MENTORING PROGRAMS TAKING SHAPE

Mentor Experiences in Two Finnish Governmental Organizations

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Abstract

Mentoring research has found mentoring to be beneficial. On the other hand, there are some doubts about the universality of these benefits and questions about how academic literature has applied terminology to developmental interactions, such as mentoring, it has proclaimed to research. The effects of mentoring have been regarded as quite unidirectional, but research has started to consider mentoring relationships more mutual in nature. Alternative mentoring models, such as peer mentoring, have received some academic attention but remain underresearched. Modern work environments demand continuous learning from all employees. Understanding of models that support the personal development of employees is valuable for modern organizations. The purpose of this study is to gain information about mentoring programs in Finnish governmental organizations, and to understand how mentoring programs are adapted to suit the implementing organizations.

This is a qualitative multiple case study that considers the mentor point-of-view. I interviewed eight employees, from two organizations, who at the time of this research were acting as mentors. I analysed the data in the tradition of thematic analysis. The mentoring programs are called learning mentoring programs. However, learning mentoring as a term does not feature prominently in previous research literature. The mentors and protégés, or actors, resemble peers. In other words, they are not separated by rank or seniority in the sense that is usually associated with a traditional mentor-protégé relationship. In addition to literature concerned with traditional mentoring and design elements of formal mentoring programs, this thesis engages literature concerned with peer mentoring. This thesis adds to the academic discussion regarding how to position studies that deal with mentoring concepts that are difficult to categorize.

Mentoring activity is always strongly tied to the context it appears in. This is evident in the results of this thesis. The organizations have put mentoring into practice in various ways. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is not to provide general conclusions about learning- or peer mentoring, but rather to explore how mentoring is implemented in formal programs. The findings indicate that mentors can be influential in shaping how mentoring programs take shape. The examined programs have predetermined elements, but the mentors have been highly involved in planning and executing the mentoring activity. The findings also provide some indication that the commonly understood concept of a traditional mentor-protégé relationship serves as a reference point as mentors reflect on their mentoring work.

The results of this study highlight the importance of including mentors in planning the practical implementation of mentoring, but also the importance of providing them with sufficient support. The results also suggest that how mentoring activity is defined at the beginning of a program can influence how mentors perceive their mentoring work.

Keywords Mentoring, peer mentoring, peer relationships, formal mentoring program, pilot program, learning mentoring, developmental interaction, mentor, protégé, actor, thematic analysis

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Tiivistelmä

Aiempi tutkimus on arvioinut mentoroinnin olevan hyödyllistä. Toisaalta on esitetty kysymyksiä siitä, voidaanko mentoroinnin todeta tuottavan hyötyä kaikissa tapauksissa, sekä siitä miten tutkimus on luokitellut ja nimennyt tutkimusaiheitaan henkilökohtaista kehitystä tavoittelevaa vuorovaikutusta, kuten mentorointia, tarkastellessaan. Perinteisesti mentoroinnin vaikutusten on nähty olevan melko yksisuuntaisia, mutta tutkimuskirjallisuus on sittemmin alkanut tarkastella mentorointisuhteita vastavuoroisempina yhteyksinä. Vaihtoehtoiset mentoroinnin muodot, kuten vertaismentorointi, ovat herättäneet jonkinasteista kiinnostusta akatemiassa, mutta ne ovat toistaiseksi verrattain harvalti tutkittu aihe. Moderni työelämä vaatii jatkuvaa oppimista kaikilta organisaation jäseniltä ja moderneille organisaatioille on hyötyä työntekijöiden kehitystä tukevien mallien ymmärryksestä. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoite on kerätä tietoa mentorointiohjelmista suomalaisissa valtionhallinnon organisaatioissa ja rakentaa ymmärrystä siitä, miten mentorointiohjelmia räätälöidään organisaatioiden tarpeisiin.

Kyseessä on kvalitatiivinen monitapaustutkimus, jonka tarkastelun kohteena on mentorinäkökulma aiheeseen. Haastattelin kahdeksaa työntekijää kahdesta organisaatiosta. Tutkimuksen tekohetkellä he toimivat mentoreina pilottivaiheen mentorointiohjelmissa. Datan analysointi suoritettiin temaattisen analyysin menetelmin. Organisaatiot kutsuvat kyseisten ohjelmien toimintaa oppimismentoroinniksi. Tämä termi esiintyy kuitenkin harvoin kirjallisuudessa. Mentorit ja mentoroitavat, tai aktorit, vaikuttavat keskenään vertaisilta eivätkä heidän väliset suhteensa muistuta perinteistä mentori-mentoroitava-asetelmaa. Siksi perinteistä mentorointia ja mentorointiohjelmien elementtejä tarkastelleen tutkimuskirjallisuuden lisäksi tämä tutkielma tutustuu myös vertaismentorointia käsitelleeseen aiempaan kirjallisuuteen. Tämä tutkielma liittyy osaksi akateemista keskustelua, joka käsittelee mentorointitutkimusten asemointia tutkimuskentällä.

Mentorointi on tutkimusaiheena aina kontekstisidonnainen, mikä heijastuu tämän tutkimuksen tuloksissa. Tarkastelluissa organisaatioissa mentorointitoiminta on hyvin monimuotoista. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena ei ole esittää yleistettäviä johtopäätöksiä oppimis- tai vertaismentoroinnista vaan tarkastella millä tavoin mentorointia viedään organisaatioissa käytäntöön. Tutkimuksen tulokset indikoivat, että mentorien rooli toiminnan suunnittelussa ja täytäntöönpanossa. Tulokset antavat myös viitteitä siitä, että yleisesti ymmärretty perinteisen mentoroinnin konsepti toimii kiintopisteenä mentoreille heidän reflektoidessa omaa mentorointityötään.

Tämän tutkielman johtopäätökset korostavat mentorien osallistamisen tärkeyttä mentorointiohjelmia suunniteltaessa, sekä tarvittavan tuen ja ajan tarjoamista mentorityötä tekeville. Tulokset vihjaavat myös, että miten mentorointitoiminta määritellään ja nimetään ohjelman alussa voi vaikuttaa siihen miten mentorit tarkastelevat omaa mentorointityötään.

Avainsanat Mentorointi, oppimismentorointi, vertaismentorointi, mentorointiohjelma, pilottiohjelma, mentori, aktori, temaattinen analyysi

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1. **Introduction**

This thesis studies two mentoring programs in two Finnish governmental organizations. One of the organizations is Maanmittauslaitos, or National Land Survey of Finland. The other case organization is Palkeet, whose full title in Finnish is Valtion talous- ja henkilöstöhallinnon palvelukeskus, and in English it goes by the name The Finnish Government Shared Services Centre for Finance and HR. Both organizations have recently implemented mentoring programs, which are in their pilot phases at the time this study is conducted. The case organizations, mentors participating in the mentoring programs, and the training provided to the case companies' mentors by Sosped-Säätiö dub the programs, and the mentoring activity that happens in these programs, oppimismentorointi or learning mentoring in English. This thesis examines the mentors' points-of-view to these programs through interviewing them about their experiences at the implementation phase of the case companies' mentoring programs.

Continuous learning is a requisite ability for modern workers and organizations alike. Organizations are under constant pressure to transform themselves, which means their employees need to constantly learn and re-learn as well. Relatedly, Botha, Kourie and Snyman, (2008) argue that modern organizations' key assets are intellectual capital and knowledge. It is argued, that mentoring programs can prove a valid method in managing these assets, because mentoring has been found to produce positive learning outcomes (e.g. Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, Dubois. 2008; Ragins & Kram. 2007). Furthermore, various types of information and support have been found to be imparted via mentoring relationships (Kram & Isabella. 1985) and research has found "clear differences in outcomes between mentored and nonmentored individuals." (Chao, Walz, & Gardner. 1992. p. 632) Although some research has criticized the mentoring research field for often failing to compare mentored and non-mentored individuals as the benefits accrued through mentoring are evaluated. Swap, Leonard, Shields and Abrams (2001) argue that not only can mentors teach job-specific critical skills, they also impart knowledge regarding managerial systems of the organization, as well as the norms and values of the workplace. Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000) describe the effectiveness of mentoring as a continuum rather than an absolute question of whether mentoring works or not.

The importance of offering support for employees' career- and task-specific skill-development, be it provided through traditional, or more novel mentoring relationships or through other means, is even more acute in the modern workplace than it has been in the past. Skill requirements change rapidly, coping with changes in information technology challenge old and new employees alike, and maintaining and enhancing employees' job performance requires methods of support for continuous learning from employing organizations. This thesis takes as its starting point the idea that one way to offer this support is through the implementation of a mentoring program. This thesis also presumes that tailoring mentoring programs to suit the needs of a particular organization, is an effort that managers of mentoring programs and program participants can influence, and that adapting mentoring programs to organizational needs can have positive effects on mentoring outcomes. Accordingly, I suggest that research that examines mentoring, and formal mentoring programs, is a timely and a worthwhile effort.

When it comes to knowledge management and the management of employees' work performance, organizational needs vary considerably. The demographic make-up of the organization's workforce, the length of employees' tenure within the organization and the career stages (Kram & Isabella. 1985) employees find themselves in, as well as the level of expertise required to cope with work tasks set context-specific requirements for organizational knowledge management. It therefore follows, that in designing and implementing programs which aim to enhance employees', and thus organizational, capabilities, the organizational context in which the mentoring takes place deserves consideration. No single ready-made design of a mentoring program can possibly suit all possible organizations and some level of tailoring and organization-specific adaptation is always required. How this tailoring work happens is a question that this thesis aims to find some answers to. Accordingly, the main research question this study aims to answer is:

> RQ: *How the case organizations tailor their learning mentoring programs to suit organizational needs?*

To help answer this question, this research engages the case companies' employees through semi-structured interviews in order to gain a mentor point-of-view into how the learning mentoring work has been planned and implemented in these mentoring pilot programs.

1.1   Research gap and the relevance of this research

As Ragins and Kram (2007) note, after years of research it is known that mentoring works, but the researchers dedicating their time to studying it are "still grappling with why, when, and how" (Ragins and Kram. 2007. p. 4) it works. In attempting to answer specific research questions, this thesis modestly aims to contribute to the accumulated insights regarding these questions. Answers are sought by examining the point-of-view of mentors participating in programs that are in their pilot-phases and that have been dubbed as learning mentoring programs. In a review of mentoring-related research articles, Allen, Eby, O'Brien & Lentz (2008) found a clear majority of previous studies to be quantitative-correlational in their design. The authors argue that, in addition to this disparity, the nature of modern careers and organizational life call for more research that adopts a qualitative approach, stating that "qualitative research on mentoring has substantial utility in helping us understand the role of mentoring and contemporary careers" (Allen, Eby, O'Brien & Lentz. 2008. p. 348). This thesis hopes to add to this academic understanding by engaging in qualitative research of mentoring. Additionally, this thesis aims to provide substantive benefit to the case companies by offering an outsiders view into the mentoring experience taking place in the case organizations.

Allen, et al. (2008) also note that a segment of research treats mentoring as an overly homogenous field of study, failing to make a distinction between different modes of mentoring. Although this thesis makes extensive use of literature and previous research on conventional mentoring, the idea that there are different modes of mentoring and that formal and informal mentoring have differing properties, are at the core of this study. The issue Allen, et al. (2008) raise is examined more closely in chapter 1.4. titled *Learning mentoring or something else? – Positioning this thesis*, where I explore how to situate this thesis in the mentoring research field and highlight some examples of doubt that has been raised related to the way mentoring literature has applied terminology to its subjects of research. In a minor way, this thesis aims to contribute positively to this form of academic discussion by being clear about the presumptions this thesis makes. In other words, this thesis attempts to be explicit and clear in designating qualifying terminology to the type of mentoring it examines.

Furthermore, searching for information throughout this research process revealed that mentoring literature, especially research reports in the English language, is quite

Americentric. This research aims to address this gap by studying mentoring in the Finnish context, by examining how Finnish government organizations implement learning mentoring programs that seek to address organization-specific needs. This thesis also adds to the academic discussion that views mentoring-related issues from the mentor point-of-view.

1.2   Objective and relevance of the research

Firstly, the objective of this research is to understand what learning mentoring programs in a Finnish government organization context look like in practice. By examining the practical ways learning mentoring activity is applied, this research aims to provide insight about how organizations adapt mentoring programs to suit their organization-specific needs.

The main research question (1) and the supporting sub-question (2) are**:**

> *(1) How case organizations tailor their learning mentoring programs to serve organizational needs?*
>
> *(2) What is the mentoring activity in learning mentoring programs like?*

To fulfil the objectives of this study and to build a foundation that allows providing answers to the research questions, I will first review literature that examines the concept of traditional mentoring. Following this, the concept of peer mentoring and peer mentoring relationships are examined. The types of support mentoring has been established to provide are then explored further in the context of peer mentoring relationships. Because this thesis examines mentoring that happens in formal mentoring programs, rather that informal mentoring where mentors and protégés usually decide to pair up in absence of a program established by their organization, literature that has examined the elements and design of formalized mentoring programs is subsequently reviewed. These components form the theoretical framework for this thesis. This theoretical framework informs both the data collection and data analysis phases of this study. For the purpose of this thesis, I conducted semi structured interviews in order to gather empirical data and following the literature review, the findings from these

interviews are presented. To conclude this report, a discussion of the findings and conclusions are presented.

The implementation of the mentoring programs in the case organizations is in its early stages. Thus, a practical objective of this study is to provide an additional resource for the participating organizations to use when considering existing organizational- and workforce features, such as peer relationships (e.g. Kram & Isabella. 1985; Cotton & Miller. 2000) that could influence the implementation, development, and management of mentoring programs. A review of literature mapping out specific mentoring program characteristics and their connection to the perceived effectiveness of the programs could also be useful to the case companies. More generally, managers affiliated with the mentoring programs might also find use for a compilation of previous research concerned with the subject of mentoring programs and peer relationships. Interviewing mentors participating in the case companies' mentoring programs could provide them an opportunity to reflect on their roles as mentors, as well as on their expectations and reactions (Young & Perrewé. 2004; Cotton & Miller. 2000) towards mentoring work.

Besides practical objectives, this thesis has academic objectives. This study aims to engage concepts and findings presented in previous research and literature which concern the broad topic of mentoring, peer mentoring, and formal mentoring programs. According to Allen et al. (2008), although mentoring research has increased in popularity and the amount of accumulated mentoring research is substantial, mentoring in the workplace context has received relatively little focus. This is evident as one reads mentoring literature, where mentoring in the academic and educational contexts has been the subject of interest to a large portion of researchers. The focus on educational research contexts in literature is especially acutely observable in the case of peer mentoring, as much of the peer mentoring-related research seems to focus either on youth or academic mentoring, or on mentoring of business executives. Particularly in the Finnish context, previous studies concentrate on peer mentoring in an educational context. This thesis examines mentoring activity that happens in the workplace and hopes to contribute to the scientific inquiry of mentoring in this context.

Peer mentoring is a somewhat under researched subject especially in the business context (McManus & Russell. 2007). The more traditional concept of expert-novice mentoring has historically received the bulk of attention among mentoring researchers. To my knowledge, researching peer mentoring, or relationships on a "continuum of peer relationships" (Kram

& Isabella. 1985. p. 118), and attempting to analyse how mentors in formalized mentoring programs in a Finnish governmental organizations view their mentoring work and adapt it to suit organizational needs provides a unique point-of-view to the accumulation of mentoring literature.

The fact that this thesis examines the topic at the scale of two case organizations sets some limitations on the generalizability of the possible findings. However, much of mentoring research (e.g. Kram & Isabella. 1985) has examined single organizations and nevertheless made interesting insights and observations that have found extensive academic use outside the studied organizational context.

1.3   Research design

This thesis engages two case organizations that have ongoing learning mentoring programs at the time this research is conducted. One of the organizations Maanmittauslaitos, or the National Land Survey of Finland, is a government agency that operates under the guidance of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland. The other case organization goes by the name of Palkeet, which is derived from Valtion talous- ja henkilöstöhallinnon palvelukeskus, or The Finnish Government Shared Services Centre for Finance and HR. This organization operates under the guidance of the Ministry of Finance of Finland. One of the case organizations, Maanmittauslaitos, has a history of fostering mentoring activity and quite extensive institutional experience with mentoring programs. The other case organization, Palkeet, does not have a comparable history in implementing formal mentoring programs.

