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Bridging the Gap?

The Role of Trainee Programs in School to Work Transition

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ABSTRACT

Title Bridging the Gap - The Role of Trainee Programs in School to Work Transition

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Key words Trainee, Trainee programs, School to work transition, Expectations, Organizational entry

Purpose The purpose of this thesis is to examine how former trainees experience the transition from the trainee programs to subsequent position and thereby examine how the trainee program affects organizational entry.

Methodology This thesis is inspired by social constructionism, where reality is seen as socially constructed and given meaning by people. We take an interpretive perspective as we are interested in explaining the respondents' subjective experiences. To collect our empirical material we have conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with eleven former trainees.

Theoretical framework Theories presented in the thesis are concerned with the transition from school to work. Our main theory is Louis' model regarding organizational entry experiences. Furthermore, other theories are presented in order to complement Louis theory.

Empirical foundation Our study is based on a case study on one company's trainee program. We have interviewed eleven former trainees, about their experiences from the trainee program and the transition from the trainee program to their subsequent position.

Analysis Louis' theory around organizational entry is the main theoretical source and assists us in the analysis of the empirical material. The main objective is to find and discuss the positive and negative aspects around trainee programs in organizational entry.

Conclusions In this case study we have found some positive and negative effects that this specific trainee program has had on the former trainees' organizational entry. Our results show that the former trainees experience the network and the overall understanding created during the trainee program as the main positive outcomes. The network and overall understanding seems to have helped the former trainees in their transition to their subsequent work role. The main problems with the transition seem to be how the transition was dealt with on a structural level and that the respondents had expectations on their subsequent position

that were too high. On the basis of this research we theorize on the role of trainee programs in organizational entry.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the reader to the fundamentals of the school to work transition and to trainee programs which are the subjects of this thesis. On the basis of these two elements we elaborate on the topic and give the reader an introduction to the research field. The purpose is to create an understanding of the importance of this research. After giving a brief background about school to work transition and trainee programs we continue with a problem discussion where it is stated that trainee programs are seen as a way to bridge the gap between school and work. Further, we present the purpose of this thesis and the research question. Lastly this chapter includes a disposition of the thesis.

1.1 Background

The process of going from school to work, or entering an organization is a period of disorientation and uncertainty (Louis, 1980). The transition process has implications for the individual's willingness to transit to new jobs and/or organizations later in life and how he or she copes with those career changes (Mortimer et al., 2002). The transition could also have impact on other aspects, such as the time it takes to learn a new job, the young adult's coping skills, responsibilities, and how comfortable they are with new colleagues and workplace norms (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). How successful the transition is influences the newcomers' productiveness and the training he or she needs; therefore, it has implications not only for the individual but also for the organization. A low level of success in the transition is also commonly associated with turnover among new hires (Louis, 1980; Feldman & Weitz, 1990).

Problems in the transition from school to work are often connected to weak links between education and practical work (Dalin, 1993). The trainee program has been presented as a potential solution to these issues. It has in part a purpose to introduce the newcomers to work life and is in this way meant to ease the transition from school to work (Porsfelt, 2001).

Trainee programs have become a popular method for companies to attract young and competent newly graduates, with a possible dip due to the economic crisis in 2009 (Karriärindex, 2008; SvD, 2009). The number of applicants per position is high and the programs are known for recruiting the top students (Metrojobb.se, 2010). The structures of the programs vary, but there seems to be a practice among trainee programs that the trainees are appointed to different positions at different departments of the company (Allen & LaFollette, 1977). It offers highly educated individuals an introductory education to a company's

products and processes which can enable them to be appointed to important positions after a relatively short amount of time (Tengblad, 1997, p. 174). From the employer's perspective the motive is often to secure the supply of competent leaders within the organization (Ibid. p. 219).

A Swedish market research organization made a survey among 13.000 students within business, law, IT and engineering about career, work life and future (Karriärindex, 2008). One of the questions was whether the students had applied for, or had intentions to apply for a trainee program. The study showed that four out of five students had already applied, or had intentions to apply for a trainee program. One example is Nordea that had 3000-4000 applicants for their trainee program in 2009 (Metrojobb.se, 2010).

1.2. Problem discussion

Even though trainee programs are popular phenomena, little research has been conducted on the topic (Porsfelt, 2001). In the Swedish context Porsfelt's research (2001), which focuses on how the organizational culture is transferred to the newcomers, is one of the few academic pieces that illuminate trainee programs.

Trainee programs can be seen as a method to ease the transition problems which, according to Dalin (1993), usually occur in the transition from school to work if there are weak links between education and practical work. Trainee programs have, in part, a purpose of showing the newcomers the "real world" of work and in this way they are meant to reduce the potential reality shock when entering an organization. Some researchers state that a trainee year is a useful way to ease the transition from school to work by bridging the gap between studies and work for newly graduates (Porsfelt, 2001, Wilkinson & Harries, 2002).

As mentioned, these programs are partly meant to bridge the gap between studies and work for newly graduates. However, we have not found any research that highlights what happens after the end of the trainee programs when the individuals are to adapt to an "ordinary" position within the company. What happens after the end of the program is interesting as the companies often invest time and money in the trainees to secure the supply of competent people within their organization (Tengblad, 1997, p. 219). In order for this purpose to be accomplished, this requires that the trainee programs develop the trainees' competence and that the trainees' stay within the company after finishing the trainee program. If the trainee programs give the trainees' the right competence, it will ease the transition and prepare them for the subsequent position and the future within the organization. If the transition from the

trainee program to a subsequent work role is unsuccessful, we presume that the organization risks a problem with early turnover despite having used a ‘bridging’ program between the individuals’ university education and work life. By focusing on the transition from trainee to a subsequent position we aim to examine the role of trainee programs in organizational entry.

1.3. Research Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how former trainees experience the transition between the trainee program and their subsequent position and thereby examine how the trainee programs effects organizational entry. This question is of interest since the trainee programs are a popular phenomenon, seen as a solution to bridge the gap between school and work, but little research has been conducted on the topic (Porsfelt, 2001). This thesis will contribute to the previous research about trainee programs. It will also provide practical and theoretical contributions about the effect of trainee programs on organizational entry which we believe will be relevant for companies who are running or planning to run trainee programs.

1.4. Research Question

Our research question is

- How do former trainees experience the transition from the trainee program to their subsequent work role within the organization and what does their experience tell us about the role of trainee programs in organizational entry?

1.5. Thesis Framework

Our thesis is based on a case study of one company’s trainee program. The company is one of the largest actors within its field in Sweden. What we refer to as company or organization is in fact a global corporate group, however for the sake of clarity we have chosen to treat it as one company. We have interviewed eleven former trainees within the company about their experience of the trainee program and how it has affected them in their subsequent work role. This was done in order to examine the role of trainee programs in organizational entry.

This thesis starts with a chapter that explains the method we have used and the methodological considerations applied when conducting this research. This chapter also contains limitations of the study and a discussion about how we have handled these dilemmas. The method chapter is followed by a theoretical chapter. The theoretical framework mainly builds on Louis’s (1980) model about organizational entry experience in which four different

key features of the entry experience are highlighted; change, contrast, surprise, and sense-making. In addition, complementary theories about school to work transition, network and identity are used. The theoretical framework aims to help us in the analysis of the empirical material and contribute to a deeper understanding of organizational entry. It ends with a description and historical background of trainee programs. In the fourth chapter the empirical material is primarily presented using quotes from the respondents. The empirical material is then analyzed with the assistance of the theoretical framework with a focus on the transition from the trainee program to the trainees' subsequent position. Finally the thesis concludes with an outline of the main findings and a discussion of theoretical and practical contributions as well as suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2. METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to give the reader a better understanding of the underlying perspectives of how this qualitative research is conducted. Our main perspective is social constructionism, where reality is seen as socially constructed and given meaning by people. We try to be reflexive when interpreting the empirical material and conducting our analysis. Our thesis is based on a case study of one company's trainee program in which the data was collected from eleven semi-structured interviews with former trainees. We also discuss the limitations and their effect on the conclusions of this study.

2.1. Methodological considerations

Methodology concerns fundamental questions about how to conduct research and the implications this might have (Calás & Smircich, 1999). It is based on ideas of how the world is seen and understood and how this affects the result of the research. Our intention is to use a reflexive perspective around how research is conducted. We see reality as socially constructed and believe that realities go through multiple and partial filters of individual mindsets (Haraway, 1998). This means that we are taking an interpretive perspective which exerts significant influence on how research is conducted.

There are different uses of reflexivity or reflection which typically draw attention to the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes, as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). With regards to the process of knowledge production we try to keep our mindsets open towards the empirical material but still allow for influences from the theoretical framework. This process involves an iterative process between working with empirical and theoretical material in order to reveal an underlying meaning (Ibid.). We conduct this research in line with Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003, p. 968) who state that one should “work with the challenge of accomplishing a good trade-off between theoretical inspiration and openness toward empirical material, between reading in the data a certain vocabulary and certain preferred results and a naïve empiricism in which theory-free data are believed to lead the researcher to the truth”. As we did not have a separate agenda from the company it made it easier for us to be reflexive and avoid looking for a certain preferred result.

The qualitative research process is inherently subjective and influenced by our basic assumptions and pre-understandings (Alvesson, 2004). Our fundamental understanding is that

there are no objective facts as all data are influenced by people's pre-understanding and contextual factors. One has to take into account the researchers and interviewees as influencing the interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010, p. 91f.). We have ourselves applied for different trainee programs and therefore we already had a pre-understanding of what the programs are about. Our pre-understanding colored the way that we approached our subject in order to understand it. Once we began to understand more, our pre-understanding was modified during a number of iterations until we came to a more defined understanding of the subject. In our pre-understanding trainee programs were seen as a shortcut to the top, but our understanding of the trainee programs has then been modified as the research has progressed and our understanding has improved.

