



SCHOOL OF
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MANAGEMENT

Developing towards a greater “We”!

How a formal mentorship program triggers identity work of mentees

A Qualitative Case Study

Master Thesis

Program: Managing People, Knowledge & Change

by

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Abstract

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| Title | Developing towards a greater “We”!: How a formal mentorship program triggers identity work of mentees |
| Course | BUSN49, Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge & Change |
| Authors | Jana Bernhardt and Laura Kristin Warlich |
| Supervisor | Stefan Sveningsson (PhD), Lund University, Sweden |
| Purpose | The main aim of our study is to gain a profound understanding of participants' sense-making in a formal mentorship program. This involves examining the significance of the relationship in the mentoring dyads. Furthermore, we aim to discover how the formal mentorship program influences mentee’s identity. |
| Methodology | Placed in the interpretative research tradition and applying a critical lens, our research consists of a qualitative case study and follows an abductive approach. We generated our empirical material through 9 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with participants of the formal mentorship program at SecuritySolutions, as well as an organizational document. |
| Theoretical Perspective | Our study focuses on a formal mentorship program aimed at exchanging competence intra-organizationally and developing employees. Hence, we draw upon conceptual studies on formal mentoring, and consider its purpose and the mentoring relationship. Moreover, a learning typology by Lankau and Scandura provides an important foundation to grasp mentee’s personal development. Additionally, Sveningsson and Alvesson’s concept of identity work is essential for our understanding of the formal mentorship program's influence on mentees identity. |
| Conclusion | Our findings reveal that the relationship in formal mentorship programs is highly significant in providing psychological mentoring functions, resulting in mentees personal development. Additionally, we identified regulatory elements in the formal mentorship program, which only function through having meaningful relationships built on trust and vulnerability. Moreover, our findings suggest that these regulatory elements trigger identity work in mentees, which ultimately increases their organizational identification. |
| Key Words | Formal Mentorship Program, Mentees’ personal development, Identity Work, Organizational Identification |

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List of Abbreviations and Key Definitions

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Cohort | The entire group of participants in a formal mentorship program participating at the same time |
| e.g. | exempli gratia / for example |
| Growth mindset | Individuals' beliefs that their abilities can enhance through dedication, creating a strong affection towards personal learning |
| High-Performing employees | Highly valuable individuals in an organization, due to their performance and organizational engagement |
| Mentorship | A more experienced person, the mentor, advising a less experienced person, the mentee, on career- and/or personal-related topics |
| Mentor Dyad | The pairing of mentor and mentee in a formal Mentorship Program |
| Personal Development | Developments that aim to improve a person's personal and/or professional capabilities |

1. Introduction

“To really give back or help grow SecuritySolutions, the bigger SecuritySolutions, like I was saying, so getting beyond our own individual worlds and branching out and then looking for the good to help others and help grow the company.”

Julia, Mentor at SecuritySolutions (Interview, 8th of April.2022)

1.1 Background

Ever since news spread that Mark Zuckerberg was mentored by Steve Jobs, business journals and professional development books cannot seem to keep away from mentorship. Not without reason: In the past, scholars have identified that mentoring results in mutual benefits for participants (e.g. Newsome, Ku, Murray, Smith, Powell, Hawkins, Branan, & Bland, 2021; Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007). Consisting of a developmental relationship between a mentor and a mentee, mentorship mainly focuses on the mentee’s personal and professional development (Kram, 1985). Accordingly, mentors share their experience and knowledge and thereby provide support and mobility for the latter’s’ career (Singh, Bains & Vinnicombe, 2002). Specifically, mentees have reported increased job satisfaction, advancement expectations, organizational commitment and salary growth (e.g. Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima, 2004; Aryee & Chay, 1994; Baugh, Lankau & Scandura, 1996). More often than not, mentorship relationships transpire informally in organizations (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). Globally, organizations acknowledge the value of mentoring and resort to establishing formal mentorship programs (Deng, Gulseren & Turner, 2022). These mainly build on intra-organizational relationships and aim to enhance individuals’ development within the organization (e.g. Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Turning towards mentoring can therefore secure effective competence exchanges, while also ensuring retention of valuable employees (Ojewunmi 2011). Ragins and Cotton (1999) highlight that little research exists to support or guide the establishment of formal mentorship programs. Legitimately, multiple scholars demand insights into subjective outcomes of mentorship

(e.g. Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Lankau & Scandura, 2008), entailing mentees' sense-making of the relationship and developmental process.

Following up on this, mentors provide career-related and psychological mentoring functions (Kram, 1983; Noe, 1988; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). Despite targeting professional enhancements, mentoring relationships thus also encompass personal development of mentees (Lankau and Scandura, 2008). Personal development not only involves transformations of one's self-view with regard to others, but also enhancement of interpersonal skills (Merriam & Heuer, 1996). Accordingly, existing conceptual research highlights that mentoring results in social and professional socialization, personal skill development and personal identity growth (Lankau & Scandura, 2008). The difference in the establishment of informal and formal mentoring as well as their length is evident, however little research on the potential difference in provision of mentoring functions and their outcomes exists (Ragins & Cottons, 1999).

Undoubtedly, formal mentorship programs consist of particular social interactions, which directly influence mentees' identity and thereby their self-view (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Whenever one's own real self-view is contradicting the ideal self-view, a person copes with the existing gap and tries to close it, which is called identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Identity can thus be seen as a processual reassessment of one's own self-view that consists of shaping, maintaining, and revisiting (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Organizational members' identity construction builds upon multiple resources, e.g. backgrounds, contexts, culture, groups, and the organization itself. Perpetual negotiation between these aspects frequently result in possible conflicts (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Apart from this, individuals tend to identify with specific groups, such as departments, rather than the overall organizations (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016). It is thus particularly interesting to investigate mentee's identity in the context of a formal mentorship program set in an intra-organizational context.

Grounded in the theoretical assessment, the prime focus of our thesis is to examine participants' sense-making in a formal mentorship program. We intend to grasp formal mentoring and mentoring relationships' influence on mentees' personal development and identity. Therefore, we chose to conduct research within the scope of a case study at SecuritySolutions, a Scandinavian IT

company providing surveillance and safety video services, to investigate the mentoring relationship and mentees' developmental processes within a formal mentorship program.

1.2 Research and Objectives

Consequently, the following section outlines our study's problematization and purpose, before presenting our two research questions.

1.2.1 Problematization and Purpose

Over and above, mentorship programs have been of particular research interest in the past decades (e.g. Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Yu & Lee, 2021). Indeed, extensive literature on mentorship regarding career development exists (Allen, McManus & Russell, 1999; Read, Fisher & Juran, 2020). Nevertheless, Craig, Allen, Reid, Riemenschneider & Armstrong, (2013) argue that mentorship studies often concentrate on correlations and objective measures, and some researchers (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Lankau & Scandura, 2008) highlight a need for qualitative research on existing mentorship concepts and theory. For example, knowledge on the connection between formal mentoring relationships and provision of mentoring functions is limited (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Additionally, existing qualitative studies point towards social contexts, such as formal mentorship programs, influencing individuals' identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Despite this, specific components in a formal mentorship program triggering identity work in mentees, have, to our understanding, yet to be investigated.

Following up on this, existing research on formal mentorship programs has predominantly overlooked participants' lived experiences and their interpretations throughout the program. As a result, only few studies have been conducted on the processes of the mentorship program, especially regarding participants' personal development and the program's influence on mentees' identity. This study acknowledges the significance of this matter and in turn, first and foremost, contributes towards a more comprehensive understanding of mentees' developmental process through the mentoring relationship. Furthermore, we provide a close examination of mentorship program elements triggering mentees' identity work. We consequently aim to contribute to existing research by exploring the identified deficit, because according to our knowledge, comparable attempts have yet to reach this explicit qualitative data.

1.2.2 Research Questions

In accordance with our topic studied, we intend to contribute to existing literature. Resulting from our abductive research approach, our research questions formed throughout our study. We have defined two explicit research questions to investigate and discuss our empirical findings, while also providing direction throughout our thesis:

- *What is the significance of the relationship in a formal mentorship program?*
- *How is the mentees' identity influenced by the mentorship program?*

1.3 Outline

This thesis is structured into six consecutive chapters. The first chapter has introduced the reader to our study on a formal mentorship program by explaining the background and outlining our research objectives, which accordingly result in our formulated research questions. Subsequently, the second chapter provides a literature review, functioning as a theoretical framework to guide the discussion in chapter five. Consequently, chapter three regards our methodology, and we lay out our research approach, philosophical grounding, data collection and analysis, as well as study limitations. The fourth chapter thereupon provides our empirical material in the form of a narrative and includes a brief case description. Chapter five assesses the given literature review and provides a discussion of the empirical findings, resulting in our theoretical contributions. Lastly, chapter six concludes our thesis and focuses on our main findings, practical as well as theoretical contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

The following chapter presents the most relevant theoretical background for our study. As we aim to understand participants' interpretations within the context of a formal mentorship program, the first chapter regards the concept of mentorship with the subthemes describing formal mentoring, the purpose of mentoring, the mentoring relationship, and the functions of mentoring. Secondly, with mentoring being a development tool, the subsequent section focuses on the personal development of mentees. Lastly, we investigate the concept of identity, specifically regarding identity work, identity regulation and organizational identity.

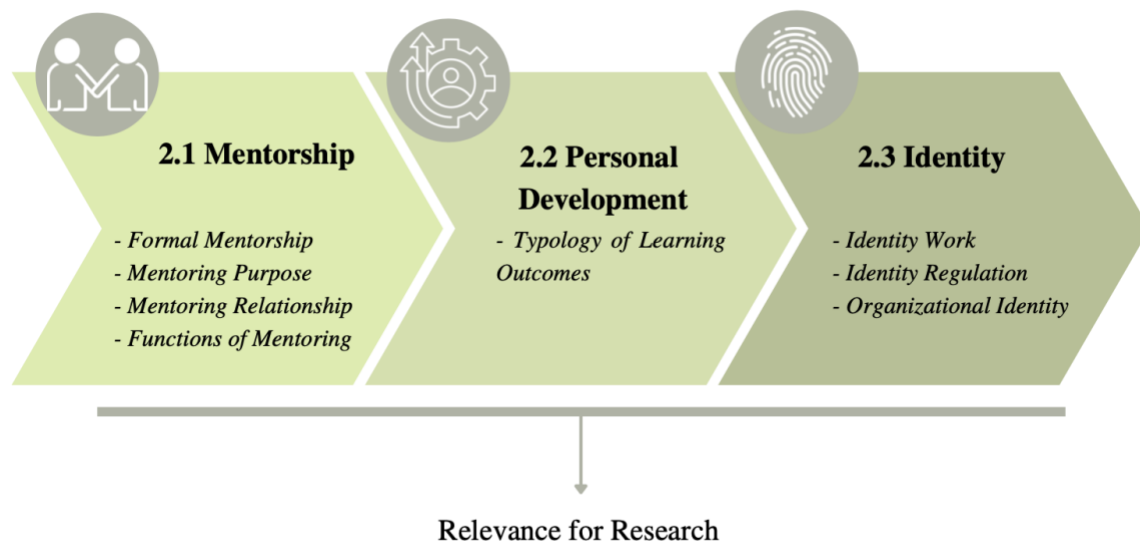


Figure 1: Contextualization of Literature

2.1 Mentorship

In studying a formal mentorship program, the following chapter examines the theoretical concepts surrounding mentorship. We first define mentorship and then dive deeper into formal mentoring and present its purposes. Further, we describe theory regarding the mentoring relationship and the functions of mentoring.

Mentorship dates back to ancient Greek civilization and has served individuals and society as a process of knowledge transfer for centuries, with empirical research only in recent decades devoting stronger attention towards it (Eleanor, Justice Sandra, Ragins, and Kram., 2008; Ojewunmi, 2011). Several definitions of mentorship have been proposed, however the most widely known definition was given by Kram (1985). She specifies mentorship to involve a developmental relationship between mentor and a mentee, which focuses on the mentee's career (Kram, 1985). Career development and growth are thus primary objectives the mentor advises the mentee on (Kram & Ragins, 2008; Levinson, 1978). Accordingly, Bozeman and Feeney (2007) outline mentorship as "a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development" (p. 731).

The literature divides between informal and formal mentorships. Informal mentorships are neither structured nor officially recognized by an organization but can rather be identified as casual relationships (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). In contrast, formal mentorship programs are operated and authorized through the organization (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). In studying a formal mentorship program, we focus on the latter and provide a detailed elaboration in the subsequent section.

Formal Mentorship

Numerous companies acknowledge the value of mentorship and aspire to reproduce informal mentorship relationships through establishing formal mentoring programs (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008; Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). In some formal programs, mentees are matched with mentors from different departments. This might lead to provision of less effective career counseling, due to mentors having different professional backgrounds and experiences compared to their mentees (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). However, Dymock (1999) argued that having a mentor from another department can help in gaining a better understanding of the entire organization and it can also be easier to talk about workplace topics, because the mentor is not directly affected. The process of matching the mentoring dyad is often discussed within the current research field as the quality of the mentoring relationship between dyad partners is seen as essential for the mentoring outcomes (Menges, 2016). Mainly, there are three different processes

for matching mentors and mentees in formal programs: assignment by the facilitators, random assignment and mentor selection based on mentees' application (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). Several empirical studies have analyzed other criteria for matching, such as personality traits, and found that especially openness to experience and conscientiousness are important for the quality of the relationship (Menges, 2016; Deng, Gulseren & Turner, 2022). Furthermore, formal mentorship programs are operated and authorized by the organization, which may result in mentors lacking to acknowledge the mentee's worthiness to receive additional support (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). Moreover, being part of an exclusive program may raise the participants' expectations regarding the program (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008).

Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, (2008) also specified that organizational goals are often central to formal mentorship programs. Hence, formal mentoring programs can pursue various purposes, which we will subsequently discuss.

Mentoring purpose

Allen et al. (1999) found that mentees' benefits are attained through the dyadic one-to-one relationship. Career development and personal growth are primary objectives within mentoring relationships (Kram, 1983, Raabe & Beehr, 2003). Mentoring is thus a competence advancement and learning driven process (Allen & O'Brien, 2006).

Furthermore, participating in a mentorship program is beneficial for both, mentors as well as mentees (Gosh & Reio, 2013; Newsome et al., 2021). Mentors offer skills and access to new opportunities, while mentees similarly display transformative benefits, such as sharing different perspectives, having new ideas, and bringing synergistic interests (Newsome et al., 2021). Allen and O'Brien (2006) suggest that certain career development approaches claim a positive relation between having a mentor and vital development functions in early career stages. Mentees improve their own skills especially through observation and imitation of their mentors (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Comparatively few interpretive studies exist concerning mentoring outcomes besides career development (Allen, McManus & Russell, 1999; Read, Fisher & Juran, 2020).

Only limited literature on organizational outcomes from mentoring exists (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008). However, common benefits regarding mentorship particularly consist of retention

and recruitment effects. High-performing employees may be more open towards participating in a mentorship program than other employees (Ragins, 1999; Ragins & Cotton, 1993). Accordingly, employees with a proactive personality tend to participate in mentorship programs, because they are more likely to commit to career management initiatives and show an increased openness towards obtaining external support (Allen & O'Brien, 2006; Eleanor et al., 2008). Mentorship programs can thus be seen as a tool to identify high-performing employees. Eleanor et al. (2008) further reason that high-performing employees choose companies that offer opportunities to grow and learn career-wise and therefore mentorship is an attraction and retention tool. Recent research also detects mentoring to facilitate organizational change, culture, and the organization's future success (Singh, Bains & Vinnicombe, 2002). Furthermore, mentoring can also result in increased employee engagement towards the organization and enhanced organizational communication (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008). Furthermore, Allen et al. (2004) highlight that mentoring can affect mentees' career and job satisfaction as well as increase career commitment, which was also confirmed by the findings of the quantitative study by Lankau and Scandura (2002). According to Karkoulian, Halawi & McCarthy (2008), knowledge sharing is enhanced when mentoring is practiced willingly. Their study indicates that, while formal mentoring results in knowledge-sharing, the formal structure of the program as well as its inflexibility hinder transmission of useful information for mentees (Karkoulian, Halawi & McCarthy, 2008).

