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A Melting Pot of Knowledge

A case study exploring willingness and barriers to knowledge sharing and learning among junior and senior preschool teachers in the public sector

by

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Abstract

Title	A Melting Pot of Knowledge: A case study exploring willingness and barriers to knowledge sharing and learning among junior and senior preschool teachers in the public sector
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Aim	This thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of how junior and senior preschool teachers engage in knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation as well as how their knowledge sharing and learning behaviour is being challenged.
Literature Review	Our literature review focuses on knowledge and knowledge sharing and relates it specifically to the public sector which corresponds to our case organisation. We also discuss literature on willingness and barriers to knowledge sharing and learning, considering differences related to various age and experience levels.
Methodology	By conducting 13 semi-structured interviews with 4 junior and 7 senior preschool teachers as well as 2 superiors we followed a qualitative case study with an interpretive tradition and an abductive research approach. Complementary data were obtained through document analysis of 3 internal documents of our case organisation.
Findings	Public sector and teaching profession contexts influence the motivation of preschool teachers and their willingness to share knowledge and learn. In relation to the latter, the preschool's values, and the employees' identification also play an important role. Regarding barriers to share knowledge and learn, some perceptions shared by our interviewees referred to the behaviour of junior and senior employees, nonetheless, the major finding concerned negative age-related stereotypes. What both generations agreed on is that their job is becoming increasingly challenging.
Keywords	knowledge sharing, learning, willingness, public sector organisation, preschool, teachers, generation shift

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

1   Introduction

Wherever there are beginners and experts, old and young, there is some kind of learning going
on, some sort of teaching. We are all pupils and we are all teachers (Highet, 1954, p.5).

Despite being an intangible and fuzzy concept, knowledge has been widely recognised as one of
the most important resources in organisations (Kalling & Styhre, 2003). Hendriks (1999) remarks
that when knowledge moves from the individual to the organisation, it can be transformed into
economic and competitive organisational value. Hence, the need to facilitate the process of
knowledge sharing and learning by organisations in order to gain new knowledge and to retain the
knowledge of those employees who leave the organisation (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). The
importance of knowledge is further reflected in the term 'knowledge society' (also referred to as
post-industrial society), i.e. the society we live in, which is characterised by the rise of professional
service work (Bell, 1973). In addition, the need to share knowledge is underpinned by the current
generation shift caused by ageing of the generation of Baby Boomers in developed countries
(Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Individuals representing this generation were born between 1945-
1964 and are seen as a source of valuable knowledge that they will take away when leaving the job
market in the next few years (Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós & Juhász, 2016; Wong, Gardiner, Lang &
Coulon, 2008). Knowledge of Baby Boomers is particularly valuable to retain because a large
number of those older employees have worked in organisations for many years, which signifies a
high level of seniority and consequently organisational know-how that they possess (Kanfer &
Ackerman, 2004; Slagter, 2007). Accordingly, the distinction between the terms senior and older
employee refers to associating the first group with the seniority of an employee and the second one
relating to the age of an employee. We find this distinction important since in some cases age is
not synonymous with the amount of job-related experience.

The benefits of knowledge sharing are commonly known in relation to organisations and
individuals (Jonsson, 2013), but they are also relevant in the national context. In Sweden, the threat
of organisational knowledge loss through a generation shift is reflected by the United Nations
(2017) expecting the percentage of Swedes aged 60 or over to increase from 25.5 percent in 2017

to 30.4 percent in 2050. Additionally, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) reported that Sweden has the second-highest employment rate among employees aged 55 to 64 which totalled 78.02 percent in 2018 among 44 researched countries. Given those circumstances, knowledge sharing is an effective way for Sweden to mitigate the risk of organisational knowledge loss in the course of a significant number of Baby Boomers retiring in the next few years (Slagter, 2007).

Despite the urgency related to the effects of a generation shift, Slagter (2007) remarks that managers lack an understanding of the consequences caused by the loss of experienced older employees' knowledge, which may suggest that managers tend to disregard knowledge sharing and learning, the concepts that are closely related (Jonsson, 2013). This is surprising because knowledge sharing "is the key process of knowledge management" that since recently is seen as an organisational panacea (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001; Jonsson, 2015, p.46). The main challenge of knowledge sharing, however, lies in the fact that without an individual's engagement to share knowledge with others, chances of knowledge having a positive influence on organisational performance are low (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Davenport and Prusak (1998) discuss the importance of engagement of employees, which stems from the fact that knowledge is strongly connected to an individual, whereas Ipe (2003) indicates that knowledge sharing is a voluntary act. This implies that an individual's willingness is a crucial element in order to talk about successful knowledge sharing behaviours (Jonsson, 2013).

So far, the literature discussing willingness to share knowledge and learn did not address possible differences with regard to seniority of individuals, i.e. the number of years an individual has been working. Nonetheless, a few studies related willingness to share knowledge and learn to the topic of age, focusing on older employees that have extensive experience (e.g. Slagter, 2007; Wikström, Eriksson, Karamehmedovic & Liff, 2018). For example, regarding mentoring programmes, Brčić and Mihelič (2015) found that experienced older employees are eager to share knowledge and increase their level of knowledge sharing further. The lack of studies about willingness to share knowledge and seniority suggests that the knowledge management field could benefit from further research that connects these two topics. Thus, our study acknowledges employees' seniority, referring to the ageing of people in organisations or employees' organisational age, to be able to recognise different experience levels rather than just consider varying chronological ages (Kooij, de Lange, Jansen & Dikkers, 2008). Accordingly, we define junior employees as those with fewer years of work-related experience compared to senior employees.

Moreover, the general topic of knowledge sharing and willingness to share and learn has been researched in mostly private organisations (e.g. Hsu, 2006; Jonsson, 2013; Yang, 2004). In this context, the public sector has been neglected with only a few studies that mainly focus on Asia (e.g. Kim, 2018; Sandhu, Jain & bte Ahmad, 2011). In addition, available research rarely addresses knowledge sharing and learning between individuals of this sector (e.g. Amayah, 2013). Despite the limited attention given to the public sector, knowledge sharing is relevant to this type of organisations with Willem and Buelens (2007) declaring that public sector organisations can be categorised as knowledge-intensive organisations since the public sector often seeks to develop and provide knowledge. In addition, the public and the private sector vary significantly in relation to their purpose and values (Willem & Buelens, 2007), which suggests that the willingness of employees to share knowledge and learn might differ between both sectors. For example, Sandhu, Jain and bte Ahmad (2011) found that most employees in the public sector have a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing and are willing to share their knowledge, whereas Amyah (2013) found no significant differences between the two sectors. In contrast, Willem and Buelens (2007) claim that for employees of public sector organisations it is usually not possible to identify with the organisation's final service delivered, which leads to a decrease in organisational identification and lower levels of knowledge sharing behaviour. Liebowitz and Yan (2004) are even more critical by arguing that public sector organisations have a knowledge hoarding culture. Based on these conflicting results, we recognise the need for more literature about knowledge sharing and learning in the public sector.

As our case organisation, we chose the public sector organisation Malmö stad, the municipality of Malmö. Malmö stad consists of 12 units out of which we focused on one unit - the preschool unit (Malmö stad, 2019a). We conducted our study at the preschool unit because the education sector's rather structured operations and regulated activities are considered as appropriate to discuss topics related to human capital, including knowledge sharing and learning (Bednall & Sanders, 2017). A teacher's education is typically based on training such as mentorship programmes where learning from each other can be seen as fundamental (Jurčević, 2015). A teacher is "a person who instructs or trains others" (Cambridge University Press, 2020), making knowledge hoarding behaviour seem counterproductive. It is also relevant to research the teaching profession in the national context of Sweden because teachers in Sweden are over the average age of teachers in all OECD countries and "without appropriate intervention, the age profile of teachers in Sweden and the perception of the profession and teaching conditions are likely to lead to future teacher shortages" (OECD, 2017, p.11). In Malmö, the city's constantly increasing population implies that the number of children in

preschools increases which correlates to the Malmö City Council (2019) that reported a shortage of skilled employees, claiming that an annual increase of 33 percent in the number of newly recruited preschool teachers is needed. However, the Preschools' leader explained that since this number is unlikely to be met, the preschool unit has to rely on effective knowledge sharing and learning.

The shortage of educated preschool teachers combined with an ageing workforce puts the preschool unit's success at risk. Knowledge sharing and learning can help in this situation. In this context, it is relevant to explore preschool teachers' individual perspective on their willingness to engage in knowledge sharing and learning and potential barriers in the process.

Following this line of reasoning, our thesis *aims to develop a deeper understanding of how junior and senior preschool teachers engage in knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation as well as how their knowledge sharing and learning behaviour is being challenged.*

1.1 Research Questions

By following our aim, we contribute to the literature about knowledge sharing and learning in the public sector, specifically in preschools. The particular preschool we studied has diverse seniority levels which allowed us to understand both junior and senior preschool teachers' perspectives. Accordingly, we also make a contribution to the literature that relates different age and seniority levels to the discussion about knowledge sharing and learning. Based on the aforementioned aim, our study is guided by two research questions:

1. Why are junior and senior preschool teachers working in a public sector organisation willing to share knowledge and learn?
2. How are junior and senior preschool teachers inhibited from knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation?

1.2   Outline of the Thesis

The structure of our thesis consists of five chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis and Discussion, and Conclusion. This chapter discusses why it is relevant to conduct this thesis, addressing the problematisation, research aim and research questions. Chapter 2 explains what we are researching by setting the theoretical context for our study and summarising key concepts for our study at the end of the chapter. Chapter 3 elaborates on our research approach and design, including how we collected and analysed our empirical data and provides more insight into our case context, reflexivity, and quality. Chapter 4 constitutes the centrepiece of our study, which is divided into three main sections, introducing our interviewees' perception of knowledge and knowledge sharing, depicting their willingness to engage in knowledge sharing and learning, and illustrating barriers to knowledge sharing and learning. For each section and subsection, we provide an analysis followed by a discussion where we link the analysis with our theoretical key concepts for the reader to easily retrace our thoughts. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes our study with our theoretical contributions, research limitations, future research suggestions and practical implications.

2   Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to knowledge and knowledge sharing and relates it specifically to the public sector which corresponds to our case organisation. Further, the chapter reviews the literature on the willingness and barriers to knowledge sharing and learning, considering differences related to various age and experience levels. We conclude the literature review with a chapter summary that connects the discussed sections to our research questions.

2.1   Knowledge and Knowledge Sharing

According to Ipe (2003), the importance of knowledge in organisations has always been acknowledged, nevertheless only in the last 30 years, knowledge became an attractive topic both in academic and practitioner circles (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2001; Kalling & Styhre, 2003). Nowadays, knowledge is understood as the most effective resource that contributes to organisations' competitive advantage (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Jonsson, 2013; Kalling & Styhre, 2003). This, in turn, aids organisational success (Jonsson, 2013; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) and provides organisations with opportunities to outperform competitors (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). The phenomenon of knowledge lies in the fact that "unlike other resources, most forms of knowledge grow rather than diminish with use" (Adler, 2001, p.216), which suggests that employees should be encouraged to share their knowledge for organisational benefits (Hsu, 2006).

However, knowledge is not an easy concept to grasp. For instance, Alvesson and Kärreman (2001) describe knowledge as ambiguous, broad and challenging to handle. Academics have debated about two perspectives on the epistemology of knowledge. The first perspective holds a traditional understanding of knowledge that recognises it as an object possessed by people, whereas the second perspective focuses on knowing, which refers to human action itself (Cook & Brown, 1999). Consequently, knowing is related to the interaction of individuals with the physical and social world (Cook & Brown, 1999). Further, with regard to the nature of knowledge, literature discusses two types, tacit and explicit knowledge (Ipe, 2003). According to Nonaka (1994), tacit knowledge

can be associated with knowledge gained through an individual's experience (know-how). Tacit knowledge can be acquired through practice and personal interactions and can be facilitated through shared experience (Lin & Lee, 2004; Nonaka, 1994). Examples of tacit knowledge, such as shared values and norms show that it is not easy to be put into words and codified (Wikström et al. 2018). Additionally, the difficulty of transferring tacit knowledge implies that it is rarer and less likely to be imitated by others than explicit knowledge which makes tacit knowledge particularly valuable to organisational success (Cavusgil, Calantone & Zhao, 2003; Collins & Hitt, 2006). Resulting from this is the common perception that younger employees should, in particular, acquire older employees' tacit knowledge before their older colleagues are set to retire because the latter group possesses much more organisational know-how that they accumulated at their jobs over the years (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Slagter, 2007; Sprinkle & Urick, 2018). In contrast to tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge can easily be codified, communicated, and stored in documents and databases (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wikström et al. 2018). Here, documented routines and policies serve as examples (Wikström et al. 2018). Importantly, despite the less complicated character of explicit knowledge, Ipe (2003) warns about equating this aspect with understanding explicit knowledge as easy to share in an organisational context.

A further complexity in comprehending the concept of knowledge is reflected in disputable opinions about the difference between knowledge and information which frequently leads to the interchangeable use of these terms (Wang & Noe, 2010). Furthermore, because of the ambiguous difference between the terms knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer, Jonsson (2008) argues that they can be used interchangeably, which we decided to adopt. Accordingly, we follow Wang and Noe's (2010, p.117) definition of knowledge sharing as making task information and know-how available to others, which can "occur via written correspondence or face-to-face communications through networking with other experts, or documenting, organising and capturing knowledge for others". At this point, it is important to remark that knowledge sharing is a voluntary act that results in giving up the ownership of knowledge of the person who shares it and acknowledgement of co-ownership of knowledge shared by sender and receiver (Ipe, 2003). This illustrates that the concept of knowledge sharing is closely related to learning since learning takes place "through acquiring knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics" (Noe, Clarke & Klein, 2014, p.247). Jonsson (2013) claims that learning is a neglected concept in discussions about sharing and managing knowledge. A common view among employees of a law firm that she studied was that knowledge sharing relates to the process of learning from each other (Jonsson, 2015). This corresponds to Wang and Noe's (2010, p.124) argument that "knowledge sharing may [also] be

considered a learning process for the sharer", not only for the receiver as one could assume. In the context of our thesis, this argument supports two-directional knowledge sharing and learning that can occur from junior to senior employees and vice versa.

2.1.1 Knowledge Sharing and Learning in the Public Sector

Most existing literature on knowledge sharing and learning focuses on the private sector (Amayah, 2013). In fact, only a few studies address knowledge sharing and learning within the public sector (Amayah, 2013; Rashman, Withers & Hartley, 2009). In addition, most of those studies that research the public sector focus on the Asian context (e.g. Kim, 2018; Sandhu, Jain & bte Ahmad, 2011) and very few look into knowledge sharing practices between employees of public sector organisations (e.g. Amayah, 2013). Yet, despite the limited attention given to the public sector, Willem and Buelens (2007) argue that the public sector organisations are a relevant focus of discussions about knowledge sharing and learning. In their study about the public sector, Willem and Buelens (2007, p.596) found no negative impacts of bureaucratisation on knowledge sharing, which is contrary to the common assumption that because of a much more procedural and formalised system, public sector organisations have "not the ideal environment for knowledge sharing". They conclude that the formal system does not constitute a barrier to knowledge sharing and assert that public sector organisations can be categorised as knowledge-intensive organisations since the public sector often seeks to develop and provide knowledge.