This qualitative research is performed with an interpretative and inductive approach. Induction refers to a research method where you try to draw conclusions from your empirical data (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). The data collected from the interviews is subjective expressions of the respondents' inner worlds and we inevitably interpret it partially with the background of our own subjective understanding and in relation to our own inner worlds. Practically this led us to keep a good awareness of our own role in the research. Important aspects of reflexivity are interpretations, which comes to the forefront of the research work and reflection which turns attention "inwards" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). To avoid reproducing our own ideas, we always tried to ask for more detailed explanations of things that we at first perceived as self-evident, for example why it is important with a broad network. After each interview we also had a discussion about how we could have colored the questions with our own interpretations or predictions. This type of "self-fulfilling prophecies" is a negative aspect of reflexivity (Flanagan, 1981).

Our understanding is in line with Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) who argue that all data are potentially value loaded. Rather than trying to reconstruct the "true reality" that Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) describe, we believe that knowledge is constructed from understanding a context and its actor's understandings and interpretations of it. Although we try to detect assumptions and pre-understanding to a great extent, they still affect the research. Another important aspect that helped us maintain a reflexive perspective is that we are three authors of this thesis. We see this as a strength as it gave us the opportunity to benefit from our different perspectives and have the ability to reflect on each other's thoughts and interpretations.

2.1.1. Social constructionism

We are influenced by social constructionism, where reality is socially constructed and given meaning by people (Sandberg & Targama, 2007; Saunders et al. 2009, p. 601). If reality is socially constructed by people it becomes important to understand those meanings that people ascribe to their experiences. Since different people have different perceptions of a phenomenon we need to dig deeper to create understanding. In our research we want to understand the respondents' experiences of the transition from the trainee program to their first subsequent position within the company. It has therefore been important to interview several trainees, to catch different aspects and views and thereby create an overall understanding. Important aspects are also the problematic nature of language and narrative in the research context. For example, some of the respondents used narratives or a certain language that was similar to each other and very positive towards the organization. Therefore we suspect that some of the respondents are colored by politics in the organization. It is needed to read between the lines to see if their experiences are really as positive as they say.

2.2. Method

We sought to follow a method, where theory is developed to illuminate a phenomenon. It is important to be open to different interpretations and different perspectives of the empirical material when doing a qualitative study. We decided not to formulate our research question from the beginning; instead it has emerged over time with regards to our empirical material.

2.2.1. Data collection

There are several types of programs that have similarities with trainee programs, such as internships or apprenticeships, but to narrow the scope of the study we have chosen to only look at trainee programs. We focus exclusively on one specific company, Alfa. There is no comparison made in relation to other companies. When investigating this specific trainee program, we were purposely interested in focusing on the employees that had undergone the whole trainee program. These respondents could reflect upon the program and the perceived effect of undergoing it in other ways than someone currently enrolled in the program.

To collect our empirical material we have conducted a series of qualitative interviews. This was done following a semi-structured interview style described by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 320). The interviews were held in a conversation like manner which gave an opportunity for the respondents and the interviewers to more freely elaborate on the questions and narrow them down during the interview. The interview guide consisted of a number of broader themes, instead of specific questions. We started with a few themes that we assumed would be

interesting with regards to our pre-understanding on trainee programs, for example loyalty, identity and personal development. The themes changed and evolved throughout the research process. During the process we started to emphasize the transition period between studies and work and also the period between the trainee program and the respondents' subsequent work role. This transition from the trainee program to the subsequent work role seemed to be a common problematic theme for many of the former trainees and we therefore decided to dig deeper into this and formulate the research question around this theme.

To expand the picture of the company and the trainee program we also decided to study written and uploaded material regarding their trainee program from the company's homepage. This was done to get an overview of what the program is about and how the recruitment process is organized. This material was used as a complement to the material gathered in the interviews.

2.2.2. Interview setting

The study is based on eleven interviews with seven women and four men. The interviews were carried out over a period of one month. All of the respondents were former trainees, still employed within the company. The respondents underwent the trainee program between 1999 and 2009. The interviews took place at the company's different sites in the southern part of Sweden. The interviews were held in a conference room, face to face with two interviewers and one interviewee. We chose to have two interviewers attend each interview in order for the second interviewer to be able to think, take notes and elaborate on the questions. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Most of them lasted around one hour. One of the interviews was spontaneously held over Skype. We are aware of the disadvantages with holding an interview over Skype which is similar to a telephone interview. When it comes to telephone interviews there is a risk for misunderstandings and bias (Bell, 2006, p. 158), but since our ambition was to gather as much relevant empirical material as possible, the use of a telephone interview was seen as a good choice. All of the interviews were electronically recorded and fully transcribed.

All of the respondents had a common background as former trainees. Today they are working in different positions within the company, such as business development, controlling and recruitment. As this is meant to be an initial study within this specific topic we chose not to take characteristics such as gender and age of the respondents into account as this would have made the study too complex.

Some of the topics we covered were rather sensitive, such as loyalty towards the company and future career plans thus it was important to create a sense of understanding and trust between the respondents and ourselves. To create a comfortable environment the respondents were informed that they were anonymous. The respondents' names have been changed in the thesis and the company is referred to as the fictive name Alfa.

2.2.3. Analysis

The interview transcripts were coded and categorized around several themes, for example school to work transition, identity, personal development and network. The categories were themes that had been touched upon during the interviews. During the coding process we tried to go beyond the surface and look for something less obvious in the text and we also tried to bear the totality of the material in mind. This is in line with Alvesson and Kärreman (2004) who argue for the importance of going beyond the surface when coding a text. To avoid drawing premature conclusions each author created their own coding of the transcripts which were compared and synchronized. After categorizing the empirical material we analyzed it in relation to relevant theory to describe how former trainees experience the transition between the trainee program and their subsequent position and what their experiences tell us about the role of trainee program in organizational entry.

2.3. Limitations

As this is a case study of one company's specific trainee program it is difficult to generalise the conclusions of this research. This can in one way be seen as a limitation. However, case studies are best used in early research on topics that are previously relatively unexplored (Eisenhardt, 1989). As the amount of research on trainee programs is limited and especially around their effect on the school to work transition, a case study is an appropriate method to approach this research gap. Despite the difficulties to generalize we try to make general suggestions about the role of trainee programs in organizational entry.

2.3.1. Romanticism

Since many of the interviewees are women of our own age, we are aware that this could possibly affect the result. A tight relationship and sense of understanding between the interviewer and the respondent could for instance lead to romanticism, a state where the interviewer is at risk to take the respondents eyes and to take the answers at face value (Alvesson, 2003). We have tried to avoid exaggerated romanticism but in some aspects it has been unrealistic to believe that we are fully neutral. During the interviews we felt that we shared similar experiences as some respondents around for example university education and

job search. Therefore there was a risk to take the respondents answers at face value. To reduce this romanticism we continuously tried to ask for clarification of things we at first found obvious.

2.3.2. English as second language

Since both we and the interviewees speak Swedish fluently the interviews were held in Swedish and transcribed in Swedish. The excerpts used in this paper are our own translation as native Swedish speakers. We are aware that a problem with translating the interviews is language differences that may arise due to the translation (Harzing, 2005). Typical Swedish words that were hard to translate were for example “räkmacka”, “gräddfil” or “lagom”. When these words were used we have interpreted and tried to translate them in the manner that best fitted the context in which they were used. This language differences may, however influence the outcome of the research.

CHAPTER 3. THEORY

The purpose of the chapter is to help us in the analysis of the empirical material and contribute to a deeper understanding of organizational entry. The concept of school to work transition, organizational entry and trainee programs are the main areas of focus. All these theories are applicable when trying to understand graduates' experience when leaving school and entering an organization. A short introduction on the importance of a successful transition from school to work is followed by a closer look on organizational entry. The main theory in this section is Louis's model where change, contrast, surprise, and sense-making are seen as crucial factors for the organizational entry process. Further, we examine the role of identity as well as network as a part of organizational entry. The chapter ends with a description of trainee programs including a formal definition and a historical background.

3.1. School to work transition

The first major adaptation young adults have to make in their career is the transition from school to work. How well this transition goes has implications for the person's willingness to transition to new jobs and/or organizations later in life and how he or she copes with those career changes (Mortimer et al., 2002). It also influences the young adult's coping skills, the time it takes to learn new job responsibilities and how comfortable they are with new colleagues and workplace norms (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997).

However, it is not only important for the individual that the transition goes smoothly, but also for the organization. The level of success in the transition will influence how productive the newcomer is and how much training he or she needs. The success of the transition is also commonly associated with the level of turnover among new hires (Louis, 1980; Feldman & Weitz, 1990). Feldman defines success in the transition as "a state in which individuals are employed after leaving school, perform at levels acceptable to their employers, and have positive attitudes towards their work environments and job requirements." (Thomas & Feldman, 2007, p. 116)

In 1980, Louis wrote that voluntary turnover during the first eighteen months of graduate students first career jobs was increasing and that there was a need to improve organizational practices for bringing new members on board. The organizational entry has historically been studied from two angles. One theme has been early turnover and another has been organizational socialization. The turnover theme has been concerned with the role that the newcomer's expectations play when entering an organization. Some of the research has

focused on the level of the initial expectations and other research has been more concerned with the level of unmet expectations the newcomer experiences once he or she is on the job (Louis, 1980). Many researchers in organizational socialization agree that a young adult who fully understands what the role expectations are of their new job is more likely to have a successful transition (Feldman, 1981).

3.2. Organizational entry

Entering an organization is an experience that is associated with a kind of sensory overload, disorientation and uncertainty for the individual (Louis, 1980). It is the process in which he or she adapts to the new organizational setting and changes from being a newcomer to an insider. Most socialization models conceptualize this adaption as a state rather than a stage. That is, the socialization is completed when the newcomer has reached the state of being adapted, i.e. assumed an insider role. As the newcomer is trusted with more information and broader responsibilities, is included in social networks, and someone who others seek advice from, he or she becomes an insider (Louis, 1980).