At the time of this research, these case organizations are pilot testing mentoring programs that both organizations are calling learning mentoring programs. This thesis examines the mentors' point-of-view to these programs currently in early phases. Interviewees from both case organizations are employees who have received learning mentoring-related training, organized by Sosped-Foundation as a part of Feeniks-hanke (2020), and who are in the process of conducting learning mentoring activity, as the case organizations call it. Feeniks-hanke is a project aiming to develop practices based on peer support. The goal of the mentor interviews is to find out how the learning mentoring activity is actually conducted in the organizations, gauge mentors' expectations and self-assessed capabilities to perform in their

new roles as learning mentors, and to gather information about how the mentors view the goal of the mentoring programs as well as the support learning mentoring provides to those being mentored, or actors as they are called in both organizations. Because I do not have the possibility to observe the mentoring work happening in the organizations, this research relies heavily on the mentors' description of the practical implementation of these learning mentoring programs. More importantly, one of the research questions is concerned with the different ways learning mentoring is implemented and tailored to suit organizational needs. For this purpose, the interviews centred around questions about the various practical methods the mentors use as they perform their mentoring work.

1.4 Learning mentoring or something else? – Positioning this thesis

As stated in the introduction, the case organizations and mentors participating in the mentoring programs this research focuses on call the programs, and the mentoring activity itself, learning mentoring or oppimismentorointi in Finnish. However, learning mentoring as a term does not seem to be well established by previous literature and thus the concept of learning mentoring is not sufficiently defined by previous research for me to establish a theoretical framework predicated on learning mentoring literature. This poses a challenge to positioning this study in the field of mentoring research. The orientation and training the case companies' mentors received prior to the start of these programs, provided by representatives of Sosped Foundation, has referred to the type of mentoring these interviewed program participants are supposed to engage in as oppimismentorointi, or learning mentoring as directly translated into English. The training however has noted that learning mentoring is based on peer relationships. This qualifying information and the significant lack of research literature dubbing its subject as learning mentoring, suggests that it could be appropriate to examine the mentoring happening in these programs through a theoretical framework that includes literature that has focused on mentoring activity that happens between peers, or peer mentoring. Instead of simply asserting that the mentoring activity under examination in this thesis is peer mentoring and should be researched as such, I feel it is important to explore the question of appropriate theoretical elements and terminology to use in the context of this thesis in some detail.

Discussing developmental interactions and terminology assigned to them, D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum (2003) conclude that in literature concerned with developmental interactions there is evident disagreement about what such developmental interaction constructs mean or represent. The object of this thesis is not to definitively classify the case companies' mentoring programs under a specific qualifying umbrella-term, if for no other reason than the fact that the mentoring activity happening within these programs takes such varying forms. However, to situate this study in relation to previous literature and to create a manageable theoretical scope for this study, it is important to consider what type of developmental interaction construct definitions the research subject of this thesis could conceivably belong under, and what type of theory is suitable to be included in the theoretical framework of this thesis. Furthermore, one of the themes that arose from the data during the analysis phase of this thesis suggests that terminology associated with types of mentoring activity can be a relevant and thought-provoking issue for mentors as well. This issue will be further explored later during the findings of this thesis.

D'Abate et al. (2003) reviewed previous literature that has been concerned with developmental interaction constructs and collated the characterizations literature has used to describe specific types of constructs. D'Abate et al. (2003) identified thirteen developmental interaction constructs, namely action learning, apprenticeship, coaching, distance mentoring, executive coaching, formal or structured mentoring, group mentoring, informal or unstructured mentoring, multiple mentors or developers, peer coaching, peer mentoring, traditional or classic mentoring, and tutoring. Going further, D'Abate et al. (2003) created a taxonomy of twenty-three characteristics that literature has commonly assigned to these developmental interaction constructs and outlined how frequently these descriptions are associated with particular constructs. According to my interpretation of the nature and logic of mentoring activity happening in the case organizations' mentoring programs, some constructs such as tutoring, executive mentoring, and informal or unstructured mentoring can be ruled out as quite unsuitable. Tutoring does not seem applicable for the purpose of this research, because tutoring literature is usually concerned with the academic or educational world. To this point Topping (2005) however argues that literature seems to exhibit some confusion between the terms tutoring and mentoring. Topping (2005), whose research examined the peer support phenomenon in the context of educational institutions, suggests a term called peer learning as "acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions" (p.631). This

description could be considered somewhat applicable to the mentoring activity this thesis examines, but the term peer learning and research that employs it, also seem to be quite exclusively associated with the context of higher education. For that reason, this thesis will not be taking advantage of literature that examines interpersonal support functions literature has examined under the term peer learning.

Returning to constructs introduced by D'Abate et al. (2003), for the purposes of this thesis, executive coaching and informal mentoring will be left mostly unexplored. The protégés, or actors as they are called in these case companies' programs, are not executives and the mentoring happens within a formalized program, not informally in an unstructured manner. As informal mentoring represents the traditional mentoring model, both colloquially and in academic literature, theory related to informal mentoring will however be discussed as a way to create a reference point to which alternative types of mentoring could be compared to and contrasted with. Many of the constructs D'Abate et al. (2003) name could be applicable to a degree, but not to the interviewed mentors collectively because their telling of the practical mentoring work they do vary so considerably. For instance, some of the case companies' mentors do mentoring in mentor pairs, some alone. Some, but not all, act as mentors to varying sizes of protégé, or actor, groups.

Despite the variety of practical implementation methods of mentoring reported by the interviewees, one considerable similarity is the existence of peer relationship, which is to say the lack of hierarchical distance, between the mentors and protégés, or actors. Using the framework created by D'Abate et al. (2003) one can find some support for examining the mentoring this thesis is concerned with from a peer mentoring perspective. D'Abate et al. (2003) found that when describing peer mentoring, literature has most commonly associated it with characteristics such as lateral organizational direction or distance between the mentoring participants, and benefits that have been observed to be accrued by both the mentors and the protégés engaging in peer mentoring activity. (D'Abate et al. p. 372-374) In my opinion, these characterizations can be appropriately associated with mentoring activity in the research context of this thesis. It must be said that D'abate et al. (2003) report most of the twenty-three characteristics they identified being used to describe developmental interaction constructs in general, to have been used in association with peer mentoring by previous research, but to a varying degree. This is the case for most of the thirteen developmental interaction constructs D'Abate et al. (2003) searched characterizations for

and very few of the constructs seem to have more than a few characterizations that over seventy-five percent of literature uses to describe them. This could mean several things. Firstly, it demonstrates that term-related confusion exists in this field of research, which is something that D'Abate et al. (2003) explicitly argue being the case. Secondly, and relatedly, it shows that determining whether some mentoring activity should be called, for instance, peer mentoring or peer coaching is not easy or straightforward, because constructs such as these are overlapping in their nature and characteristics. Thirdly, I interpret it to mean that in a research context such as the context of this thesis, where the mentoring activity itself takes many forms and the researcher is a novice with limited preliminary knowledge about the subject of mentoring, the efforts of D'Abate et al. (2003) serve less the purpose of assisting me to form "complete and sound definitions of developmental interaction constructs" (p.381) and more the purpose of carefully considering my assumptions, or the characteristics of the type of mentoring activity I am studying, as D'Abate et al. (2003) suggest researchers studying developmental interactions should do.

Due to my interpretation of the nature and certain characteristics of the mentoring activity taking place within these case organizations' programs and the amount of available literature that, in my opinion, is applicable to the research context of this thesis, this thesis takes as its starting point the assumption that its research subject can be examined through theory related to peer mentoring and peer relationships. Literature concerned with mentoring functions, peer mentoring and peer relationships, and formal mentoring programs is included in the literature review and thus the theoretical framework that instructs this study. This isn't to say that some of the mentoring activity happening in these case companies' mentoring programs couldn't be described in terms of coaching, peer learning or some other developmental interaction construct, or that the programs couldn't be examined using a theoretical framework that is based on different assumptions. Rather, I simply argue that approaching the examination of these case companies' mentoring programs through literature related to peer mentoring is a justifiable and worthwhile effort.

2. Reviewing previous literature

During this chapter, I review previous literature on mentoring relationships and functions of mentoring activity, in other words, types of support mentoring has been deemed to provide

to people who participate in mentoring activity. Additionally, I also review literature that has examined the design process of and elements commonly identified in formal mentoring programs. The concept and logic of informal, or traditional, mentoring will be covered rather briefly because most people have an intuitive understanding of the concept. For the purpose of this thesis, it is however important to lay out a sampling of what literature has to say about the definition of traditional mentoring, as it serves as a reference point to which alternative forms of mentoring are compared to. Following this, concepts of peer mentoring, and peer relationships will be reviewed. The reason for focusing on these theoretical concepts is that, as it became clear to me during this research process, figuring out whether one is dealing with 'traditional mentoring' or some alternative activity that is nevertheless based on general mentoring logic is not always a simple proposition. Categorization of different mentoring types certainly has its purpose, but exact delineation between types of mentoring is difficult, both in theory and in practice. As stated, to establish a framework with which to justifiably approach the research subject of this thesis as a distinct type of mentoring, namely peer mentoring, these theoretical concepts need to be explored in some detail.

Kram and Isabella's (1985) influential research on peer relationships plays a significant part in the formation of the theoretical framework for this study because it has formed the basis of a large body of literature, especially of research that has examined alternative mentoring under the peer mentoring definition. Kram's (1983) seminal research work that identified two distinct support functions of mentoring was selected as a part of the theoretical basis for this research, because it has been widely adopted by the mentoring research field and it operates as groundwork that much of mentoring literature has built upon (e.g. Young & Perrewe. 2004; Kram & Isabella. 1985; Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller & Marchese 2006; Ragins & Scandura. 1999; and many others). Career and psychosocial functions, the two support-providing functions of mentoring that were identified in this (Kram. 1983) influential research, will be detailed later in this literature review. Even though a close examination of peer relationships or mentoring functions, as such, is not the objective of this thesis, these two seminal research papers, and research that has relied on them, inform this thesis at multiple stages from the formulation of interview questions to the analysis process.

Because this thesis examines formalized mentoring programs, literature concerned with identifying exemplary mentoring programs, and typical program elements (Ragins, Cotton & Miller 2000; Hegstad & Wentling. 2004; Eby & Lockwood. 2005; Parise & Forret. 2008)

are reviewed and they form the theoretical backbone for the analysis of the mentors' perspective regarding the mentoring programs they are participating in at the time of this study.

2.1 **Mentoring**

To set the stage, and to define a reference point, we first familiarize ourselves with what people think of when they hear the word mentoring. Mentoring is a concept with ancient roots and is an activity that can be identified in many contexts in and outside the workplace. Mentor, a learned adviser tasked with protecting Odysseus' son, was a character in Homer's Odyssey. In tracing the history if the concept of mentoring. Ragins and Kram (2007) note that despite mythological origins of the archetype of a mentor, mentoring itself is a "very real relationship that has been an integral part of social life and the world of work for thousands of years" (Ragins & Kram 2007. p. 4). According to Ragins and Kram (2007), a traditional definition of mentoring describes a relationship between an older mentor and a younger protégé, and the purpose of a conventional mentoring relationship is for the mentor to assist the younger counterpart's career-advancement. Kram and Isabella (1985) note that according to the traditional definition, this assistance is provided by the mentor helping the younger protégé learn the ins and outs of a specific job and supporting their search for a place in an organization (Kram & Isabella. 1985). Noe (1988) adds to these descriptions of a traditional mentor by stating that a mentor is a role model who "provides support, direction, and feedback to the younger employee regarding career plans and interpersonal development and increases the visibility of the protégé to decision-makers in the organization who may influence career opportunities" (Noe. 1988. p. 458). Some sort of amalgamation of these descriptions was the picture in my head as well, as I decided to conduct my master's thesis research on mentoring and begun familiarizing myself with academic literature that has had mentoring as its primary subject of interest. Allowing for the fact that mentoring is something that can happen outside of an organizational work context, it becomes quite evident that, according to the previous descriptions, most people might have acted as a mentor and been mentored without consciously acknowledging it. Most people have played the part of a more experienced party helping a younger counterpart learn the ins and outs of a job or some other activity and most have received support, direction, and feedback from

someone they considered a role model. It is interesting that despite most people having an idea of the meaning or definition of mentoring, and probably having participated in mentoring-adjacent activity as it is described by scholars above, nevertheless would probably struggle to list their personal mentors and protégés. This suggests that mentoring itself is indeed a simple concept yet can be potentially quite hard to detect and define in practice.

Based on the previous descriptions, it is however clear that mentoring is concerned with the provision of support and aims to provide benefits to the mentoring participants. Research has indeed found mentoring activity and mentoring relationships to beneficial in many contexts (e.g. Chao, Walz & Gardner. 1992; Young & Perrewe. 2004; Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller & Marchese. 2006) although the perceived effectiveness of mentoring varies, and some research has called into question whether benefits of mentoring are in actuality as universal as they are generally perceived to be. For instance, Underhill (2006), who performed a meta-analytical review of mentoring literature argues that in reporting mentored individuals receiving benefits due to mentoring, research centred around mentoring has, to a degree, failed to investigate whether these same benefits are accrued by non-mentored individuals. To the point of differing levels of benefits provided by mentoring activity, Eby et al. (2008. p. 263) note that the strongest association between mentoring activity and positive outcomes is generally found in academic mentoring, which has proven to be more effective than workplace mentoring, the authors adding that youth mentoring efforts tend to exhibit the least effective outcomes. While affirming the commonly accepted definition of traditional mentoring as an interpersonal relationship between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced protégé aimed mostly at developing the protégé, Eby, Durley, Evans, and Ragins (2006) however note that more recently mentoring theory has begun to acknowledge the mutuality of support and learning taking place in mentoring relationships. This is to say that both the mentor and the protégé experience benefits due to participating in mentoring activity. Even though mutual learning has been considered to be more relevant in the context of informal mentoring relationships, research has found indications that co-learning is prevalent in formal mentoring programs as well (Eby & Lockwood. 2005).

Later in this literature review, the dynamics of mentoring relationships, as defined by previous literature, are explored further and it will hopefully become clear that although the basic concept of a mentoring relationship is quite simple, the fact that such relationships

occur in many forms and in variable contexts, means that studying mentoring relationships is more complicated than it would seem at first glance. Issues related to mentoring relationships will also be addressed in the findings of this thesis where we will see that mentoring relationships, and mentoring more generally, are not always straightforward and easily definable concepts for mentoring participants either. First, we will however take a closer look at how literature views the functions of mentoring. In other words, how academic discourse attempts to define mentoring activity and distinguish functions of mentoring from other types of support that colleagues routinely offer each other in a professional context.

2.1.1 Mentoring functions

In attempting to create a reference point for the term mentoring in the previous chapter, we deduced that mentoring is something that happens in the context of relationships and involves the provision of support, traditionally offered by a mentor to a protégé. However, the characterizations of support offered through mentoring seem wide-ranging, as they include such descriptions as providing feedback and direction, activities which by themselves might not evoke a perception of mentorship but rather paint a picture of day-to-day organizational life. On the other hand, the definitions assigned to the basic concept of mentoring in mentoring literature suggest that mentoring can entail the offering of support in job-learning, as well as personal and career development, activities which could more readily be viewed transcending commonplace social interaction between colleagues or other professional associates.

Ragins and Kram (2007) note that a large portion of mentoring literature has adopted a framework proposed by Kram (1985) according to which "mentors provide two distinct, but related, sets of mentoring behaviors to protégés: career and psychosocial functions" (Ragins & Kram. 2007. p. 23). Young and Perrewe (2004), whose study examined mentoring in the context of higher education, call these two support functions "the mainstay of most mentoring research" (Young and Perrewe. 2004. p. 104), the authors further noting that the examination of these support behaviours has formed the backbone of research that has attempted to qualify the support functions of mentoring. Elaborating further, Ragins and Kram (2007) define the career functions of mentoring as a "range of behaviour" (Ragins & Kram. 2007. p. 5) which support a protégé in becoming successful. This spectrum of

behaviour contains diverse activities, including "sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging work assignments" (Ragins & Kram. 2007. p. 23). In other words, career functions are more straightforwardly work-related and help a protégé learn the ins and outs of a specific job, establish a role in an organization, and compose a career advancement path (Kram & Isabella. 1985). Such definitions of support could still be considered broad but nevertheless logical, because activities and developmental goals described by Ragins and Kram (2007), and Kram and Isabella (1985) are interconnected. Expanding a protégé's skillset and raising their level of knowledge logically prepares them to advance through promotion.

