"I think it should be better maybe we should educate as Senior and Junior partners how to be in this Reverse mentoring. Maybe now is very unstructured so maybe we should in the future put a bit structure as we have on Global level… they get very nice guidelines you don't need to use it but some guidelines how to be in this partnership, what is important, how to communicate so then we decide or the parts decide if they will go with this guidelines or not. We have now very open and maybe some of the Senior partners are not so used to communicate I don't know having this partnership, they are lost a bit so maybe we should structure a bit in the future."*

Junior partner 15: *"Yes, a bit more structure and really maybe to have that real goal."*

In addition to the feedback gathered through interviews about the experience of those participating in the Reverse mentoring program, secondary data was analyzed by using the surveys the company itself distributes at the end of each cycle. Exception to this was made only in the second cycle. As mention in the previous section, the survey consists of three questions: what are the three main benefits from participating as a Junior/Senior Partner in Reverse mentoring program that they would like to point out (personally and professionally); what they think it could be improved regarding the process, program, ways of collaboration and how; would they recommend the program to a colleague and if so, why. The answers below are summarized from the feedback gathered over the years. The responses provided by the Junior partners are presented first.

The first question asks the respondents to list three benefits they would like to point out (personally and professionally). Answers to this question are similar to the ones already identified in the interviews. Most common ones revolve around knowledge and experience sharing, personal and career development, building a network of colleagues within the company and getting to know more people, building a relationship and having open discussions, career advices, improved motivation and confidence, better understanding of the organization and getting exposure to higher management levels. Only one respondent answered that they did not experienced any benefits from the program as they met only once with the Senior partner.

To the second question, what would they suggest for improvement (process, program, ways of collaboration…), respondents wrote about having the program longer than six months, expanding the pool of Senior partners to other experts, having more structure and also kind of monitoring the pairs if they meet, having guidelines and even trainings for the Senior partners, having shared activities or events where all the pairs would participate.

To the third question, if they would recommend to their colleague to apply for the Reverse mentoring program and why, all responses were positive. Moreover, the respondents once again highlighted the benefits they have mentioned as an answer in question one. Some of them even characterized it as stepping out of their comfort zone and as an overall great experience.

For Senior partners the answers were somehow similar. To the first question regarding the benefits from the Reverse mentoring program they stated that they got a chance to understand other departments and processes better, share knowledge and experience, get insights into the organization, learn something new, get to know better the colleagues, being challenged by the Junior partner in some cases and that overall it's a pleasure for them to share experience with Junior partners who are willing to learn in their career journey.

For the second question, what would they suggest for improvement (process, program, ways of collaboration…), most of them didn't add anything and said that they are happy with the

way the program functions already. However, some stated that they would need some training, pre-booked meetings, a platform where they can collaborate together or share experiences, share best practices, topics too discuss and even maybe confidential agreements.

To the third question, if they would recommend to a colleague to apply for a Senior Partner position and why, all the responses were positive. Most of them see this as a great networking opportunity, opportunity to develop Junior partners and follow their progress and at the same time learn something new.

Overall, the findings from both data collection techniques, semi-structured interviews and the surveys, gave the same results. However, responses in the interviews were more detailed and longer compared to the responses gathered through the surveys. Nevertheless, the Reverse mentoring program at Danfoss Trata has been positively evaluated by the employees. This program gives a unique opportunity to the participants to connect with each other, build personal and professional relationships, share knowledge and experience, increase their competences, get new insights into different parts of the organization and better understand top management decision-making. These are only some of the benefits and positive experience stated by the those asked to share their experience from participating in the program.

4.4.2   Results summary

The overall experience of carrying out the interviews was positive, and employees didn't have any doubt about sharing their experience of participating in the Reverse mentoring program at Danfoss Trata. What was common across all respondents is that they perceive the program as a positive initiative from the company, they find it useful and all of them would participate again.