Louis (1980) has combined the two previously mentioned research perspectives around organizational entry; early turnover and organizational socialization and developed a model in which four different key features of the entry experience are highlighted: change, contrast, surprise, and sense-making. This model is according to Porsfelt (2001) a milestone in the research of organizational entry and seen as the most comprehensive model on the topic.

Louis (1980) defines change as “an objective difference in a major feature between the new and old settings” (p. 235). It is this novelty of the new setting the individual is in that requires him or her to adjust. The bigger the change, i.e. the more elements that are different in comparison to the old setting, the more the individual has to cope with even if the differences are for the better. In line with this, the change from school to an individual’s first fulltime job often means more to cope with than a transition from one fulltime job to another.

The type of change associated with entering a new organization is also something that is publicly noted, there is evidence of the change such as new address, new title, and new job description. There are also often notable changes to the basic working conditions such as working hours, peer interaction, and feedback opportunities. Apart from the above the newcomer also experience a change in role and professional identity, for example changing from being a student to being a financial analyst and as a result they often experience a change in status as well (Louis, 1980).

The second feature in Louis's (1980) model of the entry experience is referred to as contrast. In comparison to the feature change, contrast is more of a personal experience and less publicly noticeable. It refers to the features that appear as particular to the individual when he or she enters new settings. These features are partly determined by what the newcomer has previously experienced. Louis states that a certain case of contrast is connected to the letting go of old roles, which is a process that continues well into the process of becoming an insider. The author compares it to dealing with the death of a loved one and describes it as below:

“As experiences from prior roles are recalled, contrasts are generated, and a variety of sub-processes may be triggered. For instance, the newcomer may evaluate aspects of the new role using old-role experiences as anchors on internal comparison scales. Or the newcomer may try to incorporate aspects of the old into the new role or resist the new role in favor of the old role.” (Louis, 1980, p. 236-237)

The third feature in Louis's (1980) model of the entry experience is surprise. Surprise occurs when an individual's expectations and subsequent experiences in the new setting differs. This can be associated with a positive and/or a negative reaction, in other words, it can be caused by both overmet and undermet expectations. The author distinguishes between different types of surprise that may occur in the early job experience. The surprise may stem from conscious or unconscious expectations about the job that are not fulfilled. However, the individual may also experience surprise as a result of conscious or unconscious expectations of the self that are unmet. For example he or she might have to cope with the recognition of having different skills and values than previously perceived. Another type of surprise may occur as a result of an individual relying on his or her old cultural assumptions.

Louis (1980) suggests that surprise is an inevitable part of the experience of joining a new organizational setting and that surprise triggers a cycle of sense-making. When an individual experience a discrepancy in expectations and reality, a surprise, it creates a need for explanation and an interpretation of the differences. The interpretation the newcomer makes gives meaning to the surprise experienced and he or she will select a behavioral response based on this meaning. This attributed meaning also leads to updated understandings and expectations about the organization and its actors. One of the problems for newcomers is, according to Louis, that they use interpretation schemes that they have developed in other settings to make sense of what is happening in their current setting, that is, in the new

organization. This may cause them to make inappropriate and dysfunctional interpretations and because they have most likely not developed relationships with insiders yet, they have no one to test their interpretations with. Insiders can be an important help to the newcomers by guiding them with background information to help them make sense of the surprises they may experience in the new organization.

Another researcher that also has developed a model regarding individuals' entry process is Schein. Schein (1971) identifies three borders that newcomers cross when entering an organization; the functional, the hierarchical, and the inclusionary. The functional border represents the new set of tasks that the individual has to learn in the new role. The hierarchical border represents that the new role changes the individuals' position in the hierarchy. The third border to cross in the entry process is the inclusionary, which refers to the position the newcomer gets in the more informal networks of information and influence. Newcomers seldom get much of this type of informal access to information and opportunities to influence which puts them in the outskirts of the inclusionary network rather than in the centre.

3.2.1 Network

In today's society networking is seen as a crucial skill that can increase a person's social capital and career success (Janasz & Forret, 2008). Over their careers individuals draw support from, and create different relationships within, their networks (Hall & Kahn, 2001, Kram & Isabella, 1985). Developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships can assist individuals in gaining access to information they need and in finding employment opportunities (Janasz & Forret, 2008). Apart from receiving informational and career support, individuals can also use their network for psychological support (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Situational factors, such as the composition of an organization's workforce can affect the interaction patterns and the individual's opportunities and constraints when forming relationship and networks (Higgins & Kram, 2001). The interaction pattern can also be affected by the organizational culture (Hall, 1996).

The formation of networks affects the school to work transition through its influence on work role identity. In the early stages of an individuals' career, one of the major challenges is to develop a viable professional identity (Chandler & Kram, 2007, Thomas & Feldman, 2007). The newcomers are motivated to learn the skills of the job to be able to meet the performance expectations and progress in their career. They may find some support in their peers, but the main source of support for these developmental purposes is the senior organizational

members within their network (Chandler & Kram, 2007). Through interacting with more senior individuals in their networks, newcomers may develop a more concrete work role identity because they understand the realities of work and are able to formulate more accurate expectations of the work role (Reichers, 1987). Pairing the young individuals with senior mentors can help young employees adjust to work more quickly (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

However, Kegan (1994) argues that individuals at earlier positions may be too embedded in relationships to objectively reflect and differentiate him or herself from significant others. An individual in this position has not created meaningful sense of professional identity. In contrast, an individual that has progressed to the autonomous, self-regulating, institutional stage will distance him or herself from the mentor and find more mutual relationships where the individual fosters the learning of the other.

Hall (1996) argues that individuals bring a certain willingness and capacity to each relational opportunity that is shaped and limited by developmental position. An individual is likely to experience career transitions and mini learning cycles rather than following a linear career development. Today it is more likely for an individual to experience several career transitions across organizations throughout their careers than to have a traditional career within one company (Higgins, 2000). Their networks will more likely allow for career opportunities and intra-organizational mobility.

3.2.2 Identity

In the work context, social identities, i.e. identities that refer to the group that an individual identifies with is often more relevant than highly individualized identities (Alvesson, 2004, p. 191). Social identity is a type of self-categorization that can be seen as a point of departure for how one thinks and relates. Identifying with a certain group often makes the individual more likely to take on the values, norms, and ideas that are associated with the group and, looking at it in the opposite way, if a person perceives the values and beliefs of a group to be appealing he or she is also likely to identify with that group (Alvesson, 2004, p. 191). Not only do we self-categorize, but we also routinely categorize others and what group we perceive them as belonging to. However, neither the categorization of ourselves nor our categorization of the people around us is neutral, it is hierarchical and context dependent. We may be classified as belonging to group A in one context and group B in another (Jenkins, 2008, p. 6).

However, an individual does not only have one identity. Stryker and Burke state that “to refer to each group-based self, the theorists chose the term identity, asserting that persons have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles.” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286) The same authors distinguish between social roles and identities in the context of identity theory. Social roles are “expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships”, identities, on the other hand, are role expectations that the individual has internalized (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286).

As previously mentioned, one of the major initial challenges for individuals in their career is to develop a viable professional identity (Chandler & Kram, 2007, Thomas & Feldman, 2007). Thomas and Feldman (2007) highlight the connection between the school to work transition and work role identification. They define work role identification as “the extent to which a person spends a large amount of time in the work role, feels positively towards the work role, and is able to express his/her personal values within the work role” (Ibid., p. 116). Individuals who primarily identifies with their work role may be able to transition quicker and easier into new and demanding organizational settings than individuals who have a lower level of work role identification or identifies more with another life role, such as for example being a parent (Thomas & Feldman, 2007).

3.3. Trainee programs

The level of work role identification as well as networks and relationships to insiders affect the individuals’ experience of organizational entry. The success of the transition from school to work can in turn affect the newcomers’ productivity and the initial turnover level. Trainee programs have a purpose to help ease this transition (Porsfelt, 2001).

To create an understanding of the concept of trainee programs it is necessary to make a distinction between trainee programs and internships. Internships refer to a temporary and sometimes unpaid position that normally takes place in the summer or during study time (Maynard, 1997, Feldman & Weitz, 1990). Trainee programs, on the other hand, are normally fulltime positions taking place after the individual’s university graduation (Civilekonomerna, 2011).

To cover what the concept trainee stands for a formal definition is useful. A trainee could be described as “a newly employed official, usually recently graduated engineer or economist, who undergoes in-company training for 1/2-1 years” (Nationalencyklopedin, 2011). According to Tengblad (1997, p. 219) the trainee program could be seen as a way to ensure

future survival and success of an organization and contribute to the company with well educated staff, given that the trainee stays within the company after finishing the program. One thing that most major trainee programs in Sweden have in common is that they follow a certification model originally set up by traineeguiden.se in cooperation with two of the unions¹. The certification agreement could be seen as a code of conduct for the trainee programs. We use the authorization standards to explain the basics of what a trainee program is. To be a certified trainee program, the program should meet the following requirements:

1. The trainee employment should be permanent.
2. The company should provide a full program for the whole trainee period. The program should contain both practical as well as theoretical aspects.
3. The length of the trainee program should be between 9-30 months.
4. The initial salary should be on the same level as a normal full time position.
5. The employer should be able to provide relevant work tasks when the trainee program is finished.

(Civilekonomerna, 2011)

3.3.1 The rise of trainee programs

Many large companies in Sweden offer trainee programs for example, Volvo Group, ABB, and Nordea (metrojobb.se, 2010). These programs are normally referred to as trainee programs, management trainee programs, graduate program or equivalent. It has also become more popular for governmental organizations and municipalities to offer trainee programs; one example is Region Skånes trainee program (Region Skåne, 2010). In a historical perspective the trainee programs can be seen as a phenomenon that has developed from different types of on-the-job training opportunities, one example is apprenticeships that have been regularly used within the craftsmen's guild (Lave, 1988).

