

Master's Thesis as part of the examination for a MSc in Business and Economics
Stockholm School of Economics
Department of Management
Fall 2014

Mentored by a Child?
**- Impact of Age on Enactment of Supervisory-Career Mentoring in
Young Supervisor-Older Subordinate Settings**
*A Case Study of the Finance and Accounting Departments
at Mars Inc. Europe*

Abstract: This thesis examines the research question: *How and to what extent are the Supervisory Career Mentoring functions enacted in young supervisor-older subordinate dyads?* Supervisors who are younger than their subordinates are becoming more and more common in the corporate world. According to current theory on age within the field of Organizational Demography, this increasingly common setting may have a negative impact on the quality of the relationship. Given that supervisory mentoring is believed to make significant contributions to a number of factors, e.g. skills development, that are of interest to both academic research and organizational decision-makers, this thesis assesses the impact of age reversal on the enactment of Supervisory Career Mentoring (SCM). Enactment and its explanations are studied with an in-depth embedded case study in Finance and Accounting departments in Mars Inc. Europe. Firstly, the enactment of the five sub-functions of SCM identified in the literature is described. Thereafter, the impact of age on the enactment of these functions is outlined. This thesis finds that at first glance, all five SCM sub-functions are observable. But, they seem largely confined to formal settings and most are only partially performed. Additionally, it is shown that there appears to be a negative perception bias among mentoring supervisors of their older subordinate protégés. Further, there are indications of latent conflicts in the relationships. It is found that these are contained by mentoring supervisors engaging into a passive mentoring style and communicating in a way that helps to relate to their older protégés. The distance created by these coping mechanisms further explains the limited enactment of the SCM sub-functions.

Key words: Mentoring, Age, Similarity-Attraction, Status Incongruence, Supervisory Career Mentoring, Relational Demography, Young Supervisor-Older Subordinate

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Presentation: December 2014

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis would not have been possible without the support of several people. First, we would like to thank our thesis supervisor Andreas Werr for his patience, support and helpful feedback throughout the process. Moreover, we would like to express our gratitude to Christoph Oettle for introducing us to Mars Inc. We are also very grateful for the valuable insights and opinions that our interview partners at Mars Inc. shared with us, dedicating their precious time. In addition, Eva Kolker's feedback, advice and comments were deeply appreciated. Lastly, we would like to extend a "thank you" to all the people close to us who provided us moral support throughout this busy period. Special thanks go to Chessie, Franz and Suzi.

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Table of Abbreviations

PDP	Personal Development Plan
RQ	Research question
SCM	Supervisory Career Mentoring
SQ	Sub-question
Sup	Supervisor
Sub	Subordinate

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1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the background of mentoring in reverse-age settings by reviewing how organizations use mentoring to cope with increasing dynamism in business and the demographic trends that may pose an obstacle (Section 1.1). Next, the purpose and research question of this thesis are presented (Section 1.2). Finally, the structure of the report is illustrated (Section 1.3).

1.1. Background

“Never ever make generations or age a topic. Because I think once you are down that road, it is too late.” (Sup. 4)

Business has become ever more dynamic and volatile over the last century. This in turn forces companies to become more adaptive (de Poel, et al., 2012). In order to ensure this flexibility and adaptiveness, it is crucial for contemporary companies to become smarter about developing their employees' skills.

One way of dealing with this challenge that has become widespread in recent decades is *mentoring* (Fagenson-Eland, et al., 1997). Good quality mentoring is able to improve job satisfaction, leading to higher employee and hence also knowledge retention (Ensher, et al., 2002) within the company, as well as skills development, providing just what the companies need. However, the traditional interpretation of the mentor, an older, experienced organizational member guiding and teaching a younger, novice protégé, is gradually challenged by another trend: the graying of the workforce. Today, more and more employees have younger superiors, with the consequence that supervisory mentoring takes place in a situation of reversed age roles.

Mentoring

Mentoring is increasingly catching the attention of practitioners and researchers alike (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005). Formal mentoring programs have been touted as an “extremely effective strategy for addressing organizational complexity” (Dominguez & Hager, 2013, p. 171), supporting employees in dealing with ambiguities that have to be dealt with in dynamic company surroundings. It offers many benefits, such as reduced turnover and increased job satisfaction (Ensher, et al., 2002), which counteract the potential negative influences of increasing change. Further, it has even been described as a way of coping with increasing demands from the organizational context, by reducing the learning curve (Jossi, 1997) as it contributes to skills development.

However, as some researchers point out, a considerable part of mentoring is still enacted within the regular hierarchical bounds, i.e. between supervisors and subordinates (Clawson, 1985; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). Research indicates that most mentors are, or have been, the protégé's supervisor, e.g. Burke and McKeen (1997). A combination of the mentoring field with supervisory leadership has been investigated in response, referred to as Supervisory Career Mentoring (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). This strand of research focuses on the career-counseling function of mentoring and its presence in the supervisor-subordinate dyad.

Changing Age Patterns

The topic of mentoring is closely related to another important development in most Western countries: the aging of the workforce. Generational differences in longevity and birth rates are increasing the average age of the workforce as the oldest cohort of employees (the “baby boomer” generation) is larger than the younger ones that have entered since (Hair Collins, et al., 2009). Moreover, an increasing number of them delay their retirement (Chinsky Matuson, 2011), effectively increasing the maximum age of employees, and the age span in companies, as well as keeping this large cohort in the organization for longer.

Furthermore, with the relative lack of young workers entering the workforce compared to decades past, more companies than before find themselves recruiting older workers to fill their entry-level positions (Perry, et al., 1999). This trend of difficulties in replacing employees is far from confined to entry- or lower level positions. In fact, what appears to draw more attention, at least among practitioners, is the age-related turnover among management, whose members in many companies today are nearing retirement age. In order to secure managerial capabilities for the future, many companies have been led to implement talent management initiatives such as fast track careers, e.g. trainees (Smith & Harrington, 1994). The trend towards formal mentoring programs can likely also in part be explained by a wish to foster and retain young talent as successors to management positions. Additionally, more companies are realizing the changing needs, in terms of knowledge and skills, in business today and recruit young talents into management positions based on their higher education or skills in e.g. information technology (Hair Collins, et al., 2009).

As a result, employees reporting to a younger supervisor are becoming increasingly common. One Career Builder survey cited by Chinsky Matuson (2011, p. 23), for instance, found that over 50% of employees over the age of 45 reported to a younger manager. This is a clear break with the tradition that managers are older than subordinates (Shore, et al., 2003). Research shows that such a breach of established age norms, where an increasing part of employees find themselves taking orders from a person the age of their children, may not be without risks: interpersonal conflicts and decreased job satisfaction may be the result (Lawrence, 1988).

Thus, research into the consequences of age reversal in different organizational settings has been growing over the last decade (e.g. (Shore, et al., 2003) and (Hair Collins, et al., 2009)). Mentoring, with the tradition of an older, more experienced mentor and a novice protégé, is one of the areas where such research is seen (Finkelstein, et al., 2003; Haggard, et al., 2011). However, so far the research on supervisory leadership and mentoring in reverse-age settings has mainly spawned studies on outcomes, e.g. absenteeism (Perry, et al., 1999) and job satisfaction (Shore, et al., 2003) in the former, and perceived quality of mentoring in the latter (Finkelstein, et al., 2003). Research on differences in mentoring behavior that reflect or underlie these outcomes appears to be missing. Therefore, this thesis aims to begin filling this gap by exploring mentoring behavior in reverse-age supervisor-subordinate dyads.

1.2. Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to address a gap in the literature concerning an increasingly common phenomenon: older members of organizations being mentored by younger, but more senior mentors. Supervisors, through mentoring, are believed to fill an important role in the development of their subordinates, ultimately improving the organization's performance. Most conceptions of mentors and protégés involve an older, more experienced person mentoring a younger, relatively novice person (Finkelstein, et al., 2003). However, this may not be the most common situation anymore.

Academia has not yet addressed this issue in detail. Age theory predicts that violation of age norms will promote interpersonal conflicts, reducing communication and inhibiting cooperation (Lawrence, 1988). Indeed, there have been a few studies showing a negative relationship between relative age difference and e.g. positive work change behavior (Perry, et al., 1999) and investment in the development of the subordinate (Shore, et al., 2003). However, these studies have all returned mixed results, with deviations not well explained by theory. Yet, the actual mentoring behavior enacted, the link between antecedent age and outcomes, still appears to be largely unexplored.

The authors argue that it is important to achieve an improved understanding of mentoring behavior in this setting to better inform predictions on the impact that age differences have on outcomes, such as skills development, that are of interest to both academic research and organizational decision-makers. Understanding this link is especially important when it comes to studies on age, where this has been problematic before (as discussed in Section 2.3 of the literature review). The importance is especially pronounced in the setting of supervisory mentoring, where the authors have not identified any previous studies on age difference effects.