The third research question aimed to understand what the perceived benefits of the Reverse mentoring program are expressed through the lenses of the employees. Their responses are summarized in Table 7. The Reverse mentoring program gives the colleagues who don't have a contact on daily basis the opportunity to build a relationship. The program allows them to have open discussions, to share career advice, to exchange knowledge and experience, and ultimately to build a network of colleagues and even friends. For the Junior partners this is especially important because talking to someone from the higher management level, makes them feel like their voice is being heard. Also, they get the chance to understand the thought process behind some top management decision making and discuss their standpoints. On the other hand, the Senior partners have the possibility to understand how younger generations think, get new and fresh perspective on the future of work trends and learn to better communicate with younger employees. Eventually, this provides an increased motivation and confidence for both parties.

Table 7: Benefits and obstacles of the Reverse mentoring program at Danfoss Trata

Benefits	Obstacles
Career advices	Time
Building a relationship	Trust
Having open discussions	Personality clashes
Knowledge and experience sharing	Mismatched expectations
Building a network of colleagues	
Improved motivation and confidence	
Better understanding of the organization	
Getting exposure to the higher management levels (for Junior partners)	

Source: Own work.

Apart from the benefits, questions have been asked about the possible obstacles of an effective reverse mentoring program, and in which instances there might be negative outcomes. According to the respondents' answers, time seems to be one of the greatest challenges of the Reverse mentoring program at Danfoss Trata. Many of the respondents both Senior and Junior emphasized the difficulties they are facing to find time to have meetings with their partners as one of the things that they need to improve in the future. Being overburden with regular work tasks can push the reverse mentoring meet ups on the side. By the time participants realize they didn't meet in a while they either avoid each other even more or the cycle might be already over.

Another reason why time might be a challenge is if the Senior partner chooses too many Junior partners and therefore do not have enough time to dedicate to them. This can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction that can disturb the relationship between partners and can also cause for the Junior partner to lose interest in being part of the program in the future. Showing commitment and dedication to the program and consequently to the relationship is vital for an honest communication and relationship to be developed. In addition, an extremely important part of the relationship is developing trust. According to one of the answers, establishing the relationship as trustworthy and confidential is critical if both of the parties are to experience the benefits that the program can bring. Establishing and communicating from the beginning the "rules" and expectations for both partners can help meet the expectations of the program and avoid unwanted outcomes.

When asked what they don't like about the program or they think it can be improved, one specific thing came across more answers. What respondents think should be changed or improved in the upcoming cycles is to include more experts in the role of a Senior partner. At Danfoss Trata there are people with more than thirty years of work experience that are experts in their field which until now did not get the chance to be in the role of a Senior partner. All those talents need to be recognized and used so that other employees in the company can learn from them. The reason why they didn't get the chance is because of the limiting criterion about who can in fact be a Senior partner. Senior partners can be those that are part of the senior management and those that have at least three years of people's management experience within the company.

Another thing respondents have divided opinions about was whether to give more structure to the program or not. The way the program is organized is that partners are free to choose topics to discuss and goals to achieve. For some, the freedom gives an opportunity to establish their own way of collaboration. While for others, it's hard to keep focus and know what to do exactly. They start well in the beginning but somehow lose track after a while. This raises the question whether more structured approach towards the program needs to be taken in a sense that whether topic of discussion and goals to achieve should be provided upfront or not.

4.5   Limitations of the study

This section describes the limitations identified in this master's thesis.

In general, qualitative researches are being criticized because of validity and reliability constraints. To begin with, external validity is one of the biggest constraints as findings cannot be generalized and applied to other social and organizational setting. The reason why is because they are highly context dependent (McLeod, 2019). In addition, it's also highly subjective since it examines respondents' own personal experience on the research subject and therefore lacks a single point of view.

Another potential drawback of this research is the self-reported data. This is data which is collected directly from the research participants and useful for capturing respondents' feelings, points of view and attitudes. Although the respondents agree to participate and the answers that they provide are assumed to be accurate and unbiased, if the respondents fail to give such answers to a specific question(s), issues concerning self-reported bias arise (Dodd-McCue & Tartaglia, 2010). In this concrete research, respondents were asked to give their opinion about the Reverse mentoring program at Danfoss Trata and in a way constructively criticize the program. However, such answers would potentially reveal rather sensitive information that respondents might not be willing to share or give their honest opinion about. This potential issue was address by collecting data on the same topic through two different data collection techniques – semi-structured interviews and surveys.