Furthermore, it has been commonly acknowledged that public sector organisations vary significantly from those from the private sector (Willem & Buelens, 2007). The public sector's purpose is producing 'public value', having an impact on citizens and "balancing competing stakeholder interests" rather than making a profit as in the case of the private sector (Moore, 1995 cited in Rashman, Withers & Hartley, 2009, p.465). Consequently, Willem and Buelens (2007, p.583) claim that values, including "honesty, fairness and equity compared to more economic and parsimonious values, such as cost control and goal orientedness" are promoted in the public sector. The difference between the nature of the public and private sector has induced a few studies about the potential impact of the public sector organisational context on motivational and other facilitating factors of knowledge sharing and learning. These studies will be presented in the following section.

2.2   Willingness to Share Knowledge and Learn

According to Jonsson (2013, p.20), it is the employees' willingness that "makes or breaks knowledge sharing", which indicates the significance of determining what facilitates willingness to share knowledge and learn (Lin, 2007). Accordingly, this section discusses several factors that facilitate knowledge sharing and learning. Although we recognise that literature considers a wider range of important factors, in the following subsections we consider the most well-cited theorists in the field of motivation and depict motivational and facilitating factors in the organisational context and the teaching profession context.

2.2.1   Underlying Motivational Factors

McGregor (1960) distinguishes between Theory X and Theory Y that involves two views of human behaviour. While Theory X assumes that employees are passive and resistant to change, Theory Y represents the opposite assumptions seeing employees as not neglectful but self-motivated and preferring meaningful work (McGregor, 1960). Consequently, managers that evince Theory X, which McGregor (1960) sees as limiting, claim that employees need to be motivated and controlled by provisions of the physiological and safety needs, which, nonetheless, do not motivate behaviour once satisfied. In turn, he argues that higher-order needs such as those related to self-esteem (self-respect, self-confidence, autonomy, etc.) and reputation can have motivational influence, but since individuals can only achieve these needs on their own, management's role is to create specific conditions that enable employees to seek for the higher-order needs. This is reflected by Theory Y which as asserted by McGregor (1960) points out that employees can rely on self-discipline. He explains that Theory Y emphasises the importance of integrating individual and organisational objectives in a way that voluntary use of knowledge and skills is fostered, contributing to organisational success. Here, commitment to organisational objectives positively impacts the degree of self-direction of individuals (McGregor, 1960).

Similarly to McGregor (1960), Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1993) recognise two factors that have an impact on an individual's motivation: hygiene factors and motivators. They demonstrate that insufficient hygiene factors, i.e. extrinsic incentives and rewards that include physical working conditions, salary, benefits, and job security lead to job dissatisfaction. In contrast, aspects including achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, and the work

itself enable individuals to fulfil their higher-order needs (Herzberg, 2008). Accordingly, concerning knowledge sharing, hygiene factors can "frustrate knowledge sharing when absent", however, they are not likely to impact an individual's motivation to engage in knowledge sharing (Hendriks, 1999, p.95). In turn, two sets of factors, the first one connected with recognition, appreciation, promotional opportunities, or sense of responsibility, and the latter one to reciprocity explain why knowledge owners engage in knowledge sharing (Hendriks, 1999).

2.2.2 Organisational Context

Wang and Noe (2010) remark that organisations need to create opportunities for social interactions to facilitate sharing, otherwise, as discussed by Lam (2000) an individual's knowledge might not be fully utilised. In this sense, aspects such as "employees' rank, position in the organisational hierarchy, and seniority should be deemphasised" (Wang & Noe, 2010, p.119). In addition, Ipe (2003) emphasises the importance of both formal (e.g. training, structured meetings) and informal opportunities (e.g. social networks), whereas Yang (2004) asserts that collaboration instead of competition is needed to foster communication and learning. This corresponds to the public sector context where employees are less likely to compete with others for career opportunities, but as an alternative focus on serving the public good (Frederickson & Hart, 1985).

Moreover, von Krogh (1998) highlights organisations' role of creating a climate where care and accountability for each other persists. This is related to specific organisational values that facilitate knowledge sharing. For instance, Ipe (2003) underlines values such as trust and openness. Yang (2004) emphasises the importance of the former value by acknowledging that without trust, harmonious communication, collaboration, and sharing would be ineffective. He also claims that higher levels of trust have a positive effect on people's openness. With regard to the public sector, Kim (2018) established in his study that trust has a significant impact on employees' knowledge sharing, which is why he appeals to public sector organisations to strengthen their efforts into trust-building. In addition, Wang and Noe (2010) point out that trust is encouraged by the strong team cohesiveness and long formation of a team which result in an increased likelihood for team members to share knowledge. Indeed, as argued by Brčić and Mihelič (2015, p.854) "knowledge sharing is ultimately a human process that requires ... good relationships between employees".

Furthermore, in relation to the motivation of public sector employees, Amayah (2013) found that reciprocity was not particularly important. Based on findings from another study, Amayah (2013)

suggests that public sector employees share knowledge to improve the effectiveness of work rather than because of the expectation to return the favour of sharing knowledge. Moreover, Frederickson and Hart (1985) explain that in contrast to the private sector, the public sector does not promote egoistic career advancement. Instead, public sector employees are willing to refrain from their potential career advancement in order to serve the public. This suggests that rather than focusing on self-interest, public sector employees' motivation is intrinsic, which is commonly defined as "a person's affective-based willingness to help colleagues" (Chen & Hsieh, 2015, p.814). The studies from Chen and Hsieh (2015) and Kim (2018) illustrate that so-called public service motivation which is a form of altruistic motivation that can generally be based on either intrinsic or extrinsic motives determines public sector employees' knowledge sharing behaviour. Testing different components of public sharing motivation, Kim (2018) discusses that Korean public sector employees are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing when they are committed to public values and when they want to provide a meaningful public service. These among other components such as affective motive and sacrifice were also found significant by Chen and Hsieh (2015) who studied Taiwanese public sector employees. This implies that the public sector employees' motivation is likely to vary from private sector employees' motivation. Nonetheless, Korea and Taiwan share a Confucian culture, where people usually establish and adhere to group norms, which might limit the application of both studies (Chen & Hsieh, 2015; Kim, 2018). In the light of those findings, it is important to consider the impact of organisational identification.

2.2.2.1 Organisational Identification

The term identity is commonly described as the subjective process through which people define themselves and aim to answer the question of 'Who am I?' (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). This definition of oneself is being communicated to others and helps individuals to orientate themselves in their lives by connecting to certain values (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008). In turn, the process of identification indicates an individual's effort to explore how one's identity relates to a group, which in the case of identification with a particular organisation describes a condition when the individual's self-view is closely related to the organisation's identity, creating a feeling of belongingness (Vough, 2012).

Interestingly, Boyne (2002) and Moon (2000) suggest that in comparison to private sector employees, public sector employees are less committed which might decrease organisational identification among employees. This argument is based on the reasoning that for public sector

employees it is usually not possible to identify with the organisation's final service delivered or to comprehend how an individual employee contributes to the organisation's success (Willem & Buelens, 2007).

In relation to knowledge sharing, Carmeli, Atwater and Levi (2011) argue that those individuals who display strong organisational identification are more likely to engage in a kind of behaviour, such as knowledge sharing, that will be of advantage for the organisation they identify with. In addition, according to Zhu (2016) in order to facilitate knowledge sharing, managers should put emphasis on forming one shared identity as a result of common goals and shared interests.

2.2.3 Professional Context

Next to the organisational context, the specificity of the teaching profession can also influence employees' motivation to share knowledge and learn. Namely, relating to professional learning, it has been argued that apart from individual motivation, a desire to learn can be related to the "characteristics of the knowledge bases available in the respective professions ..., accessible knowledge sources, and the extent to which these sources are made available through mediating artefacts in the workplace" (Klette & Smeby, 2012, p.143). For example, concerning teachers, it was found that the need to be up to date is a significant motivator to learn (Jensen, 2007). More specifically referring to junior teachers, Jensen (2007) concluded that to handle real-life situations, the theory that is acquired at university by prospective teachers has to be translated into solutions that need to be reasonable. This constitutes a self-motivation to learn that Jensen (2007, p.492) describes as exciting for junior teachers by referring to it as a search for "missing pieces of the puzzle".

Similarly, Nerland (2012) who discusses specific knowledge cultures that engage with knowledge in their particular ways found that teachers perceive teaching as a craft and knowledge as difficult to grasp. Based on her research, Nerland (2012) claims that a primary source of gaining new knowledge among teachers is through asking other teachers about their experience, which emphasises the importance of human interaction in the teaching profession. This human interaction is important because, through knowledge sharing, teachers foster the professional development of themselves and their co-workers, meaning that their practices, skills and behaviour improve, which ultimately leads to a better education for pupils (Runhaar & Sanders, 2016). In addition, as reasons to become teachers, Brookhart and Freeman (1992) found altruism and willingness to work with

children. Also, O'Connor (2008, p.121) remarks that much of a teacher's work involves "caring for and about others". On the other hand, some scholars found evidence of more extrinsic incentives such as status, respect, and salary as motivators to pursue a teaching career (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014).

2.2.3.1 Professional Identification

Several studies confirm that a teacher's identity is constructed in the talk about their work where they try to make sense of themselves in their profession by evaluating how they relate to different educational methods (Renga, Peck, Feliciano-Semidei, Erickson & Wu, 2020). In this way they argue, teachers position themselves with a certain professional identity that is connected to specific beliefs and values. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) add that a professional's identity construction can be considered as dynamic, fragmented, and ongoing and is influenced by both the individual and the environment. Thus, a teacher's identity develops constantly throughout the individual's career in which they are "producers, not just users, of sophisticated knowledge of teaching and learning" (Loughran, Berry & Mulhall, 2012, p. 12). Interestingly, Sachs (2001) asserts that in comparison to other occupational groups, teachers develop and sustain a strong professional identity.

Specifically related to the preschool teaching profession, including achieving professional advancement as a preschool teacher, willingness for lifelong learning through formal and informal practices is almost a necessity and "continuous research of educational practice, responsibility, ethics, creativity, [as well as] continuous reflective judgement" are required (Jurčević, 2015, p. 125). Adding to this, to provide quality services, preschool teachers need to value cooperation, have an open mind and be flexible to adapt to changes (Vujičić, Boneta & Ivković, 2015).

2.2.4 Differences in Motivation to Share Knowledge and Learn in Relation to Job Experience and Age

As mentioned earlier, available knowledge sharing literature has not considered the topic of willingness to share knowledge in relation to seniority levels of employees. Nevertheless, a few studies about age explore perceptions of older employees with extensive work experience. For instance, previous research found that experienced older employees' job satisfaction is influenced more by intrinsic incentives (Cook & Wall, 1980; Kuvaas, 2006). Slagter (2007) indicates that

experienced older employees need to experience respect, self-actualisation as well as have a meaningful and interesting job. Also, Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) remark that those older employees who are not focused on improving their careers are motivated by self-actualisation that includes being creative, willing to learn and contributing to the workplace for example by transferring their knowledge to younger employees (Ropes, 2014).

In terms of knowledge sharing and learning, Slagter (2007) explains that for experienced older employees to share knowledge, it is crucial that they feel secure. Accordingly, she underscores the importance of trust in connection with the perspective of older employees to share knowledge. Interestingly, a study related to mentoring found that experienced older employees are eager to learn and share knowledge, and are willing to increase their level of knowledge sharing further (Brčić & Mihelič, 2015). The same findings applied to younger, less experienced employees who also expressed a desire to be mentors (Brčić & Mihelič, 2015), which demonstrates a willingness of both older and younger employees to participate in two-directional knowledge sharing and learning. Relating to the public sector, Kim (2018) found that the older the employee, the more devoted he or she is to engage in knowledge sharing. Additionally, Wong et al. (2008) claim that power and having authority over others are more likely to act as motivators for Baby Boomers than for Generation Y (those born between 1982-2000). They point out that the reason for that might lie in Baby Boomers' seniority that implies that after working for many years they look for more responsibilities. In turn, it has been argued that individuals that belong to Generation Y are relatively new employees who are more motivated by career advancement, prefer to share knowledge using technology and see learning as fun, not as a duty (Sanaei, Javernick-Will & Chinowsky, 2013; Wong et al. 2008).

2.3   Barriers to Knowledge Sharing and Learning

Riege (2005) distinguishes between different types of barriers including individual, organisational and technology barriers which explain why employees engage in knowledge hoarding, the opposite behaviour to knowledge sharing. The former category relates to the fact that from an individual's point of view, knowledge sharing is often perceived as unnatural, therefore, convincing employees to share their knowledge can generally be seen as the main challenge for organisations when it comes to knowledge sharing and learning (Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee, 2005). For example, Alvesson (1995) depicts that in organisations where an individual's knowledge is the main contribution to

the organisation, employees gain a certain degree of power from their knowledge. In this case, there is a tendency for employees to engage in knowledge hoarding because of their fear of becoming redundant and losing their power when they share their knowledge with others (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000).

In addition, Empson (2001) relates to employees' fear of being exploited for their knowledge with little benefits for themselves which can constitute an obstacle to knowledge sharing. He explains that this illustrates the unfavourable aspect of reciprocity, which is otherwise seen as an important aspect of individuals' motivation to share knowledge (Hendriks, 1999). This relates back to the importance of trust and a collaborative climate for effective knowledge sharing (Yang, 2004). However, Sveiby and Simons (2002) found that newly recruited employees need a considerable amount of time to become effective and establish relationships with co-workers, which indicates that a low level of seniority, as well as a lack of time as asserted by Riege (2005), can be a barrier to share knowledge. Moreover, an interesting argument was made by Mäkelä, Andersson and Seppälä (2012) who discuss that individuals tend to have positive ties with those individuals who are similar to themselves in terms of nationality and their function in the organisation, referring to this phenomenon as homophily. They conclude that individuals who are similar in these aspects share more knowledge with each other, which inhibits knowledge sharing with other organisational members. This illustrates that although knowledge hoarding is detrimental for organisations, it is a rational and deliberate action of an individual (Husted & Michailova, 2002).

Furthermore, Hislop (2013) raises concerns about the concept of learning because he believes that it could cause conflicting emotions for individuals. He explains that while some individuals might be excited to gain new knowledge and develop themselves, others might be scared to leave their comfort zone and give up their working routines that make them feel secure. Similarly, Noe, Tews and Dachner (2010) remark that trying out new things might involve errors, therefore, the fear of making oneself vulnerable and being punished for making mistakes may inhibit willingness to learn. This refers back to the importance of a positive working climate in relation to the willingness to share knowledge and learn. Additionally, Sveiby and Simons (2002, p.426) argue that many employees who worked for more than 15 years reach a so-called professional plateau, meaning that "they feel they have learned everything there is to learn … and they do not think their own ideas are fresh any more" which constitutes a personal barrier for some senior people to learn.

In the context of the public sector, based on research about American government agencies, Liebowitz and Yan (2004) suggest that public sector organisations have a knowledge hoarding

culture. They claim that employees working in the public sector have a "self-preservation mentality" that prevents them from sharing their expertise with others because they fear that 'losing' knowledge might limit promotion and reward opportunities (Liebowitz & Yan, 2004, p.422). Furthermore, they assert that a lack of enthusiasm towards the importance of knowledge sharing creates a paradoxical situation. Namely, despite being a knowledge-intensive firm that provides knowledge to the public, the particular government agency Liebowitz and Yan (2004) researched, did not support the internal sharing of knowledge.

Considering barriers related to the teaching profession in Sweden, Löfgren (2015) found that the restructuring of the Swedish national education system limits teachers' autonomy and makes them more dependent on policies. The former aspect is relevant to motivation and is mentioned by McGregor (1960) as part of self-esteem that when satisfied can motivate employees' behaviour. Additionally, Alvestad, Bergem, Eide, Johansson, Os, Pálmadóttir, Samuelsson and Winger (2014) researched the challenges in preschools in Iceland, Norway and Sweden and found that preschools lack educated preschool teachers which complicates the implementation of the curriculum for the children because of varying interpretations and understandings. They explain that the lack of qualified employees is further challenged through an increasing number of children in the preschools which could cause stress for the employees and could potentially limit their time to participate in knowledge sharing activities.