Thus, the present thesis contributes to the research by taking an initial step towards describing the impact of relative age on mentoring behavior. This is done by examining how a specific component of mentoring, career-counseling, is enacted in supervisor-subordinate dyads when the supervisor is younger than the subordinate. To do so, the thesis aims to answer the research question:

RQ: How and to what extent are the Supervisory Career Mentoring functions enacted in younger supervisor-older subordinate dyads among finance employees of Mars Europe?

The research question is addressed in two steps. First, the thesis investigates what behaviors mentors exhibit in order to perform the functions of Supervisory Career Mentoring. This is done by answering sub-question 1:

SQ1: What actions are performed to enact the Supervisory Career Mentoring functions among the reverse-age supervisory dyads?

Next, the thesis investigates what role relative age plays in shaping these actions and any deviations from those generally observed in a more traditional setting. This is discussed under sub-question 2:

SQ2: How does the age difference impact the enactment of the Supervisory Career Mentoring sub-functions?

1.3. Report Structure

Figure 1 below illustrates the disposition of this thesis. It begins with the introduction (Chapter 1), including background and research question, before the literature review (Chapter 2) is presented. Then, it moves on to discussing research strategy and methods (Chapter 3) as well as the case context (Chapter 4). Next, the empirical findings and analysis are described (Chapter 5). Finally, the conclusion is presented (Chapter 6) and contributions are discussed (Chapter 7).

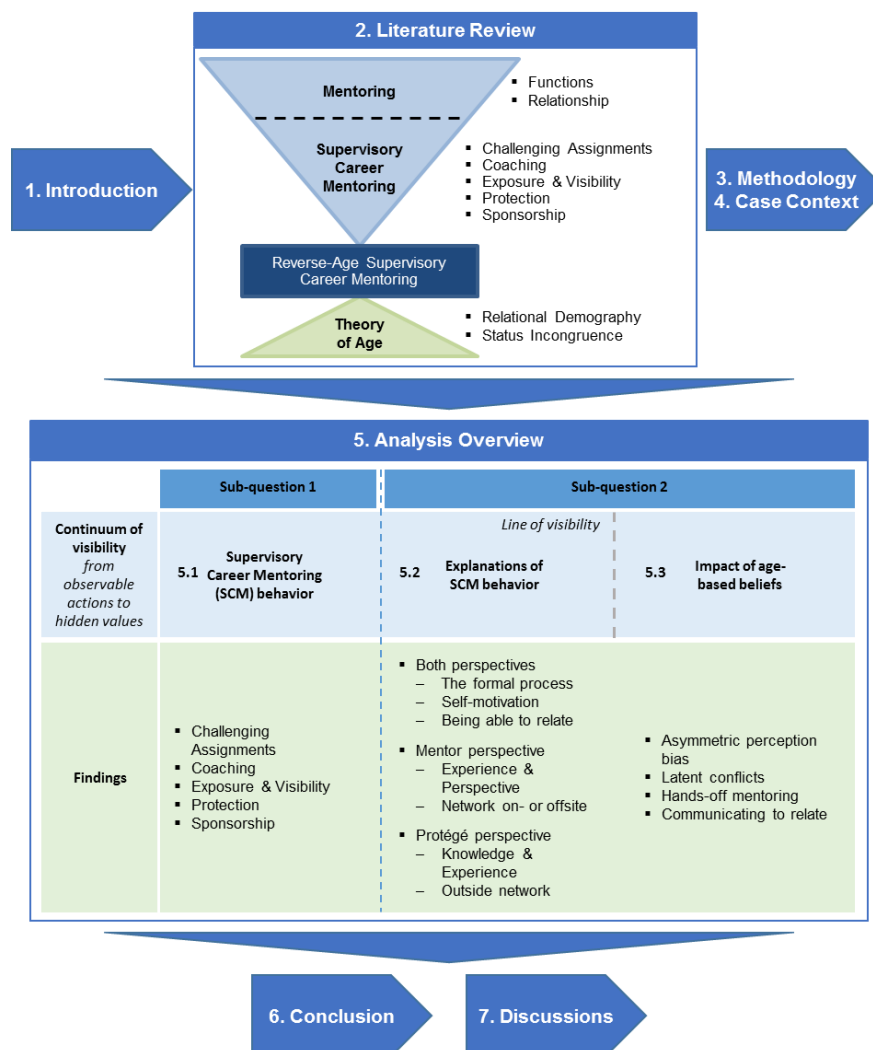


Figure 1: Report Structure Overview presenting the chapters of the thesis with emphasis on the literature review and analysis frameworks

2. Literature Review

This chapter presents the findings from the literature review, providing an overview of the previous research that forms the framework for this study. It is summarized graphically in Figure 2 below. The chapter begins by reviewing the research on mentoring (Section 2.1) and then focuses on Supervisory Career Mentoring (Section 2.2). Next, theory on age, similarity-attraction and status incongruence is reviewed (Section 2.3). Finally, in the theoretical framework section, a summary of the reviewed literature fields and their role in the present thesis is presented (Section 2.4).

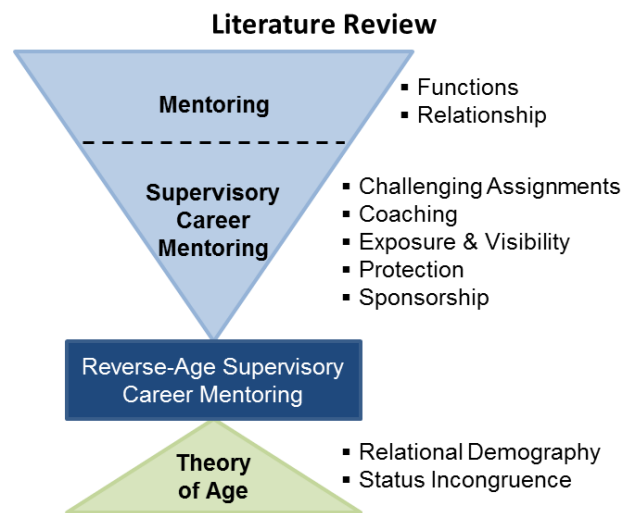


Figure 2: Overview of the literature framework, displaying mentoring and age as the two major fields of literature involved.

2.1. Mentoring

Vocational mentoring or *workplace mentoring* was originally studied as a relationship that enables "...young adults to successfully enter the adult world and the world of work..." (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 110). It was viewed as a relationship of a giving nature, with the focus being on the benefits that the protégé, the "young adult", drew. The mentor was commonly described as a more senior and preferably 8 to 15 years, or half a generation, older organizational member (Finkelstein, et al., 2003). If the protégé was too close in age to the mentor, or even older than the mentor it was argued by these early researchers that the relationship would be challenging. However they did not investigate or explain in further detail why.

While the researchers did not exclude relationships where the protégé is older than the mentor, perhaps intuitively, based on the nature of functions provided in the relationship, they viewed these constellations with skepticism. Kram (1985) investigated and formulated the functions that the protégé derives from the mentoring relationship. The author argued that the mentors provide two different kinds of behaviors, *career-counseling*, which is concerned with directly furthering

the protégés work performance and prepare her for career advancement, and *psychosocial support*, where the mentor acts as a reassuring presence, boosting the protégés self-confidence.

These functions have largely remained unchanged since their first formulation (Allen, et al., 2008). Multiple studies have verified the presence and categorization of the career-counseling components, including the use of positional power to sponsor and provide the protégé with exposure to decision-makers. However, there is a still on-going debate regarding the psychosocial support (Scandura, 1992). These were initially summarized as "...role modeling, counseling, confirmation, and friendship, which help the young adult to develop a sense of professional identity and competence." (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 111). Later studies, on the other hand, have found support for role modeling as a distinct function (Burke, 1984; Scandura, 1992). Still to date, role modeling will sometimes be included as a separate function and sometimes as a part of the psychosocial support (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Dickson, et al., 2014).

Mentoring has been credited with benefits to affective and objective outcomes for the protégé. Depending on the way that mentoring is measured, different outcomes are observed (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008). Generally, affective outcomes such as satisfaction and objective outcomes such as salary and career development or behaviors such as absenteeism are found to be improved by mentoring. The first is chiefly influenced by the quality of psychosocial support including role-modeling, the latter by career counseling provided. Overall, the impact on affective measures appears to be stronger than that on objective outcomes (Eby, et al., 2008).

Forms and definition of mentoring

Since its inception, the vocational mentoring field has expanded to include a wide variety of relationships, including *peer-mentoring* (Kram & Isabella, 1985), *e-mentoring* (Headlam-Wells, et al., 2005) and *reverse mentoring* (Murphy, 2012). These display considerable differences in characteristics, such as organizational position and thus power of the mentor (peer-mentoring and reverse mentoring) and degree of contact (e-mentoring) compared to traditional mentoring.