Psychosocial functions are not entirely separated from career functions of mentoring but are distinctive in their focus. According to Kram and Isabella (1985), psychosocial functions manifest in the form of confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship which aid in the development of "professional identity and competence" (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p.111). In other words, psychosocial support is less concerned with providing information related to specific job tasks and more concerned with listening to a protégé's concerns and providing encouragement (Young & Perrewe. 2004). In the context of professional life, both career and psychosocial support functions nevertheless have a similar goal, namely the development of an employee in a way that is conducive to enhance their capabilities and ability to function as a part of an organization. Although in a mentoring relationship a mentor is mainly responsible for the provision of support, both types of support functions can also be considered having a level of reciprocity. Young and Perrewe (2004) note that protégés are likely to respond to the career-related and psychosocial support offered by mentors, and, in turn, these responses are interpreted by mentors.

2.2   Peer mentoring and peer relationships

Peer mentoring can be seen as a form of mentoring different, but not disconnected, from traditional mentoring as defined in the previous chapter. Peer mentoring in a business context is a subject that seems to have received relatively little attention from researchers, even though support supplied by peers is a relevant concept in a modern work environment. To this point, McManus and Russell (2007. p. 273) argue that because the structure of modern organizations has become flatter and less hierarchical, resulting in a reduction in the number

of senior-level mentors who in a conventional mentoring relationship would be the ones assigned to support a protégé, peer mentoring can act as a valuable source of developmental support. Furthermore, collating the findings of Allen and Finkelstein (2003), Kram (1985) and Eby (1997), McManus and Russell (2007) conclude that alongside supervisors, co-workers are the most often reported source of developmental support in peoples' professional lives.

Kram and Isabella (1985) studied peer relationships as an alternative to traditional mentoring relationships, which they deemed to mean relatively one-way "helping relationships" (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 115) where the mentor is older and higher up in the organizational hierarchy than the protégé. In contrast, Kram and Isabella (1985) describe the two-way, reciprocal nature of peer relationships as the defining factor that separates peer relationships from conventional mentor-protégé relationships. In a peer relationship, both participants assume both the "role of a guide or sponsor" (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 118) and the role of a learner at different times and in different situations. In this chapter, we examine Kram and Isabella's (1985) findings in more detail, looking to build a better understanding of what is meant by peer mentoring in the context of this thesis. As stated, the lack of a clear delineation between different developmental interaction constructs (D'abate et al. 2003), or types of mentoring activity, sets some challenges to positioning this study in the mentoring research field and to the research of mentoring more generally. Looking at this issue from the perspective of relationships that exist between peers, Kram and Isabella (1985) also highlight the fact that there is no clear-cut definition with which to create a definite distinction between peer relationships and more conventional mentoring relationships where the participants are usually separated by rank or seniority. To build a theoretical foundation for this thesis and to situate my study in the mentoring research field, this chapter will aim to generate understanding of factors that literature uses to classify certain types of mentoring activity as peer mentoring and certain relationships as peer relationships.

It stands to reason that peer relationships where one participant's focus is mainly on learning the ins and outs of a specific job and finding one's place in a new organization, can closely resemble a traditional mentoring relationship. From a practical perspective, whether the person providing guidance or support is hierarchically on par or separated by rank with the person receiving the guidance seems somewhat beside the point in determining whether the relationship could be described as featuring mentoring activities. To this point, Kram and

Isabella (1985) suggest that in a case where a mentoring participant's career in a specific organization is in its establishment phase, the other more experienced participant "is viewed as having more wisdom or experience" and can be characterized "as a model and as a career guide, even though a peer" (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 125). Based on their research Kram and Isabella (1985) created a typology of peer relationships based on the relationship characteristics and identified support functions that peers provide to each other as they engage in peer mentoring activity. This line of research has been built upon by a wide array of subsequent literature. Based on their research, Kram and Isabella (1985) recognized three main types of peer relationships, those types being information-, collegial-, and special peer-relationships. The authors stress however, that these types are offered as "points of reference" on a "continuum of peer relationships" (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 118,) rather than as a definitive typology of peer relationship variations. Each of these types of relationships were found to serve a somewhat differing set of knowledge sharing and support functions. This concept of a continuum containing identifiable and describable types of relationships guides this thesis.

Information peer relationships are commonly occurring in organizations and, as the name suggests, the benefits of such a relationship stem mainly from a mutual exchange of information. (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 119) To the point of mutual information exchange, Young and Perrewe (2004) have noted that a level of reciprocity is valuable in all types of mentoring relationships, and that mutual exchange of attention and feedback signals can affect the success of the relationship. McManus and Russell (2007) summarize information peer relationships as being social but "limited in sharing personal experiences and providing information regarding career opportunities" (McManus & Russell. 2007. p. 277). In comparison to commonly occurring information peer relationships, organization members usually have a smaller number of collegial peer relationships. Whereas information peers can be seen mainly imparting advice and instruction, in collegial peer relationships, in addition to information sharing, peers can offer more in the way of "emotional support," "direct honest feedback," and "confirmation and validation of self-worth" (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 119-121). Collegial peer relationships could therefore be seen as deeper or more developed than information peer relationships, and something that could be assumed to develop over time. According to Kram and Isabella (1985) individuals in collegial relationships indeed exhibit more self-disclosure and the level of trust between the participants is higher (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 119-120), further suggesting a deeper

human connection than is required in exchange of information. Finally, according to Kram and Isabella (1985) special peer relationships are characterized by their rarity and a high level of intimacy, equivalent to that of friendships. Such relationships feature participants who have managed to develop a bond that can potentially elevate the relationship beyond something commonly associated with professional relationships. In the professional context, this bond between the participants can however facilitate considerable improvements on the participants' personal developmental tasks and "provide both with a strong sense of security, comfort, and belongingness on a job" (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 124).

As stated, the colloquially understood definition or concept of a traditional mentoring relationship strongly depends on the idea that the mentor is either older, or at the very least has a longer career in an organization or a profession than the protégé. A concept of peer relationships allows for the possibility that there does not necessarily have to be a disparity between the mentoring participants in this respect for the activity to be considered legitimate mentoring. However, because in a professional, organizational context the support or guidance provided by mentors can reasonably be expected to be, at least partly, connected to the subject matter experience of the participants, the career stages of mentors and protégés is a pertinent issue. In fact, depending on the career stages of information peer relationship participants, the dominant themes of peer mentoring can be quite different. Through their research Kram and Isabella (1985) concluded that participants whose careers are in their early, developmental stage are more likely to engage in, and gain most out of, career functions that assist in learning the ins and outs of a specific job, and aid in establishing a role in an organization. Information peers whose career is in the advancement or a mid-career stage, are more likely to engage in, and benefit from, career functions that support advancement or networking, including functions such as exposure and visibility within the organization (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 125). As another example, advancement-stage collegial peers more likely seek promotion options and looking for, as well as benefit from, support functions that manifest in the form of career strategizing and feedback (Kram & Isabella. 1985. p. 126). Therefore, the concept of peer mentoring supposes that legitimate mentoring relationships can exist between people who might, in some cases, be in the exact same career stages. On the other hand, career stages of the mentoring relationship participants is of relevance, because the type of support they need or benefit most from can depend on the career stages they are in.

In the following chapters, I review a sampling of research connected to formal mentoring programs. The reason for mentoring programs' establishment, benefits they have been observed offering, and their frequently occurring design elements are discussed.

2.3   Formal Mentoring programs

In this chapter, we try to form a picture of what is meant by mentoring programs, what are their design elements and what mentoring literature says about their design process. While we seemingly focus out from the mentoring relationship level into an organizational level of programs, we are not entirely leaving mentoring relationship questions behind. In discussing mentoring in the context of formal mentoring programs, Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller and Marchese (2006) note that formal and informal mentoring relationships differ in multiple fundamental ways, elaborating on two of them: the fashion in which individuals engaging in mentoring activity find each other, and the structure and timing of their mentoring relationship. In other words, the motivation to form mentoring relationships and the way in which such relationships are formed can be markedly different depending on whether the relationships develop informally or as a part of a formalized mentoring program. According to Wanberg et al. (2006), by definition, informal mentoring relationships are initiated more organically on the basis of "mutual identification and interpersonal comfort" (p.411), whereas formal relationships are usually a result of matching individuals together as part of an "organized, facilitated employee development program" (p.411). Concurring on this general description of formal mentoring relationships, Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000) also see mutual identification as a factor that motivates mentors to enter a mentoring relationship adding that mutual developmental needs can often also be a part of this motivation. In contrast to informal mentoring relationships, where the timing of their initiation and discontinuation is not up to a third party but rather the relationship participants themselves, formal mentoring relationships usually have a specified duration determined by the mentoring program's schedule and design. Ragins et al. (2000) asses a usual formal mentoring program, and thus the associated formal mentoring relationships, lasting from six months to a year. In essence, formal mentoring programs function as a vehicle with which to match individuals and initiate mentoring relationships, and thus the theory related to

mentoring programs is closely interconnected with theory concerned with mentoring relationships.

Why are mentoring programs established, then? According to Ragins and Kram (2007), as well as Noe (1988), formalizing mentoring activities into programs results from an organizational interest of reproducing informally occurring mentoring experiences, with the goal of matching mentors and protégés in a way that is apt to enhance the participants' capabilities and performance. Mentoring programs, and organizations that employ them, look to create circumstances where individuals with a desire to develop their base of knowledge can be matched with individuals with the ability to support such development. Referencing Eddy, Tannenbaum, Alliger, D'Abate, and Givens (2001), as well as Ragins et al. (2000), Eby and Lockwood (2005) state that the most frequent goal of mentoring programs is employee development and the support of employee learning. Regarding the purpose of formal mentoring programs, Eby and Lockwood (2005), whose research identified various benefits accrued through mentoring, nevertheless argue that "formal mentoring relationships may serve a much narrower and perhaps different purpose than informal mentorships" (Eby and Lockwood. 2005. p. 455), the authors further noting that their research failed to identify mentors providing many of the career development functions that are regularly associated with informal mentoring in literature.

Specific objectives of mentoring programs will logically vary based on the developmental needs of mentoring participants and the program deploying organizations themselves. The fact that mentoring relationships born out of formalized mentoring programs usually play out across a different time span than organically formed informal mentoring relationships can also dictate what kind of development can be expected to happen during the mentoring activity. Talking about the objectives of different types of mentoring relationships, Ragins, et al. (2000) describe the goal of informal mentoring relationships being the advancement of the protégés' longer term career objectives, and the authors contrast this with formal mentoring programs by stating that mentors in formal programs are often tasked with advancing the protégés' career goals in a way that is "applicable only to the protégé's current position" (Ragins, Cotton & Miller. 2000. p.1179). Along the same lines, Eby and Lockwood (2005) draw similar conclusions from their research which indicated that mentors in formal programs provide limited support to long-term career advancement of protégés.

On the point of mentoring programs' focus, Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent (2004) state that the focus of formal mentoring programs differs greatly as do their characteristics and eventual outcomes. To this point, Noe (1988) elaborates arguing that "the focus of formal mentoring programs may be on completion of designated tasks, activities, or protégé skill learning, mentors may also provide valuable counseling, coaching, and role-modeling functions for the protégé" (Noe. 1988. p. 458-459). According to Hegstad and Wentling (2004) formal mentoring programs can constitute a large part of an organization's strategy aiming to develop human resources, meaning that in the case of organizations that emphasize mentoring as a developmental tool the focus of the mentoring activity can largely influence the organizations' overall strategy, and in turn be influenced by overall strategic considerations. The exact reasons for implementing formal mentoring programs are numerous and dependent on organizational needs and goals, but the overarching motivation for establishing these programs seems to be the provision of support, be it career-related, psychosocial or something else.

How does mentoring literature view the benefits of formal programs? Mentoring programs' ability to provide benefits to individuals participating in mentoring programs have been well documented (e.g. Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima. 2004; Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent. 2004) and they include mostly similar types of benefits as literature has found to be gained through informal mentoring. In the context of formal mentoring programs, Eby and Lockwood (2005) found personal benefits specific to protégés to include things like career planning and networking opportunities, whereas mentors reported the development of personal relationships with protégés as a benefit. Highlighting the fact that benefits are usually associated with at least some costs, Eby and Lockwood, whose (2005) research examined the costs that participants associate with taking part in a formal mentoring program, found that protégés reported problems such as "unmet expectations, scheduling difficulties, and geographic distance" (Eby & Lockwood. 2005. p. 455), whereas mentor-specific issues raised were related to feelings of inadequacy or doubt about the mentors' ability to provide sufficient support to protégés. Additionally, some research has raised questions about whether mentoring programs provide discernible benefits to mentoring participants (e.g. Wanberg, Welsh & Hezlett. 2003; Baugh & Fagenson-Eland. 2007). Furthermore, the mentoring research field has received criticism for the fact that very few research designs have attempted to compare mentored and non-mentored individuals when

evaluating the benefits attainable through participating in mentoring activity (Underhill. 2006).

In contrasting mentoring programs and formal mentoring relationships with mentoring activity not performed within the structure of a designed mentoring program, Noe (1988) refers to Klauss (1981) and Kram (1985) noting that informal mentoring relationships have the potential to be more beneficial than program-related mentoring relationships, because assigned mentoring relationships, where the participants have not made the choice to be paired with each other, can exhibit conflicts between personalities and a lack of real commitment. On this point, Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller and Marchese (2006) found perceived similarity between mentoring program counterparts having less of a connection to the perceived receipt of career related support than psychosocial support, the authors theorizing that in the context of a mentoring program mentoring relationship participants "have a business directive to meet to work on the protégé's career development," (p. 420) and that for this reason "it is more likely that career mentoring will occur in the absence of perceived similarity" (p. 420). Clashes of personality are of course possible to occur in informal mentoring relationships, but it stands to reason that individuals who have willingly entered into a mentoring relationship with a person of their choosing have self-selected a counterpart whose personality more likely matches their own preferences. Such freedom inherent in the informal pairing process could influence the level of dedication to the relationship. To the point of dedication and commitment, Allen, Eby and Lentz (2006) argue that "designing formal programs that engender commitment on the part of mentors and that help participants better understand the goals and purpose of the program can be a key overarching strategy for developing more favorable mentor and protégé perceptions of program effectiveness" (p.147). This implies that mentoring programs' features can be designed in a way that they steer the participants' relationships in a direction that more closely resemble informal mentoring relationships. This is compatible with Ragins and Kram's (2007), as well as Noe's (1988) suggestions that, in essence, the motivation behind mentoring programs is the attempt to emulate and reproduce informally occurring mentoring experiences.

While scepticism about whether mentoring programs are beneficial to all individuals participating in them is worth taking note of, research has however established that organizations who have implemented formal mentoring programs experience organizational

benefits beyond the personal development of their employees. Based on their research that examined the experiences of both protégés and mentors, Eby and Lockwood (2005) found that both participant groups reported experiencing benefits, albeit "primarily in terms of understanding about different parts of the business and obtaining different perspectives on work-related problems" (p. 447). Young and Perrewe (2004) also note that because the establishment of informal mentoring relationships require initiative from the participants, mentoring programs provide mentoring opportunities for those who might not seek to initiate a mentoring relationship on their own accord. In other words, organizational benefits of formalized mentoring programs include the fact that programs with a mentor-protégé matching process lower the hurdle of finding and entering a mentoring relationship. By implementing formalized mentoring programs, organizations can therefore attract a larger number of employees to engage in mentoring activity. Additionally, Allen and O'Brien (2006) found that implementing mentoring programs can increase organizations' attraction as an employer in the eyes of prospective employees, the authors concluding that in the labour market, formal mentoring programs can act as a way to generate competitive advantage. Hegstad and Wentling (2004) also suggest that the establishment of formal mentoring programs can be viewed as a tool that helps an organization retain its employees and enhance employee satisfaction.

2.4   Elements and characteristics of formal mentoring programs

We have learned, that the motivation behind implementing mentoring programs seems quite clear regardless of circumstances, that being the mimicry of informal mentoring relationships and the capture of benefits mentoring relationships can produce, although the focus and specific objects of formalized programs can vary considerably according to organizations' and mentoring participants' realities and needs. How does mentoring literature view the elements and characteristics of mentoring programs and the effect they might have in generating developmental benefits expected to gained through the programs?