Another important aspect of whether these purposes can be fulfilled, is the relationship between mentor and mentee. Hence, the relationship is significant and highly interesting in formal mentoring programs (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008; Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). Therefore, we now provide a more detailed assessment of the literature on mentoring relationships.

Mentoring Relationship

First and foremost, each mentoring relationship is highly unique because mentees and mentors have individual skills and objectives (Newsome et al., 2021). Often, both dyad partners do not meet until they are paired. Chao, Walz and Gardner (1992) thus state that a formal mentorship potentially requires a prolonged adjustment period in order to become familiar with each other. Furthermore, according to Ragins and Cotton (1999), formal mentorships contribute fewer mentoring functions than informal mentorships. They therefore suggest formal mentorships to

imitate informal mentoring relationships to a great extent in order to be successful in providing mentoring functions. Lankau and Scandura (2008) explain that “the effectiveness of mentoring will depend on the unique learning needs of the protégée, which are determined by the demands of the organization and the ability of an opportunity for a mentor to meet those needs” (Lankau & Scandura, 2008, p. 11). Kram (1985) further claims that trust and vulnerability presented and generated by mentors in the relationship results in mentee’s feeling safe in the mentoring environment, which allows them to explore new behaviors and approaches in their organizational role. Kram clarifies further that mentoring relationships portraying mutuality, reciprocity, and interdependence offer both, mentors and mentees, the possibility to grasp their values, self-worth, and identities better (1986). Scholars have highlighted that mentoring relationships' qualities can differ and it can also lead to neutral or negative mentoring experiences (Kram, 1980; Levenson, 1978, Johnson & Huwe, 2002; Eby, Butts, Lockwood & Simon, 2004). However, most of the literature is conceptual and we see a lack of empirical studies reflecting reality.

Functions of Mentoring

Mentoring relationships provide nine main functions which are split into two categories, namely career-related and psychological functions (Kram, 1983; Noe, 1988; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). The former involves provision of coaching, exposure, and sponsorship as well as challenging work assignments and offering protection (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992), which equip mentees for organizational and hierarchical career advancement (Eleanor et al., 2008). The authors Gosh and Reio (2013) empirically confirmed that challenging work assignments, receiving constructive feedback and support in particular, are vital for mentees’ personal and professional development. While career-related functions appear initially, psychological functions gain significance throughout subsequent phases of the relationship (Kram, 1985). Psychological functions provide acceptance, role modeling, friendship, and counseling, which includes mentors acting as a sounding board (Kram, 1985). Hence, while building on intimacy and trust, the relationship also aims to improve mentees’ personal and professional growth as well as self-efficacy, self-worth, and identity (Eleanor et al., 2008). Accordingly, psychological mentoring functions can affect the mentee’s competence and perception of self (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). This was supported by the quantitative study by Gosh and Reio (2013) who claim that psychological functions boost mentees’ confidence and self-esteem. Formal mentorship mostly fulfills psychological mentoring

functions, rather than career-related mentoring functions (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland 2008). Nevertheless, Chao, Walz and Gardner (1992) claim that the connection between the phases of the mentorship and the nine mentoring functions may depend on the formality of the mentorship. It is important to note that not every mentor fulfills each mentoring function (Chao, Walz & Gardner 1992) and that the fulfilled functions vary throughout the different phases of the relationship (Kram, 1983).

Consequently, mentorship regards mentees' development, and recent studies have mostly focused on professional advancements attained through a developmental mentoring relationship (Allen, McManus & Russell, 1999; Read, Fisher & Juran, 2020). While previous research often highlights acquisition of technical skills through mentoring relationships, the outcomes of mentoring are more extensive and also consist of personal development (Kram, 1985; Dymock, 1999). Therefore, the aspect of personal development stands out for our study, which we will closely examine in the upcoming chapter.

2.2 Personal Development

In the previous section we outlined personal development as one of the main purposes of mentoring and thus we elaborate on it further in the following chapter. First, we present the 'Typology of Learning Outcome', a theoretical framework by Lankau and Scandura (2008) regarding learning outcomes, and then discuss a study which analyzed personal development empirically.

Personal development concentrates on one's self-view with regard to others, as well as enhanced interpersonal abilities (Merriam & Heuer, 1996). According to Lankau and Scandura (2008), personal development in companies is vital for individuals in today's fast-moving work climate. They argue that employees can turn towards mentoring relationships to obtain required competences and develop personally. In their work, Lankau and Scandura (2008) generated the 'Typology of Learning Outcomes', which is a four-fielder consisting of the two dimensions context-specific and context-free learning, as well as task-related and personal learning (see Figure 2).

| | Context-Specific Learning | Context-Free Learning |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Task/Role Learning | Organizational Socialization | Professional Socialization |
| Personal Learning | Personal Skill Developmental Job & Relational Job Learning | Personal Identity Growth and Personal Adaptability |

Figure 2: 'Typology of Learning Outcomes' (own illustration, based on Lankau & Scandura 2008)

According to Lankau and Scandura (2008), context-specific learning is tied to a certain role or job in the organization. In contrast, context-free learning may be generalized and can be applied across organizational boundaries. As stated by Lankau and Scandura (2008), following a task and context-specific learning approach leads to organizational socialization. Accordingly, organizational socialization is an “information acquisition about various aspects of organizational life, such as performance standards, important people in the organization, organizational goals and values, and jargon” (Lankau & Scandura, 2008, p.3). Professional socialization, referring to a more extensive selection of skills, performance requirements regarding a specific profession, expectations, and behaviors, occurs when concentrating on task focus and context-free learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2008).

Additionally, Lankau and Scandura (2008) explain that personal and context-specific learning results in relational job learning, as well as personal skills development. While in the former, employees gain increased knowledge on the interconnection of their job with other organizational

positions, the latter emphasizes attaining new abilities and competencies, as well as facilitating improved working relationships (Lankau & Scandura, 2008). Following personal and context-free learning is characterized by personal adaptability and personal identity growth (Lankau & Scandura, 2008). Personal adaptability describes a person's ability to adjust and thus includes developing "a diverse set "of role behaviors to respond effectively to constantly changing environmental conditions" (Lankau & Scandura, 2008, p.4). Personal identity growth regards recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses and leads to a better understanding of oneself (Lankau & Scandura, 2008). According to Morrison & Hall (2002), adaptability and identity growth are necessary meta competencies for continuous learning. Concerning their conceptualization, Lankau and Scandura (2008) state that mentoring relationships enable all four types of learning previously described. Existing empirical studies on personal learning conclude that mentoring relationships provide context-specific, personal learning for mentees (Lankau & Scandura, 2008). Surprisingly, only limited research has been dedicated towards personal learning as part of personal development, with regard to the mentoring process and its outcomes (Lankau & Scandura, 2008).

In his qualitative case study, Dymock (1999) found that mentorship program participants gained a better understanding for the organization and increased their network which can be seen as the organizational socialization identified by Lankau and Scandura. The participants also applied specific advice in their daily work life which matches professional socialization. Furthermore, participants attained context-specific learning because they became more self-confident and developed new skills. Hence, he did not find identity growth and personal adaptability and therefore identified three out of the four kinds of learning. According to Lankau and Scandura (2008), there is a lack of empirical research on personal identity growth which is the fourth category of the learning typology.

This is of particular interest to us because individuals' development and identity are essential aspects in mentoring relationships that facilitate successful outcomes and are often neglected within mentorship programs. Thus, we provide more information on identity in the upcoming section.

2.3 Identity

In the following section, we first present theoretical concepts regarding identity and identity work and then examine identity regulation and organizational identity in particular. The concept of identity has already been widely researched and we acknowledge its importance in research and the significance for our study as we explore a mentorship program where the participants reflect on themselves.

Previous research highlights identity as a relational construct, formed through social interactions, comparisons, and reflections (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), how individuals interpret their own values, goals, aspirations, and origin defines their identity. Identity provides answers to questions such as “who am I?” and can therefore provide stability when it comes to orienting oneself through life and also organizational life (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). At work, identity is an attempt to balance role expectations, the own personality or ideas and values (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Identity is shaped by how similar people are in comparison to others and how they share a common identity. The distinction to others is also highly important, because it gives individuals the feeling of being unique and thereby forms their identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016).

Scholars disagree over considering identity as a constant or a process (Kreiner & Murphy, 2018). Recent research defines identity as a process and similar to Sveningsson & Alvesson (2016), we also define identity as a never-ending process, because individuals continuously try to make sense of who they are and what they do. This active forming and reforming of one’s identity is also called identity work, which the following section provides a more detailed account on.

Identity work

Identity work entails acts of “shape, repair, maintain and revise” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p.39) and only occurs in social context, because the distinction to others is necessary (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Identity work aims to create a new identity, to strengthen one's own identity or to reduce tension (Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018).

However, identity work usually occurs in moments of struggle or insecurity, e.g., when receiving feedback, in which a gap between the real and ideal self-view is discovered (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). After the gap is identified, individuals use coping mechanisms in order to avoid a crack in their own self-identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016).

Employees are sometimes also called identity workers because they adjust their identity according to the interests of the company and incorporate values according to managerial goals (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This is a form of identity work that can be interpreted as control performed by the organization and therefore the following section focuses on this aspect, which is called identity regulation.

Identity Regulation

Social practices within an organization may affect the construction and reconstruction of identity which is also called identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Identity regulation and identity work are thus closely related and occur simultaneously. However, it is unclear whether it is intentional by the organization or just a by-product of actions by the organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The authors Alvesson & Willmott (2002) argue that an organization is not omnipotent and cannot easily change an employee's identity. However, there is a significant influence on the identity of individuals by the organization and it should not be neglected (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

The organization can shape the identities of its employees towards the organizational identity through language, development tools and meetings (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). When the individual identity is closely linked to the organizational identity, it can lead to increased commitment and loyalty of the employees (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). An overarching aim of organizational identification and increased commitment is also to ensure employee retention which can be regarded as manipulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Hence, the organization can play a vital role regarding individual development and identity work.

As mentioned above, the topic of organizational identity is closely related to identity regulation, and we therefore give a broader overview on organizational identity in the following section.

Organizational Identity

Organizational identity addresses the central question “who are we as a collective?” (Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth & Ravasi, 2016, p.3) and is therefore defined by the essential qualities such as values or central statements of the organization. Furthermore, an organization that is not only distinctive regarding its values, symbolic expressions, and material practices, but also encourages interpersonal exchange, and is viewed as successful and exclusive related to its surroundings, provides its members a particular social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2016). Thereupon, individuals closely associate with the organization and gravitate towards subscribing themselves to an overall “we”, resulting in feeling united and close to the organization (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016). Organizational identity is mainly communicated in three ways which are: saying, showing, and staging. While saying and showing are self-explanatory, staging refers to “choreographing a context in which members can experience or enact the Organizational Identity” (Pratt, Schultz, Ashforth & Ravasi, 2018, p.10). According to Ashforth, Harrison & Harley (2008), organizational identification can be defined as “viewing a collective’s or role defining essence as self-defining” (Ashforth, Harrison & Harley, 2008, p.329). Provided the organizational identity is less distinctive, organizational members rather turn towards other sources of identity, inter alia departments, professional affiliations, work projects, or explicit work tasks (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016). This, according to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016), generates sub-cultures and organizational fragmentation. Therefore, it is in the interest of the organization to have a distinctive organizational identity.

In this chapter we have established that identity is an important topic in research and that organizations can use organizational development tools to mold the identities of employees. The theoretical grounding of identity is significant to us as we intend to grasp how the studied program is interpreted in varying ways by its participants and we consider identity work to be an important factor in formal mentorship programs. However, we have found few empirical studies, especially within the critical field of research, about how these theories play out in reality. Hence, our study contributes to the existing literature with a qualitative case study and by applying a critical lens.

3. Methodology

The following section describes our methodological approach to the conducted research. The first part initially outlines the philosophical grounding before explaining our general research approach. Furthermore, the research context as well as some information about our case organization, SecuritySolutions, will be provided, and are followed by a description of the conducted data collection and analysis. Subsequently, we present the studies' credibility and highlight ethical factors regarding the research design. This chapter ends with the display of the limitations of this study.

3.1 Philosophical Grounding

As we aim to understand the interpretations of the formal mentorship program participants, we acknowledge that reality is socially constructed and that there is no objective truth, which is typical within social sciences. Instead, reality is constructed through sensemaking, and social interpretations and several subjective truths exist alongside each other (Prasad, 2018). Hence, we place our study within the interpretative research traditions. The symbolic interactionist tradition seems especially applicable as it seeks “an intimate understanding of social situations from the standpoint of participants themselves” (Prasad, 2018, p.23). However, according to this tradition, we have to keep in mind that everything is a process and whatever we find might evolve over time due to its fluidity. It also provides us with the opportunity to explore the self-image and roles of participants while we elaborate on multiple possible realities (Prasad, 2018).

However, we also apply a critical lens to our research and question the influence of the organization on the employees' identity work. Therefore, we follow a dual approach and not only apply the interpretative tradition but also the critical tradition.

The critical theory questions the “innocence of social and institutional practices” (Prasad, 2018, p.172), such as office parties or training workshops, and is thus relevant to us researching a formal mentoring program. Instrumental Reason is a central concept of the critical tradition and of relevance to us. It objectifies all natural phenomena as raw and usable material in order to satisfy interests and individual needs. For instance, social arrangements can be controlled and used to fulfill a certain purpose (Prasad, 2018).

Hence, we believe that the combination of interpretative and critical tradition aligns best with our research aim and enables us to satisfyingly interpret the individual perceptions and realities regarding the mentorship program.

3.2 Research Approach

Having understood the philosophical grounding of our study, it is necessary to clarify our research method, which is explained in the following.

There are two main approaches, namely induction which derives theoretical correlations from data of an individual case and deduction, which uses empirical data to test hypotheses derived from existing theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In addition to the two main approaches mentioned before, there is also abduction, which we follow in our research. It combines characteristics of induction and deduction but cannot be considered a simple mix of those as it is less shallow and focuses on patterns. Therefore, it enhances understanding, which is the biggest difference to the other two research approaches (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Abduction enables us to connect our empirical findings with existing theoretical frameworks, while simultaneously being able to develop new theories regarding mentorship and identity. For doing so, we kept moving back and forth between our empirical findings and the existing theory to find the patterns mentioned before.

As our research aims to understand how participants interpret a mentorship program and get insights into different perspectives, an in-depth study appeared to be most appropriate which can be best achieved by researching one single organization. According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2019), conducting a single case study of one organization allows us to dig deeper and get better insights into the organizational phenomena compared to a study of multiple organizations.

Research Context - Background of Case Organization

Before we dive into the data collection, it is important to fully understand the background of the studied case organization. We chose "SecuritySolutions" as a pseudonym for the organization, to ensure anonymity for the organization itself, as well as the interviewees working at SecuritySolutions.

SecuritySolutions, a Swedish IT organization, provides video and audio surveillance solutions. They employ almost 4000 workers in more than 50 countries worldwide and gain approximately 1.2 billion USD yearly. In 2019, the organization developed and implemented a mentorship program to ensure competency exchanges throughout SecuritySolutions. Alongside, the formal mentorship program had six objectives: Connect us across regions, Generate a Growth mindset, Build leaders of tomorrow, Create impactful business relationships, and Engage and retain employees well as foster diversity and inclusion. The program has a limited number of participants, and employees have to apply in order to participate. The duration of one cohort is ten months and mentees and mentors are matched by the program facilitators.

The company SecuritySolutions and its mentorship program were the ideal fit for our study and enabled us to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' interpretations of the program.

3.3 Data Collection

The following section is going to outline our data collection which had two phases.