Therefore, despite a multitude of studies, the results mentioned above may need to be viewed with a tinge of skepticism. The recent expansions of the field led Baugh and Sullivan (2005, p. 426) to conclude that "It is no longer clear what we, as academics, researchers, or practitioners, mean by 'mentoring.'" Even more recently, Allen, et al., (2008, p. 344) found that "Although a substantial body of research has accumulated, as an area of scientific inquiry, workplace mentoring is a relatively new focus of study". The authors specifically criticize the lack of agreement on the measurement of mentoring as pertains to the quality of functions provided in the relationship, noting in their review of 89 and 79 studies respectively that 31.5% of career-counseling and 30.4% of psychosocial mentoring measures were developed by the study or had only one previously recorded application.

Furthermore, Allen, et al. (2008) also investigated the type of mentoring studied by their sample of 176 articles. The authors differentiated between informal (traditional) mentoring, company-

sponsored formal mentoring, mentoring of subordinate by supervisor (*supervisory mentoring*), between faculty and student, and between peers. They conclude that 39.8% of studies did not specify type, while another 28.4% included multiple types, despite evidence of significant differences in outcome. Haggard, et al. (2011) in a recent meta-analysis arrived at similar results, noting that researchers in their study of mentoring often rely on self-selection, sometimes aided by a definition provided by the researcher.

The lack of a definition of mentoring may be explained by the difference in researchers' view on the significance of the relationship, as compared to the mentoring functions themselves (Haggard, et al., 2011). Some researchers thus examine the presence of a mentor-protégé relationship aside from the benefits produced by the functions, while others simply examine the mentoring functions received by a protégé¹. In the latter case, respondents are sometimes presented with a definition of a mentor, while in other cases no definition is provided and thus no distinction is made between the relationship and the functions derived from it (Haggard, et al., 2011).

Even when definitions are provided, however, these are far from homogeneous. Some are very brief and leave much open to interpretation, e.g.

"A senior manager who provides emotional support, guidance, and sponsorship to a less experienced person." (Kirchmeyer, 1995, p. 72)

Others supply long descriptions that provide a higher degree of specificity, e.g.

"Think of the people who have helped you the most in your career. It might be the person who helped you find out what you wanted to do, or who helped you achieve the success you achieved, or the person who you most strongly identified as a model of what an effective individual at work looked like, or in whom you identified characteristics you'd like to obtain in your own work life." (Burke, 1984, p. 357)

This has led Haggard, et al. (2011, p. 292) to conclude "... we do not believe that a single precise and comprehensive definition of a mentor or mentoring is advisable at this point." Instead, the authors advise using three relationship attributes to identify a mentoring relationship: a mentoring relationship should display reciprocity, *developmental benefits* and *consistent/ regular interaction*. However, they offer very limited guidance to operationalizing these attributes as a measure.

Supervisory Mentoring

One major point of difference between definitions of mentoring is the inclusion or exclusion of supervisors as mentors (Haggard, et al., 2011). While some researchers explicitly exclude super-

¹ The difference between these two approaches may appear subtle, but has important ramifications: in one case, researchers will first establish if there is a mentoring relationship, to then investigate the quality of the functions performed; in the other case, researchers will simply investigate the quality of functions performed and based on their quality deduce the presence of a mentoring relationship.

visors from their definition of a mentoring relationship (Wanberg, et al., 2003), others, e.g. those quoted above, do not. The studies that do include supervisors as possible mentors and investigate the frequency of supervisory to non-supervisory mentoring often find that a large proportion of protégés report that their mentors are or have previously been supervisors (Haggard, et al., 2011), e.g. 85% in a study by Burke and McKeen (1997).

Furthermore, some researchers have recognized great potential in this relationship (Burke & McKeen, 1997), and explicitly focus on mentoring within the supervisor-subordinate dyad. Burke and McKeen (1997) found that supervisory mentors provide more benefits, such as feedback, to their protégés than non-supervisory mentors. The consistency of contact (Tepper, 1995) as well as the influence on work objectives, e.g. nature and prioritization of tasks, lend supervisors great potential as mentors. In fact, this thesis' authors would argue that especially the career-counseling, but also the other mentoring functions, are a standard component of sound supervisory leadership, finding support among researchers in previous studies who refer to this phenomenon as *Supervisory Career Mentoring* (SCM) (Clawson, 1985; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994; Scandura & Williams, 2004).

The mentor's position and its inherent status set the stage for the relatively high effectiveness of SCM (Ragins, 1999). Burke and McKeen (1997) found that supervisory mentors engage in more career development for their protégés than non-supervisory counterparts. By being close to their subordinate protégés and having high influence on their daily agenda, supervisors can often engage in higher-quality career mentoring, encouraging high performance and motivation and, thereby, promoting a positive work attitude and career expectations (Scandura & Williams, 2004). This lends career-counseling a distinguished role compared to the other mentoring functions, psychosocial support and role modeling, in the supervisory mentoring setting. Therefore, the authors chose to focus on this function in their further investigation.

In conclusion, the definition of mentoring, the types of relationships it encompasses, is unclear. What functions the protégé derives from the relationship have been elaborated and tested. However, there is a still on-going debate regarding how to operationalize and measure mentoring, i.e. whether it should be considered a relationship distinct from the mentoring functions it produces, or simply be deduced by the presence of the latter. Further, there is no consensus on the relationship that mentor's and protégé's positions in the organization should have. While some researchers consider mentoring a phenomenon outside the regular supervisory leadership, others point to the opposite, stressing the importance of what they refer to as supervisory career mentoring. Recently, the three attributes of reciprocity, developmental benefits and consistent/regular interaction have been proposed as a guideline for the identification of a mentoring relationship. The authors argue that these relationship attributes ought to be standard components of a supervisor-subordinate relationship.

2.2. Supervisory Career Mentoring

According to Scandura and Schriesheim (1994, p. 1589), on a conceptual level, Supervisor Career Mentoring (SCM) is “a transformational activity involving a mutual commitment by a supervising mentor and a subordinate protégé to the latter’s long-term development, as a personal, extra organizational investment in the protégé by the mentor, and as the changing of the protégé by the mentor, accomplished by the sharing of values, knowledge, experience, and so forth.” It provides a valuable complement to transactional leadership’s (Yukl, 1989; Bass, 1985) cost-benefit exchange approach and application of positional (organizational) resources (Bass, 1990).

The authors’ understanding of SCM builds on the aforementioned definition. In order to facilitate its assessment through interviews, it is operationalized as: SCM describes a situation in which a supervisor through career-counseling makes an extra-organizational investment in fostering the career advancement of his/her subordinate protégé. The authors, thus, focus their attention on the mentoring functions exhibited, rather than the presence of a distinct mentoring relationship. As previously noted however, the attributes defined by Haggard, et al., (2011) to identify a mentoring relationship, reciprocity, developmental benefits and consistent/regular interaction, ought to be standard components in a supervisory relationship. Further, the authors stress that SCM is performed out of personal interest, differentiating it from the transactional nature of the formal supervisory relationship.

Five Sub-Functions of Career Development

Several authors have defined sub-functions of career development as part of mentoring for their research. The following five sub-functions were first identified by Kram (1983) and further defined by Noe (1988), Scandura (1992) and Scandura and Ragins (1993): *Challenging Assignments*, *Coaching*, *Exposure and Visibility*, *Protection*, and *Sponsorship*. So far, descriptions of these functions have been kept at a fairly abstract level rather than in concrete actions.

Challenging Assignments were identified by taking note if a mentoring supervisor supported a subordinate protégé in improving on his or her skills or developing a new one, endowing him or her with specific, skill-stretching tasks (within ability), pushing him or her to excel. In this way, greater responsibility was transferred to the subordinate protégé, and the possibility created to learn and make mistakes. (Levesque, et al., 2005)

Coaching was designated as the sharing of ideas with the subordinate protégé, provision of feedback and suggestion of strategies for coordinating and achieving work goals. Also, by redefining, reappraising or reevaluating a threatening situation, a mentoring supervisor supports the subordinate protégé (Levesque, et al., 2005). Furthermore, giving advice and access to information helps to identify and understand problems and their implications.

Exposure and Visibility was recognizable by assigning the protégé tasks which exposed them to organizational decision makers and/or generally increased their contact base, widening social networks, within the organization (Burke & McKeen, 1997).

Protection was detectable through the mentoring supervisor's support in avoiding that the subordinate protégé takes actions which might be considered as controversial or harmful for his or her reputation and career. Another aspect of protection was described as the mentoring supervisor's backing in case the protégé had trouble finishing a certain assignment till a particular deadline. Moreover, political assistance is provided through socialization of the protégé concerning a company's values, customs and politics, as well as briefing on desired corporate behavior (Levesque, et al., 2005).