Although, in some sense, my research considers an organizational viewpoint, as it asks how organizations can tailor peer mentoring programs to fit their needs, I interview mentors and insights of this research firmly represent a mentor point-of-view. Considering the mentors' view toward mentoring program elements deemed beneficial is important because mentors'

buy-in and commitment can influence the success of the program. To the question of which program elements deserve consideration when designing a mentoring program, Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000) note that mentoring programs' "design elements shouldn't be discussed in vacuum" (p.1191). Their (2000) research found suggestions that the degree of satisfaction the mentoring participants feel towards their mentoring relationship can potentially be more important than any design feature the mentoring program they are involved with might have. This means that the effectiveness of mentoring is potentially more dependent on the quality of the mentoring relationship, and thus the mentoring itself, than the specific qualities of the mentoring program design.

Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000), whose research examined, among other things, protégés' perceptions and points-of-view regarding the effectiveness and design of mentoring programs, identified several structural program characteristics or variables which include voluntariness of participation, opportunity to influence the matching process, guidelines on how frequently mentoring sessions take place and recognition afforded for participating, focus of the program i.e. protégé's career development or more general job orientation, and the mentor's rank or position in the organization. Based on this research, Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000) also make a connection to the general goal of mentoring programs as discussed in the previous chapter, the authors noting that some of the identified program design characteristics exhibit the goal of emulating informal mentoring processes where participants choose who to be matched with, and where the focus is the long-term career development of the protégé. This thesis considers the mentor's rather than the protégé's point-of-view, but these characteristics are nevertheless instructive to this study and they bear similarities to findings of research that has considered the mentor's point-of-view to his issue.

To this point, Parise and Forret's (2008), whose research examined the mentor's perspective regarding the effectiveness of mentoring, describe finding similar mentoring program design elements that have an effect on how mentors perceive participating in the program and whether they deem it to be personally beneficial or costly. These elements identified by Parise and Forret (2008) are the voluntary participation of mentors, an opportunity for mentors to provide input to the matching of mentors and protégés, an effective training of mentors, and support offered by management. From both the mentor's and the protégé's point-of-view, it appears that participants value the fact that they can partake in the program

of their own volition and that they feel their opinions are taken into consideration in the pairing process. However, some research has concluded that mentors and protégés level of appreciation for these attributes varies. To this point, Parise and Forret (2008) assess voluntary participation of mentors to be critical to a mentoring program's success, but nevertheless conclude that although the possibility to influence the matching process is valuable program attribute according to mentors, mentors' perceptions of the benefits and costs of participating in formalized programs have not been shown to be strongly related to the possibility of having a say in the pairing process.

It is reasonable that protégés place high value on program guidelines that clarify the intensity of the mentoring activity, its direction and focus. Furthermore, protégés may wish that recognition for participation as well as access to high-ranking or influential mentors could provide benefits in the form of eventual career advancement opportunities. Equally reasonably, mentors, who bear the pressure of providing support and assistance, value program characteristics that ensure that they themselves are supported and appropriately trained to succeed in their mentoring tasks. Based on their research, Allen, Eby and Lentz (2006. p. 130) propose a model according to which voluntariness of the participation of mentors and their ability to have a say in the mentor-protégé matching process are elements that affect mentor commitment and the mentors' understanding of the program, and consequently perceived program effectiveness. Their (2006. p.130) model also posits that the receipt and amount of mentoring training as well as training quality affect mentor commitment, the mentors' understanding of the program and through these two dimensions contribute to the perceived effectiveness of the program.

2.4.1 Voluntary participation, matching and training

Voluntary participation of mentors and protégés is a feature that literature has deemed to influence mentoring program effectiveness and participants' views regarding the mentoring activity. Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000) call voluntary participation one of the key components of a formalized mentoring program. In addition to being identified as influential, voluntary participation has also been found to be a common feature of mentoring programs. For instance, Hegstad and Wentling (2004. p. 438) who looked at exemplary mentoring programs in Fortune 500 companies ascertained that almost all examined programs operated

based on voluntary participation and in the context of their research mentors were often required to apply to participate in the programs. Research has indeed found the requirement to apply a common feature for mentors and screening criteria based on individuals' job history or job tasks is a frequently used method of selecting mentors among program applicants (Eby & Lockwood. 2005). On voluntary participation, Parise and Forret (2008. p. 227) state that a voluntary nature of participation is a program element reported by many companies, but according to them, organizations quite often have trouble finding enough volunteers to fill mentor positions, in which case some employees need to be drafted to satisfy the needs of the program. The fact that their research sample included such mentors allowed Parise and Forret (2008. p. 236) to conclude that voluntary participation seems to be positively related to a higher level of benefits perceived by mentors. In both case organizations of this thesis, the mentors' participation in the program has been voluntary. Some interviewees report being asked to join the program as a mentor. Most interviewees state hearing about an upcoming learning mentoring program-pilot from other people in the organization, or reading internal promotional material advertising the program's establishment. Although Allen, Eby & Lentz (2006) caution that in their research context an insufficient number of mentors were assigned to their roles involuntarily to draw strong conclusions about how their sample of mentors felt about the role played by voluntary participation, the authors do however speculate that unprescribed participation can have longstanding effects on programs' administration and perceived effectiveness, stating that "voluntary participation may be key to retaining willing mentors within a program across time" (Allen, Eby, & Lentz. 2006. p. 144).

The pairing of mentors with protégés, is similarly a subject whose importance is frequently highlighted in literature (e.g. Allen, Eby & Lentz. 2006; Ragins & Kram. 2007) and research has indicated that incompatibility of mentors and protégés is a frequently reported challenge in formal mentoring programs (e.g. Eby, Butts & Lockwood. 2003; Eby, & McManus. 2004). Regarding the matching process, Hegstad and Wentling (2004) characterize a structured process of matching mentors with mentees being often viewed as a "critical—if not the most important—factor in successful relationships and programs" (p.438), the authors further stating that in their study all examined organizations exhibited such a structured process. Relatedly, Hegstad and Wentling (2004) found the most frequent criteria considered in matching decisions to have been the shared interests or background, expertise level and developmental needs, and the job level of the participants. Issues related to these

criteria have been found to sometimes result in mismatches in mentor-protégé pairing (Eby & Lockwood. 2005) which could be seen further highlighting the importance of the matching process. On the other hand, some research has found the effect of pairing methods to be potentially overstated. For instance, Noe (1988) speculates that concern relating to potential negative reactions resulting from being assigned to a mentor relationship might often be unfounded, and further hypothesizes that "the characteristics of the assigned mentor program" (Noe. 1988. p. 473) play a bigger role than the nature of the pairing process in determining the success of the relationship, and thus fulfilling the program's intent. In the same vein, research conducted by Parise and Forret (2008) found mentors to be mostly ambivalent to whom they were paired with. Allen et al. (2006) however, argue that allowing mentors to provide input at the pairing stage is an important characteristic of a mentoring program and it could enhance mentors' commitment to their roles.

Regarding the question of assigning protégés to mentors, Noe (1988) highlights the fact that there nevertheless exists a fundamental difference between organically arising mentoring relationships and those mentoring relationships that are brought into being as part of a formalized mentoring program arguing that "organizations should not expect protégés to obtain the same type of benefits from an assigned mentoring relationship as they would receive from an informally established, primary mentoring relationship." (Noe. 1988. p. 473) Despite varying research conclusions and differing academic opinion regarding the crucial nature of the matching process in determining program results, it reasons that because the quality of the mentoring relationships themselves is what determines mentoring results at the individual employees' level, the matching process deserves consideration in the development of all mentoring programs. In other words, a diligent, well thought out and well-executed matching processes have been found to be beneficial, but the observable effects of the process vary, and the results of a matching process should not be expected to replicate the results of informal mentor-protégé pairing.

Training that prepares participants prior to taking part in a mentoring program has shown to be beneficial and a frequent program element (e.g. Eby & Lockwood. 2005). Not all mentors or protégés have prior experience of mentoring activity and even if they do, mentoring programs can differ significantly in their implementation, focus, and goals. Training can provide personal skills needed in mentoring activities, enhance training recipients' knowledge regarding mentoring more generally, but also be used to lay out program-specific

attributes. Allen, Eby & Lentz. (2006) found the fact that mentoring training is provided, and the quality of the received training to be important elements predicting the success of formal mentoring programs. However, their (2006. p, 145) research found that the receipt of training is the most important and the amount, as in number of hours, of training to be less consequential. Parise and Forret (2008) concur regarding the overall importance of providing training to mentors, even though in their research mentors themselves reported narrow perceived benefits accrued from the training they received.

Training that prepares participants to operate in mentoring activity has been deemed crucial by some research. In fact, exemplary mentoring programs almost universally provide training for to-be mentors (Hegstad & Wentling. 2004). How to structure and facilitate the training is an important question. Companies can offer training to mentors only or choose to include protégés in at least some parts of the training. Such a decision obviously affects how the training needs to be designed. According to Hegstad and Wentling (2004,) in the context of Fortune 500 companies it is more common to provide training to both mentoring relationship parties, although in some companies the protégés and mentors participated in their own training sessions. Another training-related question is whether to use internal trainers or whether to hire outside consulting to design and conduct the training. Even though most, if not all, mentoring-related literature stress the importance of providing training to the participants, Hegstad and Wentling (2004. p. 442) found that even many exemplary mentoring programs fail to provide ongoing training and learning to program participants.

2.4.2 Design and development of mentoring programs

The previous chapter established that research examining the composition of formalized mentoring programs has found that they exhibit similar elements and characteristics. Even though this thesis does not closely examine the design and development processes that has preceded the launch of mentoring programs in the case organizations, it is however useful to consider what previous literature has to say about these processes. Reviewing how mentoring programs have been found to be designed and developed allows us perspective into the origin of typical mentoring program elements.

So, how are mentoring programs typically developed? As mentioned previously, the focus of mentoring programs in different organizational contexts can vary significantly and it reasons that mentoring programs development processes are also varied. Hegstad and Wentling (2004), who researched Fortune 500 companies with formal mentoring programs, found that exemplary mentoring programs' development paths nevertheless exhibit some similarities. Hegstad and Wentling (2004) argue that successful programs can be seen employing systematic design processes whose components include: needs analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. These components could also be viewed as successive phases, although the stages overlap.

Related to the needs analysis component, Hegstad and Wentling (2004) stress the importance of identifying and agreeing upon a clear purpose for the mentoring program, identifying a target audience for the program, and aligning the program's objectives with organizational strategic goals. It stands to reason that carefully identifying a program's purpose is crucial so that program objectives can be communicated to the mentoring participants and the program itself can be designed in a way that can hope to fulfil its purpose. Young and Perrewe (2004) theorize that establishing clearly defined program outcomes has the potential to strengthen mentoring relationship by helping the relationship participants negotiate appropriate expectations regarding the program. Participants whose expectations are in line with potential program outcomes could be more likely to view the program, and their own participation in the program, as a success. Based on their research, Young and Perrewe (2004) found indications that a priori expectations of both mentors and protégés are linked to the perception they eventually form of the mentoring relationship and the support it has offered them. A needs analysis also has the potential to reveal information about what types of mentoring functions a program should support and encourage and suggest the type of training the mentoring participants could benefit from. For instance, a needs analysis could advise whether needs best addressed through career or psychosocial support functions (Kram & Isabella. 1985) dominate within the organization, and guide the development and structure of the program in a direction that enables mentoring participants to focus on providing the appropriate type of support.

To analyse whether a need for mentoring exists in the organization and what types of personal developmental areas could be targeted through mentoring activity, the companies Hegstad and Wentling (2004) examined primarily employed employee surveys, individual

interviews, and focus groups. Employees' familiarity with mentoring and their personal developmental needs can be expected to vary from organization to another, as can the organizational context itself. For instance, an organization with a higher number of new employees might have to design their mentoring programs differently than an organization with a stable, long-tenured workforce. Administrators in charge of designing and implementing mentoring programs might have extensive experience in setting up programs or they could be faced with the task for the first time. It is therefore unsurprising, that regarding the design process of a mentoring program, Hegstad and Wentling's (2004) research found organizations utilizing several different strategies.

The use of external consultants with expertise in the issues of mentoring, some of whom brought with them "already-developed programs to implement," (Hegstad & Wentling. 2004. p. 435) proved to be prevalent in their specific research context. Apart from a ready-made program design, outsiders participating in the design process could be of assistance as they assess organizational circumstances and needs from a different perspective, and thus can potentially provide solutions that insiders might miss. To this point, Hegstad and Wentling's (2004) research however found that the extent to which outside consultants contributed to the design process and the extent to which the companies themselves provided input can vary considerably. Another common approach employed by organizations is benchmarking, or "look[ing] to other companies with already existing programs to seek details on how they were designed, implemented, and evaluated." (Hegstad & Wentling. 2004. p. 435). Human resource development initiatives are usually internal matters and documented internally, which raises questions about how effective benchmarking mentoring programs can be if access to program particulars and documentation is limited. Benchmarking efforts targeted towards affiliated organizations could be effective as information transfer, related to for instance mentoring program results and experiences, between affiliates might happen in a more open fashion, allowing organizations looking to implement their own mentoring programs to replicate successful program elements and practices while avoiding repeating mistakes. In addition to outside consultants and benchmarking, some organizations in Hegstad & Wentling's (2004) study reported using mentoring-related literature for guidance in the design process.

Who to involve in the design process, then? In the case of Fortune 500 companies, Hegstad and Wentling (2004. p. 435-436) found that apart from frequently included outside

consultants, design teams consisting of representatives from different organizational functions provided input on the program's design. The advantages of using such cross-functional or cross-departmental design teams seem clear to me, as their inclusion in the design process makes it possible for various points-of-view to be considered prior to the implementation of the program. Like benchmarking, the inclusion of various organizational departments in the design process can reveal potential pitfalls and problems before they happen and are thus more laboursome to correct. Hegstad and Wentling's (2004) research does not report mentors themselves as being a part of this design stage, however. The design process can include the production of program guidelines for employees expected to participate in the program. These guidelines can concern, among other things, the amount of time the mentoring relationships are suggested to last, and the frequency of mentoring meetings the participants are recommended to follow (Hegstad & Wentling. 2004. p. 436). These issues can obviously be left for the participants to decide for themselves as well.

Regarding the program implementation phase, Hegstad and Wentling (2004) suggest that because the implementation of a mentoring program is often a part of a wider human resource development effort, instead of a program, mentoring could be rather seen as a process and something that is "built into the organizational culture" (Hegstad. 2004. p. 442). Fostering organizational values and employee behaviour, in other words developing a culture that is conducive to generating employee action compatible with the overall organizational strategic direction, can be considered a tool in attaining strategic goals, human resource-related or otherwise. A process-oriented view, where mentoring activity is seen contributing to the attainment of organization wide strategic goals and as part of organizational culture, suggests that it might be advisable to consider all employees of the organization as the target audience of a mentoring program, whether all employees take part in the actual mentoring activity or not. In fact, Hegstad and Wentling (2004) found that most exemplary Fortune 500 company mentoring programs adopt such a targeting approach. In the implementation phase, mentoring relationships that form the backbone of the mentoring program are at their formative stage. Young and Perrewe (2004) stress that, at this stage, a clearly defined and communicated purpose for the program aids participants in setting realistic expectations regarding their mentoring relationships and the benefits they can expect from the program.

The implementation of clear guidelines and program goals, connected to the program's purpose, are something that administrators have influence over. Young and Perrewe (2004) note that through goals and guidelines administrators can manage participants' expectations and, because individuals usually evaluate program results in relation to their personal expectations, eventual program outcomes. To this point, Eby and Lockwood (2005), whose research examined the reactions and experiences of both mentors and protégés, found communication of program objectives to be the most frequently identified shortcoming in mentoring programs. Clear communication regarding objectives is similarly something that program administrators can influence and carry out in the implementation phase and throughout the lifecycle of the program.

One question to consider is whether to employ small scale pilot testing before implementing the mentoring program in its intended scope. According to Hegstad and Wentling (2004), piloting is quite a common pre-implementation tool in Fortune 500 companies with exemplary mentoring programs. Rather than pilot-testing a program, it is of course possible to implement the program in its entirety or roll it out successively one organizational department at a time. Pilot testing calls for an evaluation of the target audience as well (Hegstad and Wentling. 2004).