First of all, we conducted one interview with a HR responsible who designed the program and was one of the coordinators during the past three cohorts and thus able to give us rich insights into the organizational perspective on the program. This interview solely served for us to get an understanding of the scope of the program and was not analyzed further. Additionally, we were given access to the presentation which was handed out as information material to employees interested in applying and served us as further insight into the program. After that, we conducted 9 in-depth and semi-structured interviews with program participants, which was our main source of data.

3.3.1 Document Analysis

Our document analysis is limited to one source which is the presentation interested employees receive before applying. The presentation entailed information regarding the goals of the program, the application process, the mentorship journey, the next steps and also what the program is not for, such as a buddy program. We used the presentation in three ways. First, it provided us with

more background and context knowledge about the program and hence, better enabled us to grasp the scope of the program. Secondly, documents can suggest questions that need to be asked in the interviews (Bowen, 2009), which was also the case for us as we decided to structure our interview questions along the six program goals.

Further, the presentation was a means of triangulation as it gave us the opportunity to not only draw on the interview with the HR responsible as a source of evidence, but also see what information the participants receive before starting the program (Brown, 2009).

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews gave us the opportunity to “wander together” with the interviewee and have an insight into their lived world and truth about the phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). It also allowed us to repeat key topics in each interview but keep flexibility to adjust the order of questions or add and leave out questions if needed. This procedure is in line with the abductive approach, which enables us to continuously adapt our interview guide to initial findings (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2018). Thereby, we were able to identify certain topics of interest that arose during the interviews. We had one main interview guide but some variable questions depending on whether our interviewee was a mentor or a mentee (see Appendix B). We interviewed 9 (N=9) program participants whereof 7 were mentees and 2 were mentors (see Appendix A). This amount gave us sufficient insight but also matched our time scope. Our focus was on the individual perspectives and therefore we did not interview both participants of a mentoring dyad but just individual participants. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were conducted in English. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of the spoken content.

The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, which came with some advantages as well as disadvantages. On one hand, we were able to have a geographically diverse sample and were able to adjust the scheduling of the interviews more freely to the availability of our participants. On the other hand, we were not able to read body language and were limited to seeing only facial expressions.

3.4 Data Analysis

The process of our data analysis entailed several steps which we now present.

First of all, we needed to transcribe our conducted interviews. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), it is important to record and transcribe interviews as it allows us to repeat the examination of the interviewees' answers and helps to ensure accuracy regarding the content. Transcriptions also help to compensate for the natural limits of the human memory, as we might remember statements differently, but can always come back to the transcriptions to verify. We used the transcription software "Otter", which recorded and transcribed our interviews simultaneously. However, we listened to all interviews again and re-evaluated and revised all transcriptions in order to guarantee accuracy.

Throughout our interviews we gathered a large amount of data which needed to be codified in order to make sense of it. Accordingly, the second step of our data analysis was to codify the gathered data. Codifying data is a method to sort and categorize information and refers to assigning labels or categories to what we see in our data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The main purpose is to narrow down the big amount of data to some identified key concepts. This process can reveal connections, similarities, and differences in the interview answers (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Each of us identified more than 30 different codes, which is beneficial in the early stages of the process as we were being creative regarding the possibilities of analysis (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In order to keep the risk of bias lower, both of us researchers codified the data individually and afterwards we compared our categories. It provided us with the opportunity to discuss matches and inconsistencies. Overlapping matches indicate higher importance of the category or simply clearer answers of the interviewees on the certain category (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). After the different codes were organized into categories or labels, we identified the ones that are the most recurring ones and are most relevant for our study. It was necessary to focus on certain categories as taking all into account is inappropriate for one single research and would make it incomprehensible (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The chosen categories helped us make sense out of our data and compare it to existing research (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

As we followed an abductive research approach, we continuously reviewed our data in order to draw connections to existing literature and were open to discover more curiosities within our empirical material.

3.5 Reflecting on limitations

According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018), reflexivity is an essential part of every research process and describes reflecting on the conditions of the conducted research. Therefore, the following part presents the limitations of our study.

As previously outlined, we chose a case study to be the best method to answer our research questions and study the phenomena. However, qualitative research is often criticized for not being able to draw generalizations (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In particular, a small sample from a single case study like ours cannot create statistical generalizations (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). This is also not the purpose of qualitative research and instead, it produces theoretical conclusions which are analytical generalizations (Yin, 2014). This applies also for our study as we provide new knowledge regarding mentorship and identity. Hence, our knowledge contribution aims for an analytical generalization in the form of a model.

It is also important to question our interviewees' reliability in several ways. Some people tend to glorify themselves and their role and therefore cannot give an objective picture (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). We also see a potential risk for the social desirability bias, which means that interviewees answer according to what is accepted by society or what they think we, the researchers, want to hear (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

Furthermore, our research was constrained by a limited time scope. It would have been beneficial for the study to interview participants before and after their participation and conduct an observation at one of the official sessions, which unfortunately was not possible. We also have to bear in mind that although the interviews were conducted in English, neither we nor most of the interviewees had native proficiency in this language and therefore both parties might not have been able to express their thoughts as they could in their mother tongue.

Being two researchers has helped us tremendously to support each other's reflexivity as we continuously challenged each other's assumptions and thoughts. During our interviews, we were able to complement each other's questions and to see the interviewees from two different perspectives. Having different backgrounds encouraged us to have discussions and reflect on seemingly obvious aspects increasing the quality of our study.

3.6 Ethical Considerations and Ensuring Credibility

Lastly, we introduce ethical considerations and regard our study's credibility.

When performing qualitative research, it is important to ensure ethical principles are retained (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Therefore, we made sure that no deception regarding our conducted research was involved and we followed the ethical principle of informed consent. Consequently, at the beginning of each interview, we informed participants about our academic background and the aim of our study. We offered them to ask us questions about the research and thereby made them feel more secure about giving us their consent. Furthermore, we asked for permission to record the interviews and assured to not share the recordings with anyone and delete it after the research is completed. In addition, we also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity to all our participants, which is significant to foster honest answers and thus generate useful material for our research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

The credibility of a study is of major importance in qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). In order to ensure credibility, we collected a diverse sample regarding age, gender, country of origin and year of participation in the program. Having a diverse sample is paramount as it allows us to see the bigger picture and not just an individual's personal perception (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020).

Furthermore, the four principles of source-criticism which are authenticity, bias, distance, and dependence, were applied to our research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Authenticity refers to whether the interviewees told us the truth and if we created a safe interview environment with anonymity to foster credibility. For the second principle, it is important to be aware of potential

bias as researchers, because personal biases based on previous experiences or knowledge can influence the interpretations of our findings (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). Therefore, we tried to be as open and imaginative as possible regarding new directions of our research and overall to be aware of our personal biases. The two principles “distance” and “dependence” are quite closely related as the first refers to the time distance to the reported experiences, while the latter depicts the number of hands the information has passed through (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). All our interviewees were participants themselves and were thus able to tell us first-hand about their experiences and perceptions of the program. Additionally, every interviewee participated during the present or the previous cohort and was therefore able to remember his or her thoughts and feelings well.

Lastly, the open nature of semi-structured interviews allowed us to follow the thoughts of the participants and let them elaborate on their opinions thoroughly. Therefore, it lowered the risk of pre-given biases and opened the field into all possible directions (Prasad, 2018).

We believe that by collecting a diverse sample, applying the principles of source-criticism, and conducting semi-structured interviews, we have enhanced and secured the credibility of our study.

4. Empirical Material and Analysis

This chapter regards our empirical material and analysis. It begins with a description of the mentorship program at SecuritySolutions and subsequently, our empirical findings are presented in the form of a narrative.

4.1 Background of the mentorship program

In 2019, the Swedish HR department was approached by their colleagues situated in the US, because they wanted to attain competitive advantages, to be at the forefront of the industry and felt that a formal mentorship program would be the best approach. Working in an international organization, they had observed that securing competence exchanges across different regions and departments within SecuritySolutions was burdensome. Swedish employees often stay in one company throughout their career and accumulate much knowledge, however SecuritySolutions missed the opportunity to share and distribute existing powerful knowledge and ideas. Based on that, SecuritySolutions was in need of a tool that would enhance global exchange of competencies, to tackle the existing issues. Consequently, the mentorship program was designed and launched in 2019 and since then, three cohorts have proceeded. To facilitate understanding, we will continue to regard the program as a whole and do not consider different cohorts, because the application process and discussed topics were identical.

The official goals of the program, which were also presented to the participants, were as follows:

- Connect us across regions
- Generate a growth mindset
- Build leaders of tomorrow
- Create impactful business relationships
- Engage and retain employees
- Foster diversity and inclusion

In order to participate in the formal mentorship Program, eligible participants had to fill out an application. The only requirement for both, mentors and mentees, besides feeling comfortable about pursuing the program in English, was employment at SecuritySolutions for at least one year.

The program was thus tailored for employees that had been with the company for a little while and were looking for intra-organizational development initiatives. After the application period closed at the end of May, the ten-month long program began in September and ended in June with a graduation.

In the application, mentee applicants needed to primarily state their location, job title, manager's name, and department. Furthermore, they had to answer what mentorship meant to them, as well as stating whether they already had mentoring experience. Furthermore, they needed to specify how their participation benefits SecuritySolutions. The application therefore consisted of personal needs and business value. In contrast, mentor applicants had to state their strengths, the kind of knowledge they could transfer, and what they were looking for in a mentee. The program facilitators received between 100 and 150 applications in total per year, with an increasing tendency. However, selection of participants was described as a competitive process, with only 40 available spots during the third year. Furthermore, the first cohort only counted 20 participants, and the number of participants has increased by ten participants each year. After the application period closed, the selection of participants and matching of dyads occurred, which was done by HR Management as the program facilitators. HR Management tried to have a balanced distribution of gender, different departments within the organizations and geographical zones in the cohort. For the selection process, they also requested applicants' managers' views and information from a HR management responsible for the respective applicants, besides examining individual goals, work experience and years of service. Apart from this, no further information was shared with the participants regarding the matching process. Accordingly, all participants were matched with someone from a different professional background and situated in a different country.

In the first year, prior to the global COVID pandemic, the program started off with a two-day physical introduction in Lund with all participants. During this kick-off event, the program facilitators moderated sessions on e.g. being a mentor and goal setting. Afterwards, no more sessions were held throughout the duration of the program, and the participants merely received "HR-Check-in" calls throughout the year, allowing them to provide feedback regarding the mentoring process.

However, due to the pandemic, the entire program was held digitally during the second and third year, which our participants took part in, and required some changes. Instead of the initial two-day introductory event, HR organized a two-hour introduction session, followed by several group sessions throughout the entirety of the program. Accordingly, due to time differences, the mentor dyads were divided into two groups for these sessions, in which smaller groups were often formed to allow more detailed discussions. These group sessions focused on intercultural differences, Growth mindset, Personal branding and giving and receiving feedback, which also allowed for mentees and mentors to connect and exchange experiences with other participants. Besides the physical introductory in the first year, and the planned digital group sessions throughout the second and third year, HR Management was not involved in the meetings of the dyads. Since the program was held virtually from the second cohort on, HR also created a digital communication channel on Microsoft Teams, where participants may exchange articles, books or inspirational ideas.

Concerning the mentoring dyads, mentees were given instructions to follow up on setting meetings, but both dyad partners were otherwise free to plan the frequency of their meetings and the meeting procedure. HR solely recommended dyads to spend two to five hours on their relationship per month and, on average, each dyad met every two to three weeks, and set up a phone or video call. The program thus provided a high degree of flexibility for each mentoring dyad to arrange their private meetings differently. However, the group sessions often served as inspiration for the mentors and mentees to talk about in their private meetings. Furthermore, especially when trying to reach mentee’s personal goals within the program, mentors gave them homework, which was usually revised during the following meeting.

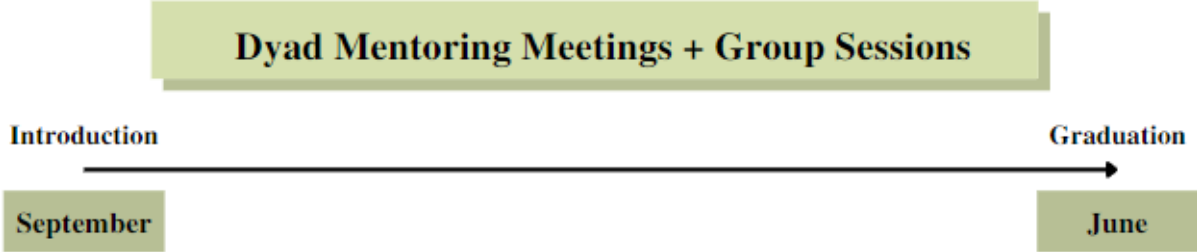


Figure 3: Timeline of the mentorship program at SecuritySolutions

4.2 Empirical Findings

Grounded in the problematization, this chapter presents the empirical material through a narrative that concentrates on the mentorship program at SecuritySolutions, and while this does not represent sequential order of the occurrences, it ensures a logical manner. Thus, we draw on interviews to contextualize them with our examinations. In accordance with investigating our research questions, we incorporate participants', ergo mentees' and mentors', voices and their respective interpretations regarding the program.

The first chapter concentrates on the participants' **commitment** towards the Mentorship Program, especially in view of the fact that they were uncertain on the specific mentoring process and program content. We highlight participants' interpretation of a particular exclusivity surrounding the program, and their commitment to create a meaningful mentoring experience. The following section then examines **the mentoring relationship** and outlines that it is characterized by trust and vulnerability. Thereafter, **mentee's developmental process** through the Mentorship Program is investigated. This describes exchanges with the respective mentor eventually resulting in personal development. Consequently, the last section regards **organizational outcomes**, which concern newly established intra-organizational connections, increased knowledge-sharing, deeper organizational understanding and enhanced employee engagement. Our narrative is thus constructed as follows:

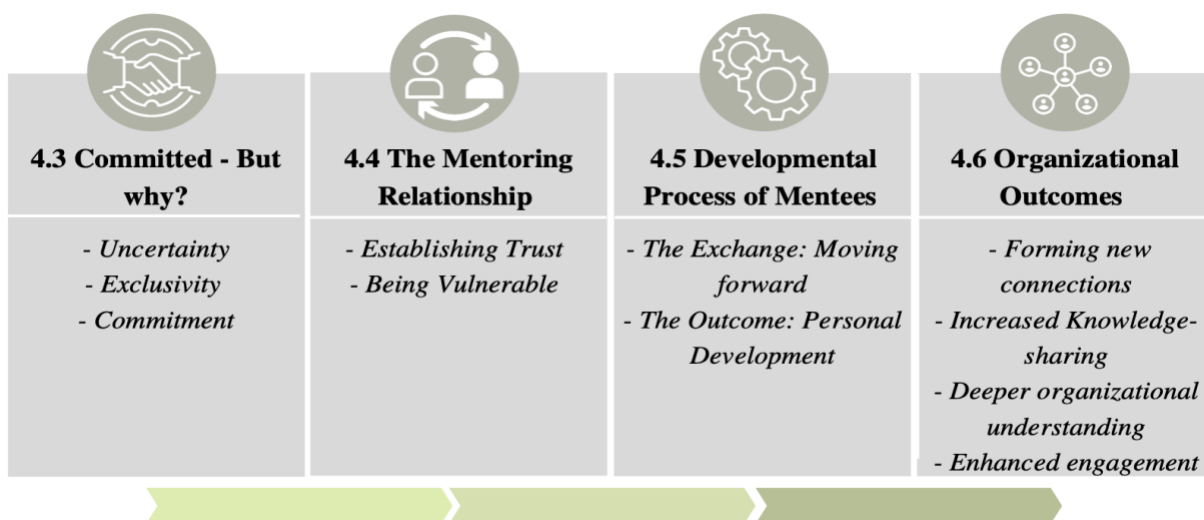


Figure 4: Narrative of the Empirical Material

4.3 Committed - But why?

As indicated previously, mentors and mentees had to officially apply to participate in the Mentorship Program. Nevertheless, all participants described having little knowledge of what was awaiting them in the program and also did not know their mentoring partner, because it was always a person from another department and region. Thus, we detected an uncertainty of mentees as well as mentors regarding the program which is illustrated in the subsequent section. Furthermore, our empirical findings demonstrate that mentees felt an exclusivity surrounding the Mentorship Program and therefore, were fully committed to the program.