Sponsorship could be recognized through the mentor taking personal interest in a subordinate's career, dedicating time to acknowledge and advocate abilities and nominate him or her for attractive projects, lateral moves and promotions. According to Levesque, et al. (2005) by being affiliated with a mentor of high status, a positive spill-over effect takes place and a subordinate's status is consequently boosted.

2.3. Age

The research area of Organizational Demography deals with the impact of demographics on organizational outcomes. It emerged in the early 1980s, as a counter-movement to what was seen as a too strong focus on the individual (Pfeffer, 1985). By studying the distribution of demographic characteristics, such as age, within the organization, researchers argued that a better understanding could be achieved of internal workings and organizational challenges.

This focus on the organization has since shifted back closer to the individual. From its beginning as a study of the aggregate distributions, Organizational Demography has readily expanded into other demographic units (Lawrence, 1997). In a critical meta-study, Lawrence (1997) also mentions groups, dyads and even individuals within groups as subjects of research within a broad definition of the field. A special case in the dyad level, which has received considerable attention, is the supervisor-subordinate dyad (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Relational Demography

An important branch of the Organizational Demography field is that of Relational Demography. According to Tsui & O'Reilly (1989, p. 403), who coined the term, it is concerned with the study of "... the comparative demographic characteristics of members of dyads or groups who are in a position to engage in regular interactions".

The study of Relational Demography is based on such principles as the Similarity-Attraction paradigm. Increasing levels of demographic difference create a perception of dissimilarity among individuals (Steele & McGlynn, 1979). Perceived dissimilarity, in turn, is related to aversion, thereby influencing the quality of interpersonal relations and frequency of communication negatively (Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). Along with research on issues such as employment interviews (Arvey & Campion, 1982), this has provided us with a fairly good understanding of the importance of considering demographic composition also of dyadic relationships such as between a supervisor and subordinate, or between a mentor and a protégé.

Further, this research strand has distanced itself from the focus on a single demographic variable, such as age, which was so important in Pfeffer's (1985) original conception of Organizational Demography. Researchers have constructed demographic characteristics as complex sets of interrelated variables (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), looking at the overall picture as well as the single components e.g. age or sex. In fact, it has been shown that a simple interpretation of relative age on its own is a quite blunt predictor of differential outcomes (Lawrence, 1984; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Shore, et al., 2003). Lawrence (1997) provides criticism that poses a strong explanation of these findings, arguing that too many researchers within the field have fallen for attempting to explain complex cognitive processes with simple, but muddled measures, represented by demographic characteristics. The argument, thus, is that better theoretical underpinnings of expected and observed differences in outcome are required.

One answer to this call may lie in the study of generations. Generation may be defined as "... a shared tradition and culture [...] that is lifelong..." (Arsenault, 2004, p. 124). It thus offers a construct that is strongly related to age, yet encompasses a better understanding of the intricacies captured by this demographic variable. However, it should be kept in mind that the use of the generation construct bears a considerable difference to the measurement of age, in that an individual's generation is seen as constant throughout aging (Schewe & Meredith, 1994). Thus, attention is given to generational cohorts aging together, rather than individuals' absolute age. It has been argued that these different cohorts have different preferences for e.g. leadership styles (Arsenault, 2004). In the context of mentoring, this would indicate that mentors and protégés of the same generation may share greater similarity in the way that they regard the relationship and likely in consequence have a higher quality relationship.

However, despite its popularity in sociology and fields such as marketing (Schewe & Meredith, 1994), the notion of generational differences is still subject to debate within organizational management (Costanza, et al., 2012). In a recent meta-study involving 20 studies and 19 961 subjects, Costanza, et al. (2012, p. 375) reveal that generational membership's impact on a number of frequently studied outcomes, e.g. job satisfaction and intention to turnover, are "... moderate to small, essentially zero in many cases."

In conclusion, while Relational Demography and the Similarity-Attraction paradigm in particular have contributed to a better understanding of the impact of age differences on interpersonal relationships, it is not without critics. Expansion into the perspective of generational differences, with cohorts rather than absolute ages in focus, has not been able to disperse these critical claims.

Status Incongruence

A different direction for the refinement of age studies is presented by the status incongruence paradigm. Rather than simply studying relative age, some researchers have taken to a normative perspective, pointing to the significance of age norms (Lawrence, 1988). Lawrence (1988, p. 309) defines age norms as "...widely shared judgments of the standard or typical ages of individuals holding a role or status." The research builds on previous findings that individuals within an or-

ganization relate to an implicit career timetable (Lawrence, 1984), judging whether they are on- or off-track. The latter meaning that they may be ahead of time, or lagging behind.

Since, this research into career timetables has been expanded to look at age-based conflicts in the supervisor-subordinate setting, often referred to as Status Incongruence (Hair Collins, et al., 2009; Perry, et al., 1999; Shore, et al., 2003; Smith & Harrington, 1994). The aforementioned conflict arises when superiors are younger than their subordinates, which may contribute to the impression that the subordinate is lagging behind. In a mentoring relationship, it may be argued that there is a two-fold application as there are age norms regarding organizational positions held as well as for the roles of mentor and protégé: a mentor may be regarded as young for his or her organizational role and/or too young for the role of mentor, and the protégé may be perceived as lagging behind in terms of organizational role or for being mentored. Finkelstein, et al. (2003), however, note that the impact of this conflict with career timetables may be asymmetrical: while the supervisor/mentor may hold a negative bias towards the subordinate/protégé who is lagging behind, being ahead of time may lead to the supervisor/mentor being viewed with a positive bias. At what age this difference becomes significant has generally not been defined in these studies. While an explicit reasoning has not been provided by the researchers, it is likely due to the expectation that age norms are locally constructed in the organization (Lawrence, 1984). Thus, what is considered a significant difference in age would depend on local circumstances and can hardly be meaningfully defined in advance.

Differences in outcomes have been the main area of interest for research on Status Incongruence. Perry, et al. (1999) for instance studied absolute, i.e. regardless of who is older, and directional, i.e. where the supervisor is younger than the subordinate, age difference's impact on absenteeism, citizenship, and work change behaviors, studying the relationship with both the immediate supervisor and the next level supervisor. They found that while with directional age difference more significant relationships were found than with absolute age difference, the change was not always in the expected direction. Subordinates engaged in more negative behavior, e.g. were absent more often, when older than the higher-level supervisor. However, in contrast to predictions, they engaged in *less* negative behavior when older than their immediate supervisor. Perry, et al., (1999) suggest that these contradicting results are due to the difference in positional status difference: the status differential between subordinate and immediate supervisor is relatively low and thus other factors, e.g. social status difference due to age, have a greater impact.

Shore, et al. (2003) similarly studied directional age difference's impact on outcomes in the forms of work attitudes, performance and potential for promotion, and developmental experience. Their findings confirm that there are substantial differences in outcomes related to the direction of age difference in the dyad, as e.g. "... older managers treat older and younger employees similarly, but younger managers provide much more development to younger than to older employees." (Shore, et al., 2003, p. 532). Further, they find that "... younger managers evaluate younger employees more highly than they evaluate older employees, whereas older managers rate younger and older employees similarly." (Shore, et al., 2003, p. 532) . The findings, if transferable to

the mentoring relationship, in particular indicate that the career-counseling function, which focuses on the development of the protégé, may be of lower quality in reverse-age settings.

On the other hand, the study also found that many of their propositions did not hold. For instance, Shore, et al. (2003, p. 533) noted that “The pattern of results for manager-rated performance was not consistent with expectations because older employees received the lowest evaluations from older managers and the highest evaluations from younger manager.” the opposite of expectations based on the status incongruence literature. Their findings confirm that the status incongruence paradigm provides explanations in addition to the similarity-attraction paradigm, but that the direction of difference is not consistently as expected.

The authors identified only one previous study on mentoring in reverse-age settings, incidentally also focusing on outcomes. Finkelstein, et al. (2003) studied the impact of non-directional and directional age differences between mentors and protégés on the level of mentoring functions provided. Their findings, again, were not as expected. Regardless of mentor age, career-counseling was found to be most present with young protégés. Surprisingly however, the greater the directional age difference to the mentor, the *lower* the decrease in career-counseling for older protégés, so that older protégés received most career-counseling from younger mentors and “... the least career mentoring [was] provided between an older mentor and an older protégé.” (Finkelstein, et al., 2003, p. 266). Thus, the findings contradict previous ones by Shore, et al. (2003) showing detrimental impact on development support interest in the supervisor-subordinate dyad. Role modeling was not significantly impacted by directional age, and psychosocial support even *increased* with increasing directional age difference.