2.5   Theoretical framework informing this research

Through the literature review, we have learned that mentoring can be beneficial to individuals who participate in the activity, and through the benefits accrued by mentoring participants, to organizations who facilitate mentoring trough formalized mentoring programs. We have also learned however, that some research has raised concern about the benefits of mentoring. By itself, establishing programs does not guarantee the attainment of expected benefits and some mentoring research has found that formalized mentoring programs fail to replicate beneficial results of informal mentoring that happens outside the confines of structured programs. We have also tried to make sense of well-established and oft-cited theory concerned with peer mentoring and peer relationships, and mentoring functions. Doing so, we have established that mentoring is a fundamentally social activity where relationships between the participants inevitably influence the type of support and benefits mentoring activity can provide. A traditional mentor-protégé relationship where a

senior employee guides a younger counterpart differs from a relationship between peers involved in mentoring activity. The distinction is however not clear, potentially less so in practice. Even though this research does not study an activity that would fall under the definition of traditional mentoring, it is important to consider theory related to traditional mentorship throughout research processes such as this thesis. People's notions of what mentoring means can influence how they view mentoring, or mentoring-like activity that is not classified as mentoring. Furthermore, traditional mentoring and alternative mentoring models, such as peer mentoring, have plenty of common features.

We have learned that the mentoring research field has widely adopted a view of two existing mentoring functions: career and psychosocial functions. These two categories are overlapping, but they provide some additional clarity to the concept of mentoring as they help delineate types of support mentoring has been observed to provide. This framework of two distinct type of support behaviour exhibited by mentors (Kram. 1983; Kram & Isabella. 1985) informs this research. Because this thesis attempts to find some insight into how mentoring programs could be tailored to fit organizational needs, it is important to try to understand which types of support mentoring has been established to provide. The notions of career and psychosocial mentoring functions are taken into consideration in this thesis throughout the research process.

Furthermore, we have built up elementary understanding about the process of designing formalized mentoring programs and the important design elements mentoring literature has found such programs to include. Issues concerning voluntary participation, the matching process of mentors and protégés, receipt of training, and organizational support have been found to influence the formulation and course of formalized mentoring programs. In looking for answers to the research question 'How is learning mentoring tailored to different organizations?' this thesis investigates mentoring programs' elements from the mentor's perspective.

In familiarizing ourselves with mentoring program elements and design, we have also learned that who to involve in the mentoring program's design process is a highly relevant question for an organization looking to develop and implement a mentoring program. Because this thesis asks how case companies' mentoring programs are tailored to suit organizational needs, the question of who takes part in this tailoring process is relevant for this study as well. We have also ascertained that even though the basic idea behind mentoring

is simple, mentoring can take such various forms, in different contexts that accurately compartmentalizing particular types of mentoring activity or formalized mentoring programs under concordant and universally acceptable labels can be difficult. Even academic mentoring literature has been deemed to struggle in achieving consistency in the way it has labelled activities such as action learning, apprenticeship, coaching, distance mentoring, executive coaching, formal or structured mentoring, group mentoring, informal or unstructured mentoring, multiple mentors or developers, peer coaching, peer mentoring, traditional or classic mentoring, and tutoring. This difficulty is something that also concerns this thesis, and as some of the conclusions drawn from the mentor interviews show, this difficulty is something that can affect mentoring participants at the practical level as well.

3.   Methodology and data

The ontological assumption this research takes as its starting point is a subjectivist, or a constructionist, view of reality and knowledge. In my view, the subject of this thesis and the nature of the research questions hint at this ontological starting point quite strongly. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) describe constructionist assumptions, according to which "social actors produce social reality through social interaction" which further allows the social actors to "change their views and understandings of social reality through interaction." (Eriksson, Kovalainen 2008. p. 13-14) Considering the object of my research, both of these assumptions resonate. Mentoring is an inherently interactive activity in which social actors, mentors and mentees, produce a social reality concerning the relationship between themselves, but also between them and the wider organization that surrounds them. Furthermore, as I am not able to observe the mentoring activity in these case companies directly, the data collection and my understanding of the mentoring activity taking place in these organizations is heavily dependent on the descriptions offered by the interviewed mentors.

To the point of perceptions and producing social realities within organizations, Swap and colleagues (2001) present an example where negative stories and attitudes regarding a new CEO, of four year's tenure, were circulating within an organization. When hashed out, these stories turned out to be eight years old and the new CEO had had nothing to do with the

emergence of these "powerful myths still lurking in the organizational culture" (Swap et al. 2001. p. 105-106). Anyone who has ever worked in an organization with enough employees that the existence of rumour mills is viable, has experience of this phenomenon, albeit not perhaps in such extreme fashion as in the example. Workmates tell stories about bosses, organizational rules and values, often implicitly, and many other subjects. These stories produce organizational realities and their telling and re-telling changes attitudes and views. Attempting to research organizational realities while relying on interviewees' telling of these realities sets some limits to how this information can be extrapolated, especially as the researcher, as an outsider, inevitably attaches an additional layer of interpretation to the relayed information.

Built into the concept of formal mentoring programs is a goal of changing the participants' understanding of their own work tasks and the organizational surroundings they operate in. This further speaks on behalf of adopting a constructionist viewpoint in researching the subject, as it suggests that organizational realities are malleable and, at least partly, created and negotiated by the members of the organization. Usually, the mentor might be the one who is assumed to be the one who imparts knowledge to the protégé whose views are changed as a result. However, as Swap et al. (2001. p. 99) mention while referring to Mullen & Noe (1999), these roles can be at times reversed, resulting in "protégé-to-mentor learning." As my research in concerned with peer mentoring, a relationship where the knowledge gap between mentors and mentees is more likely to be smaller than it usually is in situations where experts are mentoring novices, this type of two-way influence is presumably more likely to occur. Again, this further strengthens the view that mentoring activity entails interactional production of knowledge and reality.

A return to the example of eight years old negative stories being attached to new management hints at suitable epistemological positions to be adopted in this research's context. Posing the questions of what knowledge is and what are its sources and limits (Eriksson, Kovalainen. p. 13,) towards the example, reveals that knowledge about the CEO's behaviour and attitudes is subjective and created through employees' interpretations. Therefore, it seem appropriate to adopt a epistemological position related to subjectivism in the case of this research process. On a social constructivist view of reality, while referring to Blaikie (1993. p. 94,) Eriksson and Kovalainen posit that "reality does not exist outside individuals; 'reality' is always about individuals' and groups' interpretations." (Eriksson,

Kovalainen. 2008. p. 14) In line with the chosen ontological starting point, epistemologically this thesis takes an interpretivist approach to the questions of sources, limits and overall nature of knowledge. Again, this choice is guided by the research topic and questions, as mentoring is a social activity where knowledge is created, shared and interpreted by social actors. Therefore, it seems reasonable and fruitful to assume that for the purposes of this thesis' aims "knowledge is available only through social actors" (Eriksson, Kovalainen 2008. p. 15), those actors being the interviewed mentors whose telling of their own mentoring activity provides the context for this study. Furthermore, because this research requires me to interpret information told by the interviewees, I am unavoidably an actor in the knowledge creation process. In other words, I view both the knowledge under examination and the knowledge produced by this study to be fundamentally subjective and interpretive in nature.

3.1   Study design and sample

I classify this research as a multiple case study without any specific tradition. As Eriksson and Kovalainen note regarding the process of a case study, "in case study research, it is advantageous if the research design is flexible enough to allow for the refocusing of the case itself, collection of materials and their analysis, and the guiding research questions." (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008. p. 127). Furthermore, the authors suggest that in case study research, the defining of research questions is often done "in dialogue with the empirical data". (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008. p. 117). These descriptions fit both the intended and actualized research process of this thesis. The literature review, data collection, and the development of research questions has happened in parallel, these components informing each other in a cyclical manner.

To be consistent with my ontological and epistemological assumptions, I take my research and the knowledge it produces to be quite context specific. Even though this thesis engages two case companies and therefore can be classified as a multiple case study, the research process takes influences from the tradition of intensive case studies, which typically engage a single case organization or an individual. This is because an intensive approach aims to understand a case by "providing a thick, holistic and contextualized description" (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 117), and the production of rich description of the researched

phenomenon, with the research context clearly acknowledged, is the objective of this thesis as well. However, it is not appropriate to classify this thesis as an intensive case study as such. Because I, as the researcher, stress the importance of interpretation, both as a requisite for researching this topic and as a fundamental property of mentoring and knowledge construction, I also argue that loaning from the tradition of intensive case study approach is valid. This is because, according to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) intensive case studies emphasize interpretation and "elaboration of cultural meanings and sense-making processes in specific contexts." (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008. p. 119)

The interviewee recruitment process started by me contacting Sosped-Säätiö, or Sosped-Foundation, which is the organization that managed the learning mentoring training provided to the interviewed mentors. I approached them asking for suggestions of organizations that had participated in the training and had subsequently started mentoring programs utilizing the learning mentoring concept presented at the training. Through Sosped, I received the contact information of two people, in two different Finnish governmental organizations, who had taken part in the training and begun implementing learning mentoring program pilots. From these two administrators that had played a part in the set-up of these pilot programs, I received the contact information of nine employees who had acted, or were currently acting, as mentors in these programs. I approached these mentors by email, asking whether they were willing to participate in interviews for this research.

Eventually I conducted eight mentor interviews during March and April of 2021. All the interviews were conducted in Finnish, because all the interviewees were native speakers and Finnish is the operational language of the case companies. The interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to just over an hour. Additionally, I interviewed one person, from the organization Palkeet, who had taken part in the planning and implementation of their organization's learning mentoring program, to gather preliminary information about the mentoring activity in question. This interview helped me generate an interview guide and a list of interview questions to be posed to the mentors. Since I have chosen to focus on the mentor point-of-view, this administrator interview doesn't feature in the data analysis and is not counted towards the sample size of this research. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation all interviews were conducted remotely using The Microsoft Teams application. In some of the interview situations a video connection was utilized, but others were conducted almost entirely without the use of video, as technical difficulties and connection problems prevented

its use. The audio of every interview was recorded and transcribed later by me. The interviews were transcribed word-for-word apart from filler words, that were not included because that level of detail was not necessary for the purposes of this research.

It is important to note that the method of sampling in this research is not random. The selection of potential case organizations and the selection of people presented as potential interviewees were influenced by parties whose assistance I needed in accessing data. This means the selections could contain some biases unknown to me as the researcher. The sample size is small enough that pseudonymization of the interviewees is necessary so that the interviewees are not recognizable from this research report. The selection of quotes for this report have been done in such a manner that interviewees cannot be recognized from the information presented in the quotation. All the interviewees were presented with a privacy statement that detailed how the gathered interview data will be handled, and a consent form they were asked to reply to.

3.2   Semi-structured Interviews

To collect primary data, I conducted semi-structured interviews with mentors participating in the case organizations' learning mentoring programs. As stated, all interviews were recorded digitally and later transcribed. The primary reason for choosing semi-structured interviews as the data collection method was the fact that I am a novice researcher and new to conducting interviews. Semi-structured interviews are somewhat forgiving as they allow the interview situation to remain conversational and informal but still provide a chance for the interviewer to guide the questioning (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 80).

Because I attempt to identify themes connected to the research questions arising from the data, prior to conducting the interviews I had only guesses to what those themes might turn out to be. To this end, combining semi structured interviews with thematic analysis might present a challenge, because semi-structured interviews call for the interviewer to "try to fit their pre-defined interests into the unfolding topics being discussed, rather than forcing the interviewees to fit their ideas into the interviewer's pre-defined question order" (Gibson, Brown. 2009. p. 88.) Since, I am not an experienced interviewer, treading between the pressure of providing room for the interviewees to open up and provide rich data and the

pressure of making sure that I receive enough data to analyse, proved challenging as I had expected. To take this issue into consideration, I had planned a wide-ranging interview guide and an extensive list of interview questions. The purpose of these measures was to make sure that I could allow parts of the interview conversations to take their own path in a way where I nevertheless had some prepared questions to pose.

On one hand, in planning and conducting the interviews, I took inspiration from a positivist interview research tradition which aims at gathering facts and accurate information (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 80). The motivation behind this was to form an accurate picture of what the mentoring activity in these programs looks like in practice. Because interviews were the only window I had into the realities of the case organizations' mentoring programs, gathering some factual information about the programs from the mentors was crucial. This research aims to find out how organizations tailor mentoring programs to suit organizational needs and how the mentors participate in this process. To answer such questions, it is crucial to know what the mentors actually do when they conduct mentor activity. Examples of interview questions that had this goal in mind were e.g. *'Could you describe your mentoring work in practice?'*, *'How many people do you mentor*?', *'Could you describe how a typical mentoring session progresses?'*.

On the other hand, in planning and conducting the interviews, I relied on an emotionalist approach to interviews. This approach views interviews as a way to get access to the interviewees' "authentic experiences" (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 80). I imagined this approach to serve my research because in addition to facts about mentoring work, I wanted to gather the mentors' "perceptions, conceptions, understandings, viewpoints, and emotions" (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 80) related to the mentoring program they participate in. Examples of interview questions that had this approach in mind were e.g. *'What in your personal view is the reason the organization has decided to implement this program?'*, *'How has your understanding of your organization changed during this mentoring program*?', and *'How has your perception of yourself as a mentor changed during this program*?'.

3.3 Data analysis

As my research is interested in themes arising from the data, an approach in line with an "inductive-oriented strategy of case material analysis" (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 129) was applied to the analysis process. Analytical stages were iterated until I felt I had identified themes actually present in the data. Early data analysis work started during the collection and transcription of the data. At this stage, I attempted to identify crude overarching themes from the data by making notes during the interviews and after the interviews were transcribed. A more systematic data analysis began after every interview had been transcribed and the data set was complete. Most interviews were transcribed within few days, and all within a week from the time they were conducted. After all the interviews had been transcribed, I began the systematic analysis process immediately so that I had a fresh recollection of individual interview discussions and the interviews as a collective.

More specifically, for the systematic data analysis approach, my chosen analysis method and a "technique for organizing empirical data." (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 219) was chosen to be thematic analysis. As a guideline and a practical guide in the analysis process I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) description of thematic analysis and their suggestions regarding how to apply this method. As Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, the analysis was performed in an iterative manner, where the entire data set, different organized parts of the data, and theory are continuously revisited throughout the process. This turned out to be an unavoidable step because due to the length of the individual interviews, the amount of textual data grew quite large despite the relatively small sample size. This meant that in order to truly familiarize myself with the data and make sure that potential themes I saw arising from the data were truly present in the data, I had no choice but to keep revisiting the interview transcripts throughout the analysis process.

To begin, I familiarized myself with the data, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest, by closely reading and rereading the interview transcripts. Early on in this process I began "looking for key words, trends, themes, or ideas in the data that will help outline the analysis, before any analysis takes place" (Guest et. al. 2012. p. 7-8). Here, I kept the research questions in mind because the goal of the analysis process is to eventually ascertain themes that reveal something interesting or important about the research subject and the research questions themselves. On the other hand, I also kept in my mind that were interesting themes to arise

that did not fit the framework formed by the predetermined research questions. Reworking or totally reinventing the research questions remained a possibility. The theoretical framework being generated through the literature review parallelly to the data analysis process also guided this early phase. Early on, I searched for themes that exhibited the interviewees' understanding of the mentoring activity and how it relates to theory on peer mentoring and peer relationships. However, the primary purpose of this phase was to immerse myself in the data, take notes, and search for initial coding ideas. I wanted to remain open to unexpected results arising from the data. Therefore, I did not let the research questions constrain the gathering of ideas for coding, keeping in mind Braun and Clarke's (2006. p.87) notion that in the more formal coding process and throughout the whole analysis process, codes will continuously be revisited, re-assessed and refined.

As in the initial phase, during the coding process I also utilized an inductive, data driven approach where the themes depend mostly on the data (Braun & Clarke. 2006. p.88-89). This is evident in the findings of this thesis, as the final themes include themes that I had not anticipated and whose emergence required additional literature review and slight revisions of the original research questions themselves. In addition to the inductive approach, in the coding phase I utilized a deductive, more theory-driven approach where I had some specific questions in mind I was looking to "code around" (Braun & Clarke. 2006. p.88-89). During this stage, it became clear that even though this thesis primarily considers the mentors' points-of-view, questions regarding the elements and design of mentoring programs were highly relevant to my study, and the literature review that I had conducted at this point did not sufficiently reflect this. In other words, the data I had collected had less to say about mentoring functions and mentoring relationships as such. Rather, it felt the data and possible themes within the data set concerned issues related to mentoring program design and elements, as well as the mentors' perception of mentoring itself. In response, I searched and reviewed additional literature related to goals, design elements, and development of the mentoring programs. At this stage, the research questions were again revised slightly to reflect the updated emphasis of the literature review and the theoretical framework guiding this thesis, although the research questions did not experience large transformations.