2.3.1 Age Norms and Stereotypes as Barriers to Knowledge Sharing and Learning

Following Kanfer and Ackerman's (2004, p.450) claim that "job experience and age are often inextricably intertwined", this subsection specifically focuses on negative perceptions about an individual's age that might inhibit knowledge sharing and learning. Although we make a distinction between terms senior and older, we acknowledge that most of older employees are also senior employees because of their extensive job-related experience. Burmeister, Fasbender and Deller (2018) explain that age is a criterion that is automatically assessed in communications between individuals and it can significantly influence an individual's behaviour in interactions. In most organisations, three to four generations work together. Different values, attitudes, skills, flexibility levels and ways of working between these different age groups can be a source of conflict that might be difficult to handle (Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós & Juhász, 2016).

Urick, Hollensbe, Masterson and Lyons (2017) declare that negative generational stereotypes might limit effective interactions. For example, the authors mention that older employees might resist sharing information because they have the perception that younger employees are disinterested in the older workforce's routines and values. For these reasons, organisations might decide against establishing practices such as job shadowing, which as asserted by Burmeister, Fasbender and Deller (2018) demonstrates that negative age stereotypes might inhibit willingness to share knowledge. Moreover, Finkelstein, Ryan and King (2013) argue that research about age stereotypes discusses a common perception of older employees as underperforming and costly as well as unwilling to change or learn but the authors also point out that other perceptions associate older employees with experience and dependability. They claim that these age stereotypes can potentially lead to unfair hiring, promoting, and training decisions. A related example provides Urick (2017) who criticises that training programmes tend to address younger employees' perceived preference for using digital tools rather than considering all age groups' preferences equally. He appeals to management to offer various training options in order to accommodate individual preferences, which might differ from the perceived preferences of a generation group. In connection to this, Kooij et al. (2008) explain that access to training and development opportunities can increase older employees' motivation. Also, Slagter (2009) found that equally investing in employees of all ages by offering individualised HR practices can increase the workforce's engagement in knowledge sharing. In the same study, she remarks that managers ignore the aspect of age diversity when it comes to team constellations. She also emphasises that next to the distribution of competences, the added value through intergenerational teams should no longer be underrated by managers.

Furthermore, Burmeister, Fasbender and Deller (2018, p.519) discuss that older employees might be "deprived of the opportunity to learn and further develop their career". As a reason for that, they indicate so-called age norms that result in the perception of older employees as knowledge senders and younger employees as knowledge receivers. They underscore that organisations that adopt those beliefs and promote only one-directional knowledge transfer might miss possibilities to fully utilise knowledge of their employees. Mentioned normative expectations might also be detrimental to individuals, for example, younger employees might not be allowed to have their input or might be less willing to engage in knowledge sharing because they assume that their older co-workers are not interested to learn (Burmeister, Fasbender & Deller, 2018). More specifically, Urick et al. (2017) elaborate on younger employees' difficulties of bringing their new ideas and academic knowledge to the organisation because they are faced with unreceptive older employees. This

apparent rejection of innovative knowledge can potentially endanger an organisation's performance and competitiveness (Sprinkle & Urick, 2018). Slagter (2007) contrasts some of the mentioned very critical voices towards older employees with a more positive view that describes older employees as being motivated to acquire new knowledge and tasks, having the most recent skills, and being flexible and open-minded to change, with low absentee and turnover rates.

In the national context, age discrimination also called ageism was banned by law in Sweden as the last among other European countries (Ahmed, Andersson & Hammarstedt, 2012). Moreover, in their research comparing responses to a fictitious 31- and a 46-year-old applicant, the authors found that older employees in Sweden are three times less likely to be invited to a job interview or receive a job offer than their younger competitors. They argue that this finding constitutes a solid proof that in Sweden ageism is present in the first stage of the hiring process. As researchers, we restrained ourselves from endorsing any of the mentioned stereotypes. Nonetheless, the conflicting literature motivated us to explore our interviewees' perception of different age groups and their willingness to share knowledge and learn in our case organisation.

2.4   Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview about three main topics of literature which are key to our research: knowledge and knowledge sharing, willingness to share knowledge and learn, and barriers to share knowledge and learn. In order for us to understand how knowledge is shared in our case organisation, the first section reviewed literature on the topic of knowledge and knowledge sharing and connected it to public sector organisations. The second section discussed key motivational and facilitating aspects which we related to the organisational context and the teaching profession context, and pointed out age and experience related differences. The last section addressed barriers to share knowledge and learn and illustrated how differences in age and experience levels can inhibit knowledge sharing and learning behaviour among employees. Hence, the first two sections enabled us to comprehend the literature related to our first research question: Why are junior and senior preschool teachers working in a public sector organisation willing to share knowledge and learn? Whereas the third section provided valuable literature with regard to our second research question: How are junior and senior preschool teachers inhibited from knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation? The following chapter presents the methodological approach of our study.

3   Methodology

This chapter presents our research approach and provides primary insight into our case organisation. After explaining how we collected our empirical data and analysed it from the data sources of semi-structured interviews and organisational documents, the last section of this chapter critically reflects on our study's quality.

3.1   Research Approach

Following our aim of developing a deeper understanding of how junior and senior preschool teachers engage in knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation as well as how their knowledge sharing and learning behaviour is being challenged, we were guided by Prasad's (2018) interpretive tradition. Adopting this tradition allowed us to recognise the importance of subjective meaning. Since our study is mainly based on human interpretations, we made sense of a socially constructed reality and considered the existence of multiple realities by interviewing two groups of people, junior and senior employees, see Appendix A (Prasad, 2018). We followed a hermeneutic approach which is a subcategory of the interpretive tradition by being sensitive towards our interviewees' social context (Prasad, 2018). Accordingly, in an attempt to enter the interviewees' social world and further understand their perspectives, we familiarised ourselves with Malmö stad, the preschool, as well as the organisational structure and culture by studying reports provided by our case organisation. For example, from Malmö stad (2019b) we learnt about the shortage of preschool teachers which helped us to interpret our interviewees' working situation and possible challenges that the preschool needs to tackle. Following the hermeneutic approach also helped us to analyse and bring out the meaning of our interviewees' statements by considering what lies behind the particular words and metaphors they used (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In addition, to avoid personal bias when interpreting the empirical data (Styhre, 2013), we reflected on our pre-existing academic knowledge about the research topic and followed Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007) advice to keep an open and critical mind.

We opted for a qualitative method because it is portrayed as most suitable for studies that desire a deeper understanding of social interactions, meanings and values (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). Therefore, this method enabled us to comprehend the perspectives of the interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2011). More specifically, we conducted a case study at a single organisation in order to provide an in-depth examination that helped us to understand the organisations' complexities, including what occurs at the organisation and why (Yin, 2003). Moreover, an abductive approach was applied to incorporate elements from both the inductive and the deductive approach to move back and forth between theory and data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Following Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007) three steps for abduction, we applied theory on the topic of knowledge sharing among senior and junior employees, which was then combined with data gathered through document analysis and interviews and finally led to a modification of the existing theory. At the same time, we were open for alternative themes to emerge.

3.2   Research Design and Process

In the light of our study's aim, we gained access to Malmö stad and cooperated with the organisation to gather data in order to answer our research questions. The following provides valuable background information for the reader to understand the starting point of our research. Thereafter, we elaborate on our data collection method and analysis.

3.2.1 Case Context

Our case organisation, Malmö stad, is a large public sector organisation divided into 12 different units (Malmö stad, 2019a). Malmö stad, the municipality of Malmö is located in the south of Sweden. The role of Malmö stad is to provide a good quality service to its residents, including operations related to healthcare, education, culture, and environment (Malmö stad, 2019a). We conducted our research at one preschool which is diverse in terms of the workforce's seniority and nationalities. When we interviewed the Preschools' leader, we found out that most employees of the preschool are Swedish, but some employees come from the former Yugoslavia region and the Middle East. At the moment, the preschool has six teams divided across six different areas. Each team usually consists of three employees with one of them being educated to the preschool teacher level and the remaining two having a lower level education and holding a position of a barnskötare,

what we refer to as a childcarer. However, some teams also have two preschool teachers, some have four members and some childcarers have the competence and experience to take on part of the preschool teachers' responsibilities. We decided to categorize both, preschool teachers and childcarers as preschool teachers because Van Laere, Peeters and Vandenbroeck (2012) found that in Sweden, a social pedagogical role of learning and caring is taken by both preschool teachers and childcarers with the latter being under the supervision of the preschool teachers.

Malmö stad's interest in knowledge sharing and learning is reflected through their previous involvement in a knowledge sharing and learning project that had the purpose "to increase Malmö stad's knowledge of how to work with knowledge transfer, competence development and learning in a systematic way" (Malmö stad, 2019b, p.3). During the interview with Malmö stad's knowledge and competence leader (hereinafter referred to as K & C leader) we learnt that working with systematic knowledge management and learning contributes to more effective retention of the workforce, increased competence of employees and consequently, lower vulnerability of Malmö stad. Overall conclusions that were made from the mentioned project were rather positive because it was reported that "the majority of employees want to learn and collaborate" (Malmö stad, 2019b, p.12). However, despite the involvement in the mentioned project, "knowledge sharing is quite new to a lot of [employees of Malmö stad]" (K & C leader). Hence, knowledge sharing and learning within Malmö stad are those aspects that need to be further developed.

In relation to organisational culture, the K & C leader asserted that "the mission of Malmö stad is always to put the citizens first. We have three words: respect, creativity, and engagement. These are the leading words for all our employees". Thus, helping the citizens is what connects employees of Malmö stad, it is their ultimate goal, and corporate values are there to help employees. In addition, Malmö stad (2019b) mentions that they are a learning organisation, which in the words of the Preschools' leader means that "co-workers learn from each other and they learn from [her]".

As mentioned earlier, Malmö stad is a large organisation which involves challenges such as creating one organisational culture. This is related to the fact that "all administrations have different cultures and different identities. [Malmö stad] consists of 430 occupational categories and 26,000 employees" (Malmö stad, 2019b, p.11). During the interview with the K & C leader, it became clear that the role of the head of the City Office is important in this matter. "He says 'together' like 20 times every day. We have to do it together, we need each other ... he has said it so many times, but he really means it. We understand, but then to make it work, it's something else". This gives the impression that in this large organisation, the reality is more complex and challenging than the

vision of having one organisational culture. Nevertheless, the K & C leader indicated the refugee crisis as an example when Malmö stad did an excellent job in working together. Thus, cooperation can be achieved thanks to community spirit and a feeling of belongingness but can be difficult to achieve within daily working routines (K & C leader).

3.2.2 Data Collection

We obtained most of our empirical data through 13 semi-structured interviews with employees of Malmö stad. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) argue that this type of interview is particularly suitable when adopting the interpretive tradition since semi-structured interviews give researchers the chance to 'probe' interviewees' answers. Thus, asking additional, more specific questions to further explore those interviewees' responses that we found significant, allowed us to understand interviewees' "descriptions of the life world … with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p.5-6).

In order to get acquainted with the broader organisational context, the first two interviews that we conducted were arranged with Malmö stad's K & C leader and the Preschools' leader. These interviews helped us to collect background information regarding the preschool unit's structure and Malmö stad's general culture and mission. Additionally, we initially intended to apply an age criterion to choose our interviewees. However, due to an insufficient age variation among the employees, we decided to change our criterion to seniority, referring to the number of years the employees worked as a preschool teacher for Malmö stad, which allowed us to gather interesting findings by acknowledging different experience levels rather than just consider varying chronological age (Kooij et al. 2008). Consequently, we interviewed 11 employees from the preschool out of which 4 were categorised as junior employees, with less than 10 years of working experience and 7 remaining employees were senior with more than 15 years of working experience, see Appendix A. For the reader to be able to comprehend the age difference, we named the junior interviewees using numbers from 1 to 4 (e.g. Junior 1) and the senior interviewees using numbers from 1 to 7 (e.g. Senior 1) with the increasing number indicating a higher level of seniority. Additionally, the asterisk (*) put next to a number distinguishes those junior employees that rather associate themselves with older employees and those senior employees that rather associate themselves with younger employees.

Since all interviewees were approached by our contact person at Malmö stad, we identified our sampling method as a snowball (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). In an effort to minimise this methods' weakness of relying on a homogenous sample, meaning that the participants have similar beliefs, we asked our contact person to select participants based on the criterion of varying seniority levels (Lee, 2000 cited in Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

The first interview with Malmö stad's K & C leader was conducted in the middle of March in the City Hall, which enabled us to pay attention to the organisational environment. Thereby, we were able to consider the social context of the interviewees, which Alvesson (2003, p.16) refers to as "a localist position on interviewing". Some of the aspects we could observe were connected to what individual offices looked like, how many people shared one office and whether employees were dressed in a formal way. All these insights enhanced our understanding of Malmö stad's organisational culture. However, due to the situation of the COVID-19 outbreak and the rapid increase in the number of cases, the remaining interviews were conducted via the online communicator Skype. We also could not pursue observations. On the one hand, we found Skype interviews to be safer than face-to-face interviews both for us and for our interviewees given that some of them were at risk of severe illness if infected by COVID-19 because of their age. On the other hand, we were aware that Skype interviews limited our ability to comprehend the interviewees' environment and body language. For instance, we were not able to visit the particular preschool our interviewees worked at. Besides, Bryman and Bell (2011, p.478) emphasise the importance of body language because it may uncover "that the interviewee is becoming uneasy or anxious about a line of questioning". They assert that this matters in relation to the ethical behaviour of an interviewer who should not put pressure on interviewees. Additionally, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) claim that lack of face-to-face interaction could result in limited trust that is essential in the case of semi-structured interviews that have a purpose to understand interviewees' interpretations and meanings.

Given the outbreak of COVID-19, the second interview was conducted with the leader of the preschool unit via Skype and was followed by 11 interviews with the preschool's teachers for the next two weeks of March. At that time, an employee of Malmö stad has helped our interviewees to set up Skype since for some of them it was the first time using an online communication tool. However, as soon as we made sure that there were no technical problems, interviewees were in a comfortable space by themselves where they could focus on the conversation with us. During each interview, both researchers were asking questions, however, one person was leading the process, whereas the other person was taking notes and asking follow-up questions. We decided to switch

our roles after each interview so that each of us could try both roles. The person who took notes did that to a limited extent since we believe that active listening and maintaining eye contact was crucial for interviewees to feel comfortable.

We began each interview by presenting ourselves and the purpose of our thesis. After explaining to our interviewees that apart from their age and seniority, no personal information would be used in our thesis, we asked for permission for us to record the interview. We also gave them an opportunity to ask questions before we proceeded to our questions that we formulated in advance. We prepared two nearly identical interview guides to tailor our questions for junior employees, see Appendix B and senior employees, see Appendix C. Our interview guide consisted of 15 questions that were not provided to our interviewees beforehand since we wanted our interviewees to be genuine in their answers. Nevertheless, due to some of the employees' limited English proficiency, we were asked to share with the potential interviewees some general themes we planned to raise during interviews. These key themes were sent via email before the interviews. Our interview guide contained mostly open questions such as 'What motivates you to share knowledge?' and 'In your opinion, what does it take to secure valuable knowledge?'. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016, p.452) argue that this type of questions "allows respondents to give answers in their own way" and encourages interviewees to give examples of situations. They also indicate that using open questions might help prevent bias.