In summary, while the age difference impact on outcomes has been researched in different settings, such as the aforementioned studies, there appears to be very limited research on the behavior that manifest these outcomes and how they diverge from those observed in the traditional setting. This appears especially problematic given that these studies have had rather mixed results with propositions based on the status incongruence paradigm and that their findings are not consistent in regards to e.g. development support. Turning to mentoring specifically, the authors would argue that the findings regarding career-counseling are of particular interest given the lack of conformity both with expectations from theory and with empirical findings regarding development in the supervisory relationship.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The mentoring field offers an idea of the shape of the relationship between mentor and protégé. Supervisory mentoring has been found in multiple studies to be probably the most common type of mentoring relationship, as well as playing a special role when it comes to career-counseling, providing the protégé with Challenging Assignments, Coaching, Exposure and Visibility, Protection, and Sponsorship. Therefore, it is no surprise that Supervisory Career Mentoring has been studied by some researchers as a core component of non-transactional leadership in the supervi-

sor-subordinate dyad and has been shown to provide benefits over and above those of transactional leadership styles.

Still, the mentoring field's conception of the relationship and the behavior exhibited is dominated by the traditional idea of a mentor who is not only senior in the organization, but also older, more experienced and mature. But, when it comes to supervisor-subordinate dyads, this age constellation today is far from guaranteed. Younger supervisors managing older subordinates are becoming commonplace. So far, this change of background for the relationship has hardly been addressed in the mentoring literature.

The theory of age, however, problematizes this relationship by offering a perspective on these background factors, the mentors' and protégés' ages. The similarity-attraction and status incongruence paradigms assert that the quality of dyadic relationships depends on the difference between their ages, in a non-directional and directional way respectively. In the first case, dissimilarity is expected to lead to aversion and thus less communication. The latter case similarly expects perception biases, such as older protégés being considered as less capable of developing, that alter the exchange behavior. While studies in supervisory and mentoring dyads so far do indicate that there is an impact from relative age and that both paradigms have merit, the shape of this impact has in some cases been rather surprising.

Despite these mixed results, the behavior that leads to this difference, how it diverges between the traditional and the reverse-age setting, does not appear to have been explored yet. Thus, this thesis aims to take an initial step towards a better understanding of how supervisory leadership, in the shape of supervisory career mentoring, is enacted in a situation of age reversal, how this differs from the relationship described in the mentoring literature, which is based on a traditional age setting, and how relative age impacts this enactment. Age, in this case, is operationalized through chronological age².

² Chronological age is a simple measure of years of age, distinguishing it from generations or subjective age, i.e. self-assessed age.

3. Methodology

The methodology chapter discusses the design of the empirical study and the analysis. First, the research strategy is presented (Section 3.1) and the unit of analysis outlined (Section 3.2). Next, the data collection and analysis methods are described (Section 3.3). Finally, limitations (Section 3.4) and implications for quality in terms of reliability and validity (Section 3.5) are discussed.

3.1. Research Strategy

As there is no one correct way to conduct qualitative research, the research strategy has been designed and methodologies chosen with the aim of achieving good methodological fit (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Since the studied field lacks significant previous research, the authors did not find any previous studies on career mentoring behavior in reverse-age supervision settings, it was deemed relatively nascent, as described by Edmondson and McManus (2007). Thus, a study of exploratory nature was found to be appropriate.

An embedded case study (Yin, 2009) was selected for best fit with the identified research gap and question. A case study is appropriate for studies aiming to explain the “why” behind observed end-results, examining research questions of “how”-format, rather than questions concerned with strict quantitative measurement (Denscombe, 2010). This strategy enabled the authors to go in-depth, studying the dyadic relationships and their social processes as embedded within the overall case setting. Thereby, this thesis forms a good complement to the current literature, which has mainly focused on measuring end-results through survey strategies.

3.2. Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis (Yin, 2009) are the studied supervisory mentoring processes in the Finance and Accounting Departments at Mars Inc Europe. As previous research indicates that perception biases may be asymmetric, the authors believe that it is important to study the accounts of subordinates and supervisors separately in a cross-sectional approach, thus involving both supervisor and subordinate accounts to study relationships. Case selection was based on the idea of a typical case (Denscombe, 2010), aiming to investigate a setting that is likely to be replicated in similar fashion in other organizations.

The phenomenon the authors wish to study does not clearly apply specifically to any single area of business, indeed apart from office settings, studies of reverse-age supervision have been conducted e.g. in hospital settings (Ferris & Yates, 1985) and among blue-collar employees (Perry, et al., 1999). However, the authors argue that administrative functions (“office-work”) is of particular interest for two main reasons : 1) There is a relatively high frequency of recruitment of recent graduates to managerial positions, due to the high importance attached to education in contemporary business, and 2) A large portion of the workforce is employed in this kind of role.

Moreover, the specific departments in the study were selected due to their involvement in the Mars “European Finance Development Traineeship”, therefore exhibiting reverse-age supervi-

sion with high frequency. In the Finance and Accounting departments, the emphasis on education is readily observable in most global organizations, including Mars. Recruitment of graduate degree holders to advanced positions is common, and so are trainee programs that propel recent graduates directly into managerial positions. At the same time however, these departments also hold roles where educational requirements are relatively low and employees tend to stay on for longer term.

3.3. Data collection and Analysis

Approximately one hour-long individual semi-structured in-depth interviews (Yin, 2009) held over phone with supervisors and subordinates are the main sources of data, supplemented by the study of internal documentation and an in-depth interview regarding the formal processes of personnel development. As Edmondson and McManus (2007) point out, interviews are highly suitable for the kind of exploratory study conducted in this paper. They support the researchers in investigating the experiences and opinions of the interviewees (Denscombe, 2010). Further, by interviewing both subordinates and supervisors, the authors were able to study the relationship and enactment of SCM sub-functions in-depth from both perspectives. However, the interviews were held individually and interviewees were reassured that information would be treated confidentially in order to facilitate the discussion of sensitive topics. Furthermore, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the authors to ensure that all career mentoring sub-functions would be addressed, while maintaining the flexibility to explore the interviewees' thoughts in depth.

In total, six supervisors and five subordinates were interviewed for the main empirical study. These were distributed over four European countries: Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands and the UK. In each country, at least one supervisor and one subordinate were interviewed. Moreover, one Mars employee was interviewed with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the context provided by formal processes.

The interviewees were provided with information and the interview guideline by e-mail in advance of the sessions. Apart from a description of the research subject and aspired outcome of the study, interviewees were informed that their identity would be confidential and identification, e.g. through role description, would be made impossible. Further, as the authors wished to supplement their notes with audio recordings, interviewees were notified of this and asked for consent. To ensure that this information would not be missed, information on confidentiality and audio recording was provided again before commencing the interviews.

Interview Guideline Design

In a recent meta-study of mentoring research, lack of agreement on a standardized way of operationalizing mentoring has been criticized on the grounds that half of the studies had created their own operationalization, rather than using an established one (Allen, et al., 2008). In response, the authors decided to base their interview guideline on the most cited operationalization, a ques-

tionnaire developed by Noe (1988). However, adaptations had to be made as the original was designed for a survey of protégés and measured the full range of mentoring functions, including psychosocial support and role modeling.

Therefore, the authors reviewed the questions, reducing their numbers and adapting them to focus on richness of information by allowing in-depth accounts. Questions related to psychosocial support and role modeling were excluded, reflecting the choice to focus on SCM (see Section 2.2). Further, the number of questions on career mentoring was decreased, in favor of allowing for more elaboration and depth of answers through follow-up questions. Finally, the questions were made open by changing the way of expression from “what” to “how” and allowing for follow-up questions. The same guideline, with adapted phrasing, was then used for the supervisor version.

Moreover, for subordinates, questions on the degree to which they desire career mentoring behavior were added, as this had recently been raised as an important consideration (Finkelstein, et al., 2003).

Data Analysis

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the analysis was focused on inductive pattern identification (Edmondson & McManus, 2007), by means of the pattern-matching technique proposed by Yin (2009). The empirical patterns were identified by a process of iterative studies of the interviews. These were first re-listened to and transcribed. The transcriptions were then read and emerging patterns color-coded individually by the two authors.

The themes emerging from the analysis are of two distinct areas: first, the behaviors of supervisory mentoring; second, their cause and meaning as explained by the interviewees. Patterns were derived separately for the mentoring supervisor perspective as performers and from the subordinate protégé perspective as observers.

Patterns identified for mentoring behavior were used to answer SQ1, what actions are performed to enact mentoring behavior. Behavioral descriptions were grouped by similarity and compared to descriptions offered in previous research. In this way the authors create a picture of what actions are taken in the mentoring relationships to fulfill the mentoring functions, as well as how these deviate from those generally seen in a traditional setting.