3.4   Trustworthiness of the study

Triangulation in this thesis is performed through the use of various data sources. Primary data is collected through interviews and secondary data is obtained by interviewing a mentoring program administrator in one of the organizations, namely Valtion talous- ja henkilöstöhallinnon palvelukeskus or Palkeet as it is called. Additional form of secondary data this thesis utilizes in verifying the accuracy and consistency of the primary interview data, is a collection of previously accumulated documentation related to the training the mentoring programs' participants attended prior to starting their mentoring work. Access to this set of secondary data was provided to me by the supervisor of this thesis.

However, I feel that interviewing a greater number of program administrators as well as representatives of Sosped, the organization who provided the mentoring training to the program participants, would have done a service in further enriching the data and the conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Both these steps would have been possible, as a program administrator from Maanmittauslaitos and representatives of Sosped indicated to me that they would be available for interviews for this study. However, the workload and the timetable associated with this thesis work were such that these additional and surely valuable data sources were unfortunately left unexplored. I feel that the omission of these data sources also has some detrimental implications to the validity of this thesis, not necessarily by making the findings or conclusions less trustworthy, but by the fact that the perspectives this thesis explores were left narrower and the data less rich because insight from these sources are not included in this thesis. Furthermore, my own understanding of the researched issues would have surely been more concrete were these additional interviews have been conducted.

As Guest, MacQueen & Namey (2012) note, reliability can be a cause of concern with thematic analysis, due to the level of researcher interpretation required in defining the items of data, or codes, and in the process of assigning the codes to sections of the text. This issue was something that I kept in mind through the whole analysis process. However, eliminating this concern is an impossibility because interpretation is necessarily required in my research approach. One way I attempt to alleviate reliability concerns related to this thesis, is by being explicit and open about the analysis process.

It also deserves to be noted that the interviewees themselves relay their own interpretation of events when they describe their mentoring experience and their views regarding the mentoring program. This means the information that comprises the data has one level of interpretation attached to it at the mentor point-of-view level. The data then receives a second level of interpretation at the researcher level as its analysis is unavoidably affected by my research agenda, motivations, as well as conscious or unconscious preconceived notions. Relatedly, Allen, Eby and O'Brien (2008. p. 351) note that an organizational point of view, or focus of inquiry, has been relatively rare in previous mentoring research, and that prior research has most frequently focused on the protégés', the mentors', or protégé-mentor pairs' points of view. This thesis also gathers data that represents mentors' points-of-view, but some of the research questions, such as how the case organizations could tailor the peer mentoring programs to their needs, nevertheless call for considering the point-of-view of the organizations that have implemented these mentoring programs. Here lies a risk that information which is an interpretation of organizational reality by the mentors, and further interpreted by me as the researcher gets incorrectly extrapolated to say something about the organizations and their mentoring programs that is not supported by actual facts. This problematic issue is however something that I have tried to stay keenly aware of throughout the research process.

4. Findings: Mentor point-of-view to learning mentoring programs

We have now learned about some influential mentoring research and theory. We have also covered the methodology employed during this thesis' research process. In this chapter we will move onto looking at the findings from the semi-structured interviews. Firstly, we will look at a theme that relates to the issue that was raised right before we delved into the literature review portion of this thesis. In attempting to position this study in the mentoring research field, I presented views according to which the mentoring research field has seemingly found it difficult to consistently identify, and apply terms to, the types of mentoring it has looked into. Along this same vein, some of the interviewees' perceptions regarding the term learning mentoring form the first overall theme. In association with this main theme, a subtheme consisting of the interviewees descriptions of support they offer through their mentoring activity can be found. A second main theme arising from the

interviews shows that the mentors play quite a significant role in influencing the form mentoring takes in the case companies' mentoring programs. The third and final main theme concerns practical challenges to mentoring the interviewees noted having faced during the course of these programs.

4.1 What to call a learning mentoring program?

The interviews confirmed one thing that literature review also hopefully conveyed. Namely that, at its core, mentoring is an intuitively uncomplicated concept. As stated, this concept that people have about mentoring, tends to be that of an older, more experienced person guiding a novice. Once this relationship composition no longer applies and different types of terminology start being attached to the precede the word 'mentoring,' the subject matter begins to seem a little more ambiguous and complex. The term learning mentoring, or oppimismentorointi in Finnish, seemed confusing to me as a novice researcher mainly because not much in the way of information or literature could be found using that terminology. Some of the interviews indicated that this terminology, seemed to have caused some uncertainty and confusion among the, mostly novice, mentors participating in these programs as well. As three interviewees, Anne, Pertti and Jaakko, put it:

> "At first it seemed to me… I remember the first day of the training, I got the feeling of like 'Does this actually serve this purpose?' but then once you got into it a little more and I realized that at least… Learning mentoring is something that everyone comprehends a little differently and it sort of doesn't have a ready-made concept. So personally, I see it more as peer mentoring rather than any kind of traditional mentor-actor role." (Anne)

> "I just talked about this with [a person] and he asked why there needs to be learning mentoring when there's already mentoring, that how do they differ..? I feel like these sorts of new labels, which only stir up these sorts of really difficult questions, come about a little unnecessarily" (Pertti)

> "The thing is that that there are so many levels to mentoring. There's master-apprentice type of mentoring, there's coaching. So, one thing I'd hope, or that in these organizations there would be more thought put into what each term

means and what organizations seek with the terms. In my opinion, there was a kind of problem with the learning mentoring word. When you google 'learning mentoring' very little results come up, that it felt like this was a made-up term out of somewhere and not an official term… And there's nothing wrong with organizations using this kind of a term for their own purposes, I see nothing wrong with that. But this could have been spec'd sort of better, like what are we after with this, from our organization's point-of-view." (Jaakko)

As the three previous quotations from Anne, Pertti, and Jaakko demonstrate, the traditional mentor role, and a conventional notion of traditional mentoring activity serve as powerful reference points to which most interviewees quite explicitly compare their own role and the mentoring work they do. Interviewees use this reference point even when they otherwise indicate being acutely aware that neither traditional mentor roles, or mentoring relationships as described by Kram and Isabella (1985), nor mentoring activity associated with traditional mentoring are what is expected of them during these programs. Nevertheless, many interviewees use at least offhanded remarks which indicate that they view their own mentoring work through the lens of traditional mentoring. It has to be noted that not all interviewees expressed equal amounts of puzzlement regarding term learning mentoring but through the interviews as a whole, it became clear that the mentoring training the interviewees had received, and perhaps unclear goals and guidelines set for these mentoring programs, had left many of them with questions regarding the type of mentoring they were dealing with. Even interviewees who were not too concerned about the phrase learning mentoring itself, nevertheless seemed to have been left somewhat perplexed by the training as well as the amount and detail of practical guidelines given to them at the early parts of the program.

Words such as "coaching" or "sparring" are words that were often repeated by the interviewed mentors as they reflect on their mentoring work and the type of support they offer to actors and occasionally to other mentors.

"I believe that, of these themes we've gone through, that something has been passed through to the actors. It's been like a conversation, we've talked about how certain things manifest in one's own work with a focus on what one can do about it, or whether there might be another way to solve the matter. So,

> our approach has been been very coaching-like and I believe actors have been left with 'something in the bag.'" (Minna)

Examples of phrasing such as this, could of course be interpreted to be a result of people using terms, like coaching, loosely and assigning their own meanings to them, rather than an indication of the interviewees considering the mentoring work they do as coaching rather than mentoring. However, it can be noted that most of the interviewees quite fluidly mix terminology and conceptual categories which mentoring literature treats as separate, if overlapping, types of mentoring activities.

To sum up, qualifying terms attached to mentoring seem to matter to mentors. They matter in the sense that qualifying terminology introduces to mentors the idea that there is some kind of a departure from the traditional mentoring relationship composition and activity, and that they are expected to engage in some sort of adaptation of colloquially understood mentoring. In a positive sense, this obviously makes it possible for an organization to design a mentoring program that does not adhere to tenets of traditional mentoring if that is what the organization wants to do. The interviewees quite universally seem to indicate an acute sense that they are not expected to serve as traditional mentors and that this mentoring program is supposed to differ from more traditional mentoring programs in some degree. These findings seems to indicate that qualifying terminologies could matter in a potentially negative way as well. In the sense that qualifying terminology has the potential to create confusion in mentors as to what their mentoring should be like in practice and to generate feelings of doubt about how valid mentors see their own mentoring work being. For this validity-check, and for other mentoring-related reflections, many mentors appear to use the notion of traditional mentoring, no matter what the alternative mentoring they themselves are engaged in, or the mentoring program itself, is called.

Since it is apparent that the learning mentoring term has created uncertainty for some, a question of why the mentors do not simply call the mentoring activity by another name as they practice it arises. To this question a possible answer is given by Jaakko as he explains

> "We've used the learning mentoring term for sort of bureaucratic reasons, that because I've attended a learning mentoring program and I have work hours reserved for that purpose, it's been good to use the same term so that there aren't any sort of complications". (Jaakko)

No other interviewee raised this specific point, but I feel it could convey something interesting about this terminology-related theme in this specific research context. It is conceivable that had I interviewed learning mentors from a less bureaucratic, or otherwise different, organizational environment, this theme might have arisen in a completely different way or not at all.

4.1.1 Perhaps psychosocial mentoring or peer mentoring?

In the interviewed mentors' descriptions of their mentoring work, concepts of career-enhancing and psychosocial functions of mentoring in the context of peer relationships (Kram & Isabella. 1985) are reoccurring and visible in multiple ways. Many of the interviewed mentors describe providing actors the types of support that could be categorized under the psychosocial function of mentoring. "Emotional sparring" is what Malla calls the support she has offered to actors, while Elina says, "In some ways I also hope that it eases their [actor's] mind, or it feels good that someone listens to them describe all the things they have going on and what the day-to-day in their own work feels like." The fact that mentors describe providing support that differs from career-related mentoring support is somewhat unsurprising in this research context. According to the mentors' telling, the case companies have designated these mentoring program pilots to mainly serve such purposes, and the programs' goals are not so much about providing actors, for instance, exposure and visibility or challenging work assignments or information sharing and career strategizing. Rather the programs are more focused on providing other types of support to actors. In the two following quotations, Malla elaborates on "emotional sparring" while summarizing quite well how many of the interviewees view the nature of support they provide to the actors and the objective of these mentoring programs:

> "Whether it relates to work or something else, I do wish that at its best this could become such that we get so familiar with each other that if some issue is bothering the actor, they can contact the older colleague, or the mentor. That we sort through the things that at the time feel like bothersome at work or some issue that isn't quite right. That it doesn't have to be about not being able to handle a specific work task, but rather any issues. That a line of

> communication, a natural dialogue has been established. So that would be the objective here". (Malla)

> "Early on, I wondered about what's new about this. Now we're talking about learning mentoring - how does that differ from mentoring? But maybe the difference is that now we aren't teaching a specific task in a hands-on sort of way but rather life more generally, or in a way, how these situations could be dealt with". (Malla)

Here the latter quote also makes a connection to the process of figuring out what learning mentoring should be like in practice and how it relates to traditional mentoring, but another interesting insight the quotation offers has to do with the type of support, or mentoring functions, Malla and many others report. In reflecting on their mentoring work, the notion of providing emotional support appears frequently in some form, occasionally quite literally. Feedback and confirmation on the other hand, characteristics Kram and Isabella (1985) similarly associate with psychosocial peer mentoring functions, is quite absent in the interviewees' speech. This might be due to the fact that "listening" and "thoughtful questioning" are reoccurring ways the interviewees use to describe their style and method of mentoring and many of the interviewed mentors seem to prioritize hearing the actors thoughts over providing their own views and feedback. In the following two quotations first Elina and then Minna talk to this point:

> "Maybe listening skills are the most important, so that the mentor isn't constantly offering their own view, but rather listening to the actor and then if necessary, guiding the actor on the right path and asking the right questions. Kind of like challenging the actor to always think about these issues themself, instead of the mentor providing ready-made answers all the time". (Elina)

> " I believe it's just that one listens, discusses, does sparring. For me, that is the most natural way and I like a chance to get to know the subject matter a little bit first because then the quality of the mentoring is better rather than just having to think of something in the moment. But more through listening and asking questions, and sort of sparring." (Minna)

Listening is a particularly prevalent response these interviewed mentors give when asked to describe the type of support they provide actors. Several interviewees point out that they

suspect the importance of listening, and the need to be heard, to have been heightened during the increase in remote working, which has been partly spurred on by the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

It must be pointed out however that, quite predictably, not all interviewees describe being as comfortable offering support outside the realm of work issues as others. To this point Emma, who seems otherwise quite comfortable to provide wide ranging support from aiding "prioritization of actors' work tasks" to helping actors find ways to "cope with working life", nevertheless points out that mentoring is a work-related activity and subject to work-related conventions as she states:

> "[Some issues] are more the subject of one-to-one conversations where people want to unload if they are feeling bad, or that sort of stuff, and at those times you have to stay attentive of what is coaching and how much you can opine on which issues - someone simply pouring all their problems on top of you isn't mentoring". (Emma)

Although the interviewees relay providing plenty of support functions that could be conceivably categorized under psychosocial or emotional support, the interviewees also describe giving a wide range of practical, work-related support to actors. For instance, walking through work-related difficulties and finding ways to cross professional hurdles together is something that several mentors describe engaging in with actors. Similarly, helping actors organize and prioritize their work, and aiding the actors in managing their schedules are issues mentors note frequently as they reflect on the type of support they have offered to the actors. In the interviewees' telling, support in the form of information sharing, also comes up in the context of actors' expectations. A few of the interviewed mentors report some actors initially having expected support for developing their personal practical work skills from this program and from the mentors. This had caused some challenges, because common ground on the objectives of the program had to be negotiated first by the mentors and protégés in question.

Based on the entire data set, it seems clear that some interviewees, if not all of them, wrestle with identifying the type of mentoring they are involved in. In addition, the mentors seem to describe the mentoring programs' focus being on issues more closely related with psychosocial rather than career support functions of mentoring, but they nevertheless quite

uniformly report providing a mix of both types of support to actors. What to classify the type of mentoring they do, then? Would peer mentoring be an apt term to assign to these programs?

Anne, who in the previous chapter indicated viewing her role in this program as that of a peer mentor rather than a traditional mentor, is an outlier among the interviewees in how explicitly she makes a rhetorical connection to peer mentoring. Her comments on their own cannot of course be taken to mean that much when trying to ascertain whether these mentoring programs could be legitimately examined or viewed as peer mentoring programs. While reflecting on whether her view of herself as a mentor has changed during this program, Anne however makes another quotable explicit connection to peer mentoring as she talks about the mutual nature of learning and support that marks her mentoring work:

> "To me, it has been confirmed that I like the peer mentor composition better than mentor-actor because in peer mentoring there's clearly learning happening on both sides, both the mentor and actor learn. In a more traditional mentor-actor relationship - since I have experience of being that sort of mentoring as an actor myself - surely that mentor gained new outlook from us, but peer mentoring is sort of what I see myself rather doing". (Anne)

Several other interviewed mentors raise the mutual nature of learning and support, a key qualifier Kram and Isabella (1985) assign to peer relationships in contrast to traditional mentoring relationships, manifesting itself to some extent when they are doing mentoring. Most of the interviewees who talk about the mutuality aspect do not tie the idea explicitly to peer relationships or peer mentoring, but they convey numerous instances of personal learning that participating in this mentoring activity has enabled. For instance, while reflecting on what she has gained from participating in the program Minna states:

> "Of course I've also learned about these themes that we've created, like prioritization and methods associated with is something that I've found something new in, new insights for myself". (Minna)

To this point, Emma, who also recognizes personal benefits accrued through participating in the mentoring activity, seems to aptly conclude that mutual learning isn't solely a characteristic of peer mentoring or relationships but rather all social interaction as she says:

>"Well, every conversation you have with another person, you always get new ideas and realizations. Whether you're a mentor on an actor, it's fruitful and that's why I do this happily because it gives some new perspective to these things". (Emma)

Jaakko echoes these points by stating:

>"Well, sure this has expanded my own know-how considerably through having to think about things from other peoples' perspective so much more, and been forced to widen one's thinking and figure out what motivates people". (Jaakko)

It must be pointed out that these points could also be read as these mentors reporting personal learning because they are relative novices at mentoring and thus likely to learn new things simply because they are engaging in activity that is new to them. Furthermore, as Anne implied earlier when she reflected on her mentoring history, mutual learning and support happens in all mentoring relationships even though the mutuality of a mentoring relationship is something that mentoring literature designates belonging more squarely within peer mentoring relationships.