Uncertainty mentee side

Throughout our interviews, all mentees revealed feeling uncertain prior to the program, regarding the discussed topics and process of the mentorship program. The following quotes thus express mentees' answers to our question "What did you know about the program when you applied?":

"Funny enough, this mentorship thing was not very well known at SecuritySolutions. I chatted with some colleagues as I was applying, and not very many people knew about this." - Joe

"Not much. I saw some posters and my boss said, "You should apply!" and I was like "Hm I don't know, what's this about?" - Amy

"So I just knew that it was going to be a good opportunity to connect with leadership and global counterparts. [...]Otherwise I didn't know the details of the topics they were going to talk about." - Katherine

"Actually, I didn't really know what it was at first, like when I applied but I thought, maybe I can learn something and yeah, I don't know." - Ryan

Accordingly, some mentees had heard vague information on the program and connected it to development, specifically regarding leadership. However, none of the mentees knew any specifics regarding the program's topics and the overall program was rather unknown. Mentor Julia remembered her mentees' experience in the program:

“And my mentee was a little bit lost. So someone had suggested that she applied for the program and so she did and she got in, but I'm not sure she really knew exactly what she was even signing up for.” - Julia

Seemingly, her mentee felt slightly unprepared because she did not know what the program focused on. Furthermore, our empirical material clues that mentors were not more knowledgeable about the program than their mentees and therefore, the following section centers around the uncertainty of the mentors.

Uncertainty mentor side

The following quote is from Susan, a mentor who had certain expectations about mentoring due to her career experiences and shared her initial knowledge on the program with us:

“I'd say not that much. But keep in mind, I am 55. And when I was quite young, several people have been helping me, mentoring me, so I have the feeling that it's my turn to give back to the society, to the company, to the people, to the youngest people, if they can leverage on my experience.” - Susan

This quote illustrates that Susan did not know much about the specifics of the program when applying, but she had experienced being a mentee in her career and thus claimed her interest in sharing her competence with e.g., individuals in the organization. In contrast, mentor Julia used to be a facilitator of the program in previous years and joined the program for the third cohort as a mentor. Therefore, she had more knowledge than other participants about the program, but was still new to being a mentor:

“Yeah, it's a little nerve wracking, actually, you know, it sounded so exciting to sign up for it and I even knew what the program was like. But still, to get started and be assigned with someone was a little bit scary. And I was nervous about it.” - Julia

We assume that, besides knowing more about the program's structure and topics, Julia still experienced a specific uncertainty in terms of the dynamic of the mentoring relationship, which made her anxious.

Exclusivity

It became apparent that despite the little knowledge about the details of the program, all participants knew that HR was very selective when choosing the few participants. Our material hints that all the participants were excited about the opportunity to participate in the program. Accordingly, mentee Katherine told us the following:

“I knew that it was a selective group where they, you know, specifically chose a mentor to mentee strategically. I had actually applied to be a part of the program, before I was in this role, and I got denied [Laughs]. There just wasn't an opportunity to, you know, there just wasn't a good fit.” - Katherine

This statement indicates that she felt special about being part of this program due to its exclusiveness, especially taking into account that she was denied the previous year. She chose the word “opportunity” to describe her participation in the program which shows how much she acknowledged it and illustrates a positive connotation to her participation. Mentee Michael chose similar words to describe his acceptance to the program:

“I was excited when this opportunity came and applied. I didn't know I was gonna get it. I talked to a lot of people that applied for it and didn't get it. So I was pretty excited. I was pretty excited to get it.” - Michael

Michael also used the word “opportunity” to describe the participation in the program which shows the positive view he had on the participation. His statement also shows that, due to many applicants being denied, a certain distinctiveness centered around partaking in the program. Mentor Julia elaborated:

“I know that sometimes there's a little bit of [...] impostor syndrome, [...] like, ‘But do I even belong here? Or am I just faking it? [...] Is that mentee going to like me?’. And so that can [...] have some anxiety to it.” - Julia

Julia expressed that mentors sometimes felt anxious and questioned whether they belong in the program. We assume that participants felt pressure in the mentorship program, because they had to be outstanding to be chosen out of all the applicants for the program. She further remarked that some mentors also feared their mentees not liking them, which increased tension. We assume that the exclusiveness of the program and the prestige coming with it, has increased the commitment of the participants and will be further analyzed in the following.

Commitment

Throughout our empirical analysis, it became apparent that participants were eager to create a meaningful mentoring experience and also build a strong relationship. Hence, according to our findings, both, mentees and mentors, were highly motivated to perform well in the program and thus showed the same commitment, as described by mentee Michael:

“So you guys have to have a similar [...] drive to do it. So I think [...] not just the temperament but also the drive to succeed. I think that's why it's a success.” - Michael

Interestingly he used the word “success” which shows us that he was keen to make the best out of the program and also expressed that the mentor needed to have the same intentions. This was confirmed by mentee Ryan:

“They [the mentors] want to do something useful or like come up with some useful ideas for their mentees and the mentees also feel that [...] we have to prepare and we have to do our best so maybe that also helps for the relationship to be good.” - Ryan

Ryan expressed the significance of mutual commitment by both, mentors and mentees, for the relationship and highlighted that he felt he needed to prepare diligently. Mentee Katherine further demonstrated that the intention for the relationship to work out resulted in change of action:

“But he kind of made it clear like ‘I'm not usually this open but this environment, the purpose of the program, are leading me to be this way.’. [...] And I'm like, ‘That makes total sense - I'm on board!’” - Katherine

From this quote we understand that the eagerness to succeed in the program, by establishing a good relationship, led Katherine's mentor to adjust his behavior, in becoming more open than he usually was. Similarly, mentee Ryan also adjusted his behavior in the program:

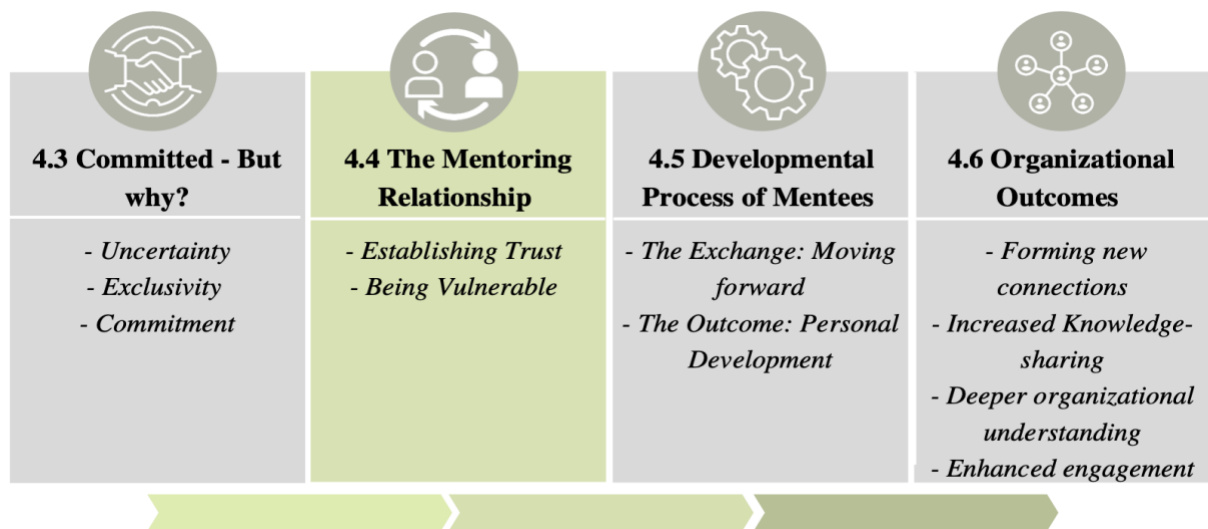
"I'm taking this director's time so I have to do my best [...], even though I feel very uncomfortable doing some things I just have to do it and push myself." - Ryan

He said that for the purpose and success of the program, he changed his behavior, even if it was outside his comfort zone. Also, the position of his mentor within the company was of significance to him as it made him feel that an important person is making time for him, which resulted in Ryan wanting to demonstrate high effort.

Interestingly, our empirical data analysis provided a major twist here: All participants shared that only scarce information regarding the program was known among the applicants. However, we found that they were all eager to commit to the program and build valuable relationships. They knew that the program was very exclusive, which made them feel distinctive to other people when they were chosen. Seemingly, everyone was positively excited about the participation in the program before and was also willing to adjust their own behavior during the process in order to contribute to building a meaningful relationship and create a valuable mentoring experience.

4.4 The Mentoring Relationship

In the previous section we elaborated that mentees and mentors were eager to fully commit to the mentorship program and our analysis points towards their commitment influencing the relationship as well. Our empirical material shows that mentees as well as mentors are keen to develop a valuable relationship with each other and have meaningful connections. Therefore, the following section outlines trust and vulnerability as major aspects within the relationship.



Establishing trust

Various quotes by the participants indicate that forming a relationship characterized by trust, mutual respect, and open-mindedness, allows for an environment in which both, mentee and mentor, felt comfortable to share their expectations, feelings, and knowledge. Mentor Susan reflected on her relationship with her mentee:

“I think it's more important to have free speech, that both feel comfortable, that this is between us, we will not share more. [...] I mean, there is no impact on what the person will say, so it's really for sharing and for helping the person. So, I think it's good to create this kind of environment for the mentorship.” - Susan

In this statement, Susan explained that having meetings and forming a relationship where both feel heard and comfortable, was of great importance. Additionally, several mentees mentioned that they felt comfortable in their dyad to not only discuss professional, but also personal matters:

“A small part of the meeting we talked about what is going on in my life and what was going on in hers. And not only the work environment, but also privately.” - Amy

“We had both personal and working professional topics. And it helped to understand each other better.” - Hannah

“He knew, [...] who my husband was and things like that, we shared pictures of our pets.”
- Katherine

From the above elaborated we can derive that mentors and mentees also talked about personal topics and we thus presume that they trusted their dyad partner, which facilitated developing valuable relationships. Mentee Michael even described his relationship as a friendship:

“You talk with somebody every couple of weeks, [...] it's been like five or six months now, [...] kind of to build that friendship, [...] we are kind of friends now.” - Michael

As Michael calls the relationship a friendship, we assume that their relationship is characterized by trust and supporting each other and thus, Michael strengthened the previous quotes. Mentee George also said that he found a friend in his mentor:

“To get [...] a new friend and someone to really dig down into stuff that you usually don't talk to other people about. It was really something special.” - George

Seemingly, being able to talk candidly about sensitive topics was really appreciated by George, which makes us assume they have a good basis of trust. Also, mentee Joe shared that he trusts his mentor to a great extend:

“I know I trust him a lot. And then when he says, ‘Hey go left!’, I go left because I realized that he has my best interests in mind. [...] I really feel that he's genuinely trying to help. And that is just [...] a virtuous circle.” - Joe

Joe describing their mentoring relationship as a “virtuous circle” is outstanding because we hence assume that trusting the mentoring partner nurtures the relationship and continuously keeps benefiting both of them.

Being Vulnerable

Trust and vulnerability are closely connected, as trust is needed to facilitate open talk, but to truly touch upon personal hardships or issues, it is also necessary to be vulnerable in front of the mentoring partner. This was illustrated by mentee Amy:

“We talked about my kind of social anxiety and how I'm working on that. Both my personal life and in my workplace” - Amy

Apparently, Amy was able to talk to her mentor about her social anxiety and therefore, showed herself vulnerable to her mentor. We believe that becoming vulnerable was only possible through having established a trustful relationship to begin with. Being vulnerable with the mentoring partner was perceived very positively, as described by mentee Katherine:

“He [the mentor] was great, he was very vulnerable and I think that I could have been more so. Afterwards, looking back and reflecting on it, I was like, ‘Damn, I could have been more open’.” - Katherine

She reflected that it would have been better for herself and the relationship, if she would have been as vulnerable as her mentor. From this we can derive that being vulnerable is an important pillar of the relationship. She further discussed a factor that facilitated open communication between them:

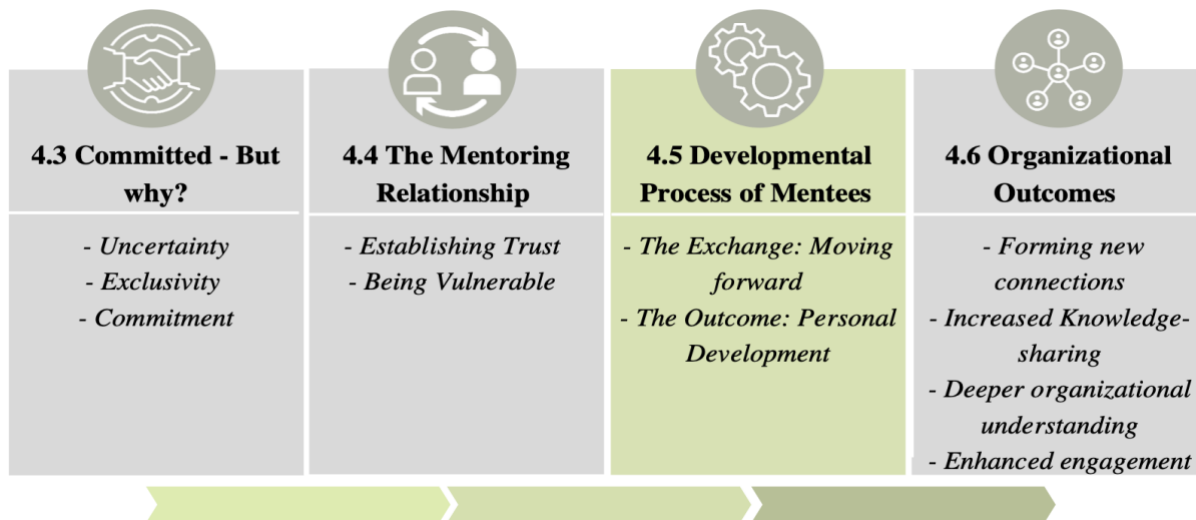
“If I failed or succeeded, it made no difference to him in that sense, and he wasn't tied to the people on my team in any way, shape, or form. He didn't even know them. So just being able to kind of talk a little bit candidly with him about maybe just some of the things that I'm working on.” - Katherine

She elaborated on the benefits of having someone to confide in who is sitting in a department independent from hers. The distance regarding departments enabled her to be more vulnerable regarding problems she was facing or topics that came up regarding her role as a manager in her team. She acknowledged that the distance to her mentor, department-wise, created a safety for her to talk more candidly and openly with him.

Our empirical analysis has thus far outlined that the relationships between mentors and mentees were built on a strong foundation of trust and that the participants were able to engage in personal conversations. It was appreciated to be vulnerable towards the partner and the meaningful relationship nurtured the overall mentoring, similar to a virtuous circle.

4.5 Developmental Process of Mentees

The previous section illustrated that even though participants were very unfamiliar with the content of the program, they demonstrated commitment towards the program, which eventually resulted in meaningful mentoring relationships. The first part centers around the exchange between the mentors and mentees with the sub themes bouncing ideas, encouragement, and guidance. Thereupon follows the outcome of the exchange which included personal development. It concerns the sub themes personal growth, learning and self-confidence.



The Exchange: Moving forward

Throughout our interviews, various mentees described the exchange with their mentors to be characterized by different functions. Therefore, the following part demonstrates how they bounced ideas off, provided encouragement and lastly, guidance.