Our interview guide started with a general question asking our interviewees to present themselves. That was followed by more specific questions about the role, responsibilities, and seniority of the interviewees. Namely, we asked our interviewees 'What is your role at Malmö stad and what are your main responsibilities? and 'How long have you been working for Malmö stad?'. Afterwards, we related to the first theme we wanted to focus on which is the willingness to share knowledge and learn by beginning the discussion with a question 'What motivates you in our daily work?'. From that point, we followed the order of the questions in the interview guide less strictly depending on the interviewees' responses. In cases of uncertainty, we asked probing questions, follow-up questions and specifying questions to explore answers further and collect examples (Kvale, 1996). In general, we were patient and paused if needed to allow interviewees to think about what they would like to say. At the end of each interview, we once again gave our interviewees an opportunity to ask us questions or share more thoughts with us. Lastly, we thanked our interviewees for their time and valuable input. The interviews lasted 40 minutes on average. Although one of us took notes during the interviews, we found it important to briefly talk about each interview directly after it ended which often led us to add some additional notes. In this way,

we followed Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2016) advice that given the intensive character of an interview, taking notes immediately after an interview ends and ensuring that both researchers understood perceptions of the interviewees is significant.

Apart from interviews that served as our primary source of data, we also engaged in document analysis which complemented our findings. According to Bowen (2009) qualitative researchers ought to base on no less than two different sources of data in order to minimise the effect of potential bias by authenticating findings from different sets of data. Before we engaged in interviews, we received three of Malmö stad's internal documents that the HR unit sent to us by email. These documents provided us with more organisational context and insight from the past (Bowen, 2009). For example, we found out that Malmö stad was engaged in a knowledge sharing and learning project in May 2019 which gave us reasons to assume that the topic of knowledge sharing and learning is important to Malmö stad. This was verified by the interviews. Additionally, having learnt about the past project gave us ideas for questions we could ask during the first interview with the K & C leader.

In general, we found the process of data collection to be very interesting. Interviewing other people was a new experience for one of the researchers (Martyna), whereas for the other researcher (Celina) it was the second time that she pursued the role of an interviewer, however it was the first time she interviewed employees in the Swedish context. Besides, we perceived Malmö stad including the preschool as a very friendly and open organisation. From the very beginning, they welcomed us enthusiastically and were flexible to arrange Skype interviews when the outbreak of COVID-19 changed the working situation rapidly. Throughout our study, our contact person and a few other employees stayed in touch with us to ensure a smooth research process. Looking back at the data collection process we reminisce about it very warmly and appreciate the great help we received from Malmö stad.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

We began to transcribe each interview immediately after it ended using a software called Otter.ai. Although it helped us to create documents with a full transcription of interviews, we decided to check manually each document in order to ensure that the software has not made any mistakes when transcribing. We also indicated pauses and moments when an interviewee was laughing.

After transcribing the interviews, we coded the data. To address the problem of chaos, we carefully engaged in sorting which enabled us to get acquainted with the empirical data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). We performed the coding individually and discussed the results afterwards. Both of us read all transcriptions and notes, highlighted the most important parts and at the same time looked for "recurring contents [that could] ... form a theme" (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015, p.77).

We sorted the empirical data in two rounds. Firstly, we focused on 'whats', i.e. "what is happening in the material and the conditions behind this" (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015, p.55). At that point, we engaged in what Kvale (1996) calls distilling and categorisation. Regarding distilling, Kvale (1996) argues that the meanings of a relevant part of an interview can be distilled to themes or shorter meanings containing original terms used by an interviewee. For example, when asked about motivation to learn, one interviewee told us: "I don't think you're feed up with everything, you have to learn all the time to be a good preschool teacher. So, in fact, I would like to learn more" (Senior 4*), we distilled it to a theme: 'being a good preschool teacher as a motivation to learn more'. Additionally, by engaging in categorisation we initially identified 15 themes. Here, we followed Kvale's (1996) remark to not refrain from adopting language used by the interviewees.

Secondly, we recognised 'hows', i.e. the form of the interview; how individuals talk; how the material is presented (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). This resulted in other ways of sorting. Namely, we paid attention to the choice of words used by interviewees. We also noticed that they used metaphors to illustrate less tangible aspects. For example, colleagues were described as having their own individual backpack of values depending on their background which they have to leave outside the preschool premises. This emphasised the preschools' strong influence on the workforce's values. Additionally, we considered the interviewees' emotions and observed that one of the younger employees we interviewed had a very critical tone towards older employees and her expressions indicated that she felt that preschool teachers from the younger generation are more competent at their job. Subsequently, we both looked at 'whats' and 'hows' together to have more complete and condensed themes (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015).

Furthermore, we engaged in re-sorting to have a fresh look at collected data and obtain new ideas on placing the material in a particular order (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). For instance, re-sorting helped us to notice that some younger employees have significantly more working experience than their older co-workers. Therefore, we realised that both factors, seniority and age might impact interviewees' responses.

Before we proceeded with the analysis, we dealt with the problem of representation by reducing our data, the process that according to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) may be seen as a brutal activity since the researcher has to eliminate a large proportion of data. Accordingly, out of 15 initial themes, we recognised the most important ones and created three main themes that we intended to discuss in the analysis section. At that time, in line with the abductive approach, we moved back and forth between theory and data which helped us to look at our material and choose our focus (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

Apart from analysing data collected through interviews, we engaged in document analysis, which according to Bowen (2009, p.31) "requires data selection, instead of data collection". The first step was to translate the reports that were written in Swedish because we are not familiar with the Swedish language. Initially, we used Google Translate to translate the documents into English. At a later stage, our contact person at Malmö stad helped us with the correct translation of those sections that were of relevance for our research. Subsequently, we reviewed all three documents and coded them by looking for recurring themes. Some of the themes overlapped with those from the interviews. Following the hermeneutics tradition, as mentioned earlier, we were aware that individuals, including us as researchers, "approach any text with certain presuppositions, ideologies, and existing familiarities with other texts ... [that] shape our eventual interpretations with the text itself" (Prasad, 2018, p.34). Additionally, we acknowledged Bowen's (2009, p.32) arguments that documents might not contain enough details to be a sole source used to answer a research question and that documents "are likely to be aligned with corporate policies and procedures and with the agenda of the organisation's principals". Accordingly, we chose document analysis as the source that complemented the interviews, providing us with an opportunity to compare and contrast rhetoric versus reality.

3.3 Reflexivity and Quality

The global COVID-19 epidemic affected our research in several ways. We were not able to conduct observations at our case organisation that could have increased our understanding of the national and local culture. Also, rather than conducting the interviews in person, we had to adjust and switch to online communication channels. This unique circumstance might have also impacted our interviewees' working routine, causing stress or other emotions that potentially influenced our interviewees' responses.

To avoid interviewee bias, we assured anonymity and declared that the results would only be shared with the participants, the organisation and Lund University. Nevertheless, the interviewees might not have felt comfortable providing answers that unfavourably present themselves or their organisation (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). In addition, potential misunderstandings might have occurred from the side of the interviewees and from us as interviewers because the interviews were conducted in English which is not the native language of either side. To reduce the language barrier and to make the interviewees feel comfortable, we followed Sekaran and Bougie's (2016) advice to use terms that the respondents are likely to be familiar with and to phrase the questions clearly, in a neutral tone of voice. Accordingly, when we wanted to ask them about their involvement in two-directional knowledge sharing or their perception about the generation shift we made sure to find alternative words and descriptions to avoid miscommunication.

We also acknowledge that the interviewees work in different teams, they hold different nationalities and personal backgrounds. Thus, in connection with the ambiguous concept of knowledge we realise that each interviewee perceives reality differently and might have difficulties to express their perception of knowledge (Styhre, 2011). This is why we engaged in source critique which signifies "a careful evaluation, reflection, questioning, rejection, and probing of interview accounts" (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020, p.1). Correspondingly, for the analysis of our research, we kept in mind that the interviewees' responses might be heavily influenced by their background. Therefore, to facilitate the quality of our data, we critically evaluated different viewpoints by putting it in perspective, comparing individual statements with the larger scheme of interviewee responses. Interestingly, Sheldon and Johnson (1993) found that people tend to report on their own behaviour and attitudes based on other people's perception rather than from their own perception. For this reason, and to collect multiple perspectives we questioned how people will respond when they are asked to reflect on their own perception about their age group's as well as other age groups' engagement in knowledge sharing and learning. Finally, we asked interviewees to elaborate on what other age groups might think about their age group's engagement in knowledge sharing and learning. In this way, we carefully evaluated which statements we can generalise or draw conclusions from. However, another limitation lies in that we were restricted in our choice of interviewees. We were able to indicate our preferences concerning the seniority of our interviewees, but the interviewees were identified by our contact person. Nevertheless, their participation was voluntary. In the end, all our interviewees were women. That is why in the upcoming sections we refer to the interviewees as "she" or "her" instead of "she/he" or "her/his".

Considering the threat of researcher bias, we followed a well-developed research process and reported our study in a transparent way for the reader to be able to retrace our thoughts. To memorise the interviews as close to reality as possible, we collected contextual data in the form of interviewees' emotions by taking notes during the interviews and we compiled a full transcript of each interview directly after conducting it.

Our student status, our lack of experience as an interviewer and our lack of expert knowledge of the preschool field might have caused us to use a certain language or gestures that might have led to the interviewees responding in a particular way (Alvesson, 2003). We acknowledge that even though we tried to avoid these unintended expressions, they might have still occurred. Nevertheless, we believe that our lack of expert knowledge in the preschool field was a sort of ice breaker that helped us to create a bond with the interviewees because they recognised our interest in their work. This enabled a less formal talk where we were able to gain deeper insights into the interviewees' actual working routines. Hence, we used our lack of knowledge regarding their work as an opportunity for them to tell us examples from their daily tasks which we then tried to bring in connection with knowledge sharing and learning.

By following Alvesson's (2003) notion of reflexivity whereby we were open for unexpected insights rather than being steered by popular academic assumptions and by probing different interpretations, perspectives and meanings as well challenging each other as researchers in a reflexive manner, we are convinced that despite the mentioned limitations we collected high-quality empirical data with a great variety of examples.

4   Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of analysing collected data from our semi-structured interviews. First, we depict preschool teachers' perceptions of knowledge sharing and learning. Thereupon, we analyse preschool teachers' willingness to share knowledge and learn by considering what motivates our interviewees, what they describe as preconditions for knowledge sharing, how they identify with Malmö stad and the teaching profession, and what they perceive as benefits of two-directional knowledge sharing and learning. Lastly, we illustrate barriers and challenges for preschool teachers' knowledge sharing and learning with a particular focus on age differences as a barrier and emphasising the need for diversity and more preschool teachers in our case organisation.

4.1   Perceptions about Knowledge Sharing and Learning

As a first step to answering our research questions, we wanted to find out how preschool teachers understand knowledge sharing and learning. After a few interviews, it became clear that most interviewees had difficulties defining those concepts and explaining how they are related. Junior 4 suggested that there is no difference between knowledge sharing and learning, whereas Senior 2 noted that the two concepts "go hand in hand" (Senior 2).

Nevertheless, our interviewees were able to describe several methods that the preschool has in place to facilitate knowledge sharing and learning. These include monthly meetings with colleagues and team leader meetings among four different preschools as well as weekly team discussions. However, most knowledge sharing and learning take place within the teams that usually consist of one preschool teacher and two childcarers. Some interviewees expressed that they see weekly discussions as a learning opportunity.

For example, Senior 6 commented that:

> Team discussions are very important because we are talking about different subjects and we are helping each other, 'How do you see about that?', 'What do you think about playing with these tools for learning?' or we can have a picture, a documentation that we can discuss. So, I think that's [pause] if I have a picture from a documentation that some children are playing, I can see one thing, if I show it to a colleague, she can see something else, you know, and that's where we are learning (Senior 6).

In general, we got the impression that the preschool has several routines for knowledge sharing and learning among its employees, which are positively perceived by the majority of our interviewees. Senior 6 specifically related to physical documentation and photographs that she likes to use as a tool for learning.

A junior employee highlighted the importance of practical learning and her approval of the preschools' decision to use more digital tools:

> I think it is a good thing that the digital tools are in our life now. And also, I think you learn more when you do things instead of just reading it [at university] because there is a big difference between reading about things and doing it in real life. So, when you practice how to do things all the time, you learn more than by reading about it. That's why we have the interns here, at this preschool (Junior 2).

Hence, Junior 2 mentions that she likes to learn with digital tools. Also, she exemplifies that theoretical learning through reading should be complemented by practical learning that students who want to become preschool teachers gain through internships.

Next to internships, the preschool's mentorship programme was described as a more formal method for knowledge sharing and learning that is specifically designed to help recently recruited employees to gain knowledge from more experienced, senior employees. One senior interviewee expressed that the mentorship programme has potential for improvement:

> I am a mentor for one of our preschool teachers here. She was done with her education now this year … but we don't work as close with each other. But it's better to have like now and if we didn't have anything at all. The best would be if we were working closer together, so

every day. Perhaps now, we just meet once a month or so. So, talking just a little bit (Senior 4*).

Overall, our interviewees support the mentorship programme and see it as a positive initiative. However, one senior interviewee explained that she would prefer closer cooperation with her mentee, including more regular meetings.

Another example of knowledge sharing and learning was given by Senior 1 who described cooperation with other preschools:

> Last year … we did a lot of going around to other preschools and looking at their environment, how they, you know, how they created different rooms and things for activities and things for the children. I found that great, really, to get new ideas and how to make a good environment for the children (Senior 1).

In the last excerpt, visiting different preschools is perceived by preschool teachers as an inspiration and an opportunity to learn. Senior 1 sees the benefit of getting new ideas, namely, using them for the sake of children.

Similar to the argumentation from Willem and Buelens (2007), we do not believe that public sector organisations' increased level of formalisation limits knowledge sharing. In fact, our findings show that the preschool has several formal knowledge sharing processes in place, which corresponds to the importance of creating opportunities for knowledge sharing as remarked by Ipe (2003) and Wang and Noe (2010). The fact that preschool teachers had difficulties to elaborate on their understanding of knowledge sharing and learning illustrates Alvesson and Kärreman's (2001) argument about knowledge as a concept that is ambiguous, broad and challenging to handle. Nonetheless, the interviewees provided us with examples of situations when they share knowledge and learn.

Both junior and senior employees pointed out the significance of tacit knowledge in learning from each other which cannot be easily codified but can be gained through experience during internships or the mentorship programme (Lin & Lee, 2004; Nonaka, 1994; Wikström et al. 2018). This relates to Jensen (2007) who claims that the theory that is acquired at university by prospective teachers has to be translated into solutions that need to be reasonable in real life situations. The interviewees'

high awareness of the importance of tacit knowledge and the preschool's existing knowledge sharing processes indicate that the preschool and its employees comprehend the significance of transferring older employees' tacit knowledge to younger employees before they retire, a remark that was highlighted by several researchers (e.g. Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Slagter, 2007; Sprinkle & Urick, 2018). This suggests that the employees perceive transferring tacit knowledge as a way to enable the preschool's continuous success (Cavusgil, Calantone & Zhao, 2003; Collins & Hitt, 2006). However, since one senior employee emphasised infrequent contact with her mentee as a weakness, the preschool might have to evaluate the mentor programme's structure in order to elevate the programme's effectiveness.

Interestingly, relating to explicit knowledge, we observed that younger employees argued that they can contribute with knowledge that can be stored in databases (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wikström et al. 2018), which from their point of view will become increasingly important. In turn, older employees value explicit knowledge in the form of documentation such as physical notes and photographs.

4.2   Willingness to Share Knowledge and Learn

In order to answer our first research question that explores why junior and senior preschool teachers working in a public sector organisation are willing to share knowledge and learn we started by asking our interviewees two main questions that related to their general motivation in their daily work and their motivation to share and learn specifically. Generally, it became clear that our interviewees take satisfaction from what they do. For instance, Junior 3* expressed:

I love working with children, I love my colleagues, my bosses, they're great (Junior 3*).