4.2   Mentors as tailors of the programs

Quite early on during the interview process it became clear that the interviewees have been quite extensively involved in planning the practical implementation methods of mentoring and many have had substantial freedom and responsibility to influence how the mentoring activity is performed. This of course means that the mentors' contributions have a significant effect in shaping the programs and influence what the case companies' mentoring programs look like in practice. The way mentors view the support they provide to actors, provides some insight into what kind of organizational goals can be achieved through learning mentoring.

As the interviewees described their mentoring work, one issue that could provide a partial answer to the question of how the case organizations tailor their mentoring programs to suit organizational needs started to emerge. Some interviewees acted in mentor pairs, who were assigned to mentor small groups of actors, other mentor pairs were assigned large actor

groups, and some performed the mentoring work on their own, either mentoring multiple or individual actors. Almost all interviewees reported having knowledge of a generic organization-level mentoring subject matter that provided an overarching theme to the mentoring program. For instance, enhancing psychological security in the workplace was an often-mentioned example of such an organization-given theme. Such program design decisions made at the administrative level are themselves ways of tailoring a mentoring program.

However, from the point-of-view of this research, the more interesting theme arising from the data is that the mentors in these case organizations indicated having considerable freedom and responsibility to plan and execute the mentoring activity in the style that they themselves, in concert with the actors, deemed beneficial. Most the mentors expressed quite clearly that they had been given opportunity to influence the practical implementation of mentoring during these programs, although it must be said that not all interviewees described receiving the same level of freedom. One interviewee describes the logic of the program and the mentor's role in defining what the mentoring will be geared towards in practice:

> "The objective was to bring mentoring into the department's day-to-day, and during the training the goal was to find a sort of use case with which learning mentoring could be brought into one's own department." (Jaakko.)

The same interviewee reflects on how he further negotiated the objective of the mentoring activity during the early part of the program in cooperation with the actors:

> "This is still a work in progress, so there are no final results yet. But yeah, if we talk about how this learning mentoring has exhibited itself in my own job description, I have been in contact with the actor team, we have organized some joint events where we have kind of thought about and gone through, first of all, what the goal of this learning mentoring is and how it affects the team, and what is sort of a long-timeframe target and how we are going try to reach them." (Jaakko.)

These excerpts demonstrate a pattern that was evident in the interviews indicating that regardless of organization-provided guidelines for the programs, a large part of the tailoring of these programs is done at the mentor level and with some actor involvement. In the following, an interviewee describes in more detail how a mentor pair has developed their approach and mentoring methods and tactics. She also touches upon the importance of including the actors in shaping the mentoring activity, a point made by several other interviewees as well:

> We have taken a sort of storytelling format, that through them [stories] the subject matter gets understood better. And of course, depending on the situation we start unwrapping and telling what the issue could be, and kind of speaking from experience about how this issue has been handled in the past and how could it be handled now, this sort of experiential storytelling… And we do the mentoring in pairs and me and my mentoring pair have three actors. And we have, as mentors, we have created these sort of themes. And first we go through them, like first we spar each other, and then we go through the things we have decided on with our actors. And of course we hope that we get input from the actors, like about what their needs are." (Leena)

Even though the sample size of this study is rather small, the interviewees however describe a wide array of different mentor-created, practical ways of implementing the mentoring programs' most important and influential part, the mentoring activity itself. Most interviewees indicate that they have had, at least some, involvement in designing these implementation methods. Some mentors, or mentor groups, report conceiving of and implementing a "learning café", which functions as an "interactive place for learning" where discussions around predetermined themes is facilitated. Related to this example the interviewee describes being in charge of planning and implementing a café concept, where a guest speaker might outline a subject matter, even in more lecture type format, after which the subject matter would then be opened up for discussion. The same mentor also reports providing actors with subject matter related materials before sessions to coax more fruitful conversations during the sessions.

Other interviewees report of planning and then conducting their mentoring in the form of workshops, where around thirty actors can be present, and where the mentors take on a role that more closely resembles a "facilitator role" than a role of a mentor, as the term is generally understood and described by literature. Here, as one might expect, themes for the workshop sessions are predetermined and the course of the sessions quite extensively choreographed in advance, because of practical requirements that come from having tens of people engaging in the activity. In this example, the mentors tasked with running such a workshop would see their role resembling that of a facilitator of discussion rather than that of a mentor. Still some, convey a description of a department where the implementation has taken the form of employees "receiving one coaching session, performing one coaching session themselves, and further conducting a self-coaching session". Other interviewees have ended up planning and implementing a system where one mentor familiarizes oneself with a theme or a topic the mentors have jointly decided to be later presented to the actors. The responsible mentor then briefs the other mentors on the subject matter, after which mentor pairs cover the theme with their assigned actors. One of such mentors describes the use of exercises or assignments handed out to the actors, and question lists with which to generate discussion around the mentor-decided themes.

However, not all interviewees report having been able to greatly influence the way in which the mentoring activity is organized. But the ability to influence the themes or subject matter the mentoring activity covers, to a degree, is something that almost all interviewees express. This despite the fact that most interviewees talk about some overarching organizational theme assigned to the mentoring program and being tasked to the mentors as a theme to be worked through with actors. As Minna says about a mentor's ability to influence the direction of the mentoring program (by topic, she here means the fact that the mentors are not mentoring about their personal area of expertise, not the specific topic of the mentoring session):

> "I've been able to influence on the part of the subject matter and the way I do this mentoring with our actors. But maybe the structure itself, meaning who I'm mentoring or which particular topic I'm personally mentoring on, maybe that is something that I haven't quite been able to affect. But I think this is still a living and a developing thing, that if this mentoring continues in our

organization, then possibly that is something that will be approached differently. (Minna)

Minna's point is also a good reminder of the fact that these mentoring programs are pilot programs in their relatively early phase and liable to change in their implementation methods before programs have run their course. The fact that the mentors have at this early stage managed to plan and implement such variety in their methods of mentoring is, in itself, an interesting finding. However, equally interesting is the fact that many interviewees note how invaluable other mentors have been in the process of creating ways to bring mentoring into practice. In the following, one mentor describes the way the mentoring activity she has taken part in took form:

> "So us in our mentor group, we planned and ideated, and then passed ideas around here within our department. Us learning mentors, we have a thing where we get together from time to time and at such an occasion we presented our idea to other mentors and got good tips from them, like "hey, you should consider this" and "have you thought about this". So we sparred with other mentors and got good suggestions from them, but at the end, we were the ones who planned the way in which to take the mentoring into action". (Maija)

Related to this point of mentors being creative as they figure out how exactly to shape their own mentoring work, the same interviewee also comments on the positive side of the training given to the mentors at the beginning of the programs not providing the mentors with strict guidelines on how to perceive the learning mentoring concept or how to take learning mentoring into action.

> "[the training] did get better towards the end and it became… I'm an organized person and I like to have schedules, times, specifications, and those sort of things sorted, but on the other hand, maybe the training allowed us to take it into a direction that we the participants wanted to take it into… That it wasn't set in stone, as in "this is perfect". Rather [the training] was sort of

ameba-like, which at the end was fine, and that's what life is like these days…" (Maija)

"Yeah. And based on that, you started to formulate your own way of doing [mentoring]?" (The interviewer)

"Yes, that's right. That, if there would have been given these sorts of strict… If it would have been strictly structured, then maybe one's own imagination would have also suffered in the process… That we were sort of forced into our own creativity as well" (Maija)

In addition to co-creation of practical mentoring methods happening within groups of mentors, many interviewed mentors note that other mentors have been invaluable as sounding boards with whom to make sense of mentoring itself.

4.3   Reported challenges to mentoring

Perhaps an unsurprising theme arising from the interview data, but important and interesting enough to deserve documentation, is the fact that conducting and planning mentoring work is quite challenging according to the telling of most of the interviewees. As the interviewees describe the challenges they have faced and sources of support in tackling these challenges during the beginning of these pilot programs, some themes emerge. As discussed, many of the interviewees reported experiencing some difficulty in determining the type of mentoring they were supposed to engage in but additionally the interviewees characterize challenges that have to do with realities of hectic and demanding organizational life, such as available time to plan mentoring activity. Organizational upheavals and changes in personnel are a central part of modern organizational life but in the context of governmental organizations some of the interviewees' telling indicates that organizational changes can have profound effects on all organizational activity, including mentoring programs such as these examined pilot programs. To this point, two interviewees offer insights on how organizational and personnel changes can have an effect on mentoring activities.

"Yes, it [changes in personnel within a mentoring group] has had an effect that we are kind of parts of the original line-up, and now new people who sort of jump into the fold. So we have go backwards and maybe start going through themes that we have already gone through previously, and since this is mentoring in a group, developing trust and a right type of atmosphere where people can openly air their views and they can trust that it stays within the group." (Minna)

"Yes, I have quite big expectations and I believe that this can be very useful once we get past this summer and this mentoring activity kind of reveals what it is going to be. And what our new organization is going to be like. How our goals and that types of things change and how we reorganize ourselves. After that, I'm sure that there are plenty of things that this learning mentoring can be used towards." (Emma)

As mentioned previously, most of the interviewees are relatively new to mentoring, which understandably means that although they seem to have quite a clear personal understanding of mentoring as a general concept, their experience of practical mentoring activity is limited, and these pilot programs serve as a platform to accumulate experience and develop personal practices. Although the basic dynamics and logic of mentoring are quite simple, at the practical implementation level the mentoring work itself can be challenging and complex. As the first theme hopefully demonstrated defining and conceptualizing practical mentoring work can also present a challenge to both those participating in or examining the mentoring activity. As one interviewee put it when talking about what it requires to prepare oneself for mentoring sessions or meetings:

"Well, it doesn't necessarily require much of anything if you are a very experienced mentor, in that case you can sort of come up with questions on the fly. For me, during the learning mentoring training, it emerged that finding the right questions to be posed in the right moments takes an awful lot of practice. Anyone can sort of be a mentor based on half a day of training - In some sense, it's not that complicated and the concept is very simple. But then the experience of knowing to use the correct term, right types of

> questions, and at the right moments during a conversation… That requires skill." (Jaakko)

Another mentor talks about the importance of keeping the subject matter the mentoring activity deals with quite simple when the participants are still getting comfortable with being mentors and actors:

> "This is something you have to practice. Simply having a good script is not enough and won't work. Rather this requires a lot of repetition, a lot of practice, and a sort of a psychologically secure environment in which to practice. I've noticed, that in the early phase the issues you start practicing with have to be quite easy, that they can't be such that they hit your feelings or elicit raw emotions. Rather some small issue with which to get started, then you start to get the hang of how to proceed." (Emma)

Not all interviewees talk about repeated mentoring work in terms of practicing, but all interviewees indicate, in one way or another, that repeatedly doing mentoring is the way they see themselves building confidence in their own abilities to provide support to actors. Mentoring training and getting familiar with mentoring literature or other types of support material can get you only so far, and as mentoring relationships are built through repeated interaction, so are the capabilities and confidence of mentors. A somewhat unsurprising theme arising from the interviews, but nevertheless worth mentioning, is that many interviewees report finding time to be used for mentoring activities being a challenge. As noted in the previous chapter, many of the mentors have had extensive freedom to influence and develop their personal methods of mentoring. This has of course required a great amount of work and some of the interviewed mentors suggest that participating in mentoring, on top of their personal workload, has proven to be somewhat straining:

> "So yes, this has given me really much, although the planning has also taken a lot. I mean, respect to those who run these kinds of sessions on a regular basis. The planning phase is quite something…" (Anne)

> "Everybody's calendars are fully booked. So to find time together to do mentoring and talk about mentoring. And another is getting ready for the mentoring. Because we have these certain themes we go through and they

require preparing for, thinking them through, the procession of the mentoring, what topics will be handled there. So that's something you can't quite do during working hours. At least preparation of the theme I was responsible for, it had to be done outside of working hours. (Minna)

"This topic, psychological security, reaööy wasn't for any of us something like: 'Well then, I know everything about this, "Let's go!"'. Rather we had to delve into the topic and we listened to a lot of podcast, watched Youtube-videos to find videos to be used in the mentoring sessions, and things like that which take a lot of time. And at some phase it started to sort of feel like 'What have we gotten ourselves into', some moments of despair. But then thinking 'better done than perfect', that this just has to be done in this timeframe and it's a surface scratch of the topic. That we can't make something that's perfectly ready and you have to accept some level of incompleteness". (Maija)

The last quote from Maija, which touched upon scheduling difficulties and the lack of available time for mentoring, also hints at another frequently mentioned challenge faced by mentors, which is that the mentors in these programs are in many cases tasked with mentoring on subjects outside their immediate expertise they. The array of support the interviewed mentors list themselves relaying to the actors is wide-ranging, including things such as "practical tips", "organizing and prioritizing work", "time management issues", "dealing with clashes of personality at work", and "alleviating self-doubt of actors", just to name a few that might not be within the areas of the mentors' expertise. Some of the interviewees connect this issue with the fact that some mentor-actor relationships were predetermined, and the participants could not influence the process. Here, one mentor first describes her mentoring style during mentoring sessions, and in the later quote brings up the challenges resulting from the fact that some actors were expecting to receive support outside the expertise of the mentors:

Yes well, mainly I just try to clearly bring it up [to the actors] that whatever I can be of assistance with, I'd be happy to help. And I have even told them I've felt that it has been somewhat difficult that the actors were assigned to

be participants in this program, which made me feel a bit uncertain of whether I have anything to offer to them" (Elina)

"Well, at least in the beginning it became apparent that the actors wished to receive mentoring on substance issues, or to the practical issues in their work and none of us mentors had a point-of-view or competence on those issues". (Elina)

Another mentor echoes the sentiment expressed by several interviewees on this issue, as she also identifies the requirement of mentoring outside of one's own expertise as a challenge faced during mentoring work:

"Well, maybe the fact that here this has proceeded from, not so much the strengths and areas of interest of the mentors, but rather we as mentors were presented with subjects on which to do mentoring on. So, I'd see that as a partial challenge, and something which leaves less room to operate in and maybe results in underutilization of mentors' potential. So maybe the model of thinking here was a bit different than what it could be in traditional mentoring where a significantly experienced expert could mentor a less experienced employee on a certain subject area, so maybe that is something that isn't a part of what we're doing here at this moment". (Minna)

To summarize, the interviewed mentors reported a variety of challenges they had identified facing them and other mentors in these mentoring programs. However, it must be said that these challenges were mostly conveyed in a very analytical fashion rather than as complaints about the difficulty of participating in the programs. All interviewed mentors seemed to treat most of the challenging aspects of mentoring and the way the programs are organized as points of potential improvement that could be, at least partly, corrected as the programs are developed. With that being said, the frequently raised issues related to scheduling difficulties or finding enough time to prepare for mentoring seemed, in the mentors' telling, to be somewhat unavoidable qualities of organizational life. Similarly, the constant organizational and personnel changes, raised by some interviewees as difficulties that hinder the building of sustainable mentoring activity, were conveyed, by some, as constant fixtures unlikely to change in the future.

5. Discussion

The most significant finding of this study relates to the main research question that asked how the case organizations tailor their learning mentoring programs to suit organizational needs? The interviews revealed hints of multiple possible answer to this question, as the interviewees described how the mentoring programs were designed and set up prior to their implementation, but not all of them were concrete or consistent enough in the data set that they could have been seen to form a theme. However, in my interpretation, the most consistent theme arising from the data that addresses this research question was the level of input the mentors themselves have had in these programs. The mentoring methods used in these pilot programs, seem to be largely the result of the mentors themselves, or in many cases collectively, planning the ways in which to engage the protégés or actors. The interviews revealed that the programs have a design and structure, and predetermined themes the mentoring activity is supposed to cover. This is consistent with theory related to the design processes of mentoring programs, where organizational needs analysis result in program guidelines that are intended to ensure that the program's purpose is fulfilled. However, in the context of this thesis, if the question is who is responsible for making sure that, at the grass-root level, these programs address the needs of the organization, the answer in my opinion seems to be the mentors. Moreover, through their engagement with the actors, the mentors seem to play a large part in the ongoing needs analysis as well as they assess the needs of the mentoring recipients and tailor the practical mentoring work towards those ends. In my opinion, the fact that the mentors have successfully created a wide array of practical mentoring methods suggests that from the points-of-view of both the mentors and the organizations, giving mentors freedom to plan and adapt their mentoring activity rather than providing overly constraining guidelines for it can be beneficial. It allows the mentors to create an implementation method that suits them personally, or as a group, and it allows the mentors to evaluate the actors' needs and include the actors, whose development is the main objective of a mentoring program, in the development of the program.