The observed explanations of cause and meaning of mentoring behavior were analyzed in order to assess the consequences of age reversal in organizations, i.e. answering SQ2. In this analysis no direct relation was made to previous research. Explanations were categorized and similar categories grouped to derive a set of distinct categories that the authors deemed could not be further combined without loss of information.

Next, the derived categories were further analyzed to better understand the relationship between behavior and age difference. To this end, the explanations were critically reviewed to find overall

themes across the categories. These themes were related to the literature on age, analyzing in what way age-based beliefs may be driving them.

The design of an embedded case analysis allowed and urged the authors to analyze the data both in detail, at the level of the subunits, and holistically, at the overall case level (Yin, 2009). Thus, the patterns identified in individual interviews were first compared *within* the subunits, i.e. within subordinates and supervisors respectively, then *between* the subunits, i.e. between the groups of supervisors and subordinates respectively (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Similar patterns were summarized and merged before the final step of a holistic analysis *across* the groups.

3.4. Limitations

While the selection of the case was an informed choice, it holds some limitations concerned with the data collection. Firstly, while interviewees in different regions were sought so as to avoid a strong local influence, e.g. culture or history of mentoring style set by previous mentors, holding interviews in English, not the interviewees' mother tongue, may have made it more difficult for them to express themselves. Further, while phone interviews have their benefits (as described in the next section), they also have the downside of not allowing for the observation of body language.

Secondly, interviewees were recruited by a snowballing process, meaning that the number and distribution of interviewees was unclear at the outset of the study. However, as given the research design no randomized sampling was sought and referees were provided with clear criteria for nominees, the authors believe that the sampling method should not pose a major limitation.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

Reliability

In social sciences, reliability is commonly defined as “demonstrating that the operations of a study [...] can be repeated, with the same result” (Yin, 2009, p. 40). However, the authors argue that the qualitative and exploratory nature of this thesis renders the analysis inherently subject to the authors' interpretation. Thus, they have incorporated reliability in two steps.

The first step concerns describing the process and interview guideline used for data collection, to allow for recreation of the empirical study procedure. A description of the interviewees, to the point ethically defensible given consideration of their confidentiality, has been given, and the interview guidelines upon which the interviews were based are available in the Appendix (Chapter 9). The main risk to reliability with the chosen data collection method is the so called interviewer effect (Denscombe, 2010), distortion of objectivity arising from the interference of the interviewer. Due to the demographic difference between interviewed subordinates and the interviewers this may be an issue. However, as Denscombe (2010) points out, conducting the interviews over the phone may help ease these problems by taking away visual impressions. Further,

the authors attempted to present themselves in a neutral manner so as to not unnecessarily draw attention to such differences.

The second step concerns the analysis of the empirical findings. As interpretation is inevitable, the authors, apart from describing the analysis procedures, focused on designing them with an awareness of their subjective interpretation (Sandberg, 2005). The authors leveraged the fact that this thesis is a pair-work by bringing in both authors' interpretations. Transcripts were analyzed individually before the authors' respective impressions were integrated through negotiation in a critical discussion.

Validity

Validity refers to whether the findings represent knowledge. Its understanding is strongly related to the ontological and epistemological perspectives applied. In the light of the type of study, attempting to gain an understanding of peoples' inherently subjective perceptions and interpretations of themselves in relation to their coworkers, the authors found that a positivist perspective would not be suitable to discuss the validity of method and outcomes. Rather, the discussion will build on a framework by Sandberg (2005) originally described for interpretive approaches. The author discusses validity under three facets: *communicative validity*, *pragmatic validity* and *transgressive validity*.

In the context of this study, communicative validity captures whether the authors understood interviewees' descriptions the way they sought to express them, as well as the coherence in interpretation of parts with the whole. The former is mainly driven by the communication before and during the interviews. Interviewees were informed of the aim and context of the study by email before the interview and were also provided with the interview guideline. Further, the description was summarized again at the beginning of the interview.

During the interview, the authors sought to maintain a dialogue rather than simply running through a repertoire of questions. Follow-up questions were used to further the understanding of descriptions. These were intermingled with encouraging the interviewee to explain using concrete examples and with summarizing the interviewers' understanding to allow the interviewee to comment on the interpretation. Furthermore, the authors performed all the interviews together, so that each could offer his or her understanding of the interviewees' descriptions.

After the interviews, communicative validity was sought by providing the interviewees with interview summaries. Also, during the analysis of transcripts, the authors both reviewed independently, so as to allow for their individual interpretations to emerge and be compared. They also paid attention to viewing statements not only in their immediate context, but also in the broader contexts of the transcript as a whole and the group of transcripts.

As Sandberg (2005, p. 56) notes, "... [communicative validity] does not provide enough attention to possible discrepancies between what people say they do and what they actually do."

Pragmatic validity regards truth in practice, seeking to avoid distortion of interviewee accounts due to e.g. a wish to represent certain values.

A good way of improving pragmatic validity would have been to include observations of the mentoring processes in practice. However, due to the transitory nature of these processes and the time limitations, this was not possible. Instead, the study was designed to include both supervisors/mentors and subordinates/protégés in order to observe the phenomenon “from both sides”. Moreover, during the interviews the authors employed three main strategies to challenge the accounts. First, drawing out concrete examples, as previously described, also served pragmatic validity as the interviewees were asked to go beyond their sometimes rather idealistic representation to describing practice. Second, during the interviews the authors occasionally challenged the interviewees’ descriptions when apparently inconsistent internally or with information from other interviews. Finally, the authors split responsibilities during the interviews, so that one was responsible for maintaining the dialogue, while the other focused on this strategy of identifying and challenging inconsistencies.

Lastly, transgressive validity forms a complement to the previous two concepts by turning attention from coherence to divergence (Sandberg, 2005). The study involved diversity in the recruitment of interviewees, involving both genders, different ages and people from different countries. This, along with not excluding descriptions that deviate from others allowed the authors to capture views from different perspectives. Furthermore, having both authors apply their individual interpretation in the analysis ensured that it was not viewed with a singular subjective perspective.

4. Case Context

The authors decided to study the case of supervisory relationships in Finance and Accounting departments in Mars Inc. Europe. This chapter will provide a short overview of the case context, beginning with a short description of Mars Inc. Then, the EFDP program, through which participating supervisors were recruited, is introduced and the general formal process for personnel development presented.

The American company Mars, Inc. a global manufacturer of confectionery, pet food and other food products, based in McLean, Virginia. The company operates in six business segments (ordered by percentage of sales), namely: Petcare, Chocolate, Wrigley, Food, Symbioscience, and Drinks (Mars, Incorporated, 2014). The company's annual revenue is estimated to amount to more than \$33 billion for 2014. Mars has operations in 74 countries and employs approximately 75,000 people worldwide. (Mars Incorporated, n.d.)

According to the interviewed process expert, Mars offers a variety of fast track programs where participants, during the program's duration of about 12 to 36 months, rotate either across functions or within a certain functional area. Special focus is accorded to their training and development as people managers, in order to have them take on a management position afterwards. One of these programs is the European Finance Development Program (EFDP). During three years, trainees rotate twice, working in three different positions for one year each, within the Finance area at Mars. During the program's duration, trainees undergo special trainings and have to pass yearly assessment centers in order to stay part of the program. After five to seven years with the company, EFDP graduates usually take on a higher management position. The six managers involved in the study are all EFDP graduates.

Outside these fast track programs, personnel development is ensured through the *Personal Development Plan* (PDP) process. In order to make sure that employees at Mars constantly work on developing themselves towards their long-term career goals, every individual has a PDP. It supports in setting definite goals based on an established catalogue of competences spanning all the functional areas. The PDP process is often used as a basis for salary reviews (process expert interview).

5. Empirical Findings and Analysis

In this chapter the findings from the in-depth interviews performed in the empirical study are presented and analyzed. Its structure and major areas of findings are summarized in Figure 3 below. The first Section (5.1) outlines the enactment of the five SCM sub-functions as described by supervisors and subordinates in the interviews and compares the descriptions with the findings from the literature review. This section serves as an answer to SQ1, comparing the enactment found in practice with the previous literature.

In the next Section (5.2), an inductive investigation of the explanations and reflections that interviewees provided about the behavior they enact and observe is presented. Finally, in Section 5.3 the impact of age reversal on the relationship in the shape of biased perceptions and latent conflicts are discussed in greater detail, along with methods to cope with these latent conflicts identified in the empirical study. In this way, these two Sections explore SQ2, explaining how the age difference affects the enactment of the SCM sub-functions.