Trainee programs has a history of being run to secure a steady stream of management talents, hence, trainee programs are sometimes referred to as management development programs (Allen & LaFollette, 1977). On a management level ABBs engineer graduate program could be seen as a predecessor for Swedish trainee programs, starting as early as 1905 (Porsfelt, 2001, p. 5). In an international perspective Vick and General Electric ran successful trainee programs in the 1950s (Whyte, 1956).

¹ Civilekonomerna; a Swedish union for people within business and management and Sveriges ingenjörer; a union for engineers and technical experts.

CHAPTER 4. EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with descriptions on the trainees' experiences of the trainee program as well as the perceived benefits of having undergone the program. A short introduction of Alfa's trainee program is followed by the empirical material collected from the interviews. The empirical material is presented in nine different categories: school to work transition, trainee to subsequent role transition, network, personal development, different placements, assignments, identity, expectations, and loyalty. The order of the different categories does not reflect their importance. The purpose is simply to assist us in structuring the empirical material. To show the respondents' experiences and thoughts, quotations from the interviews are presented.

4.1. The Alfa trainee program

The trainee program at Alfa is one of Sweden's most reputed trainee programs, described by the company as a dream start of your career. The program runs over eighteen months and contains four different blocks. One of these four blocks is abroad. The trainees are signed on a permanent contract, i.e. not for a limited time period. This gives the trainees the possibility to stay with the company after the trainee period is finished. After the program the trainees are able to apply for any available job in the organization as their subsequent position is not predetermined.

Alfa's trainee program meets all of the certification requirements mentioned in the theory chapter. The arrangement of the trainee program makes it possible for the trainees to try four different positions in different departments of the company. These different positions can contain several different work tasks. These positions or blocks are often referred to as "placements". The program is individually tailored, which means that the trainees' interests and educational background are taken into account. In addition to the four placements the trainees go through training programs, language training, and study visits that will help them get a broader understanding of the company and support them in their personal development. The trainees are assigned a mentor to guide them throughout the program. After the trainee program is finished, the trainees have, as earlier mentioned, a guaranteed permanent position within Alfa with a salary in line with the current market conditions.

The trainees are newly graduated or have approximately two years of working experience. To be accepted to the program the individual needs to have a masters degree within business

or/and engineering. Experience from studies or work abroad is also important. Every year around five to ten trainees are admitted to the program.

4.2. School to work transition

As mentioned in the theory chapter, the first major transition for young adults is the one from school to work (Mortimer et al., 2002). For the respondents in this study, the transition from school to work could be seen as having been bridged by the company's trainee program. Their first transition is hence from university to the trainee program. When asked why they applied for the trainee program many mentioned a major reason being the chance to get to try out different positions.

”I didn't know what to do [after university]. I definitely had the ambition to do something but I didn't want to choose something that made me unable to change later, I wanted to keep all doors open. [...] I thought trainee is perfect, then I get to try out, test and see what I think I fit as and get to know myself in that process and know what I think is fun.” (Lucas)

”It was sort of the entry gate, I had some friends who had started working and I won't say you can get lonely at your workplace, but you get out there [into the working world] and you don't really get a context but instead you get a role appointed to you which might be fairly niched and you might not feel that you get to know your colleagues in the same way. So this is really a golden opportunity to 'jump around' a little. You have a year and a half to consider where do I fit in into this organization and where does my passion lie here?” (Rachel)

The opportunity to try different positions within the company and find the right match between themselves and a work role seemed, according to most of the respondents as one of the main reasons to why they applied for the program. One respondent even questioned if there would be any reason to undergo the program if you already before knew what you wanted to do.

“If you know what you want, then I see no reason [to apply for a trainee program], I mean if you are very dedicated and have wanted to work with HR or finance, then I don't know how much extra it gives you to undergo a trainee program.” (Jessica)

Many of the former trainees saw the trainee program as a learning period and a way to get practical experience. They explain the transition from school to trainee as rather easy and the delivery requirements as relatively low.

“A trainee program becomes more like a continuation of your education. Of course you work but it is also lot of education outside of your daily placement.” (Emma)

“It’s a pretty soft transition I would say. [...] The delivery requirements after the trainee program are much higher than they were during the trainee program.” (Jessica)

Many of the respondents have the opinion that a university education does not prepare them for the work role, the degree is more seen as a proof that you are able to learn.

“I don’t think the university education prepares you for a company at all, unless you do one were you work a lot with companies, otherwise you are not prepared. Not for how an organization works politically and how you do things.” (Troy)

”You have to be very careful as a trainee because you are not familiar with the work tasks and it takes quite a lot of time to learn the job. I usually say that the education does not teach you the job. The education is just a proof that you can learn the job once you start working.” (John)

“It [the trainee program] was very exciting and instructive from a number of aspects because I was brand new from school and realized somehow that it isn’t about the knowledge itself that you bring into play in your job, it is about who you are as a person, your personality and that you have courage.” (Rachel)

4.3. Trainee to subsequent role transition

The arrangement of the trainee program enables the trainees to try four different positions within the company. These positions are in different departments and can contain several different work tasks. The respondents explain that one difference between the trainee positions and the subsequent position is that they work with longer projects and stay in the same position for a longer time in their subsequent work role. Some of the respondents

explain that they feel a greater sense of calm around this long term thinking however, some are also a little worried they will struggle with the change of the pace.

“You feel a greater sense of calm [regarding their subsequent position], [you feel] that this is where you should stay. During the trainee program you are so stressed out to learn things fast. It’s nice to talk to your boss and to know that there is a long term plan and not just to know what you should do in four months.” (Emma)

“The trainee placements were like running a hundred meter heat, it went very quickly and then it was over. [...] But now it’s more like running a marathon, it just goes on and on.” (Julia)

If the transition from school to the trainee program is generally perceived as smooth, the experiences of the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent position are not quite as positive. One of the biggest issues for many respondents was how the transition was dealt with by the organization.

“If I say something that was a disadvantage with the trainee program, it was the transition [between the trainee and the subsequent position]. It was not perfect. You became a permanent employee from the first day you entered the trainee program and you were practically promised a subsequent position [after finishing the program], but when I was done with the program, there were no vacancies in the company. HR takes their responsibility, to a certain extent, but you have to struggle quite a bit by yourself and it is tough.” (Mary)

“If I have any criticism against the program it would be that it is not quite clear how the transition from the trainee program to a normal position in the company should work out. Sometimes it just ran on with an extended trainee placement that became a permanent position and in other cases it was like an external recruitment where you had to go through different recruitment processes.” (Andrew)

Some of the respondents describe that the trainees almost need to fight for their survival after the program, however this critique is often directed towards the trainee program rather than towards their new employment. It seems like the company does not always help the trainees

to transfer to a suitable position after the trainee program. Sometimes the trainees only get a temporary position while waiting for a permanent position that suits them. This problem also seems to be depending on the company's economic situation and the conjuncture. The former trainees seemed to have an easier time finding a job in the company when the economy was flourishing compared to trainees who finished the program in a recession.

What almost all of the respondents seem to have experienced is a certain level of insecurity about the recruiting process and transition from the trainee program to a subsequent position. Many respondents describe that when they entered the trainee program many things were served to them, but when they looked for their first full-time, real position, they needed to find it by themselves, which sometimes created a clash and disappointment. However, many also mention other problems with the transition, but are reluctant to say that they have experienced them themselves; they rather speak in general terms. They mention problems with leaving the trainee life behind when starting in a subsequent position within the company.

“I think it can be rather tough to be the boss of someone who comes from the trainee program because as I said my expectations [on the trainee program] were in many ways surpassed, so when you get out you might have really high expectations² on your first role. And then once you are there, you realize that there is a certain pace and certain tasks that are within the frames for what I'm meant to do and what I should deliver and I might not always be able to go as far out and go to these fun events and fairs and those kinds of things but instead the focus is now on delivery. And of course there is a threshold you have to pass were you might in one way like being a trainee and have that life and at the same time you have to realize that no, now I'm going to take responsibility here and grow in my career from on the basis of, amongst other things, delivery.” (Rachel)

4.4. Network

According to many of the former trainees the opportunity to develop a large international network is one of the main advantages of having undergone the trainee program. The networks are used for different purposes, however, it is possible to see a pattern where social, career, and informational needs seems to be the respondents' main reasons for networking.

² The expectations that the respondent refers to will be discussed further in section 4.9.

Many of the respondents feel that the network they have built during the program has helped them in their subsequent roles as they have known who to turn to for information.

“The times when you realise you have a question, your network is of great importance as you know who to turn to and who to talk to.” (Jessica)

“Right then when I was in the trainee program I valued it [the network] highly, because I was in need of it. Now, it is more like a good bonus. Through my trainee network I know exactly whom I can call to find the right person.” (Kate)

The importance of a professional network is mentioned by several of our respondents as a key factor for future possibilities. Some of the respondents explain that using the network they built during the trainee program has been important for career development purposes after the end of the program. They also explain that it played an important role in the process of finding their first subsequent role.

“I applied for the position by myself, and I got it using contacts. I was informed through contacts I met during the trainee program that the position was available. I applied for the position before it was available for externals to apply.” (Jessica)

“There were always a couple of people that it went really well for; they got fantastic, interesting positions directly. They had really bonded with their future boss during the trainee program: ‘you make sure that you finish the trainee program, then you'll come here and let us take care of you.’” (Sarah)

The same respondent, Sarah, feels that she did not fully utilise the opportunity to network during the trainee program and regrets this in retrospect.