An unsurprising, but noteworthy finding from the interviews is that mentors face challenges or difficulties related to the participation in these mentoring programs. Issues having to do with scheduling conflicts are prevalent in mentoring programs, as discussed in the literature review, and the case companies' mentors report experiencing these challenges as well.

Because interviewed mentors have participated so extensively in the planning and implementation of the mentoring activity, they might have experienced an increased workload and thus been even more prone to facing such challenges as they have searched for available time. Another frequently mentioned challenge related to difficulty of mentoring work itself. In the context of this study, this could be due to the fact that many of the mentors have quite little experience in doing mentoring work.

Another interesting research finding is the fact that, although the mentors seem to have been quite successful in creating their own ways of administering mentoring, they nevertheless expressed doubts and some confusion regarding the overall concept of learning mentoring, under which the mentoring programs operate. In the findings, I connected this theme with the subtheme where mentors described the types of support they view themselves offering to the actors. I saw a connection between these two issues in the way the interviewees talked about them, but a further purpose of linking these issues was the motivation to examine whether the theory related to peer mentoring and associated mentoring functions, as covered in the literature review, could be reasonably applied to this activity called learning mentoring. In my opinion, it can be said that in the context of these case organizations' mentoring programs the mentors' relationships with their mentoring counterparts exhibit some qualities assigned to information and collegial peer relationships by Kram and Isabella (1985), which seems to partly validate the decision to view the subject matter of this thesis, learning mentoring, through a theoretical lens of peer mentoring. The way most mentors I interviewed describe their mentoring work and their relationship with the actors, could be argued to suggest that these mentors see collegial and peer relationships (Kram & Isabella. 1985) as something to strive towards, or at least as relationship qualities that would be even more conducive to produce meaningful and fruitful mentoring.

The fact that the interviewed mentors, who are parties to peer relationships (Kram & Isabella. 1985) rather than traditional mentoring relationships as defined by mentoring literature, relay being engaged in activity or performing mentoring functions that literature has observed mainly occurring in traditional mentoring relationships is not a particularly surprising result. Mentoring can happen in so many contexts and in so many practical ways that it is unreasonable to expect there to be no overlap between such activities, especially in the context as diverse as these case companies' mentoring programs. This result could however be seen to exhibit the "continuum of peer relationships" Kram and Isabella (1985. p.118)

also defined in their research. Perhaps the interviewed mentors' personal peer relationships are situated somewhere between the "points of reference" on this continuum of relationships Kram and Isabella (1985. p. 118) speak of.

The case organizations' mentoring programs are in their pilot-testing phase. As the issue of peer relationship types is considered, I suspect that partly for this reason collegial or special peer relationship descriptions, as they are defined by Kram and Isabella (1985) do not appear frequently in the interviewees' speech as they convey the nature of their mentoring work. However, numerous interviewees report the sharing of personal experiences, a feature Kram and Isabella (1985) designate to peer relationships, occurring in their mentoring relationships albeit mostly in reference to mentoring tactics where the shared experiences relate mostly to professional life and serve as educating examples. Some interviewees also mention that their relationships with the actors allow the sharing of experiences outside the professional context. Considering McManus's and Russell's description of an information peer relationship as "limited in sharing personal experiences" (McManus and Russell. 2007. p.277) the nature of some of the interviewees' mentoring relationships could be viewed as something approaching a collegial, rather than an information peer relationship. Issues of self-disclosure and trust (Kram & Isabella. 1985) between the mentoring participants, also show up as the interviewees reflect on their mentoring activity. In the data set, these topics are typically raised by interviewees when they speak of initially establishing a relationship with the actors and trying to develop an atmosphere that is conducive to mentoring and open, honest dialogue. Security and comfort are likewise topics that the mentors mainly talk about in relation to the establishment phase of the mentoring relationship. Addressing some of such particular topics happens to be a part the overall themes that the case organizations have assigned to the pilot programs, and which some interviewed mentors report striving towards in their mentoring work. This might partly explain why issues such as enhancing psychological security, reported by interviewees to be one of such overall directions assigned to the mentors by their organization, are on the interviewees' mind even as such issues relate to the mentoring relationships themselves.

In summary, as to whether these case companies' mentoring programs could be seen as representative of peer mentoring, no clear answer is possible to derive from this research. The multitude ways the interviewed mentors have taken mentoring into action - such as one-on-one mentoring, large mentoring workshops, mentoring in pairs or mentoring solo - is

enough to prevent drawing sweeping conclusions from this data. In my opinion there are however enough clues, such as peer mentoring-related terminology many of the interviewees use and the type of mentoring activity, or functions, most interviewees report engaging in, to justify academic examination of these two mentoring programs through the lens of peer mentoring theory or literature. Whether to categorize the mentoring these interviewees practice as peer mentoring for purposes other than academic inquiry, I am not so sure.

Regarding the confusion some of the mentors exhibit in relation to the term learning mentoring and the fact that the interviewed mentors use terms such as "coaching", something Kram and Isabella would (1985) see belonging to career functions of traditional mentoring relationships, or "sparring" to describe mentoring work is perhaps not surprising, rather it should be expected. After all, as D'Abate et al. (2003) noted academic mentoring literature has been established to use terms associated with mentoring, and other developmental activities, quite loosely and inconsistently. This research finding regarding the confusion generated by the term learning mentoring could perhaps be seen as a data point strengthening the argument D'Abate et al. (2003) make about the field of mentoring being insufficiently rigorous and specific in defining the object of their studies and interest.

These findings do have some limitations. I am a novice researcher and, as I discovered, not yet as adept as an interviewer as I would have like to have been. The choice of conducting semi-structured interviews worked as intended in the sense that the collected data contained interesting information, but it must be noted that my inexperience as an interviewer showed in the sense that I was not able to plan interviews that would have been conducive to yielding large amounts of comparable data. If I would have had time to conduct a second round of interviews after I had had a chance to review the collected interview data in its entirety, I would have had a much better sense of which questions potentially yielded rich answers in this research context. The insights provided by the interviewed mentors and the set-up of the case companies' mentoring programs themselves turned out to be so interesting and multifaceted, that a more experienced researcher would have surely been able to generate more extensive and deep-delving findings than I was able to produce. Additionally, non-participant observation could have be an effective method of collecting primary data for my research aims, and I believe that such data could have also yielded more concrete and reliable findings. By observing the mentoring work, I could have recorded "action as it takes place," (Eriksson, Kovalainen. 2008. p. 87) which differs significantly from asking people to recall

and relay what they have done. Mentoring is a fundamentally social activity and relying solely on interviews inevitably means that this thesis deals with a limited perspective into the research matter. Furthermore, the data is not as rich and my own understanding of the mentoring work happening in the case organization not as holistic as it could have been, were I to have observed the mentoring activity in practice. Considering the subject matter of this thesis, I view the lack of observation to be somewhat detrimental to the validity of this research. However, I do not see this limitation as too concerning taking into account the research questions and the cross-sectional nature of this study. In other words, this research takes stock of mentors' points-of-view on issues and events that have transpired since the beginning of the mentoring programs, but at a particular point in time, namely the time this research is conducted. Even if interviews would have been complemented by secondary data collection through observation, this observational data would have primarily affected my own understanding of the research matter in its context.

6. Conclusions

The research context of this thesis has been formed by mentoring programs, in their pilot testing phase, in two Finnish governmental organizations Maanmittauslaitos, and Valtion talous- ja henkilöstöhallinnon palvelukeskus. This study has considered the mentors point-of-view to the establishment and continued development of these mentoring programs by interviewing them about their experiences. The data gathered through the interview process has been analysed using principles associated with thematic analysis. A primary objective of this research process was to provide answers to the research questions, which were:

> *How case organizations tailor their learning mentoring programs to serve organizational needs?*

> *What is the mentoring activity in learning mentoring programs like?*

The possible answer this thesis found to the main research question of 'How case organizations tailor their learning mentoring programs to serve organizational needs?' was alluded to in the previous discussion chapter. The interview data indicated that the mentors' role in tailoring, or adapting, the practical mentoring work in this research context has been significant. That is not to say that other organizational actors, such as for instance management charged with the administration of the programs or the training providers, have

not been influential in shaping these programs. This research conclusion might be partly due to the selected mentors' point-of-view, as it has steered this thesis towards examining mentors and paying less attention to other possible groups of people that could have been the subject of the answer to this research question were the research have been conducted in a way that considered their point-of-view. Even so, I am quite confident that no matter whose perspective a research looking at these case companies' mentoring programs would take, the effect the mentors have had in shaping the programs would be clearly visible. The fact that the participating mentors have been very hands-on in planning the practical ways to implement the mentoring activity combined with the multitude of solutions and methods of administering mentoring the programs have produced in a short amount of time, attests to the validity of the conclusion that the interviewed mentors have so far been active tailors of the programs. This conclusion could be seen adding a seed of a new perspective into academic literature that deals with formalized mentoring programs. In practice, anyone participating in or observing mentoring activity could probably theorize that the mentors, who are usually the active part of a mentoring relationship, are in a key role in determining how the mentoring takes place and thus mentors collectively play a role in shaping the entire mentoring program they take part in. Mentoring literature however seems to view designing and developing mentoring programs as something that belongs to management or the administrators of mentoring programs. These parties are of course the ones who bear a responsibility for these programs and possibly constitute the audience mentoring literature is in large part aimed towards. Even so, after this research process I am quite surprised how little mentoring literature seems to talk about the influence mentors themselves are bound to have in shaping mentoring programs.

Answers to the supporting research question 'What is the mentoring activity in learning mentoring programs like?' are more multifaceted and hard to state succinctly. The research question itself nevertheless served its purpose, as trying to find answers to it aided me in clarifying the answer to the main research question. As that is the case, it reasons that, at least some, the answers to this research question are linked to the fact that mentors seem to have been influential in the shaping of these case organizations' programs. One way to answer this research question is to state that, from my point-of-view, in this research context mentoring activity takes almost as many forms as there were mentors willing to be interviewed for the purpose of this thesis. Some mentors mentored in pairs, some mentored groups of people and other individual actors. Some mentors ideated mentoring cafes and

others decided to assume the role of facilitators as they planned group mentoring sessions that could be seen resembling seminars rather than mentoring sessions as they are colloquially understood. Relatedly, it is clear that despite somewhat widespread confusion related to the term learning mentoring and the training that introduced this concept to the mentors, mentors nevertheless seem to have mostly taken what they saw fit and useful out of the learning mentoring concept and the training, and proceeded to create ways of mentoring that suit the context in which their mentoring work happens.

Regarding the question of what the mentoring activity is like, the interviewed mentors describe some mentoring activity that would at least partly fit the description of traditional mentoring. The interviewees also quite clearly use their personal notions of traditional mentoring as a reference point as they ponder their own mentoring work and relationships. They however rightly, in my opinion, recognize that the mentoring work they do is not traditional mentoring but something different. These mentoring programs are not predicated on a hierarchical status difference between the mentors and the individuals being mentored, but the participants are rather acting as peers. The case companies' mentoring programs are not however called peer mentoring programs, but rather learning mentoring. In connection to this supporting research question, this thesis attempted to probe whether learning mentoring could be equated with peer mentoring. However, as the discussion in the previous chapter revealed, no strong conclusions can be drawn on this issue based on this study.

6.1 Practical implications

The fact that the mentors have at this early stage managed to have planned and implemented such variety in their methods of implementation is an interesting finding with potential practical implications. In my opinion, this finding suggests that from the points-of-view of both the mentors and the organizations, giving mentors freedom to plan and adapt their mentoring activity rather than providing strict, potentially constraining guidelines regarding how the mentoring is to be administered can be beneficial. It allows the mentors to leeway in creating ways of mentoring that suit them personally. Furthermore, it allows the mentors to take stock of individual and organizational needs that mentoring could be geared towards addressing. As was evident from the findings that touched upon the challenges associated with mentoring, it is clear if mentors are tasked with a large role in planning and shaping the

practical mentoring work, adequate support must be offered to them. Managers and program administrators have to make sure that the mentors have ample time to use for their mentoring duties, which they more often than not perform as extra work on top of their own job tasks.

I feel like the confusion the concept of learning mentoring generated among the mentors, has practical implications for organizations looking to implement mentoring programs that operate under a term on which not much information can be found, were a mentoring participant to look for it. I see similar practical implications for organizations who administer mentoring training under terminology that is not well known to the participants. In both cases, I feel like it might even be prudent to kick off a program by calling the mentoring activity it promotes simply by the term mentoring, because that term is a reference point that almost everyone intuitively understands. As a program or mentoring activity progresses, such terminology could of course be updated and elaborated on, but in such a case the meaning of the updated term could more readily be negotiated by mentoring participants as the change happens.

6.2   Limitations of the study

The small sample size is an issue that limits the usefulness of this study. Furthermore, considering the fact that these findings and conclusions are extremely tied to the context of these case organizations, and affiliated actors such as the training provider, extrapolating any of the conclusions outside of this specific context is precarious. Previous research has raised concerns regarding the research design and methodological choices prevalent in many academic studies that have examined mentoring. Some of these concerns, which relate to study design and methodology, are relevant in the case of this thesis as well, and thus deserve to be mentioned. After a review of two hundred published academic articles, Allen, Eby and O'Brien (2008) argue that segments of mentoring-related research are overly reliant on cross-sectional, non-experimental study designs and self-reported data. This thesis ticks all of these boxes, as it is also cross-sectional and non-experimental in its design, its analysis is concerned with interviewees' views and opinions regarding mentoring programs and associated training at a specific point in time. Interviews, the main data gathering method in my research, yield self-reported data. However, the concern Allen, Eby and O'Brien (2008) raise is due to the fact that mentoring-related research papers have relied heavily on surveys

as a means of data collection. Because I attempt to form a deep and holistic understanding of the organizational context and the organizational actors' views regarding the topic of this thesis, the use of interviews somewhat alleviate the limitations of this study. These issues however inevitably limit the application of the results of this thesis.

6.3   Recommendations for future research

One suggested avenue of further research is the pairing process of mentors and actors. In considering mentoring program elements suited to organization-specific tailoring, this thesis has taken into consideration questions related to mentor-protégé pairing. Some of the interviewees were asked about how the case organizations' peer mentoring programs have handled the pairing of mentors and protégés, and how the mentors view the importance of pairing. In a learning, or peer, mentoring setting, the process of matching mentors with mentees isn't necessarily as straightforward as it might be in the case of more conventional mentoring where mentor-actor pairs usually form more or less organically, or even as clear as in other types of formal mentoring programs. Since research indicates that the effective matching of mentoring participants has the potential to affect the benefits derived from the mentoring activities, it would have been valuable information were this thesis have been able to yield meaningful data on this issue. However, even though the issue of mentor-protégé pairing yielded some interesting answers from those mentors who spoke of this subject, I was not able to collect enough data on this question because I was inconsistent in the way I posed questions regarding the pairing to the interviewees. Even though in both organizations the choice to assume a mentor role has been done voluntarily, in one of the organizations the coupling of mentors and actors cannot be described as totally voluntary, as groups of actors were assigned to specific mentors. In hindsight, I, felt like the interviewees would have had interesting insights regarding mentor-protégé pairing would I have been adept enough to access it. For this reason, I suggest that the pairing issue be a subject of further research, either in the context of these particular case organizations, or companies in a similar mentoring pilot program situation.

Because this research targeted organizations whose mentoring program participants have received specified training, this thesis adopted training as a design element of mentoring programs part of the theoretical framework. However, this research was unable to examine

the issues related to training deeply and meaningfully enough. For practitioners and academics alike, it would be interesting to examine how learning mentoring training, provided by Feeniks-hanke (2020), has affected the attitudes, expectations, and self-assessed peer mentoring-readiness of the case organizations' group of mentors. If these pilot programs are expanded, a larger number of mentors is required, and thus further mentoring training is needed. Furthermore, most of the interviewees are novices at mentoring. In the case of novice mentors, training that prepares participants for mentoring work, is presumably even more important. The near future provides a chance to gather a preliminary assessment of perceived effectiveness of training, which could, in theory, serve as a reference point in the future when the mentors have performed their mentoring duties and it's possible to conduct a retrospective assessment of the effectiveness of training received. Furthermore, were a longitudinal research project to examine these organizations' learning mentoring activity in the future, the data and insights of this cross-sectional research could provide a view of the activity in its early stages.

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