Analysis Overview			
	Sub-question 1	Sub-question 2	
Continuum of visibility <i>from observable actions to hidden values</i>	Supervisory 5.1 Career Mentoring (SCM) behavior	<i>Line of visibility</i> 5.2 Explanations of SCM behavior	5.3 Impact of age-based beliefs
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenging Assignments ▪ Coaching ▪ Exposure & Visibility ▪ Protection ▪ Sponsorship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The formal process – Self-motivation – Being able to relate ▪ Mentor perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Experience & Perspective – Network on- or offsite ▪ Protégé perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Knowledge & Experience – Outside network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asymmetric perception bias ▪ Latent conflicts ▪ Hands-off mentoring ▪ Communicating to relate

Figure 3: Overview of the analysis structure as well as major areas of findings.

5.1. Enactment of Supervisory Career Mentoring

Challenging Assignments

Concerning the sub-function of Challenging Assignments, it was assessed if a mentoring supervisor supported his or her subordinate protégé in improving on skills, or developing new ones, by appointing him or her to specific, skill-stretching tasks (within ability), pushing him or her to excel.

Mentors and protégés supplied similar accounts regarding this SCM sub-function, several of them mentioning some action indicating Challenging Assignments. At first glance, the sub-function appears clearly present. However, the descriptions did not indicate that mentors systematically engage in these activities, rather the actions were described as singular, occasional occurrences. Moreover, both mentors and protégés indicate that the assessment of skills that subordinate protégés should develop is conducted mostly according to the formal processes, especially with regards to the timing:

“Clearly it is not something that I refer to on a daily basis or even on a weekly or monthly basis. But, it is the way that, when we sit down for a conversation, I prepare, looking again at what was said before and see exactly what each and everyone’s objectives are. So that is something that I use to prepare for those conversations to prepare them and then see what else comes up in those conversations. The official PDP meeting is twice a year.” (Sup.2)

“So, that would be, in the beginning of the year you agree what the development areas are. And then you agree what they could do in terms of will they read a book or do a specific training, do they need a mentor, and how will they try to improve themselves in day-to-day life, what type of behaviors do they want to change? We make that plan and I support them.” (Sup.3)

The interviewees stress the connection between Challenging Assignments and the formal processes. The authors, however, question whether this should still be regarded as mentoring: meeting twice a year according to the PDP in order to assess needs for skill development hardly points to a mentor taking personal interest, aside from formal requirements, in developing his or her protégés.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that only one interviewee mentioned provision of Challenging Assignments with the specific purpose of improving present or developing new skills by pushing to excel:

“What I do: I put them in situations that feel a little uncomfortable, in a ‘stretch zone’, in new situations. I would assume, if you asked my subordinate, [he or she] ³will say it feels a little bit ‘Uooooooooh’ [indicating insecurity/being overwhelmed]. Nevertheless, I always assess whether they are going to be fine, and if they can handle the situation. I am in the background meanwhile to step in. You know, they say ‘you learn to swim in water’. So sometimes I push.” (Sup.4)

Furthermore, aside from provision of assignments, mentors frequently mentioned trainings as a way of developing new skills. Again, however, looking to previous literature, the authors would

³ The researchers substituted all gender-indicating words, in order to ensure the interviewees’ confidentiality, which otherwise might have been endangered

argue that this is not directly related to Challenging Assignments, considering that training is usually considered a part of formal skills development processes.

Still, even though mentoring supervisors do not seem to provide Challenging Assignments outside of formal processes frequently, they signaled that if subordinate protégés proactively ask for and/ or need it, help to foster skills through Challenging Assignments would be provided:

“If anybody in the team has the energy to do something outside and they call out, then I am absolutely 100% behind it.” (Sup.1)

“First to understand from the associate’s, the subordinate’s, point of view, and then from the organization’s point of view, what the skills are they want or need to develop and then find small projects that can help them – either gaining exposure to those skills or working together with people who actually have those skills to make sure that they develop these skills to” (Sup.2)

Summarizing, mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés paint largely the same picture in terms of enactment of Challenging Assignments. Skill development is primarily planned and conducted in accordance with formal processes and not initiated by the mentor based on personal interest. The presence of actions outside formal requirements appears to be rather limited. In general, Challenging Assignments are not provided unless protégés actively ask for them.

Coaching

In the context of Coaching, how mentors aid their protégés in realizing their strengths and shortcomings, e.g. through provision of feedback, was assessed. Further, the authors investigated how the mentors supported their protégés in coordinating and achieving work goals, sharing ideas, giving advice and providing access to information.

Regarding the first area, feedback about strengths and shortcomings, both mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés described that it is mainly given concerning goals related to competences selected in the PDP, e.g.:

“We really do that [identifying strengths and weaknesses] through our PDP process, the personal development plan. [...] I ask them what they need, if they need anything from me, how?” (Sup. 2)

In contrast, providing personal and corrective feedback, aside from the formal processes, appears rare. It was indicated only by one mentor:

“I think in terms of strengths, I provide [him or her] with some feedback, I [...] collect some feedback from their main internal customers to say ‘what is it you actually do well?’ So when they see the list, it actually makes them feel proud, as it makes them feel good to see what they have been recognized for. And then when to give the corrective feedback with regards to what they can do better, I try to always link it to a specific situation to

take away the personal element. Because if somebody gives you feedback to develop, that is already something really positive, because that means [he or she] cares and wants you to be better.” (Sup.4)

However, mentors were described as more active in the second area of supporting the protégés in attaining work objectives: interviewees signal that mentors are easily available when a problem arises and their support is needed:

“He is quite helpful, I can at any time just go to his desk and he will come and help me.” (Sub. 2)

“[...] when I am in the office, I do try and check in always, say good morning, which not everybody does, in order to let people know I am available and try to create touch points as frequently as possible.” (Sup. 1)

Mentoring supervisors help to make sense of difficult situations by providing guidance and information in order to help subordinate protégés see problems from a different, broader perspective and find resolutions for them on their own:

“That is something that I, because I have limited technical knowledge of what they are actually doing on a day-to-day basis – because it is very transactional and system-driven and I don’t have that [competency]. I am more looking at the bigger picture, try to identify the “why?” behind why they are doing stuff, or what the objective is and trying to enter that stage where they can identify what the benefits of certain projects are.” (Sup. 1)

“I think [he or she] will try to leave me to solve it myself by sort of guiding me in the direction I would need to go, giving me his opinion. So, instead of just giving me the full answer and say that is the only way, [he or she] would try to get me to think about the problem – you are really stuck solving the problem yourself.” (Sub. 1)

Protégés specifically stress that they proactively ask their mentors where or whom they can get input from to clarify questions:

“Well yes [I did proactively suggest I talk to someone], I mean I want to get everything correct and I want to do as good a job as possible [...].” (Sub. 2)

Mentors tend to let their protégés work very independently and react once approached by their subordinate protégés asking for directions in ambiguous situations.

Once mentoring supervisors have been asked for help, they try to offer support in different ways, such as opportunities for developing strategies with the objective of coordinating and achieving their work goals:

“We sat down earlier this week and yeah [he or she] is quite helpful. So functional [he or she] is very good at, you know, [he or she] knows someone who can help me, like who

can I contact, or [he or she] is great in terms of just asking [him or her] some questions.”
(Sub. 2)

“I will say for example ‘Would you like me to contact this person for you? I would be happy to do it’, and really offer those [more] opportunities. (Sup. 3)

In summary, mentors’ and protégés’ accounts regarding actions related to Coaching reveal that it is only partially enacted. While advice and information to understand problems and opportunities for developing strategies to coordinate and accomplish work objectives are generally provided once the mentors are asked to do so, feedback is only given in context of the formal processes and about related goals. Feedback on a personal or corrective level was only mentioned once in the study.

Exposure and Visibility

According to the literature, the SCM sub-function of Exposure and Visibility encompasses two main areas: the first regards protégés being assigned tasks which generally increase their network within the organization; the second is about providing them with exposure to organizational decision-makers.

Similar to the other sub-functions, mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés provided comparable accounts on the enactment of Exposure and Visibility. With regards to assisting protégés in increasing their networks, interviewees described that when subordinates need assistance, mentors would provide contacts from their personal network, e.g.:

“When they have a question, because they can’t solve it or they can’t fix it because they need to talk to someone in the central teams, I try to identify the right person, because I know most of the people, and then try to steer them into the right direction to approach and get things done.” (Sup.2)

“I would use my supervisor’s knowledge, because [he or she] came through the training scheme that Mars runs, which actually involves having [him or her] work in different sites. So, [he or she] has pretty good knowledge from different sites of who does what on them. It is a good point of reference actually, if we do need something, some expertise from another site, [he or she] usually actually knows someone who might be able to provide that.” (Sub.1)

Interestingly, most of the interviewees indicated that these cases were task-related, getting expertise to help “fix a problem” or learning how to do it. Further, they all mentioned gaining contacts off-site, which the mentors had acquired during their rotations.