“I regret that I did not create more contacts, that I did not understand how important it is to think about politics and be good at networking. To maintain networks that are superficial until the day you really activate them as you would like to ask someone for a favor or something. That is something that I still think about today, that I should have networked more, but it is really not my thing” (Sarah)

As mentioned above, contacts and networks are used mainly to get access to information and new career opportunities. However, some of the respondents also accentuate the social interaction with peers as a valued part of their network, both within and outside the trainee group. One respondent even mention the network as more socially enriching than important for the work tasks.

“Something that you may not always think about is the friendship within the trainee group. [...] We have been an incredible support to each other and we have seen each other’s development, which has been something that enabled us to grow.” (Rachel)

“We [the group of trainees] were like a family” (Mary)

“Even if I have a network with, let's say 200 people that I have a connection to that have undergone the trainee program in other countries and that I have met during my trainee placements, it is still only 200 people out of a hundred thousand co-workers within the company. So the probability that one of them should be the right contact person for the specific work tasks I have now, is very small. [...] It is socially enriching to have a network within the company, but it is not as important for the work tasks” (Andrew)

4.5. Personal development

Within the program, there is emphasis on personal development. To encourage personal development each trainee is given a mentor during the program. Apart from a mentor, the program offers international workshops and seminars. During the program the trainees also meet with the whole group of trainees for feedback sessions and other developing activities. Overall the respondents seem to feel that this has been rewarding and a great benefit of having undergone the program.

“I wouldn’t say that my core values have changed but there was an incredible focus on personal development during the program and you could say that you almost got flooded with personal development [...] and it was fantastic how much you got to take part in and reflect on your own person. I mean, you have always tried to identify what your strengths and weaknesses are when sitting down to write your CV, but it is another think to really hear it explicitly in a feedback session from both colleagues and the others in the trainee group. To

get feedback and development opportunities makes you grow as a person and learn from situations” (Rachel)

“At least you got some tools to use; I have been attending a couple of courses that others [non-trainees] haven’t been attending so maybe you can say that I am a little more prepared. I believe that it is because of the courses and that I had a focus on development but I am also being rather harsh on myself, and that may be because of the trainee program.” (Mary)

The different courses seem to have played an important role for the trainees. Some of the respondents’ think of the different workshops and courses as management courses, while others do not make this connection.

“The workshops and the courses we had focused on how to become a manager. A lot about who you are as a leader, how you are perceived and similar matters. As I understand it that is the kind of question a leader struggles with.” (Lucas)

“I would not say that it is management training. One should not think that you are mature enough to be a manager when you finish the trainee program at the age of 27 or so.” (Troy)

4.6. Different placements

As mentioned earlier, many of the respondents said that the chance to try out different positions within the organization was one of the main reasons for why they applied for the trainee program. Many also mention that getting to try out different roles and see different parts of the organization has been one of the greatest advantages of undergoing the program for a number of reasons. The most commonly mentioned reason the respondents bring up is that they have gotten a general understanding of the organization. Most of them believe that they would not have this general understanding if they had not undergone the trainee program.

“You have gained a different perspective on things. You acquire so much from being out in the different parts of the company and from seeing different leadership styles. You get a completely different view, if you compare to colleagues that have not undergone the program. Other people are aware that you know a lot about Alfa as a company and facts about the corporation. It is invaluable.”(Emma)

“I believe I have obtained so much more than I would have if I had been at the same work place for two years. I have gotten another perspective, partly in the way that we have been talking about before, that I know how things work [with regards to for example resources for personal development] and that I can require things in a different way. [...] I can often tell that I have bits and pieces from here and there and a sense for it and also a contact that I can pass on.”(Rachel)

After the program the trainees are able to search any available job in the organization. Some respondents explain that this broader perspective has made them consider jobs within the organization that they otherwise would not have considered.

“I have a different perspective than if I had walked right into a regular employment, I have completely different possibilities. Before the trainee program, I probably never would have imagined taking a regular employment in some of the departments. Today I'd really like to take a position there; they do a lot of exciting things. Just this attitude means that I may proceed in a different way.” (Kate)

However, some argue that the trainee positions could have prepared them better for their subsequent work role if they would have known from the start where they would end up after the end of the program.

“There are enormous possibilities around where to do your trainee placements. If I would have known that I would end up in my current employment, I would perhaps been able to do something that had more to do with my current department. I felt like there were too many choices. But that is very personal. For me, it would have been better to not have so many choices [around the trainee positions]. “(Emma)

“I think I could have gotten more out of the trainee program if it had been more structured. In one way I think it is good with choices, because then you can do what you want, but in another way it is very difficult to know what you can do when you are completely new in the organization. In retrospect I can see that I probably shouldn't have done some of the placements I did. Not that there was something wrong with them, it was more that I didn't learn much. That I felt I

could have developed my skills a lot more if I had taken a different position.”

(Troy)

The fact that the trainees have already worked in four different places within the organization means they have also gotten to “practice” transitioning. One respondent describes herself as having become good at being a newcomer.

“My boss warned me and said that you should think about being humble when you come to a new department and not just march in and think that you are a gold nugget. [...] You [as a trainee] are really good at that, because you have done it five or six times. I have been the one who has started all over again and have not understood anything or known anybody six times. That makes you learn to be humble and get to know people [...] and be the one who asks for help.” (Lucas)

Apart from giving the respondents a greater comprehensive understanding and the chance to practice transitioning, some respondents point out that getting to try different work places also increases the likelihood of them finding a job that corresponds to what they really want to do.

“The trainee program increases the likelihood that you fit better into your first job. I believe it’s easier to make this match when it’s a person that the employer has seen during 18 months and the trainee has been trying out various tasks and got to know the different parts of the company. It is probably much more likely then, that the match is correct.” (Andrew)

4.7. Assignments

When it comes to what kind of work the respondents have done at their different placements most of them distinguish between projects that have been outside of the daily operation and tasks that have been a part of the daily operation of the department where they had their placement. Many of the respondents have experienced both types of work.

“I have done projects that have been complete sidetracks. One part has been separated from the rest and then you as a trainee have been assigned to do that part. That is very fun because you feel that it is something you’ve done. If you have been a part of the daily operation it is hard to point at what you have actually done, as you do a lot of small tasks all the time. [...] Personally, I thought it was better when I got to be a part of the daily operation. [...] I felt

that you got more experiences to bring with you [from working in the daily operation] because otherwise it was more like doing a shorter thesis or graduation project.” (Emma)

“It is always a trade-off whether you should be a part of the daily operation or work on a separate project. It’s easier to get challenging tasks if it is something that is finished when you move to a different placement. It is hard to find a task that is a part of the daily operation and at the same time challenging. It should be a task for which you have responsibility but at the same time you have to be able to leave it after four months. So the tasks I had as a part of my program that were a part of the daily operation were of a rather simple nature.” (Andrew)

Although many participants have experienced both kinds of work, it seems to have been more common to work with a project outside of the daily operation. This is also what most of the respondents found the most challenging. Two of the respondents describe these projects as below.

“It is one of our strengths in my opinion. They [the departments] have been prepared in the way that now you [the trainee] are here and you have this assignment and before you are done you should present this. The presentation might be for the management or the boss of your department and they are counting on you to deliver something that can make a difference. So it is very hands on tasks, it is not some cosmetics on the sidelines, it really leads to something and I think that’s cool” (John)

“I think all of the placements I did during my program has involved projects that would have been done regardless of my presence, but if I hadn’t been there they would have used resources from the organization instead.” (Jessica)

However, there are also respondents that do not share the same view of the projects that they got to do in their placements. They rather think it was something that would not have been done if they had not been there to do it. Some of the respondents also criticize some of the placements for not offering the trainees qualified tasks.

”Often the projects were something like ‘oh, this is something we’ve wanted to deal with for a really long time but nobody has had time to so maybe you could have a look at it.’ It was fun, but it became something of a side track.” (Mary)

“Some of the placements I had were maybe not as qualified tasks as I had hoped for or expected. That was different for each of us, the trainees in my program I mean. It depended on your placement supervisor and how much preparatory work they had done whether you got qualified tasks or if it was just some smaller investigation that nobody else had the energy to do.[...] I was unfortunate enough to have two placements like that. [The respondent describes the unqualified task she did during one of those placements]. It felt like something the department had surely been aware of for five years but not done anything about. Then a trainee happened to come along and ‘oops, she starts on Monday and we haven’t really prepared anything well thought-out for this person to do so she could do this [the unqualified task described by the respondent]’. So that time, and one other time I felt like...what the hell am I doing here.”(Sarah)

4.8. Identity

Along with having been chosen from a large number of applicants for the trainee positions a feeling of being special and “the chosen one” seems to have arisen in some of the respondents.

”You can’t deny that you get a little bit of a confidence boost when you have pushed your way in amongst all the other applicants.” (Jessica)

”It was a little like ‘here I come’ [...] You felt that you came in as a breath of fresh air. They often said that you come in with new thinking and lots of energy. Our boss often said ‘you are chosen’, ‘you have eyes on you when you are not a trainee anymore’ and ‘you should get far.’” (Lucas)

There are respondents who describe expectations on the trainees that come from the organization. These expectations often seem to be high.. One respondent explains how the trainees sometimes were viewed as overachievers.

“You are seen a little as an übermensch, you should deliver so much and they have very high expectations on the trainees out in the organization. It is a little

hyped as they know there are so many applicants and it is published on the intranet when the new trainees are recruited. So when you got somewhere, on the one hand they expected you to be an overachiever and at the same time I think some probably thought you would be a little bumptious and have taken a shortcut [to the top]. They thought that you wouldn't be nice and that you would be some know-it-all or something. And then from above, also from the managerial level it was a little like you should be visible, you couldn't really pass unnoticed.” (Troy)

Even though the expectations around the trainees seem to be different in the organization, all of the respondents seem to have identified rather strongly with being a trainee during the program. Many of them also express that the feeling of being a trainee has lingered after the end of the program.