A senior employee confirmed this view:

The children. I like to work with the children. That's why I'm still here if you can say so [laughing]. Because I feel that I'm tired in my body now. I have aches in my neck and my hands and in my back, yes, in my knees. But the children make it worth going to work. And even the social things with the colleagues (Senior 7).

We got the impression that our interviewees are highly satisfied with their work. The employees' connection with the children was indicated by all interviewees as their main motivator, followed by their great relationship with co-workers and superiors. In addition, several interviewees mentioned the daily tasks as a motivator by pointing out that each day brings new situations and challenges.

Furthermore, concerning motivation, Senior 6 highlighted the importance of job flexibility:

> It's a free job [being a preschool teacher] because we have a choice. So, we can work outside, we can work inside, we can use different kinds of materials and it's a kind of free job (Senior 6).

Hence, the possibility to decide what to do with children motivates the interviewee.

More specifically regarding preschool teachers' motivation to share knowledge and learn, most interviewees told us that continuous learning is essential in their job. For instance, Senior 4* told us that:

> I think my work is the best work in the world or one of them. It's so, it motivates me ... I would like to learn them [colleagues] new things all the time. I don't think you're feed up with everything, you have to learn all the time to be a good preschool teacher. So, in fact, I would like to learn more. I hope I can give others knowledge, I hope we can give and take from each other (Senior 4*).

This excerpt shows that our interviewees are motivated to learn as a way to improve their skills as a preschool teacher. They argue that they can always learn more, and in order to do so, they are aware that they also need to share their own knowledge. Although most interviewees expressed that they engage in both knowledge sharing and learning, there were employees who in their job clearly focus on one, either knowledge sharing or learning. For example, Junior 1 remarked that she shares:

> Because I want our employees to be better … I want them to understand the preschool better [pause] to teach better (Junior 1).

Whereas Senior 3* said:

> I'm not the one to share knowledge. Yes, I am, but not in the big groups. I can do it in smaller groups. I'm a little bit shy. I can give my knowledge to the children, no problem, but privately, with older people, I have a little bit of a problem … I like learning from others, I like having new ideas from others and to get them to do with the children later on (Senior 3*).

During the interview with Junior 1, we sensed that she is particularly confident about her role in knowledge sharing. The provided quote illustrates that the interviewee's motivation to share knowledge is connected to making the preschool teachers better at their job and ultimately the preschool that they work in a better place. In contrast, the latter excerpt depicts that Senior 3* is motivated to learn, but not to share. A reason given by the interviewee is being shy around older colleagues. It is interesting that even though this interviewee has worked for more than 20 years at Malmö stad, she is less willing to share knowledge than her junior colleague. The following discusses these findings in the context of reviewed literature.

It is clear that working with children brings satisfaction and serves as a motivator to our interviewees, which is in line with Herzberg's (2008) notion of work itself as motivating. The interviewed preschool teachers are therefore intrinsically motivated, which was indicated by Brookhart and Freeman (1992) in analysing reasons for an individual to become a teacher. Moreover, the interviewees mentioned job flexibility and daily challenges as motivating, which corresponds to the responsibility and autonomy (part of self-esteem) that according to Herzberg (2008) and McGregor (1960) enable individuals to fulfil their higher-order needs and motivate employees' behaviour. Nonetheless, we did not perceive a sense of achievement, recognition of a job done, occupational advancement (Herzberg, 2008) and reputation (McGregor, 1960) as motivators.

With regard to motivation to share knowledge and learn, our interviewees underscored that the desire for them and their colleagues to become better preschool teachers was a primary motivator. We see this as an illustration of a specific character of the teaching profession whereby being up to date is a motivator to learn (Jensen, 2007). Additionally, relating to the teaching profession, learning and knowledge sharing are crucial because professional development of the workforce enables a higher-quality education for children (Runhaar & Sanders, 2016). This is reflected in our finding that enhancing children's education is our interviewees' ultimate goal. Hence, in line with

findings presented by Chen and Hsieh (2015) and Kim (2018), we argue that our interviewees are motivated to provide a meaningful public service which consequently fosters their engagement in knowledge sharing. Accordingly, their motivation to share knowledge is connected to providing high-quality service to children rather than for reasons of self-interest. Nonetheless, the example of Senior 3* shows that personal characteristics can influence the decision to share knowledge.

Similarly to Amayah (2013) who researched the public sector, we did not recognise the importance of reciprocity. This social norm was discussed by Hendriks (1999) who based on Herzberg (2008) defined it as one of the sets of factors that explains why knowledge owners engage in knowledge sharing. In addition, we did not find the significance of promotional opportunities (Hendriks, 1999), which we assume might be related to the fact that the public sector does not promote egoistic career advancement, but instead focuses on serving the public good (Frederickson & Hart, 1985), which links back to the ultimate goal of all our interviewees to make the preschool a better place for children. Consequently, we did not note any distinction between the motivation of preschool teachers having different levels of seniority. We see preschool teachers' motivation as underpinned by the public sector context and teaching profession context. In order to further understand preschool teachers' willingness to share knowledge and learn, the following section addresses relevant values that facilitate a knowledge sharing and learning environment.

4.2.1 Preconditions for Knowledge Sharing

Most interviewees from the preschool claimed that they see Malmö stad's values of respect, creativity and engagement reflected in their daily work. Apart from that, junior and senior interviewees repeatedly mentioned openness, support, teamwork, flexibility, and fun as important values for the preschool. For example, Senior 1 underlined the importance of openness and support:

> I think at least in the team where I am, we are very open, we learn from each other and we also give credit to each other very much. I think that is very important. Also, when maybe you can experience that it's a little bit too much for someone, you can also, you know, say: 'Hey, I'll take over here' (Senior 1).

Adding to this, Senior 2 suggested teamwork and flexibility as important factors for the preschool:

> It is a teamwork … we must have an open mind and think outside the box. Because everything we are doing is for children's development. So, we have to listen to each other,

respect each other and communicate in a positive way. Cooperation is very important (Senior 2).

Elaborating on the teamwork aspect, Junior 3* emphasised the importance of fun in the daily work:

> We have a very warm atmosphere and we have fun together. And that's important, I think, to have fun with the children and together with the colleagues. We can talk together about everything (Junior 3*).

Thus, next to the already established values of respect, creativity and engagement, our interviewees also raised the importance of other values. By using modal verbs of obligation, such as 'must' and 'have to', our interviewees clearly depicted their close attachment to the preschool's values of openness, support, teamwork, flexibility and fun.

Generally, we interpret that unified values are well communicated among our interviewees, which challenges the view of the K & C leader who saw 'being together' as difficult in daily working life. To exemplify the importance of shared values for preschool teachers, Senior 6 used the metaphor of a backpack of values:

> When we talk about values, it's what you have with you. You can say that every person has a backpack with their own values. And it's very important to talk about. You have different [values] in your backpack if you are from another culture, you have another religion, and lots of things that can be important to you, but … you can have your own opinion at home. In preschool, you have to follow what's the rule in the preschool. So, I think it's something that you never can just close the door to, because you have to talk about it all the time actually (Senior 6).

This excerpt shows that the preschool realises that their workforce comes from different cultural backgrounds with varying values and perspectives. While these values can remain in the employees' private life, we interpreted that at the preschool all employees are expected to buy-in the preschools' unified values, therefore, adapting to the shared values and letting go of or ignoring alternative values for the time being of working on the preschool's premises. In this context, Junior 1 described the bond that she has with her co-workers:

> We work together eight hours a day, every day. So, we become like a little family. So, when there are critical things, we always talk about it (Junior 1).

Similarly, Junior 4 expressed:

> We are a team. We are a work team. So, we talk to each other about everything (Junior 4).

Hence, the preschools' shared values help to guide the employees in their daily routines, which reduces conflicts among co-workers and provides the basis for enabling knowledge sharing and learning.

When connecting our findings to the literature we found that our interviewees' strong attachment to the preschool's values of openness, support, flexibility, teamwork and fun reflects cooperation, having an open mind and being flexible to adapt to changes discussed as core aspects to provide quality services as a preschool teacher (Vujičić, Boneta & Ivković, 2015). The preschool's values also illustrate the values of the public sector that include "honesty, fairness and equity" rather than "more economic and parsimonious values, such as cost control and goal orientedness" that are promoted in the private sector (Willem & Buelens, 2007, p.583).

We relate the mentioned values of teamwork and support to Yang (2004) who sees collaboration instead of competition as aspects that foster communication and learning. The nature of public sector organisations to serve the public good, or specifically in relation to the preschool, making the education better for children, encourages collaboration (Frederickson & Hart, 1985). This was depicted by one of our interviewees by using the term family as a metaphor. We suggest that this shows strong cohesiveness and good relationships between the preschool teachers which are indicators for high levels of trust, leading to an increased likelihood for knowledge sharing (Brčić & Mihelič, 2015; Wang & Noe, 2010). This argument is supported by the fact that one of the values mentioned by our interviewees is openness, which evinces that preschool teachers trust one another (Yang, 2004). This value is relevant since Yang (2004) argues that without trust the harmonious communication, collaboration and sharing, that our interviewees reflected on, would be ineffective.

Another metaphor formulated by our interviewees was "the backpack of values" which indicates that it is expected of employees to adopt the preschool's values in the context of work. This illustration underlines the importance of uniformity in the preschool, which helps to integrate employees from different backgrounds and avoid conflicts. The mentioned metaphor is closely related to organisational identification where an individual feels belongingness to an organisation based on relating identities (Vough, 2012), which is further explored in the next subsection.

4.2.2 Identification with Malmö stad and with the Teaching Profession

Although working at Malmö stad involves compliance with specific norms, in total, the majority of interviewees identify with Malmö stad. This is illustrated by Junior 2 who claimed:

> Yes, I do [identify with Malmö stad]. Because I have been here for so many years now. And I feel like I'm being a part of it [Malmö stad] very much (Junior 2).

Further, Senior 5 explained that she identifies with Malmö stad now that she has returned as an employee of Malmö stad after working in preschool outside of Malmö stad for several years:

> Yes, I think I can feel it better now [pause] which is my part of Malmö stad, what I have to bring to Malmö stad and that I can feel quite safe working in Malmö stad. I think it's especially now with the coronavirus [COVID-19 outbreak], I feel very safe with the directions we get from Malmö stad. So, I like to work for Malmö stad. I have tried, for a couple of years, I worked for a preschool and that was not in Malmö stad, but I did not like it. So, I went back to Malmö stad again … I like my work. I like to work in Malmö stad [laughing] (Senior 5).

Also, Junior 1 identifies with Malmö stad for reasons of security:

> It [Malmö stad] gives me what I want. I have a job. I have a paycheque. I have my rights. … For the private school, you do not have the same rights as you have at Malmö stad. … I feel secure to work in Malmö stad (Junior 1).

Based on these excerpts, we interpret that most interviewees are satisfied with their employer and enjoy working for Malmö stad. Interestingly, the example of an unusual situation caused by COVID-19 outbreak indicates that employees trust Malmö stad.

Apart from the high level of organisational identification, our interviewees see their profession as an important part of who they are. For example, Senior 2 made it her mission to help children develop:

> Everything we plan, we do for children. All of us love to work with small children, we have very much responsibility to have a good generation start, next generation, what they read and what they learn. And we are all like different feathers of a peacock and we together enhance the beauty of the peacock or the workplace (Senior 2).

This statement demonstrates identification with the profession as a preschool teacher. The profession's components of continuous learning and impacting children's development are aspects that some interviewees translated into their personal mission. In general, as portrayed through the metaphor of a peacock, the topic of an ultimate ambition to contribute to children's sake recurred many times during our interviews. The following relates our findings to the literature about organisational identification as well as identification with the teaching profession.

In terms of organisational identification, we did not find reasons to believe that in comparison to the private sector, the public sector employees' level of commitment and identification is lower (Boyne, 2002; Moon, 2000). Accordingly, contrary to Willem and Buelens' (2007) explanation that for public sector employees it is usually not possible to identify with the organisation's final service delivered or to comprehend how an individual employee contributes to the organisation's success, we claim that as a result of being close to children, preschool teachers can participate in their development. Thus, they clearly recognise the final service delivered and can identify with the organisation.

Also, we suggest that the preschool follows McGregor's (1960) Theory Y which implies the ambition of aligning individual and organisational objectives. In this way, the preschool teachers voluntarily commit to the preschool's objectives and contribute to the organisation's success, by producing 'public value' because the interviewees repeatedly mentioned their impact on the children who are public citizens (Rashman, Withers & Hartley, 2009). Thus, in line with Carmeli, Atwater and Levi (2011) we believe that identification with Malmö stad and the preschool fosters knowledge sharing behaviour of interviewed preschool teachers.

Additionally, because our interviewees have a common goal and shared interests related to making the preschool a better place for children, they share one identity (Zhu, 2016). Hence, they are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing (Zhu, 2016). Here, it is possible that benefits such as a paycheque and employee rights that were mentioned by one of the interviewees are examples of hygiene factors that are important but do not serve as motivators (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993). Moreover, we argue that our interviewees strongly identify with the teacher's profession, because they understand that knowledge sharing and learning are fundamental to their profession (Jurčević, 2015; Sachs, 2001). This identification is further reflected in their role of "caring for and about others" (O'Connor, 2008, p.121).

4.2.3 Perceived Benefits of Two-directional Knowledge Sharing and Learning

With regards to different levels of experience, we found it important to understand how junior and senior employees cooperate with one another as well as how they perceive this cooperation. In general, most interviewees expressed that they share knowledge and learn from both, more and less experienced employees. Senior 3* described this two-directional learning:

> I like to learn from both. The younger one has new knowledge, new education and new research material backgrounds, they have that. And the older ones, they have done it, they have seen the consequences of what they tried (Senior 3*).

Similarly, Senior 7 recalled two-directional learning between her and a junior co-worker:

> I had a man working with me for a couple of years. He was just from school … I have worked many years, he learnt from me, and I learnt a lot of new things from him. And I get more commitment when I work with a younger person who has lots of ideas (Senior 7).

In addition, a junior employee's statement confirmed those perceptions:

> My co-worker, she has been here for over 40 years, at this preschool, so she knows everything about this preschool. So, if I want to know something, I ask her and she goes to find it because she just knows things … the more you work the more you know about the job ... [but] us younger people … we're coming with new eyes on how to see things (Junior 2).

These statements illustrate that junior and senior employees agree that junior preschool teachers can be seen as a source of new ideas and perspectives with the latest scientific knowledge, while senior employees' most valuable knowledge is their experience. Thus, since both groups are described as having relevant knowledge, it is implied that knowledge sharing and learning are beneficial for both junior and senior employees.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that the difference between knowledge of junior and senior employees results in two-directional learning that enables employees in the preschool to come up with new ideas together:

> My colleague and I, she has worked 10 years more than me, … we complete each other, we learn from each other all the time. And if I have a discussion with my colleague or someone else younger or older it's good to: 'Ah, you think like that. I haven't thought like that, that could be good' or 'I think like this when you think like this, how can we do the best for the children anyway' (Senior 4*).

This excerpt indicates that knowledge sharing and learning among employees with various levels of experience enable them to bring together different perspectives and opinions. In this way, diverse groups are able to develop new and more enhanced ideas together, which they could not have come up with individually. This leads to an increase in the quality of the services provided for the children.

Senior 2 related to this argument by explaining that two-directional learning improves the overall group work which is vital to have a functioning educational system:

> I think when you learn from each other, it shows in your group work, it shows in your daily work, because if we do not learn from each other then you cannot have a good educational system for the children. So, that is very important I think (Senior 2).