Another thing affecting respondents' answers was the language of the study. It was conducted in English, a language that for the respondents was not native and therefore might have limited their possibility to freely and accurately express themselves. However, taking into consideration that Danfoss Trata is an international organization in which English language is required, we assume that this limitation does not hinder the responses and therefore the findings of the study.

Another minor setback was limited access to data. Due to time constrains, Senior partners were not as accessible as Junior partners for the interview process and therefore Junior partners' opinions prevail in the research. However, the Senior partners' responses were given the same importance as the ones collected from Junior ones and presented in a balanced way. Lack of HR data regarding all the people employed at Danfoss Trata regardless of their contract type limited the possibility to portray an accurate picture of the age structure in the company. In addition, the researcher tried to obtain data specifically related to the participants in the Reverse mentoring program in order to further investigate the popularity of the program amongst generations, however access do such data was denied because of the time-consuming process and the General Data Protection Regulation law.

The above above-mentioned limitations have been taking into consideration when presenting the findings to avoid any unjustified and unreliable conclusions.

4.6   Discussion of the research findings

In this master's thesis, three different research questions are addressed and discussed below.

The first research question – what reverse mentoring is, has been identified through the analysis of the existing literature written on this topic. Although there isn't a single definition about what reverse mentoring is and even though authors describe it in different words, the essence remains the same. Reverse mentoring is an innovative way or a tool which flips the role of the mentor and mentee in such way that the junior employee takes the role of a mentor while the experienced one the role of a mentee (Burdett, 2014; Murphy 2012). Although the relationship can be developed between employees from different generations, it is not age dependent. The purpose of this relationship is to encourage knowledge and experience sharing as well as to improve understanding and collaboration between generations (Deshwal, 2015; Murphy, 2012).

In the '90s when this phenomenon was for the first time coined, common topics of discussion were the ones in which the younger generations have more experience and skills than the older ones, those being the Internet, social media, use of applications, newest technologies and alike. However, nowadays the scope became broader and companies have been using reverse mentoring to achieve different organizational goals. For example, KPMG and Procter & Gamble are using it to address cultural and diversity challenges in the workplace (Leh, 2005; Skoulding, 2018). Through the reverse mentoring relationship, the mentee can

learn from the junior's employee up-to-date technological or social media knowledge, as well as gets insights into workplace trends and how new generations think and work (Deshwal, 2015, p. 3622). While the mentor – junior employee also has an opportunity to learn from the mentee's experience, topics such as leadership, communication and decision making on a higher organizational level. This allows for the knowledge to flow in both directions making the reverse mentoring a two-way street (Burdett, 2014).

To further investigate how reverse mentoring functions in practice, an analysis of the Reverse mentoring program at Danfoss Trata has been carried out. The second research question aimed to find out how exactly the Reverse mentoring program was implemented in this organization.

At Danfoss Trata, the reverse mentoring cycle lasts about six months and includes matching Senior and Junior partners. In order for employees to fit for the role of a Senior partner, they must be part of the top management team or have at least three years of people's management experience within the organization. The rest of the employees can take the role of Junior partners regardless of their expertise and years of working experience in the company. The motivation to do so lies in the willingness of the employees to learn something new, connect with colleagues and sometimes even secure a time in the top management's busy schedule, something that otherwise would be hard to get to. Information about the Senior partners is published on a SharePoint website specifically dedicated for the Reverse mentoring program. From the SharePoint website, Junior partners can choose up to three Senior partners to apply to. After answering some personal questions and partner specific questions, they submit their application. Matching is done in such way that the Senior partners chooses their Junior partner(s) based on the applications they receive. Although they can have more the one Junior partner, practice shows that in order to ensure the quality of the relationship built between partners, it is better to have one or maximum three Junior partners. After the pairs are identified, a Kick-off event takes place where the pairs are officially announced, and partners establish their first contact in the newly appointed roles. In addition, some guidelines and recommendations for better collaboration are communicated with both parties. From then on, the pairs are completely on their own. They must establish their own way of communicating and meeting, topics to discuss and goals to achieve. At the end of the reverse mentoring cycle, which is approximately after six months, a survey is distributed to gather feedback about the experience of participating in the program.