Bouncing ideas

As outlined earlier, meaningful relationships enabled the mentoring dyads to have open conversations where they felt comfortable to discuss ideas. Mentee Joe claimed that he considered bouncing ideas off of his mentor particularly valuable:

"I need that bounce. Because by myself, I don't do that, I get tunnel vision and I just go around in circles. So yeah, different perspective." - Joe

This statement indicates that Joe appreciated having a different perspective and that it helped him to move forward instead of in circles. We interpret that being able to talk to his mentor and see another approach improved his efficiency. This is also illustrated by mentee Katherine:

"It was just nice to know that there was a sounding board right around the corner and throwing ideas out there into the open end and talking to him." - Katherine

She referred to her mentor as a sounding board. Seemingly, she looks upon their relationship as a safe environment because she felt comfortable to share ideas and receive feedback. She further elaborated:

"I don't know what he would say if he did learn from me, but I think that we bounced each other out. I challenged him when, you know, I was like, 'But why would you do it that way? Why wouldn't you do this?'. " - Katherine

She mentioned that both, she and her mentor, challenged and questioned each other in their actions, believing that their relationship was mutually beneficial regarding the learning experience.

This section outlined that having a safe space where ideas and feedback can be exchanged was valuable for mentees.

Push & Boost: Mentoring as encouragement

Michael, similar to previous statements, appreciated the ability to throw ideas at his mentor and he reflected that receiving feedback on his ideas had a great impact:

"I always thought having a mentor [...] was about, [...] like helping people out being able to bounce those ideas off of them. [...] Having someone who can tell you, 'Hey, you're wrong. That's not the way you want to think about it'. Or 'Hey, maybe you want to think about it this way', and kind of [...] help guide you on your way in your career to kind of push you and put you in a better position." - Michael

Seemingly, specifically receiving his mentor's opinion, who was a more experienced employee in a management position, was helpful and directed Michael career-wise to a great extent. He found that his mentor challenged him and pushed him to become better. His mentor's overall attitude as well as perspective had a positive impact on him. Joe strengthened this statement:

"He just keeps challenging me whenever I think that I'm coming close to the finishing line, he just moves the finishing line one step forward." - Joe

This quote demonstrates that his mentor pushed Joe, and that while he felt he was close to accomplishing something, his mentor challenged him even further. We interpret that the mentoring relationship was often seen as a means to encourage the participants to go further than they would on their own.

Mentee Michael drew a connection between the earlier mentioned bouncing off of ideas and receiving a push from the mentor:

"This is a way to kind of push those people in the right direction, build relationships with people who maybe don't have the same experience as you, but management and can be good mentors to [...] allow you to bounce ideas off of them, but also [...] help you push you along and figure out the path that you're trying to go on." - Michael

By saying that the mentorship program would "push those people in the right direction", Michael believed there to be a correct way to develop within the company and that the mentor helped to find the "right direction". He complemented previous statements and emphasized that mentors can lead their mentees and push them further.

Furthermore, a recurring aspect within the mentorship program was the growth mindset. Mentee Hannah reflected on it with regard to the mentorship participants and program itself:

"I think that this kind of mindset is in all of us and different events. Like the mentorship program helps to boost or helps to show how to boost it [growth mindset] further. And I think the mentorship program is the master in having this impact." - Hannah

While Hannah believed everyone to carry the growth mindset in them, the mentorship program at SecuritySolutions demonstrated how to boost growth mindset further, which is one of the six main goals of the mentorship program. Moreover, describing the program to “boost” her growth mindset, Hannah illustrated that the program has had an extensive impact on her personal development within the organization, as previously also indicated by Michael.

Mentees frequently used the words “push” and “boost” to describe the effect their mentors had on them. We believe that mentees felt encouraged and challenged by their mentors.

Guidance

Further, it became apparent that the mentors provided guidance to their mentees according to their needs, as illustrated by the following quote by mentee Joe:

"It's much about having a structure and methodology, [...] to know to move forward. That is t[...] the strongest thing that I'm getting from this mentorship program." - Joe

He highlighted that the program provided him with tools to improve his own work and to “move forward” within the company. Additionally, Joe described this guidance on internal progression as most important for him during the program. He continued:

"I always wondered about that relationship, mentor-mentee, and actually saw it much as an opportunity to grow, to exchange ideas, to get inspiration, you know, and have [...] a more structured approach to how to move forward." - Joe

Again, he reasoned that the process of the mentorship program facilitated moving forward. Thus, he indicated that the structure of the program, while stimulating growth, exchanging ideas and inspiration, clarified how to move forward, and set a structure. Moreover, his mentor helped him to clarify several matters:

“You know, I call it the hole of the needle. He identifies the one gap that needed to be identified and is able to put an end to it. [...] And it was there all the time. And I was not able to see it. So, he is really good to do that.” - Joe

From this quote, we can derive that his mentor clarified Joe's struggles through providing an additional perspective. During our interview with mentee Michael, he also elaborated on the program's impact on his perspective and hence possible future role in the organization.

"I would say he's kind of helped clarify some of my use, and maybe I had [...] misconceptions about being a manager. [...] But having done this [the mentorship program], I think it's definitely kind of helped clarify that." - Michael

He acknowledged the influence talking to his mentor, who is a manager, has had on his view on being a manager himself. Michael reflected that through participating, his understanding of his use in the company has changed and that now he felt better prepared to take on different roles in the organization. It encouraged him to grow personally.

This section outlined that mentees felt guided by their mentors and that they received structure and clarification when they needed it.

The Outcome: Personal Development

Our interviews showed that the previously outlined exchange resulted in personal development for mentees. Therefore, the following section centers around their personal growth, their learnings, and their increase of self-confidence.

Personal Growth

Our empirical data demonstrates that “growth” is an important topic for the participants of the mentorship program. Mentee Katherine reflected that she saw the entire program as an opportunity to grow:

"It was really just an opportunity to grow [..], to learn from someone else, because I had never been in a leadership role, in a business environment." - Katherine

She highlighted the importance to learn during the mentorship program and to be open towards another person's input and experience. By mentioning "to grow", she indicated her enthusiasm for attending the program in order to learn. Julia, a mentor, commented on the growth mindset with regard to the culture at SecuritySolutions:

"I think just the fact that it's the opportunity for growth personally and for someone else and that's part of our SecuritySolutions culture. But always looking to grow and develop and help others do the same [...]." - Julia

According to Julia, the mentorship program encouraged pursuing and facilitating personal growth, which seemingly is a well-established objective in the organization. Accordingly, some mentees mentioned their personal growth through the program:

"And although I said that I wasn't 100% successful opening up, I think there was a ton of progress and I think I'm taking that progress outside the mentorship program." - Katherine

Between the lines we can interpret that making progress in opening up made mentee Katherine feel more confident about herself. Stating that she wanted to take her progress "outside the mentorship program" expresses the success of her development. She continued:

*".. but just kind of growing as a manager and leading these people was kind of a goal for me, you know, it was new. I hadn't done it yet. So just kind of getting his thoughts and opinions on what has worked or not worked for him. That was kind of how I went into it."
- Katherine*

She saw her mentor as an experienced person who she could learn from about dealing with specific situations and aspects within her new leading role inside the company. Similar, Michael expressed the following:

"Just kind of talking with him about how he's dealt with conflicts and stuff, [...] that's helped me out a little bit as well." - Michael

He mentioned that especially learning how his mentor handled challenging situations benefited him and simply understanding his point of view helped him grow.

Our empirical analysis outlined that growth was an important topic for all mentees and that they experienced personal growth through participation in the program. For some, growth meant understanding the perspective of the mentor and learning from someone more experienced, whereas for others, it was about overcoming challenges and understanding how to cope with difficulties.

Learning

Mentees took several learnings from their participation in the program. Mentee Amy elaborated on a concrete learning she took from her mentor:

"We had these kind of four different squares and I kind of visualize that square almost every day, when I prioritize my tasks." - Amy

Amy mentioned a simple prioritizing trick her mentor has shown her throughout the program which is helping her now frequently. Seemingly, knowledge her mentor had shared with Amy, has had an impact on her daily professional practices. Mentee George explained that for him it was rather personal learnings than technical skills that he developed through the program:

"I think it's just some kind of personal knowledge that you gained that you have with you. I wouldn't say it's a skill because we didn't really train in skill wise, but I would say [...] a deeper knowledge and maybe a different perspective, when you look at those topics that we covered." - George

Especially getting to know another perspective was appreciated by George and he highlighted the personal knowledge he gained from it. Mentee Michael indicated that he enjoyed learning and was eager to learn more through the program, which is illustrated by the following quote:

"I like to constantly learn things [...]. I think being able to learn what my mentor is going through, and kind of other moving parts of the thing, [...] is very helpful. And I enjoyed that. [...] I always say that if you're the smartest person in the room, you need to find a new room." - Michael

Michael described himself as someone who enjoys continuously learning new things and he thus found the exchange with his mentor helpful for getting a different perspective and thereby learning through someone else's experience as exemplified earlier. He indicated that during the mentorship program, he saw what challenges his mentor was going through and that it helped him cope with his own challenges, too. Furthermore, mentee Hannah started another development program during her participation in the mentorship program and saw a correlation between her participation and her desire to learn even more:

"And it was me searching for [...] something new and fresh. I don't know how it works, but I know that I had this fact of new learnings and new results and of course I can't say that the mentorship program did not influence it. Of course it did." - Hannah

Her quote showed that while she was developing through the mentorship program, her desire to learn and grow increased even more which made her proactively search for more opportunities at SecuritySolutions.

Our empirical data analysis highlights that mentees learned and personally developed themselves through the program. Apparently, learning did not entail acquiring new skills, but rather understanding general strategies by exchanging perspectives with their mentors.

Enhanced Confidence

The exchange with the mentors as well as their personal growth had an effect on mentees self-confidence, which is illustrated by the following quote by Hannah:

"I think it was a challenge for me to speak up more and at the end of the program I can say that it wasn't such a big challenge as it was at the beginning." - Hannah

From this quote we can reason that mentee Hannah gained confidence through the program. Mentee Amy also shared that the exchange with her mentor increased her job confidence:

"She had a very big impact on me becoming comfortable in my role and becoming comfortable in my way of leading that I think is not typical for men in most leading positions." - Amy

As a result of forming a strong relationship with a female lead, she was able to settle into her role. Due to being the only female lead in her department, having her mentor help her settle into her new role in the organization was meaningful to her. She continued:

"I'm really happy that she's experiencing the same things as me and a little bit sad. Like even though she's in Germany, and she is in a really big role there and she experienced the same things that I struggle with from time to time." - Amy

Amy and her female mentor discussed incidents that surrounded being a female manager in a department mostly consisting of male leads. This quote illustrates that Amy valued exchanging experiences with her mentor and finding that they are quite similar. Seemingly, she appreciated exchanging opinions and learnings with her mentor, which comforted her in being a female lead herself. During the interview, mentee George also reflected on his enhanced job confidence through the program:

"And I was curious, I was quite new as a manager and I wanted to have some other spokesperson to discuss different topics, high and low, regarding my role." - George

From this statement we interpret that George saw participating in the mentorship program as an opportunity to satisfy his curiosity regarding his new management position. He found the possibility to exchange ideas and reflect on another expert's experience valuable to settle into his new job. Our empirical data also demonstrates a recurring pattern, with multiple mentees mentioning their increased self-confidence and courage through the program, as claimed by mentee Ryan:

"And it was because it was this mentorship program, like I just have to follow everything and just challenge myself." - Ryan

Apparently, he saw the reason for his increased self-confidence in participating in the mentorship program. He elaborated further:

“I don't feel afraid of ‘Oh, I don't know this, I should not engage in this conversation’. [...] Maybe I'm more open to just okay, ‘I don't know anything at the moment’, and I'm not afraid to say ‘I've never worked with this before’.” - Ryan

From this statement we can draw that Ryan felt more secure in his role and had gained trust and confidence in himself through the program. Mentee Amy shared her view on her increased courage:

“After the mentorship ended, we got the new manager in a different department as a female. [...] I don't think I would ever have reached out to her if it wasn't for the membership program, [...] I don't think I would ever have done that if it weren't for this membership program. And the same about this other lead that wants me as a mentor. I don't think I would have the courage to do that if I hadn't been in this program.” -Amy

In the beginning of our talk, Amy described herself as a shy person, but told us about her increase of self-confidence during the program. This quote illustrates that after the program she herself even reached out to other people.

Amy's gain of self-confidence and her new understanding of her own competences are a good example of how mentees started to recognize their own abilities through participation in the program and adapting their behavior accordingly. Therefore, mentees also expressed their desire to be more acknowledged and speak up more. This is illustrated by the following quote by Hannah:

“And it's about how to become visible. I think not just to become visible, but to say openly to share what you think and don't think about what others will think. [...] The mentorship program is a big big milestone in this.” - Hannah

Between the lines we interpret that she was a rather shy person to begin with and after participating, wanted to be noticed more. This is aligned with the second part of the phrase when she continued about speaking openly and not caring what others think and therefore, being able to make herself

visible. It seems that her confidence in herself was deepened through the program. Mentee Katherine considered visibility regarding career advancement at SecuritySolutions:

"But I know that I need to expand and you know, especially if I do want to become a leader in a leadership role and make an influence here. So I'm working on that and that [participating in the mentorship program] was definitely a step towards that." - Katherine

She had become aware of her need to become more visible and she especially considered the mentorship program to have had a major influence on her perceptibility in the company. Ryan continued by connecting visibility to the growth mindset:

"But this growth mindset was, I think it was, that has changed a little bit about how I see myself and like maybe more like I can take more responsibility or like thinking more like it's my responsibility to do things I can't just work and do my best and hope that somebody sees what I do." - Ryan

He highlighted that through the program he felt more capable to take more responsibility and knows himself better. Supposedly, participating in the mentorship program has resulted in Ryan understanding that his success in the company is dependent on his ability and courage to become more visible.

From our empirical analysis we interpret that mentees gained self-confidence through their participation in the program. They seemingly felt encouraged and capable to take over more responsibilities and showed courage. Furthermore, they wanted to be noticed more and therefore worked on their own visibility and spoke up more.

4.6 Organizational Outcomes

As outlined in the previous section, the process of the mentorship program resulted in personal development by mentees and ultimately also led to organizational outcomes. Thus, this section focuses on these organizational outcomes and therein highlights formation of new connections,

increased knowledge-sharing, deeper organizational understanding, and enhanced mentee engagement.



Forming new connections

Another aspect that became noticeable throughout our interviews was participants creating intra-organizational connections through the mentorship program. This can also be illustrated by the subsequent quotes:

"And you know, it's a nice thing about it [...], not just as a mentorship program but as a whole, like how they do it. It's really easy to connect with people from around the globe."- Michael

"For me, when I was applying it was really to meet someone else, network and meet the group, because it was going to be a group collaboration as well, meeting global counterparts". - Katherine

"We have a lot of employees globally, but it's very common to just sort of stay in your bubble and work with the people in the countries that you work with every day. So this program was really nice opportunity to get some connections outside of your day to day regular relationships." - Julia

"But now we kind of got some interconnection like people, different people, and so I think that was one a little bit important goal of the mentorship program." - Ryan

We can detect that many participants found the mentorship program to increase their intra-organizational connections. Similarly, mentee Katherine elaborated further on her perspective:

"It [intraorganizational connections] can help guide your experience because you're like 'Uh, they're doing that, that's a cool opportunity. How can I start to get something into that or is there something over here that's doing it?' or, you know, even within the US like, 'Oh, they're working on I want to work on that, [...] or 'They're my team, but they are in a different state and I didn't even know they were working on this but that's a really cool thing and let's talk about it or let's see how we can make it bigger and better!'. " - Katherine

From this quote we can derive that connecting with people from other regions, countries or different departments within the mentorship program and being exposed to their projects, inspired individuals. Katherine saw great value in exchanging ideas with others throughout the organization and specifically by stating "let's see how we can make it bigger and better" she demonstrated that collaborations through the program seemingly can result in improving SecuritySolutions. Furthermore, this quote also shows her commitment towards her work and the company. Seemingly, she appreciated being exposed to new perspectives within the organization. Meanwhile, mentee Ryan expressed that participating in the program lead to him being exposed to different areas at SecuritySolutions:

"I said that it could be interesting to hear what other people are doing in the organization, different parts of the organization. So, he kind of talked to some people and I would have these personal calls with them. And some of them were a little bit higher in the organization." - Ryan

Ryan expanded on taking the initiative in one of the meetings with his mentor when he proposed to reach out and connect to other departments in the organization. He emphasized that his mentor was the key to setting up these calls with people who were ranked higher in the organization than him. He indicated that this opportunity, as well as gaining insights to other areas of

SecuritySolutions, was only made possible through the relationship he established with his mentor in the program.