In general, these excerpts illustrate that preschool teachers are aware of the importance and benefits of two-directional learning for a well-functioning education system, which was communicated by the Preschools' leader:

> If you combine all my co-workers' knowledge and experience it will be massive. When we share, we will be greater. If we don't share we would be very narrow and one-sided (Preschools' leader).

This notion of sharing knowledge as strengthening was also confirmed by a junior employee:

> We can talk to each other, we ask questions if we have any and everyone, everyone is giving. So, we learn from each other. It's about giving and taking [pause] simple things as different songs or how to talk to the children about the virus (Junior 3*).

Here, the Preschools' leader expresses a positive attitude towards the competence of the workforce by saying that knowledge sharing will make the employees greater, it will broaden their perspectives. This, in turn, will make the preschool a better place. Also, a junior employee affirms that her colleagues are willing to both accept suggestions from another person and contribute with their own ideas.

Overall, it is clear that when talking about knowledge sharing and learning between junior and senior employees, 'the giving and taking' perspective prevails among our interviewees. This corresponds to Wang and Noe (2010) who argue that individuals who share knowledge also learn. Additionally, it confirms part of the introductory quote by exemplifying that our interviewees see themselves not only as teachers but also as learners (Highet, 1954). The employees help each other to better orientate themselves in the workplace, improve their skills and overcome their weaknesses. Thus, learning and sharing are an important part of their professional development. In line with Nerland (2012), we found that interaction between preschool teachers is an important source of gaining new knowledge. Whereas with regard to different levels of seniority, we again recognised Jensen's (2007) remark that in order to handle real-life situations, the junior preschool teachers have to translate the theory into reasonable solutions. In that context, senior employees are a helpful source, nonetheless, from senior employees' point of view, recent academic knowledge possessed by juniors is also appreciated. Hence, our interviewees claim that they engage in two-directional knowledge sharing and learning and see the benefits of those practices. This reflects Brčić and Mihelič's (2015) finding that both junior and experienced older employees are eager to share knowledge. Nonetheless, despite those positive findings, the next section analyses and discusses barriers and challenges that inhibit knowledge sharing and learning between employees.

4.3   Barriers and Challenges to Knowledge Sharing and Learning

Given the findings of cooperation between junior and senior employees, we addressed our second research question about how junior and senior preschool teachers are inhibited from knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation. Accordingly, we asked our interviewees about potential barriers and/or challenges related to knowledge sharing and learning in their workplace.

Concerning willingness to share knowledge and learn we recognised that some interviewees like to share knowledge while others prefer to learn. A particularly interesting example was the previously discussed statement by Senior 3* who identified being shy as her personal barrier to share knowledge. The remaining examples shared by our interviewees revolved around their colleagues' behaviours and attitudes. For instance, Senior 4* saw that being too confident can occur among senior as well as junior employees and might be a barrier to learn:

> The barriers could be when people have: 'I know everything, I have worked very long'. I hope there are not more people like that. The younger can learn us lots and so there could be some, maybe, who say they know everything and that could be a barrier (Senior 4*).

This quote suggests that an excessively high level of confidence about one's own experience and academic knowledge can occur both among senior and junior employees, respectively. This attitude can result in decreased willingness to learn. As a way to deal with this obstacle, Senior 4* recommended promoting learning as a positive action. This suggests that the importance of learning might not be sufficiently emphasised by superiors.

Interestingly, although Senior 4* remarked that some junior employees might be too confident, Senior 6 claimed:

> Maybe I can sometimes think that they're [junior employees] just taking their work a little [making a noise 'hm'] a little not so serious. I think it's a very important work we are doing. I would like that every colleague would think that as well. I really hope they see what an important job it is (Senior 6).

Here, the senior preschool teacher talks about some junior colleagues not taking their job seriously enough which we believe might entail lack of willingness to share knowledge and learn from their side. During the interview with Senior 6, we found that this interviewee clearly understood the great responsibility that comes with being a teacher and working with children.

Furthermore, even though we identified openness and flexibility as part of the shared values among the interviewees, Senior 6 also raised the problem of insufficient openness from the side of senior employees:

> If you are younger and you are working with seniors and they are saying: 'Well, we have always done like this' and you know, this is [pause]. So, sometimes they [junior employees]

need some support, very much support and we [mentors] can help them with that (Senior 6).

This quote presents younger employees as willing to contribute with new ideas which are blocked by some senior employees being committed to their own ways of doing things. Here, the mentorship programme is seen as a solution to this problem where mentors (i.e. mostly more experienced employees) help junior employees to deal with the mentioned situation.

A tendency among experienced older employees to prefer sustaining familiar routines rather than testing alternative approaches was elaborated by Junior 2:

> It's maybe how they are raised and how they think about these new people that are coming. Some older people just do not think outside the box. Just same old, same old, same old all the time, and they don't care about others. They just think this is the right thing and this has been working all those years. I think they're scared to try new things because they don't know what is going to happen if they try new things. They have a large obsession. They want to control things. Just them, they won't let in other people from the younger generation (Junior 2).

This quote illustrates a lack of openness among some experienced older employees that may inhibit both learning and knowledge sharing. Junior 2 uses the metaphor of lack of ability among experienced older preschool teachers to think outside the box. As a reason for senior employees' behaviour, the interviewee sees fear to engage in new things which is connected to unknown results. This, in turn, relates to a lack of control that senior employees do not feel comfortable with as argued by Junior 2.

An alternative explanation of why some senior employees might be less willing to learn was provided by the Preschools' leader who said:

> If you've been working for more than 20 years, then you have an education that is not up to date. It can be quite hard for a person. To be able to say that, you have to be secure. Some people might see young people who have the most recent education as a threat. We are working hard to make people feel safe and comfortable to develop (Preschools' leader).

In this excerpt, the Preschools' leader suggests that senior employees might find it difficult to admit that they need help. Feelings of insecurity might inhibit learning. Nevertheless, the Preschools' leader ensures that this is something Malmö stad is working on.

Moreover, another obstacle identified by two interviewees relates to limited proficiency in the Swedish language. In this context, Senior 5 explained:

> Here in our preschool, we have lots of preschool teachers that are not so good at Swedish and then it's also difficult to read books or have discussions about new literature. Because they are not so good in Swedish. So, it's a little bit difficult (Senior 5).

This statement demonstrates that some preschool teachers are not familiar enough with the Swedish language to be able to participate in discussions which thereby limits their engagement in knowledge sharing and learning. We also suspect that those employees who speak the same language are more likely to share knowledge and learn from each other.

Lastly, Junior 2 shared with us a thought that in her opinion, it is not possible to get along with everyone:

> I think everywhere you have co-workers that you don't like. I think everywhere you have that. I have one colleague in my group, sometimes we can come along, but not always (Junior 2).

This excerpt shows that it is not possible to get on well with all colleagues. Thus, due to personal preferences, employees might not want to share their knowledge with all co-workers.

Related literature by Liebowitz and Yan (2004) claims that knowledge hoarding is typical for American public sector organisations. However, despite knowledge sharing being tantamount to giving up the ownership of knowledge that one possesses (Ipe, 2003), we did not detect any signs of knowledge hoarding in our case setting in Sweden. We suggest that this illustrates a strong identification with the teaching profession as well as with the preschool as a learning organisation. Nonetheless, we found other insightful barriers to knowledge sharing and learning. For example, one of our interviewees expressed that she sees it as a barrier to learning that some preschool teachers are excessively confident about their knowledge. This relates to Sveiby and Simons' (2002) discussion about a so-called professional plateau that is reached by many employees who worked for more than 15 years and feel that they have already acquired all knowledge that there is to learn. As a way to mitigate this learning barrier, the preschool should continuously emphasise the relevance of learning in relation to the goal of the preschool, making the environment better for the children, that all our interviewees described as their motivation. In this context, collaboration

over competition by attaching little importance to employees' seniority level or position in the organisation's hierarchy is also crucial (Wang & Noe, 2010; Yang, 2004).

Moreover, junior employees' lack of seriousness in their job was remarked by one senior interviewee, which we identified as a barrier because Jurčević (2015) specifically named willingness for lifelong learning and taking responsibility as prerequisites for the teaching profession. Hence, we assert that some junior employees have a weaker identification with the teaching profession and are less motivated by the thought of teaching children and serving the public compared to senior employees. We suggest that this causes a lack of willingness to share knowledge and learn from the side of senior preschool teachers because as Urick et al. (2017) indicated, older employees might refrain from sharing information when they have the perception that younger employees are disinterested in the older workforce's routines and values. However, in this context we also acknowledge that a low level of seniority in itself can constitute a barrier to knowledge sharing because newly recruited employees need a considerable amount of time to become effective and establish relationships with co-workers (Sveiby & Simons, 2002).

In line with Hislop's (2013) argument that learning provokes conflicting emotions, our junior, as well as senior interviewees, reported about senior employees' tendency to avoid leaving their comfort zone. This means that senior preschool teachers are inclined to continue using their well-established routines rather than being open-minded for new methods. Thus, even though we identified openness and flexibility as part of the shared values among preschool teachers, we interpret narrow-mindedness as a barrier to learn among senior employees. In this context, the Preschools' leader raises the issue of senior employees recognising junior employees' recent academic knowledge as a threat to their established knowledge base and power. Similar to von Krogh (1998) and Slagter (2007), the Preschools' leader underlines the significance of establishing a secure working environment, especially for older employees with significant working experience. In addition, researchers underscore trust as a meaningful value to enable an open and harmonious knowledge-sharing climate and to possibly overcome interpersonal differences which were remarked by Junior 2 (Kim, 2018; Yang, 2004).

Another aspect that was mentioned in the context of barriers to knowledge sharing and learning was some preschool teachers' limited proficiency in the Swedish language. This challenge can be connected to Mäkelä, Andersson and Seppälä's (2012) research that found that individuals with similarities for example, in terms of their nationality share more knowledge with each other than individuals with different backgrounds. Consequently, interpersonal differences in terms of

nationalities among preschool teachers might constitute a barrier to knowledge sharing and learning. The upcoming section explores how age-related stereotypes stand in the way for effective knowledge sharing and learning.

4.3.1 Perceptions about Age Differences as a Barrier

To collect different perspectives, we asked both junior and senior employees how age differences constitute a barrier for preschool teachers' engagement in knowledge sharing and learning. One interviewee indicated communication problems between different generations:

> My colleagues, we are younger. But next door, we have three seniors. We don't have great communication [laughing], you know. There is not so good communication between us. I think they [pause], the thoughts are older than mine. So yeah, we don't click so good (Junior 1).

Thus, this interviewee recognises a problem with regard to how employees from different generations communicate with each other.

Moreover, Senior 4* raises that in her opinion older preschool teachers are more determined and loyal:

> I hope they don't think we are boring and grey. We are, I think, we are better, we come at the right time to our work, we are not as often late like they are … we who are a little bit older, we are more disciplined, loyal, we are more loyal, I think to our work. We used to stay longer today. We say in Sweden if you have worked at the same work for 25 years, you get a gold watch. But when I show to the younger today, 'What 25 years at the same work? Are you crazy?' (Senior 4*).

This remark by Senior 4* illustrates that older preschool teachers think of themselves as being the more loyal generation. Here, Senior 4* also discusses a different way of thinking that younger people have. She suggests that for the younger generation it is not common to stay in one organisation for a longer period of time. Further, the interviewee implies that her younger co-workers are less determined and disciplined in their work. This assumption might inhibit knowledge sharing between younger and older employees.

Another example of an age-related barrier was presented by a younger interviewee who explained that she does not see the sense in learning from her older co-workers:

> The knowledge of the Baby Boomers isn't as good as ours, the young ones. For the younger generation, it's more simple to [pause] I don't really know … I have here, for example, Baby Boomers who have been working here for 30 years. And they still don't know how to work on the computer, and it's annoying. Yeah, [laughing] it can be annoying. But I feel it's very good that there come more teachers that know more about the computer. So, I think it's a good reason for them, then [laughing] to quit their jobs, the older ones .... maybe the boss sends them to school so they can learn more about the computer. And they go, of course, they go, they have to. But, it seems it's very, very difficult, so they always left us younger people take over the computer (Junior 1).

This strong opinion that rates older employees' knowledge as outdated indicates intergenerational tensions when it comes to knowledge sharing and learning. Several interviewees highlighted the increasingly important role of technology in knowledge sharing and learning. In that context, two younger employees criticised that their older co-workers cannot sufficiently use online tools and have difficulties with understanding the advantages of technologies. Here, adding to Junior 1, another younger employee reflected:

> Because I think the world is more, more work with laptops and mobile phones. You can do so much with all of this stuff. Before this stuff didn't exist. If you know how this works now, you can do so much more, you can with only one mobile you can go to the Internet, it becomes a small computer that you have always in your pocket and I have seen more older people that don't understand this. So, if they understand that it's going to be so much easier to stay tuned with others (Junior 2).

Senior 5 confirmed this statement:

> And I think the younger with digitalisation, they are better than some of the older [laughing] (Senior 5).

Further, Junior 1 pointed out that in her opinion next to the shift to digital communication tools, the older generation is challenged by the increasing number of children in the preschool:

> I have here, one woman, she is [close to retirement]. She's going to quit her job [soon]. She has seen all the differences, she has seen all the things that go different, all the rules, new

rules. And, she thinks it's good that she will quit because she can't handle it now. And the children, they get more and more and more. When she was younger, she was working with two others [preschool teachers] and they had only 10 children. Now, for example, we are three and we have from 18 to 30 children. Do you see the difference? So, she's a little panicked. She said, it's better that I quit because I can't, I can't anymore. I can't work on the computer. I can't work with children anymore. And we say, I often say that we can help, we can look at it together (Junior 1).

A senior employee acknowledged that her job is becoming increasingly challenging:

The work itself has changed so much because it's so much more. So much more to document now than what it used to be. And that's not my strongest side. I had to learn a lot about that. It's a big change from when I started to now ... and I can't really say if it's for good or bad sometimes. Maybe that's my age (Senior 1).

These explanations illustrate that a preschool teacher's increasing work responsibilities are becoming challenging for the older generation. The perceptions seem to be that the older generation cannot handle the speed of change that brings with it an increasing number of online communication channels, children, as well as documentation requirements. In the end, some older employees' lack of digital knowledge causes frustration for some of the younger employees, which might result in prejudice and tensions among the workforce and limit their willingness to share their knowledge with each other.

Additionally, both younger and older interviewees confirmed that older employees' engagement in learning declines when they come closer to retirement. This was explained by Senior 7 who told us that:

I can see, now, that I don't have the same engagement anymore for new things. I have the engagement for the children and I have the engagement for what happens in the house … but new things [pause] I know that I'm soon going to quit [meaning retire], so, I have not so long time left to work. So, now starting with IT and that, I think yes, okay, I do it, but I don't do it with all my engagement [laughing]. But I do it, as long as I work, I do what I have to do (Senior 7).

Hence, despite older employees' continuous motivation to share their knowledge, their motivation to learn decreases as they approach retirement. As Senior 7 stated, she does what is expected from

her, but not more than that. One younger interviewee perceived her older colleagues as reluctant to learn and expressed:

> Some of them [older employees] are like: 'Yeah, I mean I am older than you', and stuff like that, 'I know better' (Junior 4).

From this very negative statement, we interpret that some younger employees believe that their older co-workers use their age as an argument to not engage in learning. Nonetheless, although some employees look at their co-workers through the lens of age, Senior 5 indicated that the age criteria might be less relevant for some junior employees:

> I know that there are some [junior co-workers] of course that think that I'm old, but I also know that there are a lot of them who don't think about the age (Senior 5).