Findings of this master's thesis based on the twenty-two interviews done with the participants of the Reverse mentoring program and the feedback gathered by the organization, reveal its positive aspects. But at the same time, the current work suggests directions for further reverse mentoring improvements. To be more specific, improvements regarding the matching between Junior and Senior partners as well as the criterion for being a Senior partner can be done. At Danfoss Trata, the Senior partners are people from the top management level or managers with at least three years of people's management skills. Because of this limiting criterion, the rest of the employees take up Junior partner roles

regardless of their knowledge or experience. Although in most of the cases the partners are truly Junior and Senior in their knowledge and experience, still there are some exceptions in which experienced employees take a Junior partner role just to be part of that program and enjoy its benefits. In order to improve this, one recommendation is to consider the employees' data such as years of experience in the company, age, field of work or expertise and use it as a basis for appointing Senior and Junior roles as well as matching the partners. This way, employees that are experts in their field but are not people's managers nor part of the senior management team will have the opportunity to be matched with a Junior partner where they can exchange skills and experiences.

Furthermore, at Danfoss Trata there aren't any goals or specific knowledge domains appointed by the program for the pairs to achieve. They are free to choose topics to discuss and fields in which they would like to develop their skills. On one side, this is good for Senior and Junior partners that have a clear vision of what they want to achieve through the relationship, but on the other hand, findings show that there are also many that are "wandering around" without a clear direction of what they should do after a couple of meetings. Having a clear goal in mind as well as communicating it with the partner at the beginning of the reverse mentoring relationship it's critical for a fruitful reverse mentoring experience. Findings from the interviews confirm this by realizing that those Junior partners that had clear goals in mind and prepare well in terms of what they can offer to the Senior partners have by far better experience than those being unclear. To address this challenge, topics of discussion might be suggested for those uncertain in their goals as it was the case of the reverse mentoring programs described in section 3.2.3 of this thesis. In relations to this challenge and as some of the interview responses reveal, few of the Junior partners feel uncertain in what they can offer to the Senior partners and have difficulties positioning themselves as mentors. This is understandable as Junior partners lack mentoring experience and being matched with a partner on a very high management level can be a daunting task. For example, the General Director of Danfoss Trata takes active participation in the reverse mentoring program and being his mentor – Junior partner can be an intimidating experience. That is why another recommendation regarding this challenge is to provide trainings for their respective roles. It can be difficult for the younger employee to put themselves in the role of the mentor or for the experienced colleague to listen and be the one mentored. Trainings for both before entering in a reverse mentoring relationship has the potential to overcome those difficulties and ensure success in taking up the newly appointed roles.

Lastly, the most common challenge reported across almost all participants' responses is their struggle to fit the reverse mentoring meetings in their busy schedule. One way to solve this challenge is to include the reverse mentoring program in their individual development plans or have predefined schedule provided by the organization to which they would have to adhere to.

It is important to understand that successful reverse mentoring programs do not happen by chance. Besides the recommendation provided, things to be taken into consideration for a

successful reverse mentoring program, as previously described in section 3.2.2, are top management support, diversity in terms of gender, age and experience of the participants as well as creating an environment in which partners will feel comfortable expressing their standpoints on suggested topics. If those are overlooked, it can have negative impact on the reverse mentoring program and hinder its success. When it comes to the relationship between the partners, obstacles which can lead to negative outcomes or effects have been also identified during the study. Such obstacles are lack of trust, commitment and dedicating time for the reverse mentoring relationship.

Finally, the last research question asks what the perceived benefits of the reverse mentoring through the lenses of employees are. The benefits identified are: knowledge and experience sharing, personal and career development, building a network of colleagues within the organization and getting to know more people, building a relationship and having open discussions, career advices, improved motivation and confidence, better understanding of the organization and getting exposure to the higher management levels.