“In the beginning, when you had just finished the program and still lived a lot in that world, you had close relationships to the new trainee program. You were out on after work activities with the new trainee group. You were still out representing Alfa on job fairs so I still felt like a big part of it [the trainee world] then.” (Sarah)

4.9. Expectations

In the transition from the trainee program to their subsequent position, many respondents describe a problem with the trainees in general having high expectations on their subsequent work role that are unmet. Some of the former trainees explain that they during their trainee program got many benefits and felt as if they were served many things on a silver platter. One respondent explains how easy she felt it was to get the placements that she wanted while she was a trainee.

“I would really say that I didn't need to fight for myself, it has been more like riding the gravy-train. I could call someone and say ‘hi, I'm a trainee and I'm interested in what you are doing, could I come and do a placement with you?’ Everyone says, ‘sure’, It hasn't been any trouble at all.” (Emma)

When transitioning to their subsequent position within the organization, the respondents seem to have experienced a different reality. The transition to the subsequent position seem to be experienced as a cultural change and some of the respondents explain that they felt as if they

got a cold shower when starting their subsequent position, much because of less attention and benefits compared to what they got during the trainee program.

“I think it is a problem in general, the mismatch when you go from being a trainee to when you start working. I think most people got a cold shower when it became apparent that we [the former trainees] were not as much the centre of attention anymore and we did not get the salary that we expected. Simply the reality. So I think that this would be a good thing to work with within the program, simply to prepare the trainees for the reality.” (Sarah)

“When you are in the trainee program, you are everywhere and I thought it was really nice to get a real job and get to be in a place a bit longer than just three to four months. [...] At the same time it is a big cultural change after having been the centre of attention, one that everyone is talking about, one that is seen on the intranet, in pictures and in articles. You are at universities to talk about what it is like to work within Alfa and so on. Then you start to work at a regular position in the company and you do not get the same attention anymore. There is a big change and I know that some have thought it was a bit hard. You start to feel like ‘was this what working was going to be like’ and things like that. It was not as fashionable after the trainee program.” (John)

“You get very spoiled [during the trainee program]. All the time constantly developed and satisfied in a number of different levels. So I had hoped it would continue.” (Kate)

Some respondents also explain that former trainees can possibly be more demanding compared to other employees, as they are used to their previous situation as trainees when entering their first non-trainee role.

“I think you adapt very easily when the conditions around you get better so to speak. However, it’s very difficult when the conditions change for the worse or become more challenging for you. Then it is very easy to start whining. You get four placements almost served to you and then you should get a job yourself and do not get it served. You wonder why it is like that, because you come to expect that you should get it served to you.” (Andrew)

Trainee programs in general are often referred to as a kick start to your career but when asked whether they would have been able to acquire the position they hold today without the trainee program, the experiences seem to differ among the respondents. Some of them find themselves having had expectations that were too high and others had expectations that were in line with the reality they faced.

“You expected that you would get a good position [after the trainee program] and things like that. What I have thought about now is that I work in a similar employment as someone who has not undergone the trainee program. It's not like you're on the gravy-train to the CEO position just because you have undergone the trainee program” (Kate)

“I think that the trainee program played a crucial role when I got my present position. I don't think I would have the position I have today, or at least not so soon after graduating from university, if it wasn't because of the trainee program” (Jessica)

The respondents do, however, specify some of the ways in which the trainee program can be seen as a short cut to the top. For example the former trainees are automatically qualified to attend the company's management development centre. In order for other employees to attend the centre they need a recommendation from their manager.

“I think you have a small advantage of being a former trainee. At Alfa you will move forward and be part of a ranking, you are evaluated. I have a VIP lane since I will get there [to the management development centre] when my manager feel that I'm ready. But then when I get there it won't be only trainees, everyone will be there, and then I will be evaluated from scratch.” (Mary)

Another advantage that is mentioned is benefits in terms of salary. One respondent explains that the trainees could get a little higher salary after the trainee program than an average employee.

“You could probably say that if I had an advantage [from having undergone the trainee program] it is purely salary wise. [If you have been a trainee] your salary increases faster or has done at least, then you never know in the future.

But I started with a little higher salary after the trainee program than the average [newly employed]. (Mary)”

4.10. Loyalty

Many of the former trainees mention the amount of money and resources they know have been invested in them when speaking of their loyalty towards the organization.

“What is most important for me is that I am challenged and can develop. But then of course, I feel a certain amount of loyalty towards Alfa since I know how much money and resources they have given to me through the trainee program.”(Mary)

“Directly after the trainee program they would probably have been rather cranky if I started somewhere else. But I can understand that, as they have invested one million SEK on the trainee program for each person.[...]You don’t deliver that much during those months.[...]You have cost them money for a year and a half, of course the company wants something back.”(Troy)

Most of the respondents think that the company has expectations on the trainees when they pass on to their subsequent positions. However, the respondents seem to have a hard time defining how the company’s expectations on the trainees, regarding loyalty, to the organization are expressed.

“I am not really sure, it is hard to specify what it is that they expressed to make me feel like this [the respondent feels that she is expected to continue her career within Alfa]. But that is the way I feel. Just the fact that they keep statistics over the ones that quit [contributes to this feeling] but then it is also ourselves who hype it and compare how many trainees that still are left from the different years. There is also very much about the new trainees now and it becomes some kind of group belonging. We keep track of each other and have an alumni network.” (Emma)

The opinions differ among the former trainees about their loyalty to the company after the trainee program. Most of them have felt some expectations to be loyal to the company and stay at least for a while after the end of the trainee program.

“I know that it is expected that we should stay, everything else would have been strange. It is hard to say for how long though, if you should discuss it in terms of time. It is hard to say, in their eyes I think they would like us to stay forever.” (Jessica)

However, this opinion does not seem to be shared among all the respondents. One respondent says that she did not feel any expectations at all from the organization that she should stay after the program as they did so little to make her transition from the program to her subsequent position work well.

“I felt the opposite way [that the organization did not expect her to stay], ‘if you want me to stay so badly, couldn’t you have made sure I was able to enter the organization’ [after the trainee program].[...]They could have done much, much more [to make the transition work]. I was definitely pissed off and disappointed then.”(Sarah)

Although the turnover numbers the respondents mention are low during the first years after the end of the program there is no guarantee among the respondents that they will stay within Alfa forever. Many of the respondents say that they will only stay within the company as long as they get personal development and feel challenged. However, when discussing loyalty, the respondents often refer to a trend in today’s society that you should not stay for too long with the same employer or within the same industry. Some respondents say that they will most likely leave at some point either way.

”The day I feel that I am not challenged any more I will off course look outside of Alfa, but if you have undergone the trainee program you feel a little more connected to the company.” (Mary)

“I believe that I and Alfa still have a lot left to learn from each other, but nevertheless, one day it will be challenging to try another industry.” (Jessica)

“I want to see other businesses [...] I don't think it is a good idea to stay with one company for too long. I really don't think it is a good idea, so I'm starting to feel that whether I like it or not I should leave Alfa.” (Sarah)

CHAPTER 5. ANALYSIS

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the empirical material with the assistance of the theoretical framework. We start with an overall analysis of the trainees' organizational entry. The focus during the rest of the analysis is the transition between the trainee program and the trainees' subsequent work role although a complementary aspect is analyzed, the transition from school to the trainee program. This aspect is important to bear in mind when creating an understanding of how the former trainees experience the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent work role since this is a part of organizational entry. However, as this transition is not part of the main focus of the thesis this section is quite short. The analysis of the transition to the subsequent work role is broken down into different sub-categories that represent the factors that have affected the transition the most.

5.1. Organizational entry

According to Louis (1980) entering an organization is an experience that is associated with a kind of sensory overload, disorientation and uncertainty for the individual. It is the process in which the individual adapts to the new organizational setting and changes from being a newcomer to an insider. The bigger the change i.e. the more elements that are different in comparison to the old setting, the more the individual has to cope with. Louis (1980) describes that one of the problems for newcomers in the organization is that they use interpretation schemes that they have developed in other settings to make sense of what is happening in the new organization. Many respondents had the opinion that a university education did not prepare them for a work role and that it is more seen as a proof of your ability to learn. With this view the trainee program can be seen as way of learning new interpretations schemes that are customized for the organization. Drawing on the logic of the above, the transition from a trainee program to a subsequent position ought to be smoother than the transition from school to the trainee program as the change involves fewer elements. It is also likely that the individuals who have undergone the trainee program benefit from having gotten used to their settings changing and might be able to cope better with the transition from the program to their subsequent position. Paradoxically, the respondents in general experience the transition from the trainee program to a subsequent position as tougher than the transition from university to the trainee program.

Most trainees, however, seem to stay in the company a couple of years after their trainee program. One reason for this can be loyalty towards the organization and some of the

respondents highlight the amount of time and money that has been invested in them and that they feel that they want to give something back to the organization.

5.2. School to trainee transition

The first transition, that from being a student to being a trainee, has seemingly been a positive experience for all of the respondents. The main reason why most of them applied to the program was because they wanted to try out different positions within the organization. Many of the former trainees saw the trainee program as a learning period and a way of getting practical experience. All respondents explained that their initial expectations were fulfilled and they were able to try different work tasks during the program. There seems to be very few trainees that have left the company during the trainee program. This is in line with Louis (1980) that explains that when an individual's initial expectations are fulfilled it is more likely that the individual stays within the company.