Similarly, a few interviewees acknowledged that there are personal differences regarding younger employees' willingness to learn. Accordingly, Senior 3* said:

> That's up to the person. There can be a person that wants to learn everything and all the time. Then, there are people that are satisfied with their education and think: 'Yeah, I got an education, I can work' (Senior 3*).

This excerpt explains that employees' willingness to learn is also dependent on personal preferences. It appears that some younger employees are very eager to learn while others see their education as a sufficient source of knowledge.

Overall, most interviewees gave us examples of what they perceive as barriers to knowledge sharing and learning in relation to age differences. For instance, a junior employee described poor communication between her younger team and some older co-workers because, in her opinion, the older co-workers have "older thoughts" than her. This confirms Burmeister, Fasbender and Deller's (2018) argument that age is an important criterion that influences how individuals interact with each other. The example also demonstrates that negative age stereotypes limit effective interactions and might inhibit willingness to share knowledge (Burmeister, Fasbender & Deller, 2018; Urick et al. 2017). Since different age groups with varying values, skills and attitudes are working together in the preschool, conflict might seem as inevitable (Bencsik, Horváth-Csikós & Juhász, 2016).

Another illustration we discussed is the senior interviewee who defended her generation as being more loyal and committed to their job than the younger generation. This relates to Slagter's (2007) positive stereotypes that connect older employees with low absentee and turnover rates. However, since this senior employee believes that her younger co-workers are less determined and disciplined in their work than herself, this assumption might inhibit effective knowledge sharing and learning between her and her younger co-workers.

Moreover, most of the negative perceptions concerned older employees. A highly critical voice was raised by Junior 1 who claims her knowledge to be superior to her older co-workers' knowledge. Similar to Junior 2 and Senior 5 she remarked that older generations have difficulties with the preschools' shift to using more online communication channels, which causes feelings of frustration from her side. This confirms part of what Finkelstein, Ryan and King (2013) describe as a common perception about older employees as underperforming and costly. In line with Burmeister, Fasbender and Deller (2018) we argue that such unfavourable stereotypes might inhibit knowledge sharing and learning between different generations.

Generally, both a junior and a senior employee explained that the job is becoming increasingly challenging, especially for older employees because of the shift to digital tools, but also because of more documentation requirements and an increasing number of children in the preschool. Following the argumentation from Kooij et al. (2008), training and development opportunities can increase older employees' motivation. However, similar to what was criticised by Urick (2017), we recognise that the preschool offers more development opportunities for junior employees than for senior employees which we see as a potential indicator of ageism, a problem that Ahmed, Andersson and Hammarstedt (2012) found to be evident in Swedish workplaces. Hence, the preschool should follow Slagter (2009) by putting an effort into investing in employees of all ages which can increase the workforce's engagement in knowledge sharing.

Moreover, Löfgren (2015) confirmed that the restructuring of Sweden's education system makes teachers more dependent on policies. Also, the lack of qualified preschool teachers combined with an increasing number of children in the preschools causes stress and leaves employees with less time to engage in knowledge sharing and learning (Alvestad et al. 2014). Correspondingly, Riege (2005) discusses lack of time as a barrier to knowledge sharing. We suggest that these stress factors have a stronger impact on senior employees than on junior employees because those who have been working in the preschool for several years had to adapt and change their routines whereas

junior employees as newcomers rather than adapt to, had to adopt routines of the preschool at the beginning of their careers.

In the context of adapting her routines, the choice of words from Senior 1 for example, "I had to learn" and the fact that she is uncertain if it was "for good or bad" indicates that she perceives learning as a duty that she has to follow. This conflicts to some extent with Brčić and Mihelič (2015) who found that older employees are eager to learn and share knowledge and can be connected to the previous argument of older employees not wanting to leave their comfort zone. Adapting to new routines might involve mistakes, therefore, the fear of making oneself vulnerable to criticism may inhibit willingness to learn, especially for older preschool teachers (Noe, Tews & Dachner, 2010).

Interestingly, younger and older interviewees believe that their older co-workers' engagement in learning declines when they come closer to retirement. For example, those preschool teachers who are close to retirement are less motivated than their younger co-workers to learn completely new technology systems, rather they conform with what is expected of them. Nonetheless, our interviewees who are close to retirement are willing to share, which relates to the literature about older, experienced employees wanting to have a meaningful and interesting job and contributing to the workplace for example by transferring their knowledge to younger employees (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Ropes, 2014; Slagter, 2007). Moreover, willingness to share knowledge among older employees is in line with Kim's (2018) study who found that in the public sector, the older the employee, the more devoted he or she is to engage in knowledge sharing.

The older employees' tendency to engage less in learning was particularly negatively understood by Junior 4 who mimicked older co-workers' supposed attitudes as "Yeah, I mean I am older than you … I know better" (Junior 4). This statement lets us assume that some younger employees perceive their older co-workers as unreceptive to their academic knowledge and new ideas (Urick et al. 2017). In the long term, the rejection of innovative knowledge could harm the quality of the preschool's services and could decrease the preschool's competitiveness (Sprinkle & Urick, 2018). In addition, this situation where older employees are primarily seen as knowledge senders and younger employees as knowledge receivers should be avoided by the preschool because it could prevent older employees from further developing themselves and it could lead to some younger employees' ideas being rejected (Burmeister, Fasbender & Deller, 2018). Generally, due to the very negative perception from Junior 4, we got the impression that some older employees might use their advanced age as a reason to not engage in learning. Thus, we suggest that some older

preschool teachers see themselves as having authority over some younger preschool teachers, which is corresponding to the study from Wong et al. (2008) regarding Baby Boomers and Generation Y. A possible reason for this might be that those older employees who have extensive working experience develop a desire for more responsibilities. In turn, we suggest that some younger preschool teachers might be discouraged from engaging in knowledge sharing because they have the impression that their older co-workers are not interested in learning from them (Burmeister, Fasbender & Deller, 2018).

It is relevant to acknowledge that besides age-related perceptions about knowledge sharing and learning, a few interviewees voiced that some preschool teachers might have preferences that deviate from the perceptions about their age group. Specifically, we found that some younger employees are very eager to learn while others perceive their education as a sufficient source of knowledge. In this context, we would like to refer back to Urick's (2017) study who emphasises the importance of offering a diversified training programme as a way to address not only different age-related but more importantly, individual needs. For the preschool, this would imply offering more programmes besides the mentorship programme in order to encourage two-directional knowledge sharing and learning.

4.3.2 The Need for Diversity and More Preschool Teachers

When our interviewees discussed the cooperation between junior and senior employees they gave us examples of both successful collaborations that yield benefits for the preschool and less positive experiences they had that revealed inhibitors of knowledge sharing and learning between two mentioned groups of employees. Overall, several interviewees pointed out that for the effective knowledge sharing and learning to take place, teams within the preschool should consist of employees from two or more generations and employees having a variety of experience. This is reflected both in junior and senior employees' statements:

> When you come in as a new preschool teacher and you're 25 years old and you come to colleagues who are 50, 60 years old. You know, it's not the same talk. It's not the same thoughts. It's not the same learning. That's why I think it's good that we are one young and one senior and one in the middle maybe. It should be like that, yes. Not three younger and three senior employees, for example (Junior 1).

> I think it's positive that we are different, in different ages here. It's good for the children, and it's good for everything. See, in my department, there are three of us. One of us is 36 years old. She is perfect with computers and when I can't do something, I call her: 'Please, help me', and she helps me. And then when she has things that she cannot do, she calls me: 'Can you help me with this'? She's not so good at talking to the parents and she always tells me: 'Can you talk to the parents'? So, we help each other when we're younger and older people working together (Senior 7).

This view was also supported by the Preschools' leader who said:

> The younger generation and the older generation have to meet. That's best. Variety is important not just in age but also in experience (Preschools' leader).

These excerpts emphasise that our interviewees would like to work in more diverse teams. Such teams are strong because of the combination of experienced older employees and recently graduated junior employees. Similarly, the Preschools' leader recognises the variety of ages and experiences as the best option.

Lastly, our interviewees see the need for more employees that are educated as preschool teachers. For instance, Senior 6 explained that having preschool teachers in her team makes the job easier:

> I'm glad that we are two preschool teachers that share the work because we can talk. We can talk so much about teaching and it's collegial learning because we can just make the work really forward and make progress with the children. I think the teams that just have one preschool teacher have a little bit [pause] it is a little more difficult for them because nearly everyone who is working here has some education, but there are also people who have no [university] education at all [refers to childcarers]. So, the preschool teacher who has a team where a colleague is not educated has a bit of [pause] it's difficult because they do not get the feedback, you know, and they are a little bit lonely, so they have to take help from other preschool teachers in our preschool (Senior 6).

This excerpt illustrates that having another preschool teacher in the same team is appreciated by senior employees. Holding the same position makes it easier to work, communicate and thereby share knowledge and learn. Accordingly, this relates to a statement of Senior 4* who described having other preschool teachers in her team as "a luxury".

To discuss our findings, we suggest that our interviewees' call for age diverse groups corresponds to Slagter (2009) who asserts that managers should acknowledge the added value through intergenerational group constellations. Our interviewees specifically indicated that groups should be divided in a way that diversity in terms of age and seniority levels is maximised. The preschool teachers' claim that this solution would facilitate knowledge sharing and learning is confirmed by Slagter (2009). This links back to the importance of human interactions because more diverse groups enable teachers to gain new knowledge (Nerland, 2012).

In addition, a higher proportion of educated preschool teachers is needed to minimise varying interpretations and understandings among the workforce and to facilitate high-quality education for children (Alvestad et al. 2014). As the Preschools' leader remarked, a constantly increasing population increases the demand, meaning the number of children in the preschool increases, which leads to more stress for the employees and lack of time to engage in knowledge sharing and learning activities (Alvestad et al. 2014). In fact, according to the Malmö City Council (2019), an annual increase of 33 percent in the number of newly beginning preschool teachers is needed. Following the Preschools' leader's statement, this is not feasible to achieve because the interest in educating oneself as a preschool teacher is low and more employees are retiring. To cope with this challenging situation, the preschool relies on effective knowledge sharing and learning among the existing workforce to sustain the preschool's competitiveness. We hope that through our study, our case organisation can better understand how junior and senior preschool teachers engage in knowledge sharing and learning, as well as how their knowledge sharing and learning behaviour is being challenged.

5   Conclusion

This study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of how junior and senior preschool teachers engage in knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation as well as how their knowledge sharing and learning behaviour is being challenged. In order to achieve that as well as answer our research questions, we conducted a study in the preschool that is a part of Malmö stad, the Swedish public sector organisation. In this final chapter of our thesis, we will draw conclusions from our research which will be followed by theoretical contributions, research limitations, suggestions for future research, and practical implications.

To answer our first research question why junior and senior preschool teachers working in a public sector organisation are willing to share knowledge and learn, we found out that the motivation of preschool teachers lies in the work itself, namely, working with children that brings satisfaction and next to job flexibility and daily challenges motivates preschool teachers (Herzberg, 2008). More specifically, in relation to motivation to share knowledge and learn, our interviewees expressed a desire for them and their colleagues to become better preschool teachers, which serves as a primary motivator explaining why both junior and senior employees engage in knowledge sharing and learning. Since by being better in their job our interviewees intend to contribute to their ultimate goal of making the preschool a better place for children, we interpret that preschool teachers are intrinsically motivated and evince elements of so-called public service motivation (Chen & Hsieh, 2015). They are not motivated for reasons of self-interest, including reputation, recognition or advancement among other aspects (Hendriks, 1999, Herzberg, 2008; McGregor, 1960). We assume that a lack of those might be based on grounds that public sector organisations do not promote egoistic career advancement (Frederickson & Hart, 1985). Also, a specific character of the teaching profession whereby being up to date is a motivator to learn was found significant (Jensen, 2007). For junior teachers specifically, translating the theory that is acquired at university into reasonable solutions plays an important part (Jensen, 2007).

Furthermore, with regard to engagement in knowledge sharing and learning, we found that values of openness, support, flexibility and teamwork were indicated by our interviewees as important. Some of those values correspond to aspects that Vujičić, Boneta and Ivković (2015) claim as

necessary to provide quality services as a preschool teacher and they also reflect typical values of the public sector such as "honesty fairness and equity" (Willem & Buelens, 2007, p.583). Thus, the collaborative environment in the preschool is underpinned by the nature of public sector organisations (Frederickson & Hart, 1985; Willem & Buelens, 2007). In addition, preschool teachers' objective of providing better education for children is in line with the objective of the preschool to encourage participation in knowledge sharing (McGregor, 1960). We also found that our interviewees identify with the teaching profession because they understand that knowledge sharing and learning through human interactions is fundamental to their profession (Jurčević, 2015; Nerland, 2012; Sachs, 2001), as well as their professional development as a way to improve children's education (Runhaar & Sanders, 2016). Consequently, we argue that in order to answer the first research question it was crucial to consider motivation, the nature of the public sector and the professional context of the teaching profession, including organisational and professional identification, because they influence preschool teachers' engagement in knowledge sharing and learning.

Furthermore, concerning different levels of seniority, we found that our interviewees engage in two-directional knowledge sharing and learning whereby, according to our interviewees, senior preschool teachers can contribute with their expertise and junior preschool teachers can bring their recent academic knowledge. This connects accurately with the introductory quote that illustrates that no matter the age or seniority level, each individual employee can be seen as both a pupil and a teacher (Highet, 1954). Generally, we mainly recognised formal routines for knowledge sharing and learning, therefore, we suggest the preschool to consider the added value through informal knowledge sharing and learning opportunities (Ipe, 2003).

To answer our second research question regarding how junior and senior preschool teachers are inhibited from knowledge sharing and learning in a public sector organisation, we found that some preschool teachers' excessive self-confidence about their knowledge might inhibit learning. We suggest that in relation to senior employees this attitude might be explained by a so-called professional plateau indicating that an experienced employee feels that he or she has already acquired all knowledge that there is to learn (Sveiby & Simons, 2002). Further, some senior employees think that junior employees do not take their job seriously enough, which might lead to senior employees' reluctance to share their knowledge with their junior co-worker because senior employees could perceive them as disinterested (Urick et al. 2017). A few junior employees saw some senior employees as rather closed-minded and caught up in their routines, which, according

to the Preschools' leader might be because senior employees feel threatened by junior employees' recent knowledge. Hence, this could form a barrier for senior employees' learning. These few points show that although our interviewees highlighted the importance of values such as openness, support, flexibility and teamwork, the interviewees' perceptions indicate that these values are not followed by everyone to the same extent. Besides, we learnt about some employees' difficulties with the Swedish language which can lead to a barrier to share knowledge and learn because those individuals with similarities for example, in terms of their nationality share more knowledge with each other than individuals with different backgrounds (Mäkelä, Andersson & Seppälä, 2012).

More than half of our interviewees shared negative age-related stereotypes with us which can generally be seen as a barrier to knowledge sharing and learning (Burmeister, Fasbender & Deller, 2018; Urick et al. 2017). Despite one older employee stating that she perceives younger employees as less loyal and determined than her age group, most negative remarks were expressed by younger employees and were directed towards their older co-workers. A few strongly negative opinions about older preschool teachers were that their knowledge is outdated and that they have difficulties with using modern technologies. Further, a junior, as well as a senior employee, reported that mainly due to a lack of preschool teachers, an increasing number of children in the preschool and more documenting requirements, the job is becoming increasingly demanding, especially for older employees, causing more stress and leaving little time for knowledge sharing and learning activities (Alvestad et al. 2014). Besides, we found out that more development opportunities are offered by the preschool for junior employees, which potentially indicates ageism, a problem, according to Ahmed, Andersson and Hammarstedt (2012), that is evident in Swedish workplaces.