This master's thesis provides value by contributing to the literature with another real-life reverse mentoring example – the case of Danfoss Trata. It provides an insight on the way the program is implemented and how it functions, which can serve as a basis or a starting point for building a reverse mentoring program in another organization. Some shortcomings are identified; however, the program provides lots of benefits for the participants and serves the reverse mentoring purpose: knowledge and experience sharing between generations in the workplace. In addition, the recommendations for improvement suggested in this master's thesis related especially to the case of Danfoss Trata, give a possibility to enhance even further the success of the program, if implemented, and are a lesson that all interested in building a successful reverse mentoring program can learn from.

CONCLUSION

This master's thesis explores the reverse mentoring phenomena by taking a closer look into the case of the international organization called Danfoss Trata. The research is conveyed by using a single case study. The aim is to understand what reverse mentoring is, how it is implemented at Danfoss Trata and what are the benefits identified by the employees. By answering these questions, recommendations for improvement are drawn to increase the successfulness of the program. In addition, it can serve as a basis for creating a reverse mentoring program in different organizational setting.

Reverse mentoring is described as a tool where, contrary to the traditional mentoring, the younger and/or junior employee takes the role of a mentor and teaches something the older and/or more experienced co-worker which takes the role of a mentee. The purpose is knowledge and experience sharing and encouraging cross-generational relationships. Consequently, at Danfoss Trata the aim is to facilitate building relationships and improve

understanding between generations. Moreover, to promote knowledge and experience sharing between Junior and Senior partners, networking and competence building. The program started in 2015 and from then on, is successfully occurring every year. To date, four reverse mentoring cycles have occurred, which had a total of 40 Senior and 99 Junior partners taking participation in the program. The program has been positively evaluated and accepted by the employees. It allows them to take time out of their busy schedule and dedicate it to developing themselves in new ways. The Reverse mentoring program gives them a chance to get together with colleagues with whom they don't usually have a daily interaction, possibility to get an opinion from a different generational standpoint on numerous topics, learn something new and even develop a friendship. Yet there is still room for improvement. The recommendations provided, such as redefining the criterion used for appointing Senior partner roles and matching between partners, trainings for their newly appointed roles and better time management, to name a few, have the possibility to enhance the success of the program, if implemented. In addition, building a relationship based on trust and commitment and creating an environment in which is "safe" to talk about different topics and share opinions, is one of the key pillars for a reverse mentoring relationship and therefore, program.

It is hard to make general conclusions using findings from exploratory case study. What works for one company might not work for other because findings are highly context dependent and doing a replica of this reverse mentoring program might not provide the same results in another organization. Nevertheless, lessons can be learned, and this example can be used as a foundation for building a reverse mentoring program in different organizational setting. As findings show, reverse mentoring delivers on its promises. It does assist in bridging the gap between generations in the workplace and enables for knowledge and experience to be shared in both directions. It allows for all employees in the workplace to get a recognition for their contribution regardless of their age and years of experience because nowadays, everyone has something to bring to the table and therefore their knowledge should be recognized and shared.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek (Summary in Slovene language)

Organizacije se skozi leta močno spreminjajo. Edina stvar, katera je stalna, so ljudje v njej. Ravno iz tega razloga je pomembno, da se ljudje skupaj z njo konstantno razvijajo ter prilagajajo. Eden od možnih načinov za dosego le-tega je program vzajemnega mentorstva.

Pričujoča magistrska naloga preučuje program vzajemnega mentorstva ter predstavlja primer programa vzajemnega mentorstva v mednarodnem podjetju Danfoss Trata. V raziskavi so bila obravnavana naslednja raziskovalna vprašanja:

- Kaj je vzajemno mentorstvo?
- Kako je bil izveden program vzajemnega mentorstva v izbranem podjetju?
- Katere so prednosti vzajemnega mentorstva iz vidika zaposlenih?

Cilj je razumeti program vzajemnega mentorstva ter njegove umestitve v organizacijo, kar posledično podaja priložnost za predlaganje priporočil za možne izboljšave.