5.3. Transition to subsequent work role

When it comes to the transition from the trainee program to the respondents' first subsequent position, the experiences have varied between the respondents, but overall been far from as positive as those of the first transition. Thomas and Feldman defines a successful transition from school to work as "a state in which individuals are employed after leaving school, perform at levels acceptable to their employers, and have positive attitudes towards their work environments and job requirements" (2007, p. 116) If we use the same definition to evaluate the transition from the trainee program to the individuals first subsequent position, we cannot state that the transition is entirely successful. Once in their new role, we do believe the trainees perform at an acceptable level, however they do not always seem to possess completely positive attitudes towards their new situation. As the transition, at least for some of the respondents, is not successful the organization may still risk a problem with early turnover when the former trainees face a reality that does not correspond to the expectations they built during the trainee program. The two main positive outcomes the respondents feel have helped them the most in their subsequent roles are however, the general understanding of the organization and the network.

5.3.1. Different placements and assignments

As mentioned, while the respondents were trainees they got the opportunity to try out different positions and were also able to see what they liked best and where they best fitted into the organization. Many found this to be an advantage of undergoing the program. In this way, the trainee program can be seen as an opportunity to facilitate a proper match between

an employee and a work role. Worthington and Juntunen (1997) argues that the level of success in the transition and the match between employee and employment will influence how productive the newcomer is. By having the opportunity to try different placements within the company, the trainees got an overall understanding of the company. This can ease the success in the match between trainee and subsequent work role.

One problem encountered in this case, however, is that although the trainees got a general understanding of the company, some trainees explain that the trainee program did not practically prepare them for their subsequent role. Their tasks, often projects outside of the daily operation, at the different placements were seldom in line with the work tasks of their subsequent role. Even in the cases where the trainees had tasks that were a part of the daily operation these tasks were sometimes perceived as rather unqualified. This mismatch can be seen as a reason for the problem with the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent position as the trainee program has not helped the individuals cross the first of the three borders identified by Schein (1971). The first border that the individual has to cross to enter an organization is the functional border which represents the new set of tasks the individual has to learn in the new role. However, as the trainee program offers such a broad spectrum of placements for the individuals, some of the respondents feel that they have not had much use of what they have learnt in some of their placements. Further, the tasks are often not of the sort that helps the trainees learn the work role. Hence, for most of the respondents, the challenge to overcome the functional border still remained after the end of the trainee program.

We argue that this structure with four placements within different departments of the organization suit some of the former trainees, depending on their preferences and the requirements of their subsequent position. In some cases it would have eased the transition if the trainees would have known from the start where they would end up after the trainee program. This would have had enable them to choose placements that would have prepared them better for their subsequent position. On the other hand, the trainees might then have lost some of the overall understanding which is one of the strengths of the program. Further, they would not have had the same chance to learn where they passions lie during the course of the program.

On the basis of this study we suggest that it can be relevant for companies who run, or are planning to run, a trainee program to decide the purpose of the trainee program and structure

the program accordingly. If the aim is to have employees with a general understanding of the different business areas within the company, a structure such as the one of Alfa's trainee program, where the individuals are not already from the start appointed to a specific business area or role, is likely to be suitable. If the individuals after the trainee program are offered roles where a general understanding is important, this type of structure is likely to ease the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent role.

However, if the aim is to secure a future supply of employees that are specialists or that are already after the program equipped to handle the functional tasks of a specific role it might be appropriate to create an individually customized program structure for each trainee. If the program is focused on enabling the trainee to learn what is needed for the subsequent position they will be able to cross the functional border which is part of the process of entering an organization. Between these two extremes, companies should also be able to create hybrid structures suitable for the purpose of their specific trainee program.

5.3.2. Network

Another positive aspect that the respondents find with the trainee program is that it gave them the chance to build a large network. As said by Janasz and Forret (2008), the individuals' networks are used both for gaining access to information they need to do their job and for career purposes. Many of the respondents describe using their networks to find information they need in their subsequent work roles and perceive this as very useful. That the respondents feel like they often know who to call and ask for information might at least partly compensate for the fact that many of the respondents felt like they were not prepared for the tasks of their new work role. Having built this network and being able to use it in the way described meant that many of the respondents had, already before the transition, crossed the inclusionary border (Schein, 1971). The inclusionary border refers to the position the newcomer gets in the more informal networks of information and influence. Newcomers seldom get this type of access but as the respondents have crossed this border already during their trainee program; we expect this to have eased their transition into their subsequent position. Apart from valuing the network they have built, many of the respondents also value the social network they had, or in some cases still have, with the others who were trainees during the same year. This is likely to have the effect of psychological support as mentioned by Kram and Isabella (1985) as the trainees shared many of their experiences with each other. The feeling of being part of a group and not being the only one, who experienced the

transition, might have helped them cope with the changes that occurred when they left the trainee life behind.

We argue that the inclusionary border in Schein's model could improve if it evolved and also took into account the benefits that the newcomer experiences from being included in a social network. The former trainees have already before starting the work role after the trainee program had a chance to socialize with people in the organization and build a social network. The trainees emphasize that this social network has had a positive effect on the transition to their subsequent position. We therefore argue that the role the newcomer gets in the informal network is not only important for information and influence purposes, but also plays an important role for their social well-being. We assume that this, in turn, can help to ease the organizational entry.

5.3.3. Expectations

The respondents' negative experiences in the transition from the trainee program to their subsequent permanent positions have mainly been focused around two general themes, unmet expectations and structural problems of the transition. The expectations the respondents had of their subsequent position were partly determined by what they had experienced during the trainee program. What they experienced when they entered their new role can therefore be seen as a contrast to the respondents' previous employment, i.e. the trainee program. In the transition process there is a change in role identity and a change in status as well as notable changes to the basic working conditions, such as working hours, peer interaction and feedback opportunities (Louis, 1980). Many of the respondents explain that they experienced the period after the transition as a different reality and some state that it was like getting a cold shower when they started at their subsequent position after the trainee program. As a trainee they were the center of attention and a lot of resources were invested in their development. They got benefits that were not provided for them in their subsequent position. As Louis (1980) described, this contrast is connected to letting go of old roles. This contrast appears as a personal experience and refers to the features that appear as particular to the individual when he or she enters new settings. These features are partly determined by the newcomers' previous experience and are connected to the letting go of old roles. The trainees are not always aware of this contrast between trainee and subsequent position.

As we discuss in section 5.3.1 the opportunity to try out different position can be seen as a way to facilitate a proper match between an employee and a work role. This can ease the success in the match between and subsequent work role. Despite this, it seems like the trainee program has not fully prepared the trainees with an understanding of what their subsequent position will be like and how it will affect them. When the expectations are not fulfilled the experience becomes associated with a negative reaction that according to Louis (1980) can be explained as a surprise. This surprise creates a need for explanation and interpretation which gives the former trainee a chance to adapt to the new organizational setting. This problem with the transition can also be explained by Feldman (1981) who argues that young adults who fully understand the role expectations of their job are more likely to have a successful transition. When some trainees do not fully understand the role expectations, they can become disappointed which will affect the transition from trainee to the subsequent position negatively.

Some of the respondents mention experiences that suggest that their expectations were unmet when they got a subsequent position that was at the same level as a position as someone who had not undergone the trainee program could have had. This suggests that if companies want to secure a future supply of competent employees through a trainee program they might be best off if they try to make sure that the expectations the trainees have on their subsequent roles are met. This will help the individuals to have a smooth transition to their subsequent work role. We assume that this could either be done by trying to keep the trainees expectations down during the program or by offering more challenging subsequent roles. If the trainees' expectations are unmet and the transition is unsuccessful there is a risk that they consider leaving the company. The trainee program can in that case not be seen as having achieved its purpose. In relation to this, it might also be wise for companies to reflect upon how to market the program and what type of profile to use, since many tend to associate the trainee program with management opportunities which is likely to create high expectations among applicants.

On the basis of this study, we suggest that the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent work role is likely to be easier if the company who runs the trainee program has prepared their trainees for the reality they will face after the program, regarding for example resources, attention and the type of roles they can expect to get.

5.3.4. Identity

Another aspect that seems to have affected the trainees' transition is their work role identity. As Alvesson (2004, p. 191) points out, an individual is likely to take on the values of the group that he or she identifies with, however, it can also work the other way around that the individual is more likely to identify with a group whose values he or she share or find appealing. Because of the seemingly thorough recruitment process the trainees who were chosen might already share the values of the company to greater extent than somebody who has been employed for a position after just an interview. This could mean that they are more likely to have a high level of work role identification. The trainees are also likely to take on values, norms, and ideas that are characteristics of the trainee group. What these characteristics are depends on the previous trainee groups. The respondents all seem to have identified rather strongly with the work role, which according to Thomas and Feldman means that the individual "spends a large time in the work role, feels positively towards the work role and is able to express his/ her personal values within the work role" (Thomas & Feldman, 2007, p. 116). This is likely to have contributed to the ease of the trainees' transition from school to the trainee program. It could also have helped the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent position as individuals with high work role identification are supposedly able to transition quicker and easier than those with a lower level of work role identification.

However, this does not seem to describe the entire picture. Stryker and Burke (2000, p.286) distinguish between social roles as "expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships" and identities, which are role expectations that the individual has internalized. The empirical material can in a way illustrate how the organization attaches expectations on the trainees and that the trainees in some cases have internalized these expectations and do feel like a special, chosen group. The respondents explain that they strongly identified with being a trainee during the trainee program. This strong identification can have made the transition from trainee to subsequent position harder because they did not only have to change work tasks but they also had to leave their identity as trainee behind.

In summary, it seems like the identity as trainees has helped the respondents adapt to the subsequent position, but in another way it could have made the transition harder, due to a change of identity. We believe the latter is linked to Schein's (1971) second border in the entry process. The second border, the hierarchical, represents that the new role gives the individual a position in the hierarchy. As trainees the individuals have a certain place in the

hierarchical order, but after the trainee program their place in the hierarchy might change. This could possibly lead to a sense of insecurity. It is therefore somewhat unclear if the trainee program helps the individuals cross the hierarchical border or not.