Also, we found that older employees who are close to retirement are less willing to learn. This was not only a perception of young employees, but it was confirmed by one older interviewee. This situation, in which older employees are seen primarily as knowledge senders and younger employees as knowledge receivers should be avoided because it could prevent older employees' development, reject some younger employees' ideas, and in the long-term decrease the preschool's competitiveness (Burmeister, Fasbender & Deller, 2018; Sprinkle & Urick, 2018).

Moreover, we found that the working groups should be more diverse in terms of age and seniority in order to gain new knowledge, which was supported by both, younger and older interviewees (Nerland, 2012). Additionally, they explained that a higher proportion of educated preschool teachers is needed to be able to continue offering high-quality education for the children (Alvestad et al. 2014). This relates back to the initial problem illustrated by the Preschools' leader and the

Malmö City Council (2019) regarding the need for an annual increase of 33 percent in the number of newly beginning preschool teachers, which is rather unrealistic to achieve due to a low demand for learning the profession and an increasing number of retirees.

5.1   Theoretical Contributions

Our thesis contributes to the literature about knowledge sharing and learning, in particular in relation to the public sector, including the preschool context, which as mentioned earlier has been given very limited attention. Moreover, our thesis focuses on the individual perspective to understand an individual's willingness to share knowledge and learn as well as barriers that might occur in the context of knowledge sharing and learning. Thus, by considering different levels of seniority of employees, we made a contribution to a neglected body of literature that considers personal differences such as varying seniority levels in connection with willingness to share knowledge and learn.

With regard to our first research question, we contribute to the literature about motivation by showing that the motivation of preschool teachers is influenced by their identification with the public sector that has the purpose to serve the public good (Frederickson & Hart, 1985) and with the teaching profession that requires constant learning and development from teachers by engaging in human interactions (Jurčević, 2015; Nerland, 2012). Interestingly, we did not find motivators related to self-interest such as promotional opportunities, recognition and reputation which stand out from the common perception in this area (Hendriks, 1999; Herzberg, 2008; McGregor, 1960). Thus, we contributed to the literature about teachers' identity by discussing that a motivation to develop as a teacher is a result of altruism and dedication to children. We also addressed other facilitating factors for knowledge sharing and learning such as organisational values and work climate which were also impacted by the nature of the public sector. Hence, we made a contribution to the literature about factors facilitating knowledge sharing and learning in the public sector.

Concerning our second research question, we enriched the literature about barriers to share knowledge and learn by pointing out that we did not recognise any signs of knowledge hoarding in our public sector case organisation which contradicts a part of Liebowitz and Yan's (2004) study that is limited to the American context. We believe that this illustrates preschool teachers' strong identification with the teaching profession as well as with the preschool as a learning organisation.

Further, we observed that it is mostly younger preschool teachers who have negative age-related stereotypes towards their older co-workers. Other factors that the individual preschool teacher has little influence on, namely lack of preschool teachers, an increasing number of children in the preschool and more documenting requirements further limit our interviewees' ability to engage in knowledge sharing and learning.

5.2   Research Limitations

As already mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, we acknowledge that our study has several limitations. Generally, empirical research is limited by the fact that it is necessary to select certain elements because it is simply not possible to represent all existing perceptions in the case organisation (Styhre, 2013). More usage of ethnographic elements such as participant observations could have provided us with further insights into our interviewees' social interactions (Prasad, 2018), but due to the COVID-19 outbreak, this could not be implemented. Regardless of this limitation, we put an effort into presenting as truthful as possible what is happening at the preschool by discussing at least three statements of each interviewee, giving voice to all interviewees.

The critical reader may argue that our small sample size with 11 preschool teachers and childcarers (4 junior and 7 senior) as well as 2 superiors may limit our research through possibly biased findings. Typically for case studies, our findings are restrained to the particular preschool we researched and cannot be generalised to other public preschools (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, we want to emphasise that following Dyer and Wilkins (1991, p.615), we focused on illustrating "a rich description of the social scene" to increase the accuracy of our findings. Therefore, in terms of theoretical generalisability, we claim that the factors we identify as impacting preschool teachers' willingness to engage in knowledge sharing, as well as those factors that inhibit them from doing so, could be tested in other preschools, providing an incentive for future research.

5.3   Future Research

Since literature related to knowledge sharing and learning in the public sector organisations is limited, we see the need to explore this area further, with a focus on the individual perspective that in comparison to organisational perspective has generally been given less attention. We encourage

the future research to focus on different organisations within the public sector that regardless of some common characteristics differ among each other as asserted by Willem and Buelens (2007), which motivates authors' distinction between government institutions, public sector institutions, and state enterprises. Therefore, we believe that distinct findings might provide clarification when researching public hospitals, government agencies, postal services, etc.

Furthermore, our findings revealed a few interesting ideas for future research related to preschools. Given that Swedish preschools are challenged by a shortage of preschool teachers which is dependent on the fact that not enough young people choose to become preschool teachers, we suggest that further studies could address how the issue of the shortage can be solved and how the preschool teaching profession can be made more attractive. Moreover, we would like to encourage more research about identity and identification, for instance, all preschool teachers we interviewed were women and some of them have foreign backgrounds, therefore, in line with Atewologun, Kutzer, Doldor, Anderson and Sealy (2017) we believe that it would be relevant to explore the impact of gender and ethnic identities on how employees relate their self-view to the context of work. In addition, it would be interesting to explore public preschools in other countries to see how other preschools are structured and what career opportunities are offered by public preschools in different countries. We assume that these may have an important impact on the findings. Further, although Sweden is an example of an individualist society, the Swedish leadership style is based on joint vision, collaboration, and consensus (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Jonsson, 2013). This might explain why our findings concerning public service motivation resemble those from the Confucian culture such as Taiwan and Korea (Chen & Hsieh, 2015; Kim, 2018). Nonetheless, we suggest examining other countries in order to obtain more perspectives on that matter.

Moreover, our research considered different levels of seniority with relation to knowledge sharing and learning in the context of the ageing society. We believe that knowledge sharing literature would benefit from the research that further analyses how seniority and age are connected to knowledge sharing since both areas have been rather ignored. In this context, we also suggest developing further the discussion about generations, more specifically, by considering technological changes that have impacted more recent generations. Our research reflected that younger employees see technical knowledge as increasingly important, whereas many senior employees value primarily human interactions. Therefore, when comparing employees from different generations, it would be interesting to evaluate if there is any pattern in understanding the ambiguous concept of knowledge and the role of knowledge management when comparing

employees from different generations. Lastly, we think it would be valuable to conduct further research about age stereotypes in relation to knowledge sharing and learning. We believe that because stereotypes are a hindrance per se, they are a relevant topic to discuss (Burmeister, Fasbender & Deller, 2018; Urick et al. 2017).

5.4   Practical Implications

Based on our research, it became evident that in order to facilitate two-directional knowledge sharing and learning, all employees should recognise that their junior, as well as their senior co-workers, are receiver and sender of valuable knowledge. Therefore, we suggest that the public sector including the preschool can support this process by offering more opportunities for formal and informal knowledge sharing and learning, including training based on personal preferences, and emphasising collaboration over competition by refraining from differentiating between employees' seniority level or position in the organisation's hierarchy (Wang & Noe, 2010).

In this context, practitioners should be aware of stereotypes, including age stereotypes that are a hindrance per se because stereotypes might not only have a detrimental impact on knowledge sharing and learning practices but more generally on employee relations and organisational performance. Moreover, we argue that the preschool should reflect on the current constellation of the working groups and should, in an ideal world, divide the groups in a way that the diversity in terms of ages and seniority levels increases. Thereby, creating a titular melting pot of knowledge where different types of knowledge meet. Ultimately, what was highlighted by our interviewees is the importance of sustaining a positive working environment where employees feel secure and supported.

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Appendix A - Anonymised List of Interviewees

The table below illustrates relevant characteristics from our interviewees.

Interviewee	Date, time of the interview	Work experience as a preschool teacher/childcarer	Generation
K & C Leader	12-03-2020, 14:00	-	-
Preschool's Leader	16-03-2020, 15:00	-	-
Junior 1	24-03-2020, 10:00	5 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Gen Y (1982-2000)
Junior 2	24-03-2020, 09:00	6 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Gen Y (1982-2000)
Junior 3*	26-03-2020, 09:00	7 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Gen X (1965-1981)
Junior 4	23-03-2020, 10:00	8-9 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Gen Y (1982-2000)
Senior 1	23-03-2020, 09:00	15 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Gen X (1965-1981)
Senior 2	26-03-2020, 10:00	17 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Baby Boomer (1945-1964)
Senior 3*	17-03-2020, 10:00	22 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Gen X (1965-1981)
Senior 4*	17-03-2020, 09:00	25 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Gen X (1965-1981)
Senior 5	25-03-2020, 09:00	30 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad, last 4 years as the first preschool teacher	Baby Boomer (1945-1964)
Senior 6	18-03-2020, 09:00	35 years as a preschool teacher, including 20 years at Malmö stad	Baby Boomer (1945-1964)
Senior 7	19-03-2020, 09:00	45 years as a preschool teacher at Malmö stad	Baby Boomer (1945-1964)

Table 1: Anonymised list of interviewees

Appendix B - Interview Guide for Junior Employees

The table below portrays our interview guide that we followed for our interviews with junior preschool teachers.

Topics	Interview questions
Pre-Interview	- Who are we? - What is the purpose of our thesis? - We will not use your personal details in our thesis, could we record our conversation for the benefit of our thesis? - Do you have any questions before we start with the interview?

Background and context	1. Can you tell us about yourself including your age and your role/position at Malmö stad?
	     a. What are your main responsibilities?
	     b. How long have you been working at Malmö stad?
	
	2. (Personal question, it is okay if you do not want to answer this question) Are you planning to continue to work for Malmö stad for the next few years?

Motivation	3. What motivates you in your daily work?
Introducing the topic of generation shift	4. Our thesis considers the perspectives of different generations. As you probably know, there are generations such as Baby Boomers, Generation X and so on. In the next few years, employees from the Generation of Baby Boomers will retire. a. What do you think is the impact of this development/this change on your workplace/the preschool? How does this development influence your workplace/the preschool?

Relevance of values; identification with Malmö stad/profession	5. We learnt that the values of Malmö stad are respect, creativity and engagement. How do these values influence your daily work?
	     a. To what extent do you identify yourself with Malmö stad?
	     b. Do you identify yourself more with being an employee of Malmö stad or with your profession in the preschool?

Understanding of knowledge sharing/learning	6. Do you think there is a difference between knowledge sharing and learning? Why? a. (If yes) Could you give us examples from your daily work?
How to secure knowledge	7. In your opinion, what does it take to secure knowledge so that the knowledge is not lost when the older generation leaves?

Knowledge sharing and learning at Malmö stad	8. In your daily work, with whom do you usually share knowledge? (position/age group/attitude of people)?
	     a. Can you give us an example of a situation from your daily work when you share knowledge with your colleagues?
	     b. Do you have any formal routines for knowledge sharing/learning?

Motivation to share knowledge/learn	9. What motivates you personally and co-workers from your generation to share knowledge/learn new things?

Knowledge sharing/learning from younger to older employees	10. How do you work with older employees (over 50 years old) in terms of knowledge sharing and learning? (e.g. mentorship programme?) Why is this implemented at Malmö stad?
Two-directional knowledge sharing/learning	11. Generally, junior employees can learn from senior employees, but also, senior employees can learn from junior employees. What are the advantages or positive effects of this for you personally and for Malmö stad?
Barriers to knowledge sharing/learning	12. In your workplace, do you see any barriers or problems to share knowledge between different generations? What about learning? Could you give us examples? a. In your opinion, what are the best ways to resolve these barriers?
Willingness to learn	13. When you hear about senior employees' ways of doing things/ideas/suggestions, are you personally willing to adopt their routines and try out new ways or would you feel more comfortable staying in your own routines? Could you give us an example of a situation from your daily work?
Older employees' willingness to learn/share knowledge	14. Do you think that older employees are eager to learn from you and share their knowledge with you? What makes you think that?
Older employees' perception about younger employees' willingness to share knowledge/learn in the eyes of the interviewee	15. What do you think older employees think about your generation? a. Do you think they see your generation as open to share knowledge with them and learn from them?
Closing	Thank you for your valuable input and your time. Do you have any questions for us? We will send a copy of our final version to your unit by the end of June. If you have any more ideas/input for us, you can always reach us via email.

Table 2: Interview Guide for junior employees

Appendix C - Interview Guide for Senior Employees

The table below portrays our interview guide that we followed for our interviews with senior preschool teachers.

Topics	Interview questions
Pre-Interview	- Who are we? - What is the purpose of our thesis? - We will not use your personal details in our thesis, could we record our conversation for the benefit of our thesis? - Do you have any questions before we start with the interview?

Background and context	1. Can you tell us about yourself including your age and your role/position at Malmö stad?
	    a. What are your main responsibilities?
	    b. How long have you been working at Malmö stad?
	
	2. (Personal question, it is okay if you do not want to answer this question) Are you planning to continue to work for Malmö stad for the next few years (or are you planning to retire soon)?

Motivation	3. What motivates you in your daily work?
Introducing the topic of generation shift	4. Our thesis considers the perspectives of different generations. As you probably know, there are generations such as Baby Boomers, Generation X and so on. In the next few years, employees from the Generation of Baby Boomers will retire. a. What do you think is the impact of this development/this change on your workplace/the preschool? How does this development influence your workplace/the preschool?

Relevance of values; identification with Malmö stad/profession	5. We learnt that the values of Malmö stad are respect, creativity and engagement. How do these values influence your daily work?
	    a. To what extent do you identify yourself with Malmö stad?
	    b. Do you identify yourself more with being an employee of Malmö stad or with your profession in the preschool?

Understanding of knowledge sharing/learning	6. Do you think there is a difference between knowledge sharing and learning? Why? a. (If yes) Could you give us examples from your daily work?
How to secure knowledge	7. In your opinion, what does it take to secure knowledge so that the knowledge is not lost when the older generation leaves?

Knowledge sharing and learning at Malmö stad	8. In your daily work, with whom do you usually share knowledge? (position/age group/attitude of people)?
	    a. Can you give us an example of a situation from your daily work when you share knowledge with your colleagues?
	    b. Do you have any formal routines for knowledge sharing/learning?

Motivation to share knowledge/learn	9. What motivates you personally and co-workers from your generation to share knowledge/learn new things?

Knowledge sharing/learning from older to younger employees	10. How do you work with younger employees in terms of knowledge sharing and learning? (e.g. mentorship programme?) Why is this implemented at Malmö stad?
Two-directional knowledge sharing/learning	11. Generally, junior employees can learn from senior employees, but also, senior employees can learn from junior employees. What are the advantages or positive effects of this for you personally and for Malmö stad?
Barriers to knowledge sharing/learning	12. In your workplace, do you see any barriers or problems to share knowledge between different generations? What about learning? Could you give us examples? a. In your opinion, what are the best ways to resolve these barriers?
Willingness to learn	13. When you hear about junior employees' ways of doing things/ideas/suggestions, are you personally willing to adopt their routines and try out new ways or would you feel more comfortable staying in your own routines? Could you give us an example of a situation from your daily work?
Younger employees' willingness to learn/share knowledge	14. Do you think that younger employees are eager to learn from you and share their knowledge with you? What makes you think that?
Younger employees' perception about older employees' willingness to share knowledge/learn in the eyes of the interviewee	15. What do you think younger employees think about your generation? a. Do you think they see your generation as open to share knowledge with them and learn from them?
Closing	Thank you for your valuable input and your time. Do you have any questions for us? We will send a copy of our final version to your unit by the end of June. If you have any more ideas/input for us, you can always reach us via email.

Table 3: Interview Guide for senior employees