Increased Knowledge-sharing

Multiple participants elaborated on enhanced knowledge sharing throughout different regions and departments within the organization, which is illustrated by the following quote by mentee Hannah:

"How are we different and the same at the same company. And exchanging our learning, so exchanging our energies and exchanging our ideas of what [...] we can do together to improve both working styles and personal styles." - Hannah

She highlighted that exchanging ideas and knowledge led to overall improvements which everyone benefited from. Mentee Ryan revealed his perspective on knowledge-sharing and exploring other ideas through the mentorship program:

"I think the plan was, from those that arranged the program, that we should mix a little bit so we could kind of spread ideas over the organization. So, it would not be just like 'Okay, the people in Sweden, they think and do like this. And the ones in the US they do and think like this, '. You know, like different islands that are not connected." - Ryan

By describing "different islands", Ryan, similar to Michael, highlighted that especially in an internationally operating company, offices and people in varying countries act and think differently on certain topics. He emphasized that one of the initial objectives of the program was to exchange information and ideas with people and departments in different countries. Mentor Susan shared her perception on knowledge-sharing as a mentor in the program:

"'One day I got this kind of advice and it has been very useful for me, so I'm happy to share that with you and think about it and see if it is useful to you.'. So, I will say it's more sharing." - Susan

Susan regarded her role as a mentor to share recommendations that have helped her in her career with her mentee. Reading between the lines and also noticing her choice of words, we assume that Susan not only seemed to reflect on what she had to offer as a mentor but was willing to share her experience and useful suggestions in order for the other person to succeed at SecuritySolutions. Mentee George elaborated:

"Maybe not skills in that sense. I don't think, depending on how you say that I don't think we'll learn that type of skill in the mentorship program. It was more knowledge sharing and maybe personal growth." - George

According to him, program participants did not learn technical skills through the program but rather grew personally and attained soft skills. He also mentioned that knowledge is shared, which can be connected to our previous findings. Mentee Joe also told us about the benefits of sharing knowledge:

"He also comes every now and then 'Hey, I'm struggling with this in my work. How can I go about this?' And actually, [...] I do know the answer to that one. And for me it's one of those that I take out of my pocket, but I'm thinking because I am used to solving that type of problem. He didn't have those types of opportunities, so does not know how to solve them. " - Joe

He explained that he possessed knowledge in the form of solutions to problems, which his mentor had not been exposed to previously. Therefore, their exchange and the shared knowledge seemingly benefited both of them and hence also their departments as well as SecuritySolutions overall.

Deeper organizational understanding

Our empirical data hints that the mentorship program increased intra organizational and cross-functional connections and communication at SecuritySolutions. Accordingly, many participants found that the program impacted the participants' understanding of the entire company. This was exemplified by mentee Michael:

"I think my goal was to get a better understanding of someone else's job and how it affects me. [...] You're playing a checkers match, it is popular over here, right? And being siloed in a region, you're playing checkers, you're only narrowed you're looking at one view, but being able to talk to him and kind of understanding what he's going through and how it affects not just me, but everybody around the world. It's a chessboard now, I kind of have a better understanding of that stuff." - Michael

His statement displayed that Michael found the idea to better grasp another employee's role inside the organization through the mentorship program highly interesting. He underlined that working in a global company resulted in distant offices focusing on themselves rather than looking further outside their practices. Additionally, Michael reasoned that having someone to confide in who is located in a different country and department, exchanging ideas and views with this person, has increasingly broadened his perspective and understanding of processes in the company. He continued:

"It [participating in the mentorship program] has definitely kind of helped give me a much better understanding of a company that I thought I had a good understanding of." - Michael

Michael strengthened his view on the mentorship program having had a major impact in his interpretation of the company. He has enhanced his understanding of the company, even though he already had extensive knowledge through working there for more than seven years. Joe concluded:

"He [his mentor] really brings interesting input. And the funny thing is that [...] because he has a different perspective and sits in another position in the company, he is also able to see how my ideas and such, can benefit the company or even his work and that's very enriching. Because usually, I don't have those sorts of interactions, right? I don't know what other people are thinking. So, I only see things from my perspective and this fuller perspective is very, very, very helpful." -Joe

From this statement we can draw that the exchange Joe had with his mentor broadened his perspective to a far greater extent. Due to his mentor having a different view on certain processes and following other priorities, he was able to support Joe and offer considerations that varied

substantially from someone in the same department or position as Joe. Further, Joe emphasized his appreciation for the unique opportunity to form a more comprehensive perspective on his work and its connections within the company, through the relationship with his mentor. Mentor Julia further claimed:

“To really give, give back or help grow SecuritySolutions, the bigger SecuritySolutions, like I was saying, so getting beyond our own individual worlds and branching out and then looking for the good to help others and help grow the company.” - Julia

From this quote we can interpret that Julia found her role in the mentorship program as a mentor to benefit SecuritySolutions to a great extent. She found that through the program, individuals found ways to go beyond personal barriers and do more for the company, which contributed to a better SecuritySolutions overall.

Enhanced engagement

Another aspect became apparent through our data analysis. As highlighted in a previous segment, some mentees desired to become more visible in the company through the mentorship program and we further see that they are more engaged to contribute to SecuritySolutions growth. Michael elaborated on his view:

“ I would say that it's definitely kind of motivated me to keep kind of pushing, no matter what I do, whether I stay in the same position, or if I decided that I want to go for other positions. This kind of pushed me or motivated me to keep going with it and keep trying to learn and keep trying to be better.” - Michael

Apparently, the program enhanced Michael’s motivation to continuously develop himself. He further reasoned that the program could act as a funnel in order to recognize valuable employees for the company:

"I believe with the company [...], they hire good people and they want to keep those good people happy. And something like this mentorship is a way to identify people that they think are future leaders or people that could be promoted." - Michael

He believed the mentorship program facilitated identifying employees with leader ambitions or key players in the company that should receive more responsibility. Hannah strengthened his statement:

"What I can do in SecuritySolutions, I can look wider, and do wider and deeper and communicate with more colleagues with more companies. And bring in more value, more than my role is expected for example, [...] and it's good to understand for me and other team members, I think also understand this, that it's okay and it's appreciated. When you can do more, suggest more and it's okay. And company loves this." - Hannah

In her illustration, Hannah mentioned how her participation as a mentee resulted in her acknowledgement of her increased commitment in the organization to a much greater extent. She reflects that the “company loves this”. From her statement we can derive that the organization benefits from her personal development within the program such as her desire to work more thoroughly and being more engaged and hence, being a valuable employee.

Our findings demonstrate that mentees were more committed and engaged to contribute to the growth of the company due to their participation in the program.

4.7 Summary of Empirical Findings and Analysis

The analysis of our empirical data has shown that both, mentees and mentors, did not have a clear understanding of the mentorship program, neither when they applied nor when they got accepted. Nevertheless, we suggest that participants felt that taking part in the mentoring program was an extraordinary opportunity for a selective group of employees at SecuritySolutions, which made them feel distinctive. Our data hints towards a certain exclusivity surrounding the program. Furthermore, many participants revealed their intention to meet their own expectations as well as

the expectations surrounding the program, in order not to fail. They were thus highly invested and profoundly dedicated and committed towards the mentoring program.

Furthermore, while participants did not have considerable knowledge on the program, it became apparent that they showed extensive commitment and all participants created impactful relationships with their dyad partners. Initially, mentors and mentees became acquainted with each other, but soon, they established profound relationships, characterized by mutual trust as well as vulnerability. Seemingly, all participants described their relationship as successful. Consequently, taking part in the mentoring program and being in the mentoring relationship, led to a developmental process for mentees. Our empirical data suggests that the strong relationships created a safe space where the mentors acted as sounding boards and mentees were able to bounce ideas off. Furthermore, mentees felt encouraged and challenged by their mentors, but also guided into the right direction. Seemingly, mentees personally developed through the frequent exchange with their mentors. Personal growth was especially an outstanding topic for them and all of them were eager to grow and develop themselves. By understanding the perspectives of their mentors, they learned to cope with their personal challenges and felt more self-confident. This also led to their desire to be more visible within the company and to take on more responsibility. Subsequently, our empirical analysis demonstrates that the mentorship program created new connections across regions and departments within the company and enhanced intra-organizational knowledge-sharing. Through the participation in the program, mentees had an advanced understanding of the organization as a whole and were more committed to contribute to the growth and improvement of the SecuritySolutions.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, we draw upon our previously introduced empirical data and, while considering mentor voices, we focus on implications for the mentee. Therefore, we answer our presented research questions on the significance of the relationship in a formal mentorship program and how the mentees' identity is influenced by the mentorship program. By examining the significance of the mentoring relationship, and specifically discussing mentoring functions provided through the formal mentorship program at SecuritySolutions, we answer our first research question. In answering our second research question, we discuss three regulatory elements in the program that triggered identity work within mentee's. Usually, developmental tools such as the mentorship program are viewed solely positively, however, we want to take a critical stance and analyze whether it can be used as a tool to mold employees according to organizational interests. Therefore, the third section centers around the participants' increased understanding of the organization and their enhanced organizational identification. Ultimately, we conclude our findings and merge them in the form of a model.

5.1 The quality of the relationship

This section discusses the relationship between mentor and mentee in a formal mentorship program and investigates mentoring functions provided to mentees in detail. We consequently draw initial insights on the mentoring relationship as a whole, which is fundamental to eventually answer our first research question on the significance of the relationship in a formal mentorship program in a subsequent chapter.

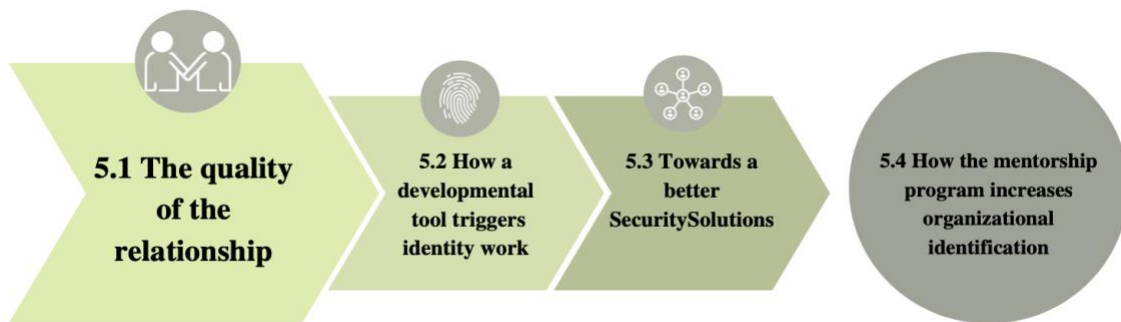


Figure 5: Structure of the Discussion

Accordingly, our findings demonstrate that the relationship of dyads in the formal mentorship program at SecuritySolutions illustrates a high degree of informality. While many participants illustrate having common ground with their partner in the mentoring dyad in the beginning of the program, they claim that through becoming acquainted, talking about personal matters, and feeling more comfortable in the relationship, they rapidly created a meaningful relationship with someone they feel they can confide in. All participants pointed towards relationships, characterized by trust among dyad partners, which helped to not only become more personal, but also understand the other person and their perspectives better. Accordingly, all participants highly enjoyed their mentoring relationships with their dyad partner. Primarily, our findings confirm that the relationship is fundamental in formal mentoring programs (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008; Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). Even though participants did not meet prior to participation, they quickly formed a meaningful relationship, which contradicts existing theory claiming that formal mentoring sometimes involves an extended adjustment period (Chao, Walz and Gardner, 1992). Our literature review has also shown that formal mentoring relationships resembling casual relationships, are more successful in providing profound mentoring functions (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). We thus reason that SecuritySolutions has reproduced informal mentoring relationships through their formal mentorship program, which is desired by many organizations (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008; Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). We interpret that the quality of the relationship is vital in a formal mentorship program to e.g., secure successful mentoring functions, which we will now discuss further.

Mentors becoming more than career counselors

We paid close attention to the mentoring functions provided by the mentors and their effect on mentees. As we investigated the mentorship program, several mentee's had mentors who provided challenging work assignments and highlighted the fact that their mentor guided them in their decision making and planning of future career. They further described their mentor pushing and challenging them and claimed to have a better understanding of their goals and their abilities through having someone to make them move forward. This is aligned with existing literature, where giving challenging work assignments is part of career-related mentoring functions (Kram, 1985). Furthermore, Gosh & Reio (2013) suggest that working on challenging work assignments leads to mentees moving out of their comfort zone and increased learning, which we also observed.

While our findings do not demonstrate mentee's hierarchical career advancement through career-related mentoring functions (Eleanor et al., 2008), we acknowledge that cross-departmental dyads may provide less career-related mentoring functions due to differing professional backgrounds (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Most mentees illustrated psychological functions provided by their mentor, which we will elaborate on in more detail. Several participants expressed that both dyad partners communicated openly, became vulnerable, and shared personal challenges. In turn, some mentees described their relationship as a friendship. 'Friendship' is one of the psychological mentoring functions, which strengthens the relationship as the mentee can develop trust and rely on the mentor's support (Kram, 1985). Besides, as previously highlighted, few mentees described their mentor as a sounding board, someone they could bounce thoughts and ideas off of. We also see a connection to Kram (1985), who mentions mentors acting as a sounding board as part of counseling, which is another mentoring function. We conclude that mentees saw their relationship as a safe space to turn to, in order to try out different approaches and vocalize ideas which they could not do in their usual work environment. This thus supports theory, claiming that a safe environment created through the mentor allows mentees to explore new approaches (Kram, 1985). Referring back to our finding that the relationships were filled with trust, we consequently argue that this was a vital aspect and characterizes the quality of the relationships in the program. In turn, mentees were feeling comfortable to be open, vulnerable, and feel comfortable enough to approach their mentor with ideas and thoughts. We draw a clear connection to Dymock (1999), who found that cross-departmental mentoring relationships provide a certain distance between the dyad partners, which facilitates talking about workplace topics. Apart from this finding, some mentees, while all had previous experience in the company, expressed "Being shy" in the beginning of the mentorship program. Similarly, another mentee opened up about his self-consciousness regarding new situations within the beginning of the program. Primarily, these mentees highlighted their increased self-confidence and courage through attending the mentorship program. While we cannot trace this finding back to the sole influence of their respective mentor, we suggest that mentees became more self-confident and gained courage through their mentoring relationship and partaking in the program. In the literature, providing psychological mentoring, and in particular role modeling, is said to positively affect mentee's self-esteem and level of confidence (Gosh & Reio, 2013), which is confirmed by our empirical data.

Besides this career-related mentoring function, mostly psychological mentoring functions were provided at SecuritySolutions from the beginning on. In this, our findings suggest that in particular friendship, acting as a sounding board as part of counseling behavior, and role-modeling were psychological functions offered by mentors. This is in accordance with literature on mentoring functions in formal mentoring programs, which suggests that formal mentoring participants experience more psychological functions compared to career-related functions (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2008; Chao et al., 1992). Furthermore, Bozeman and Feeney (2008) highlight the relevance of psycho-social support for mentees professional development, which the relationships at SecuritySolutions confirm. While taking into account that the psychological functions most likely intensified throughout the relationship, our findings contradict theory, describing career-related mentoring functions to prevail in the initial phases (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992).