5.3.5. Structural issues of the transition

When the respondents describe the problems of unmet expectations they often speak in fairly general terms and do not necessarily say that it is their own experience. They sometimes refer to these problems as something they believe the other trainees experienced in their transition. There is, however, one aspect expressed more explicitly by the respondents which is the structural issues of the transition. The respondents seem to experience a lack of a plan around how to continue after the trainee program. The transition from the trainee program to the subsequent position seems to have happened in different ways for each trainee. Some respondents seem to have experienced the transition as pretty trouble-free while others explain that they almost had to fight for their survival when transitioning to a subsequent position. These issues seem to have been especially hard for those who finished the program in a recession. By not taking care of the trainees in the transition to their subsequent role in the organization, Alfa is risking to lose some of them to other organizations. This also means that one of the main purposes of trainee programs would not be fulfilled. This purpose is according to Tengblad (1997) to provide the company with well educated staff. We therefore find it rather strange that Alfa invests a significant amount of time and money in their trainee program but when it is time for the trainees to contribute to the organization with the knowledge that they have created during the trainee program, they struggle to get a subsequent position. The trainees are guaranteed employment within Alfa, but in some cases they have trouble finding a position after the program and the company does not always seem to help them get on track. In some cases the trainees explain that they have gotten stuck in a type of limbo after the program where they have in fact been employed (by Alfa's HR department) but they have not found a permanent role within one of the departments of the company yet. In some cases the respondents only got a temporary position which they experienced as a kind of unofficial prolonging of the trainee program.

While this may be a problem specifically prevalent in Alfa's case, it might at least offer a warning to other companies that run or are planning to run a trainee program. A lack of clarity regarding how the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent role should work might lead to uncertainty and disappointment among the trainees.

5.3.6 Postponing the problem

The trainee program is seen as a way to ease the transition from school to work and bridge the gap between studies and work for newly graduates (Porsfelt, 2001). But our findings show that this is not always the case. Whether the problems of the transition depended mainly on unmet expectations or on how the transition was dealt with on a structural level, the transition between the trainee program and the subsequent position seems to affect the trainees more than the transition from school to the trainee program. We therefore argue that the trainee program seems to partially postpone the problem with the school to work transition, with the exception of giving the trainees a broader understanding of the company and a comprehensive network.

Instead of giving the trainees the skills they need for their subsequent role and prepare them for a subsequent position the program provides them with an overall understanding of the company and a strong network. This pointer is similar to the one made by the respondents themselves about the university degree, that it does not practically prepare them for a work role. We believe that there is a significant need for more research regarding the effect that trainee programs have on the transition from school to work.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarizes our conclusions drawn from the analysis focusing on the research question: How do former trainees experience the transition from the trainee program to their subsequent position within the organization and what does their experience tell us about the role of trainee programs in organizational entry? Our main findings suggest that the experience of the transition, in the case of Alfa, is mainly positive as the trainee program has provided the trainees with the opportunity to build a great network and obtain a general understanding. Although, the trainees got a general understanding of the company most of them feel that the works tasks within the trainee program did not fully prepare them for their subsequent position. Another negative aspect is the structural problems of the transition and the trainees' unmet expectations of their subsequent positions. We therefore argue that the trainee program seems to partially postpone the problem with the school to work transition. This chapter also includes practical and theoretical contributions as well as suggestions for further research.

6.1. Main findings

In this research we have seen some negative and some positive effects that Alfa's trainee program has had on the respondents' organizational entry. The experiences varies among the respondents but the two main positive outcomes that most of them feel have helped them in their subsequent roles are a general understanding of the organization and their network. Their networks are used both for career purposes and to gain access to information. That the respondents had the chance to build a network and were able to use it in these ways means that they had crossed the inclusionary border described by Schein (1971) already before they started their first role after the trainee program. We argue that in this regards, the trainee program has eased the former trainees' transition to the subsequent position. The respondents also seem to have developed a social network throughout their trainee program which according to Kram and Isabella (1985) has likely offered them psychological support. This might have helped them cope with the transition from trainee to subsequent position.

Most of the respondents feel that they developed an overall understanding of the company during the trainee program which they have found useful in several ways during their subsequent position. By trying different placement the former trainees also got the opportunity to see where they best fitted in the organization and in this sense the trainee program facilitated a proper match between the trainee and the subsequent work role. The

level of success in the match between employee and employment will influence how productive the newcomer is (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). We therefore argue that the trainee program can help the transition to the subsequent position by helping the trainee find out where they best fit in the organization. One problem with this is that although the trainees got a general understanding of the company most of them feel that the work tasks within the trainee program did not fully prepare them for their subsequent position. Although the overall understanding could ease the transition to the subsequent position, the mismatch between the work tasks within the trainee program and the skills needed for the subsequent position does not necessarily help the organizational entry.

The respondents also express other problems with the transition from the trainee program to the subsequent position. The main problems with the transition seem to be the structural problems around the transition and unmet expectations around their subsequent positions. The structural problems seem to relate to the lack of plan about how the trainees should continue after the trainee program. Some respondents seem to have experienced the transition as pretty trouble-free while others explain that they almost had to fight for their survival when transitioning to a subsequent position. By not taking care of the trainees in the transition to their subsequent role in the organization, Alfa is risking to lose some of them to other organizations. This also means that one of the main purposes of trainee programs would not be fulfilled. This purpose is according to Tengblad (1997) to provide the company with well educated staff.

A non successful transition can lead to a problem with early turnover especially when the former trainees face a reality that does not correspond to the expectations they built during the trainee program. The former trainees' expectations were partly determined by what they experienced during the trainee program and what they experienced in their subsequent positions. This can according to Louis (1980) be seen as a contrast. Many of the respondents explain that they experienced the period after the transition as a different reality and some state that it was like getting a cold shower when they started at their subsequent position after the trainee program. Many felt that they did not get as much attention as before and experienced the transition as though. When the expectations are not fulfilled the experience becomes associated with a negative reaction that according to Louis (1980) can be explained as a surprise. This surprise creates a need for explanation and interpretation which gives the former trainee a chance to adapt to the new organizational setting. When the trainees start in

their subsequent positions they must let go of their former role as a trainee and create another role identity, a process that seems to have been pretty hard for the former trainees. When the trainees do not fully understand the expectations of their new role, they become disappointed which affects the transition from trainee to subsequent position negatively. We therefore argue that the trainee program seems to partially postpone the problem with the school to work transition, with the exception of giving the trainees a broader understanding of the company and a comprehensive network.

6.2. Practical contributions

During the research we encountered several findings that we believe are of interest to discuss with the purpose of making practical contributions to companies currently running trainee programs or who consider offering one in the future.

On the basis of this study, we recommend that organizations carefully consider the purpose of their trainee program. Does the trainee program have the purpose to create generalists with an overall understanding of the company or educate experts within a special field? Depending on the purpose, the structure of the program must be planned in order to achieve that goal.

We believe that if you want to secure a future supply of competent employees through the use of a trainee program you should ensure that the trainees have the right conditions for a smooth transition to their subsequent work role. To achieve this, we suggest that it is important to develop a program that is in line with the trainees' expectations on their subsequent role with regards to for example, resources, attention, and work tasks. If the trainees are not prepared for the reality they will face, there might be a risk that the trainees' expectations are unmet and that they consider leaving the organization.

In relation to this, it might also be wise for companies to reflect upon how to market the program and what type of profile to use, since many tend to associate the trainee program with management opportunities which is likely to create high expectations among the applicants.

Based on this case study we also believe it is important to have a strategy around how the trainees' transition from the trainee program to the subsequent position should be dealt with on a structural level. A lack of strategy in this matter might otherwise lead to insecurity and disappointment among the trainees.

6.3. Theoretical contributions

Trainee programs are seen as a way to ease the transition from school to work and bridge the gap between studies and work for newly graduates (Porsfelt, 2001). However, based on our finding we question if the trainee programs can really be said to serve this purpose.

The trainee program we have studied seems to have provided the trainees with an overall understanding of the company and a strong network which can ease the transition to their subsequent work role. However, it does not seem to have given the trainees the functional skills that they need for their subsequent role and in this way prepared them for their subsequent position. Many of the trainees also seem to have had expectations of their subsequent position that were unmet. This is similar to what newcomers commonly face when they enter an organization for the first time (Louis, 1980). We therefore argue that the trainee program seems to partially postpone the problem with the school to work transition. This point is also similar to the one made by the respondents themselves about the university degree, that it does not practically prepare them for a work role.

We also argue that the inclusionary border in Schein's model could improve if it evolved and also took into account the benefits the newcomer experiences from being included in a social network. Based on our this study, the role the newcomer gets in the informal network is not only important for information and influence purposes, but it also plays an important role in their social well-being. We assume that this, in turn, helps ease the organizational entry and therefore believe it should be included in the model.

6.4. Suggestions for further research

We believe that there is a significant need for more research regarding the effect that trainee programs have on the transition from school to work. Our research has only scratched on the surface of issues related to the transition between a trainee program and a subsequent position. It is important to bear in mind that our study only concerns one specific trainee program and cannot be generalized. To develop a more general result there is a need for a more comprehensive study on several trainee programs.

Another interesting angle in the research of trainee programs is to look at it from the company's point of view, discussing the trainee program out of a human resources perspective where the strategic as well as economical advantages of trainee programs are yet to be examined. This could involve investigating parameters such as years of employment within the organization after the end of the trainee program and the former trainees'

performance in comparison to employees who have not undergone the program. It is also of interest to consider the attention the trainee programs get in media and what kind of marketing and employer branding benefits the company might receive from providing a trainee program. This kind of research could include companies that currently run trainee programs as well as companies that have decided to withdraw their trainee programs. A study of the aspects above could illustrate whether the long term investment of the trainee program is profitable or not.

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