Po Murphy (2012, str. 549) je vzajemno mentorstvo inovativen način za spodbujanje učenja ter olajšanje medgeneracijskih odnosov na delovnem mestu. Pri vzajemnem mentorstvu mlajši zaposleni prevzamejo vlogo mentorja, starejši ali bolj izkušeni pa vlogo mentoriranca. Namen tega odnosa je spodbuditi izmenjavo znanja in izkušenj, zagotoviti priložnost za osebni rast in razvoj ter izboljšati komunikacijo in sodelovanje sodelavcev različnih generacij.

Raziskava je bila izvedena z uporabo metode študije primera. Razlog za izbiro omenjene metode je predvsem v možnosti poglobljene raziskave programa vzajemnega mentorstva v podjetja Danfoss Trata. Podatki so bili pridobljeni tako iz primarnih kot sekundarnih virov. Primarni podatki so bili zbrani z izvajanjem pol strukturiranih intervjujev z dvaindvajsetimi udeleženci programa vzajemnega mentorstva. Sekundarni podatki pa so bili zbrani z anketami, ki jih v Danfoss Trata izvajajo na koncu posameznih ciklov vzajemnega mentorstva. Sekundarne podatke smo prav tako pridobili s proučevanjem interne dokumentacije podjetja.

Do danes so bili v Danfoss Trati organizirani štirje cikli vzajemnega mentorstva, v katerih je sodelovalo 40 starejših (angl. senior) in 99 mlajših (angl. junior) partnerjev. Zaposleni so program sprejeli kot pozitivno iniciativo podjetja. Slednji namreč omogoča zaposlenim, da si vzamejo čas iz svojega zasedenega urnika, pridobijo nova znanja in veščine ter se posvetijo razvijanju samega sebe. Poda se jim priložnost, da sodelujejo s sodelavci s katerimi vsakodnevno nimajo stika, možnost da dobijo drugačno stališče do različnih tem, da se naučijo nekaj novega ali pa celo razvijejo prijateljstvo. Ugotovljene prednosti so: izmenjava znanja in izkušenj, osebni in karierni razvoj, povezovanje sodelavcev v podjetju in spoznavanje novih ljudi, vzpostavitev medosebnih odnosov in iskrenega pogovora, karierni nasveti, izboljšana motivacija in zaupanje, boljše razumevanje organizacije in izpostavljenost pri višjemu vodstvu. Način izvajanja programa vzajemnega mentorstva pri

Danfoss Trati se je izkazal za uspeh v svoji prvotni nameri: izmenjavi izkušenj in znanj, razumevanje razlik v mnenjih med posameznimi generacijami, povezovanju in krepitvi kompetenc, kljub naštetemu pa še vedno obstajajo možnosti za izboljšave. V magistrski raziskavi so bile prav tako izpostavljene slabosti programa vzajemnega mentorstva. Med njimi so najpogosteje omenjeni čas, ki se ga porabi za sodelovanje v programu in treninge za vlogo mentorja in vlogo mentoriranca. Omenjene ugotovitve, tako prednosti, kot slabosti, predstavljajo za podjetja, katera bi se lotila vzpostavitve tovrstnega programa, dober vpogled ter pomoč pri izboljšanju uspešnosti implementacije ter izvedbe programa.

Appendix 2: Interview questions

The question asked during the interview process in order to obtain the results of this study are the following:

- What does reverse mentoring mean to you?
- How many times have you participate in the program?
- How did you choose your Senior/Junior partner?
- Did you have any trouble in terms of what would you offer to the Senior partner? (this was a question addressed only to Junior Partners)
- Do you think the relationship with your partner was more like mentoring in the traditional sense or reverse mentoring?
- Do you think it helped you in any way with your career or doing your job better, directly or indirectly?
- What are the things you like about the program in terms of benefits?
- What in your opinion are the potential obstacles for successful reverse mentoring to happen?
- Do you think that reverse mentoring can have any negative outcomes/effects?
- What are the things you don't like about the program or you think it can be improved?

Appendix 3: Survey questions

Danfoss Trata does its own survey at the end of the reverse mentoring cycles to get a feedback from its employees. The questions that the survey contains are the following:

- What are the main 3 benefits you would point out (personally and professionally)?
- What would be your suggestions for improvement (process, program, ways of collaboration…)?
- Would you recommend your colleague to apply for Junior Partner and why?