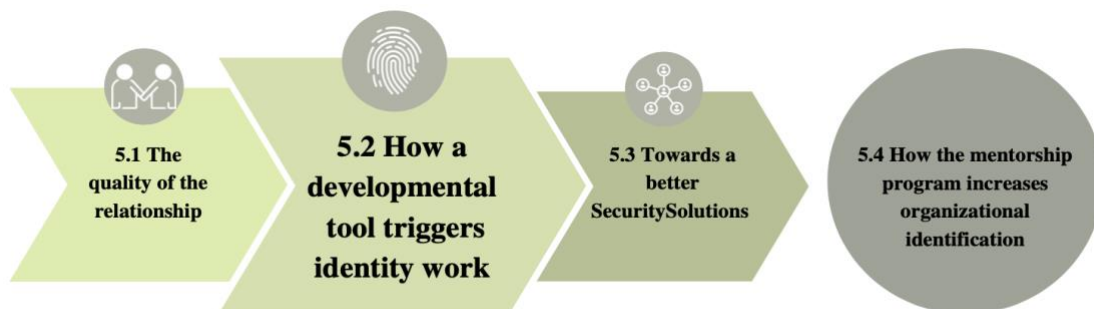
Considering our discussion on the quality of the relationship between mentor and mentee, we return to our first research question on *the significance of the relationship in a formal mentorship program*. We consequently draw initial insights on the relationship in the mentoring dyads as a whole, which is essential to answer our research question fully in a subsequent chapter. Thus, this section demonstrated that participants, despite not knowing their respective dyad partner beforehand, quickly formed a meaningful relationship. Therefore, dyads not only discussed professional and work-related topics, but also shared personal matters. Accordingly, mentees felt they had someone to confide in and our findings point towards a high degree of trust. This resulted in participants being vulnerable and thus ultimately strengthening the mentoring relationship. In turn, mentors provided career-related and psychological mentoring functions. Concerning career-related mentoring functions, our findings show that mentors provided challenging work assignments, resulting in mentees feeling challenged and growing personally. Furthermore, we identified that while the relationship enabled some career-related mentoring functions, our empirical data emphasized that it highly encouraged psychological mentoring functions, specifically friendship, counseling behavior as well as role modeling. Accordingly, our findings portray a meaningful relationship, profoundly providing psychological support, which is fundamental for the entirety of the program. We argue that only through establishing this deep relationship, the psychological functions could be provided to this extent. Yet, to grasp the complete significance of the relationship in a formal mentorship program, examining its influence on mentee's identity work is imperative.

5.2 How a developmental tool triggers identity work

Apart from the previous findings, our empirical data demonstrates the unique circumstances of the formal mentorship program at SecuritySolutions and its effect on each mentee. At SecuritySolutions, the mentorship program was facilitated and administered by a HR team that set the focus on the six aforementioned organizational goals:

- *Connect us across regions*
- *Generate a Growth mindset*
- *Build leaders of tomorrow*
- *Create impactful business relationships*
- *Engage and retain employees*
- *Foster diversity and inclusion*

We found that the frequent group sessions and meetings in their dyads surrounded the objectives set by the organization for the program, and consequently, the focus on the program objectives guided the experience among mentees. Our empirical findings indicated that participants specifically connected with global counterparts, created meaningful relationships, and were highly engaged through the program. In particular, all participants highlighted their eagerness to learn, which is connected to the growth mindset. Thus, to better understand the unique circumstances of the researched formal mentorship program, this section discusses different elements of the mentorship program that triggered identity work in mentees.



During our interviews we found mentorship program participants who were eager to develop themselves further through the program and described themselves as “Being a learner” and were

keen to look for learning opportunities. Accordingly, mentees had adopted the growth mindset and we interpret that mentees not only incorporated “Being a learner” into their identity, but also that being part of the mentorship program impacted how mentees wanted to see themselves and impacted their values. Indeed, we cannot reduce this finding to the sole influence of the mentorship program and need to consider the possibility that mentees enjoyed learning also before partaking in the program. Nevertheless, our findings exposed that the program goals were fundamental to the mentee’s experience, who seemingly adopted the program’s objectives and values. Hence, all objectives guided personal dyad meetings, while specifically “Generate a growth mindset” was vital for each mentee. While we acknowledge that the flexibility results in different dyads ultimately following different objectives, we argue that the program’s objectives acted as guiding themes for mentees development. Accordingly, mentoring relationships, characterized by mutuality, interdependence, and reciprocity, are described to help mentees to increasingly understand their values and identities (Kram, 1986). Furthermore, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016) found that social interactions result in differences between individual’s real and ideal self-views, which stimulate coping mechanisms to avoid a gap in their own self-identity. According to literature, identities are formed through social reflections, interactions, and comparisons (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hatch & Schultz, 2002), which shape, repair, maintain, and revise one’s identity, particularly through the distinction to others. Accordingly, as the program is based on social interactions, this is confirmed by our findings, and we see a connection to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), describing that identity is a continuous process in which individuals attempt to make sense of what they do and who they are. Further, Caza, Vough, and Puranik (2018) claim that identity work not only reinforces one’s own, but also creates a new identity, which our findings support.

Moreover, while we see “Growth mindset” as a regularly used expression in the field of development, it is a rather outstanding term in the usual working environment. Nevertheless, each interviewee mentioned the “Growth mindset”, which we find peculiar. We suggest that the organization was keen on having employees that are eager to learn and develop themselves further and thus stressed the term “Growth mindset” in the program. Hence, we draw a connection to theory, Alvesson and Willmott (2002), who claim that the organization influences an individual's identity. They further reason that individuals adjust their identity with regard to organizational interests, and thus integrate managerial goals, which our findings accordingly confirm.

Consequently, we outline that the mentorship program at SecuritySolutions represents a tool to trigger identity work. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) state that identity regulation can be performed through the usage of language, which our data clearly confirms. We thus argue that, while we do acknowledge mentees following their identity in following developmental initiatives and demonstrating enhanced engagement after finishing the program, we see a clear organizational influence on their desire to learn and grow within the company. We thus suggest that the six program goals overall guided mentees' experience in the program, while the objective to "Generate a growth mindset" in particular directed them. Similar to Alvesson and Willmott (2002), we acknowledge that identity regulation might just be a by-product of the acts of the organization instead of an intentional manipulation to retain employees. Accordingly, we recognize that partaking in a mentorship program targeting personal and professional development, may automatically and unintentionally affect the mentee's identity. Nevertheless, considering that the program emphasized six specific objectives, with one specifically labeled "Engage and retain employees", we argue that some components within the mentorship program seemingly functioned as intentional mechanisms to actively trigger identity work. Accordingly, these components are:

1. Mentor Selection
2. Exclusivity surrounding the program
3. Mentee Development

While all components except for 'Mentee Development' were described by mentors as well as mentees, our findings strongly indicate their influence on mentees identity. Subsequently, we thus provide detailed discussions of the identified aspects that triggered identity work of mentees in the mentorship program at SecuritySolutions.

Selection of Mentors

This section examines the selection of mentors for the program and further considers mentors' influence on triggering mentee's identity work.

While knowledge-sharing was not explicitly stated as one of the six program objectives, intra-organizational competence exchange, which accordingly includes sharing knowledge, initiated the establishment of the mentorship program. As outlined, mentees built meaningful relationships with

their mentors and thus predominantly shared knowledge and experiences with more experienced individuals in the organization. Through comparable little investment by the organization, knowledge was independently and voluntarily shared amongst mentoring dyads, which we argue to be highly valuable for SecuritySolutions. Our empirical analysis demonstrated that mentors wanted to give back and enhance not only individuals in the organization, but SecuritySolutions itself. Furthermore, some mentees mentioned their profound trust established with their mentors, which we interpret to have facilitated and increased mentors' influence on them. From our findings, we interpret that knowledge shared by mentors included, but was not limited to, their experience and thus also organizational values and norms. Therefore, we assume that the HR team selected those mentor applicants, who not only had experience in the organization, but also embodied the company's values and culture the most and would thus be appropriate mentors. This is especially interesting, considering that mentors advise their mentee on development and growth (Lankau & Scandura), which our findings also demonstrate. Furthermore, we draw a connection to Pratt et al. (2018), who argue that the organizational identity can be communicated and shown. Hence, we interpret mentors acting as mediators between mentees and the organization and seemingly replicating the organizational identity. By establishing these connections, we think that the organization in turn triggered identity work. This is in accordance with Alvesson and Willmott (2002), who state that the organization has the power to influence identity work and thereby conduct control. Therefore, selecting the "right" employees to mentor was essential and ultimately triggered identity work.

Exclusivity surrounding the program

The second regulatory element is the program's exclusivity, which is discussed in the following section with regard to triggering identity work.

Additionally, our findings also outlined an interesting twist: While no participants were certain what topics the program discussed, nor understood the specific mentoring process, our findings demonstrated that everyone was highly committed towards the program. We acknowledge that the flexibility granted by the program facilitators might have enhanced participants' commitment. We also recognize that all participants established a meaningful relationship throughout the program that potentially influenced their commitment. Nevertheless, our empirical findings point towards

a certain exclusivity surrounding the program and we suggest that belonging to this prestigious group created a feeling of being distinctive and thus of importance, which triggered identity work and ultimately increased commitment. We draw a strong connection to literature claiming that identities are formed through comparison and reflection (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Identity work occurs in distinction to others (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016) which the exclusivity provides. In the literature, formal mentorship programs are described to potentially result in less commitment due to organizational administration and lack of personal connection (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). Hence, while acknowledging the existing flexibility and established relationship, we reason that belonging to an exclusive group triggered identity work which increased participants commitment.

Additionally, we also observed that the exclusivity resulted in a particular pressure for both, mentors and mentees. Participants desired to live up to the expectations coming along with being a mentor or mentee and reported a fear of failure. Despite seeing the program as an opportunity to develop, our data indicates that mentees felt that they had to live up to expectations of the program and prepare diligently. We thus think that they not only wanted to be seen as competent mentees, but also as good employees. Consequently, our empirical material hints towards participants' fear of disappointing their dyad partner, which is consistent with literature on formal mentoring, describing that being selected to an exclusive program may raise expectations regarding the program (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2008). We further see a strong connection to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), who argue that identity in the work environment also attempts to balance one's role expectations. We thus interpret that through being in the social context of the mentorship program, mentees felt to meet the expectations of their role in the program. Identity work also aims to reduce tension (Caza, Cough, & Puranik, 2018), which we clearly recognize in mentees' fear to fail and in turn striving to be good employees by showing high commitment. Consequently, our findings highlight that the program's exclusiveness triggered identity work for mentees, which primarily resulted in participants' need to justify their participation and in turn demonstrated heightened commitment.

Mentee Development

The following section discusses Mentee Development as a regulatory element in the mentorship program and particularly discusses mentees' task-related and personal learning with regard to the 'Typology of Learning' (Lankau & Scandura, 2008).

Considering that the mentorship program was a development initiative for mentees, learning is an important aspect that became apparent in our empirical data. Accordingly, all mentees claimed to have shared knowledge with their mentor and have thereby learned new competencies, especially soft skills, that are useful for their daily work tasks. Remarkably, while all participants stated to have learned on important topics, such as cultural differences, and some soft skills, none stated to have learned technical skills. Our findings indicate that mentees learned about organizational expectations and behaviors through their mentor's use of vocabulary which is important to SecuritySolutions, such as the "growth mindset". Our empirical data analysis also offers a detailed account on some mentees grasping a broader understanding of their role in the organization, as well as in relation to other organizational positions. Besides, some mentees highlighted that they acquired performance methods for their new job position through the mentorship program. To our surprise, our data also suggests that all mentees became more adaptable towards uncertain situations, portrayed a better understanding of themselves through the program, and grew personally.

Our findings are in accordance with the literature, which describe mentoring as a process focused on competence enhancement and learning, resulting in benefiting the participants (Allen & O'Brien, 2006; Lankau and Scandura, 2008; Newsome, Ku, Murray, Smith, Powell, Hawkins, Branan, & Bland, 202). Thus, while our findings support literature describing mentorship as a process to share knowledge as well as social capital informally (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), they contradict Karkouljian, Halawi and McCarthy's (2008) reasoning, that shared knowledge is usually not utilized among mentees in formal mentoring programs. While previous research has solely focused on technical skill acquisition through mentorship, according to Kram (1985) and Dymock (1999), mentoring relationships also facilitate professional and personal development. While none of the participants reported technical skill acquisition through mentoring, our findings confirm professional and personal development. Regarding personal learning, as mentioned in our

literature review, Lankau and Scandura (2008) provide the “Typology of Learning Outcomes”. It discusses four types of learning and focuses on the two dimensions context-specific or context-free learning, as well as task and personal learning. Existing research claims that mentoring leads to context-specific task and personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2008) and Dymock (1999) also found context-free task-related learning. Our findings are thus aligned with the developed concept of personal and professional development. Meanwhile, most mentees acquired not only context-specific task and personal learning, but also context-free task-related learning. Besides, our empirical data further contributes to research, by demonstrating acquisition of context-free and personal learning by mentees, leading to personal identity growth. Accordingly, our empirical findings demonstrate that personal learning was a fundamental aspect in the formal mentorship program at SecuritySolutions and resulted in personal identity growth. We thus interpret mentee development to be a regulatory element, due to mentees learning about the organization and their mentors' experience in it and also generating personal identity growth.

The previous chapter reasoned how the mentorship program at SecuritySolutions triggered and thus simultaneously regulated identity work of mentees through three regulatory elements. Consequently, Selection of Mentors, Exclusivity surrounding the program, as well as Mentee Development were identified as the regulatory elements in the program and closely examined.

5.3 Towards a better SecuritySolutions

After identifying three regulatory elements in the mentorship program that trigger identity work, this chapter explores mentees' increased organizational understanding and then investigates the enhancement of high-performing employees. Subsequently, we draw implications on mentees' organizational identification.



Our findings indicate that the organizational identity, while not explicitly stated, was talked about and demonstrated in the group sessions and private dyad meetings. We conclude that the mentorship thus gave room for participants to perform or experience the organizational identity, which is in accordance with Pratt et al. (2018), who describe communication of the organizational identity through saying, showing, and staging.

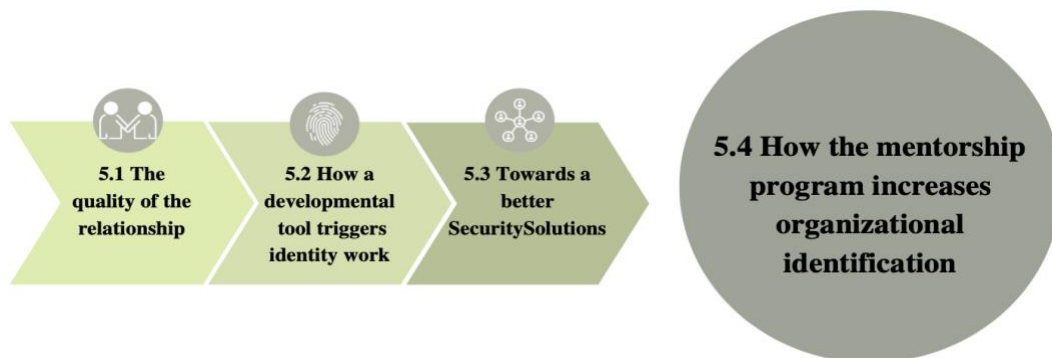
Moreover, through participating in the program, specifically regarding their intra-organizational meaningful relationship, it became apparent that mentees gained a broader perspective outside their usual field of view. This ultimately resulted in an increased understanding of the organization as a whole and participants' enhanced willingness and commitment to look for ways to improve SecuritySolutions itself. Our findings support Dymock (1999), who presents cross-departmental mentoring relationships to enhance mentees' understanding of the organization. While our findings do not provide evidence on the program's effect regarding organizational performance (Singh, Bains & Vinnicombe, 2002), we strongly reason that mentee's future actions are in accordance with their broad perspective on SecuritySolutions and enhanced identification with it. This is aligned with Baugh and Fagenson-Eland (2008), who argue that mentorship positively influences mentees engagement towards the organization.

As outlined, some mentees refrained from speaking up and did not feel comfortable in their professional role. Thus, despite some mentees discussing their initial low self-confidence, all mentees were eager to develop themselves further within SecuritySolutions as well as be more engaged in the organization and also sought after ways to improve it after graduating from the mentorship program. Whilst some mentees displayed self-consciousness in the beginning of the program, their eagerness to personally develop and to partake in the mentorship program prevailed.

Hence, we reason on one hand that all mentees were keen on developing themselves further and thereby improving SecuritySolutions. We found that initially self-conscious individuals, despite being proactive, only recognized their full potential in the organization through the program. Our empirical findings thus complement existing literature (Allen & O'Brien, 2006; Eleanor et al., 2008), claiming that high-performing employees with a proactive attitude are more likely to participate in developmental organizational initiatives, such as mentorship programs. We reason that SecuritySolutions hence identified highly valuable employees. Furthermore, Allen et al. (2004) highlight that partaking in mentoring may increase not only job satisfaction, but also mentees' career commitment, which our data supports. We identified mentees' high satisfaction at Security Solutions through the program and in turn confirm theory, suggesting mentorship to reduce turnover (Aryee & Chay, 1994; Lankau & Scandura, 2008). Consequently, we suggest that the mentorship program not only identified, but rather profoundly advanced employees holding a high potential to enhance the organization in the long-term.

Clearly, mentees felt greater unity towards SecuritySolutions, and their intra-organizational connections provided an increased sense of belonging to the organization as a whole rather than solely to their department or country-specific office. According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2016), organizational members tend to identify with their departments or professional affiliations, rather than the organization itself, which is contradictory to our findings. Furthermore, intra-organizational exchange, as provided by the program, results in people feeling closer to the organization and identifying with it (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016; Ashforth & Mael, 1989), which our findings demonstrate. We suggest that mentees at SecuritySolutions identified with the organizational identity, creating greater unity and seeing themselves as part of SecuritySolutions, as a greater "we" (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016).

5.4 How the mentorship program increases organizational identification



Taking up on our discussion on regulatory elements in the program triggering identity work in mentees, and their enhanced organizational identification, we now first answer our second research question on *the influence of the mentorship program on the mentees' identities*. First and foremost, we identified that the social context of a formal mentorship program resulted in participants seeing themselves in distinction to others. Thus, through comparison and reflection, mentees became aware of a gap between their real and ideal self-view, which resulted in identity work. Consequently, we classified three regulatory components in the mentorship program that triggered identity work. Accordingly, mentors were selected and demonstrated a desire to help individuals as well as the organization to become better. We reasoned that, through sharing their values and communicating as well as showing the organizational identity, mentors acted as mediators between mentees and the organization, influencing mentees' identity. Moreover, we suggest that the intentional selection of mentors also functioned as a regulatory element. Furthermore, we have observed that mentees felt chosen and distinctive because the program was highly selective. Seemingly, besides hoping to contribute towards a valuable mentoring experience as good employees, mentees also feared failure. These aspects in turn triggered identity work and resulted in enhanced commitment. Hence, we classified exclusivity as a regulatory element, influencing mentees' identity through identity work. Additionally, considering the safe environment provided by the mentoring relationship, mentees also personally developed. Through grasping and learning knowledge important to the organization and their mentors, mentees' development process triggered identity work and ultimately resulted in personal identity growth. Consequently, through

these three regulatory elements which triggered identity work in mentees, the program influenced mentees' identity.

However, to understand the program comprehensively, we return to our first research question on *the significance of the relationship in a formal mentorship program*. As previously established, the mentoring relationship was an essential part of the program. Building on the pillars of trust and vulnerability, enabled mentees to be seemingly honest and open with their mentors and thus exchange ideas freely. Taking the previous elaboration into account, we further suggest that establishing a meaningful relationship functioned as a prerequisite to enable the before discussed three regulatory elements. Thus, besides the relationship's importance to provide psychological mentoring functions, we suggest that the relationship was also highly significant in order to trigger identity work through regulatory elements in the formal mentorship program.

The explained phenomena led us to the development of the following model:

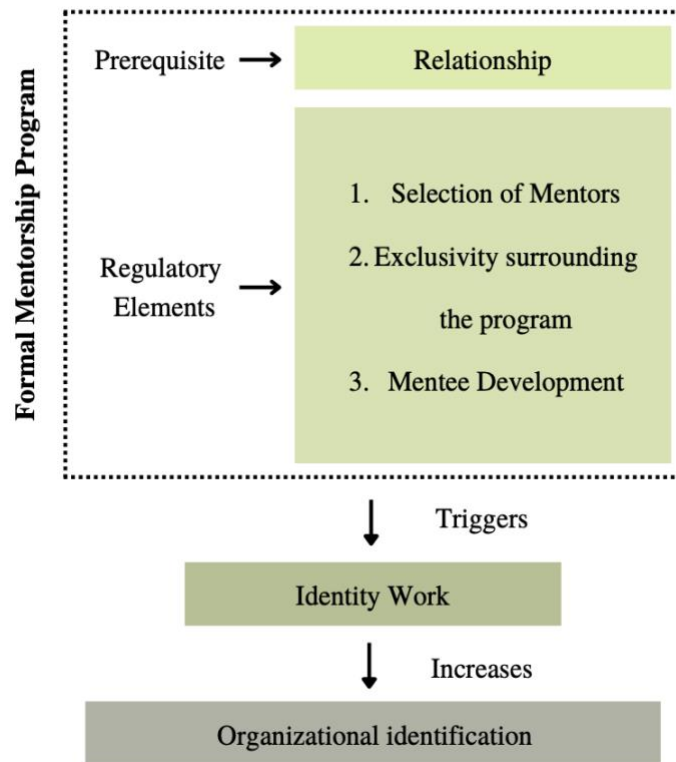


Figure 6: Constructing identity through mentoring

The three regulatory elements triggered identity work in mentees and thus the organization was able to mold their employees' identities according to their interests which ultimately increased organizational identification. Consequently, the program created meaningful relationships which were essential to enable triggering identity work and thus increase mentees' organizational identification.

6. Conclusion

For this research, a qualitative case study was conducted at SecuritySolutions, where we researched a formal mentorship program. In drawing upon the interpretative and critical research tradition, we aimed to get a profound understanding of participants' interpretations of the formal mentorship program. The subsequent chapter summarizes our main findings, in line with our theoretical contributions as well as practical implications. Finally, we consider limitations to the study and outline opportunities for future research.

6.1 Main Findings

Our first research question on *the significance of the relationship in a formal mentorship program* resulted in the following findings. A strong relationship, built on the pillars of trust and vulnerability, created a safe learning environment for mentees which was necessary for their development. Furthermore, having a meaningful relationship with the mentor enabled psychological mentoring functions. Additionally, the relationship was also identified as a prerequisite to trigger identity work. We thus argue that the relationship between mentee and mentor is highly significant in a formal mentorship program.

Then, we evaluated our second research question on *how the mentees' identity is influenced by the mentorship program* and classified three elements of the program which triggered identity work and hence influenced mentees' identity. Firstly, the facilitators of the program selected mentors who were able to transmit the organizational values to mentees and thus act as mediators between mentees and the organization. Secondly, the exclusiveness of the program created the feeling of being distinctive to others and hence, triggered identity work. As a consequence, mentees felt special and were highly committed to be good mentees and also employees. Thirdly, the development of mentees demonstrated personal identity growth and occurred according to the program goals and therefore, mentees were influenced into an already determined direction. As mentees were highly engaged towards their own development and the success of their mentoring experience, they actively performed identity work.

From our results we witnessed an interesting phenomenon: The observed identity work enhanced the organizational identification of mentees. After the program ended, mentees were highly

engaged and willing to do more for SecuritySolutions which consequently resulted in “a bigger SecuritySolutions” as the quote from the mentor Julia in the beginning of our thesis claimed. The mentorship program not only functioned as a development tool for mentees but enhanced organizational identification of mentees and hence improved the overall organization.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

The following part illustrates our theoretical contributions based on our main findings and the practical implications we were able to draw from our data analysis.

Theoretical Contributions

More and more businesses establish mentoring programs and the topic has also gained attention within research during the last decades (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Yu & Lee, 2021). However, most of the literature focuses on career development (Fisher & Juran, 2020) and literature regarding mentoring functions and particular components of the relationship is rather scarce (Ragins & Cotton, 1990). Several researchers claimed a need for more qualitative studies (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), which created the motivation for our research. Hence, we add to the existing literature by making sense of the participants’ interpretations. Through conducting an abductive qualitative in-depth case study, we have outlined the significance of the mentoring relationship within a formal mentorship program and the influence of the program on mentees’ identities.

Through our abductive research approach, we found a phenomenon and developed the model “Constructing identity through mentoring” (see Figure 6). It analyzes how the formal mentorship program triggers mentees’ identity work and its impact on their organizational identity. We have outlined that the relationship, built on the pillars of trust and vulnerability, is a prerequisite that enables the three regulatory elements in the program. The three elements, namely Selection of mentors, Exclusivity surrounding the program, and Mentee Development, trigger identity work, which leads to an enhanced organizational identification of mentees. Therefore, the organization had an essential influence on mentees’ identities.

We further offer the following three theoretical contributions:

1. We have found that formal mentorship programs mostly provide psychological mentorship functions and only few career-related mentoring functions, which supports existing theory (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2008).
2. Matching dyads with individuals from different countries and professional backgrounds increases participants' organizational understanding. This supports the findings of Dymock (1999).
3. We found that formal mentorship programs result in context-free and context-specific, task-related, as well as personal learning of mentees, which supports Lankau and Scandura's (2008) 'Typology of Learning'.

We contribute to existing academic research on mentorship programs by following the theory generating approach and thus being able to generalize our findings to other formal mentorship programs at large (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Practical Implications

Throughout our research and especially the data collection and analysis, we gained rich insight into success factors of the program. We draw the following practical implications for improvement for SecuritySolutions as well as other companies with formal mentoring programs:

1. Firstly, the **matching of mentors and mentees should be cross-regional and cross-departmental**, which facilitates open communication and organizational understanding.
2. Secondly, the program should be **exclusive** and requires an application process
3. **Conducting group sessions with all participants** in the cohort enhances the exchange between different mentoring dyads and also serves as inspiration for discussions in private mentoring meetings.
4. Formal **mentorship programs should communicate clear goals**, which guide mentees' experience.

5. Also, **mentors must be carefully selected**. They should be valuable employees who fully share the values and objectives of the company.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Due to the time scope of our thesis, we were merely able to conduct research after participants finished or were close to finishing the mentorship program. In order to better grasp participants' interpretations in varying phases of the mentoring relationship, conducting a longitudinal study would be necessary. Therein, interviews can be held throughout the duration of the mentorship program and be timed to group sessions and private dyad meetings. Furthermore, observations in group sessions could be beneficial to grasp the dynamic and thus enrich the study.

By performing a qualitative case study, we could concentrate on internationally located participants situated in the same organization and also gained profound understanding of participants' interpretations of the formal mentorship program. However, considering that organizations establish formal mentorship programs with different program objectives, conducting a similar case study in other organizations can strengthen and supplement our findings.

Moreover, taking into consideration that our study only involved one person from the respective mentoring dyad, it would be worth conducting further research with a bigger sample size. While we believe that our interviewees shared the beliefs and perceptions of other program participants, it would be interesting to adjust the sample size of the interviewees. Further, it would be of interest to conduct a study involving both dyad partners to receive a more holistic view of the relationship. It could also be of interest to apply a gender perspective and research possible differences between same-sex or mixed-sex dyads regarding the relationship and the outcomes. Also focusing on solely female programs and research possible career-advancements through the program could be an opportunity for new insights.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Interview Overview

| Nr. | Interviewee | Date | Mentee/Mentor | Location | Year of participation |
|-----|---------------|------------|---------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Hannah (F) | 24.03.2022 | Mentee | Russia | 2020/2021 |
| 2 | Michael (M) | 24.03.2022 | Mentee | USA | 2021/2022 |
| 3 | Amy (F) | 24.03.2022 | Mentee | Sweden | 2020/2021 |
| 4 | Susan (F) | 25.03.2022 | Mentor | Singapore | 2021/2022 |
| 5 | George (M) | 28.03.2022 | Mentee | Sweden | 2020/2021 |
| 6 | Joe (M) | 29.03.2022 | Mentee | Sweden | 2021/2022 |
| 7 | Katherine (F) | 29.03.2022 | Mentee | USA | 2020/2021 |
| 8 | Ryan (M) | 31.03.2022 | Mentee | Sweden | 2020/2021 |
| 9 | Julia (F) | 08.04.2022 | Mentor | USA | 2021/2022 |

Appendix B - Interview Guide

Interview Guideline for Semi-Structured interviews Master Thesis Jana Bernhardt & Laura Warlich

Ice Breaker:

- How are you doing?
 - First of all, thank you so much for taking the time for this interview, it will last for approximately 45 minutes.
-

Introduction:

- Before we start we want you to know that:
 1. Firstly, all material including your name will be anonymized for the University and also for SecuritySolutions.
 2. Therefore, we want to invite you to be open with us and share your perception of what is going on → There's no right or wrong
 3. Additionally, we would like to record this interview to simplify our analysis after the interview. The audio files will be deleted after our analysis and won't be handed over to third parties. Is that alright with you?
 - Demographics: Name, Gender, Age, Department, Location
-

Main Body: *Divided into categories, not all will be covered in every interview*

About the Person:

- Could you introduce yourself briefly?
- What is your role in the company?

About the Mentorship program:

- What is the mentorship program about?
- Are you a mentor or mentee?
- Are you a current or past participant?

- Before applying - What did you know about the program?
- What did you think about the mentorship program (before applying)?
- Did you hear much about it?
- What did people normally talk about regarding the program?
- What made you apply to the program?

- How do you look upon the program?
- What did you like about the program?
- Were there any particular challenges within the program? Things to be improved?

- What have you personally learned from the program?
- Have you used that knowledge in your daily work? How?
- Can you pinpoint to a skill/learning that comes from the program?
- How has the mentorship program impacted your day to day work?
- If you wouldn't have done the program, would you think differently on some things?
- Has the program changed the way you see challenges in your daily work?
- What would you recommend future participants?

Relationship

You have a relationship with your mentor/mentee:

- Can you describe the relationship?
- How do you look upon the relevance/importance of the relationship to your mentor/mentee?
- What do you talk about with your mentee/mentor?

Build leaders of tomorrow (career development)

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- Is there anything you want to achieve? What?
- Are there challenges on the way to it?
 - *What kind of challenges do you see in reaching your goal?*
 - *How could the mentorship program change something about it/ prepare you?*
- How would you describe an ideal leader/manager?
 - *@ Mentor do you see yourself as such a leader?*
 - *@Mentee Do you think the program has helped you become such a leader?*
 - *Has the program changed your view on what is a good leader?*

Connect us across regions:

- Is your mentee/mentor from another region/country?
- Has the mentorship helped you to connect to people from other regions/countries?
 - *What does this look like? (e.g. lots of contact, gaining new perspectives, gaining new business insights from other locations)*
 - *Do you know more people from different countries than your own through the program?*
 - *Do you think you can reach out to more people within SecuritySolutions for help or support since participating in the program?*

Create impactful business relationships:

- Do you think you will stay in contact with your mentee/mentor?
 - *In what way would you expect further contact to look like?*
 - *How might it be helpful for you?*
 - *Have you connected with other people through the program?*

Engage and retain employees:

- How did you feel when you got accepted into the program?
- Has the program changed how you see SecuritySolutions as an employer?
 - *In what way?*
 - *How do you look upon this change?*

Final phase :

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Do you have further questions?

We thank you very much for your time and all the interesting insights! If you like, we are happy to provide you with a version of our master thesis at the end of May and can just say that we wish you all the best.

Follow-up questions: - Raised throughout the interview to gain a more profound understanding

- What does this mean to you?
- How did that make you feel?

Declaration of Authorship

Hereby, we confirm that we have independently constructed this paper, where no other resources than the ones mentioned were utilized. All literature extracted from books, articles, and papers and presented analogously or as a quote have been specified by indicating the relevant source. Moreover, this paper has been presented to Lund University School of Economics and Management as an examination office solely. Lastly, we declare that all interviews conducted have been transcribed, which are all available upon request.

Jana Bernhardt & Laura Kristin Warlich

Lund, 20th of May 2022