However, only a few of the interviewees indicated mentors aiding subordinates in getting exposure to organizational decision-makers to help advance their careers. The authors would argue

that this is linked to mentors' apparent lack of personal involvement in advancing their protégés' careers, as was seen in previous SCM sub-functions.

Those who did indicate exposure to organizational decision-makers generally described the mentor doing so by sharing some of his or her responsibilities with the protégé. Moreover, the mentoring supervisor may allow the subordinate protégé to take credit for his or her own work:

"I am always pushing people, unless they are really uncomfortable with doing that, to communicate the work that they have done to the person, instead of going through me." (Sup.2)

"For me, it's about trying to give up some of the things that I do, part of my role." (Sup.1)

"It is an example about a team member. We have video conferences with people from all units of Mars. And on this conference day, with teams from different countries participating, we have a project that is presented there by one person of my team. It is great for [him or her] to show it to all the different teams, colleagues in the same role in other countries." (Sub.4)

To conclude, while protégés are aided in enriching their network, a relatively task-oriented activity, only few interviewees could produce an example of being helped to gain exposure to decision-makers. Mentoring supervisors provide support in networking, but apparently only to off-site contacts. Questions on gaining exposure to organizational decision-makers, on the other hand, were met with silence by most interviewees.

Protection

In order to investigate Protection as an SCM sub-function, the authors asked interviewees whether mentors support protégés in avoiding that they take actions that might be considered controversial or even be harmful for his or her reputation and career. Further, the authors looked for whether the mentor offered support in case the protégé had trouble meeting a deadline.

Protection was described differently by mentors and protégé. The mentors' descriptions showed a great deal of contrast in regards to their perception of the first part, avoiding harmful actions, while the protégés did not mention it at all. Neither group indicated that mentors helped their protégés in meeting deadlines.

Hindering protégés from exposing themselves to situations that may put their career at risk was described only by mentoring supervisors, not by subordinate protégés:

"My operations manager: [He or she] is very hard to deal with, [he or she] can be very aggressive and very demanding. To expose somebody from my team to [him or her] early on, without creating discomfort, giving a very bad impression of [himself or herself] to [him or her] – it is really about getting that timing right." (Sup.1)

“And then I come with something like ‘look, we have the materials, we can rehearse before if you want to go, we can sit, you can tell me what you want to say’. You kind of have to slowly ease [him or her] in the situation, otherwise this would lead to panic.” (Sup.4)

Nevertheless, as the quotes reveal, even in these cases it is not clear if this act of Protection is concerned with protecting a protégé from endangering his or her career. It may better be described as protecting a subordinate protégé’s self-esteem and only indirectly affect his or her reputation. In fact, several mentoring supervisors actually seemed startled at the questions related to Protection, laughing at them and indicating that they had not consciously considered such actions.

An explanation for the different experiences between mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés may be that protégés are likely not able to perceive the protective actions taken by their mentors. The omission of harm is hard to detect for the protégé, unless the mentor clearly points it out.

Furthermore, most interviewees described protégés having a quite independent work style. This may contribute to only mentors perceiving protective actions: mentors offer help and guidance, but the protégés only ask for it when they cannot deal with a problem on their own:

“We have a wonderful agreement: I help [him or her] when [he or she] requests help. [He or she] has a more independent working style.” (Sup.4)

“I try to make sure that they know I am there in case something happens. We have the agreements that everyone comes to me when there is a problem that they can’t solve themselves.” (Sup.3)

The reactive problem solving apparent in the quotes further reinforces the authors’ impression that mentors act on organizational requirements rather than personal interest.

In summary, mentors’ and protégés’ perspectives on Protection differ, likely due to the proactive and hidden nature of Protection, but it seems evident from both perspectives that the sub-function is not enacted in most of the studied mentoring relationships. Mentors, who are the only ones mentioning Protection, show lack of proactivity and personal interest. In fact, Protection does not even appear present in mentors’ minds as a way of supporting their protégés in advancing their careers.

Sponsorship

The SCM sub-function of Sponsorship bears similarity to Exposure and Visibility, but is distinct in that the mentoring supervisors take greater personal interest in a subordinate’s career, acting on their own to sponsor the subordinate protégé, rather than empowering him or her to do so through exposure. It implies mentors dedicating time to acknowledge and advocate the protégé’s

abilities to decision-makers and nominating him or her for attractive projects, lateral moves and promotions.

That protégés are supported in engaging into activities of special interest to them, or even applying for other roles was only scarcely mentioned. Further, when it was mentioned, their own proactivity was described as crucial, more so than the mentoring supervisor's personal interest:

"The roles become available and what should, and normally does happen, is that when a person wants to apply for a role, they come to talk to me. [...] I will then discuss that with my boss and you know try to push that that is the right thing to do." (Sup.2)

"And specifically for one of my subordinates, I realized that there was a very nice opportunity for [him or her] in the European team. So before [he or she] knew what the impacts of the reorganization would be, I already identified the opportunity. I basically convinced [him or her] and [his or her] future line manager that this would be a really good step for [him or her] and for the other ones." (Sup.3)

"... [He or she] is looking for ways to promote me more. [He or she] talks about me more to the people in the management team, and my skills." (Sub.3)

Yet, in case a protégé's position becomes obsolete, for instance due to internal restructuring, mentors seem engaged in keeping their employees within the organization, helping them to find other viable positions:

"I have a person in my team who will be leaving, whose contract ends (...) due to some structural changes. So what I am doing now, is to promote this person to a manager outside of finance, technically doing HR, so that [his or her] exposure is raised and [he or she] is able to get a job outside of finance when these changes happen. So my job is more, I, working on [his or her] behalf, rather than leaving it to [him or her], because this is very important." (Sup.1)

"So we are in a reorganization phase, which means the team is getting smaller. (...) In the end, the team is going to get smaller and at least over the past half a year, I have been trying to find solutions, how to make sure that everyone in the team has a job in the future." (Sup.3)

"We are currently looking at new roles actually, because unfortunately my role will disappear shortly with the reorganization of the finance department. My supervisor has been very supportive in trying to find a new role, which hopefully will start to kick in next year. [He or she] has been very supportive in dealing with P&O [Personnel & Organization] and looking at what opportunities are available on site, running ideas past me on what I would like to do." (Sub.1)

However, the authors question whether this action is truly based on personal interest or might be motivated by corporate guidelines in context of internal restructuring. Contributing to these doubts, Subordinate 1 told about a situation, where his or her mentor supported him or her in dealing with the consequences of a restructuring initiative, through which his or her position would become obsolete. Subordinate 1 expressed that he or she was quite satisfied with the support received. He or she mentioned that, among other actions, his or her mentoring supervisor identified different alternative roles for him or her to consider. When the researchers asked more specifically about this situation, it turned out that Mars generally looks after its employees, meaning that different initiatives seemed to be in place to help affected people within the organization to deal with the restructuring through for instance providing a fund for retraining or counseling. In this context, Subordinate 1 mentioned that the actions that his or her mentoring supervisor engaged in are correspondent with what he or she has learnt to expect from the company. Additionally, it can be considered controversial that someone's general continuance in the company would be considered career mentoring.

In conclusion, it appears evident, by the accounts of both mentors and protégés, that Sponsorship actions are fairly uncommon. Furthermore, as seen before with other sub-functions, mentors do not seem to take a personal interest. Instead, enactment is largely dependent on the protégés' proactivity.

Figure 4 summarizes the findings from Section 5.1 and addresses SQ1. In conclusion of this section, it has to be noted that due to the independent work style that is lived at Mars, the mentors and protégés generally do not interact very frequently in day-to-day business. While all the SCM sub-functions are visible to some degree, only one sub-function, Coaching was described by all interviewees. Challenging Assignments, Exposure and Visibility and Sponsorship were described by some interviewees, but only very few mentioned Protection. Furthermore, they all appear restricted in terms of facets or actions described and, perhaps most importantly, largely limited to formal processes, i.e. the PDP. That mentors would show personal interest appeared relatively rare, their activities are characterized by a lack of proactivity and a rather reactive mentoring behavior. Therefore, protégés' initiative is a requirement for the latter's career advancement. Apart from Protection, mentors and protégés generally described the enactment of the sub-functions similarly.

Sub-Functions	Findings
Challenging Assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Skill development in accordance with formal processes ➤ Challenging Assignments generally not provided based on mentor's personal interest, unless protégés proactively ask for it
Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Feedback about strengths and shortcomings mainly given in line with formal processes ➤ Personal and corrective feedback generally not provided ➤ Mentors help make sense of difficult situations/support if problems arise, when proactively asked by protégés for it ➤ Mentors offer different opportunities for developing strategies to coordinate and accomplish work objectives
Exposure and Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Support for networking for outside networks provided at request ➤ Exposure to organizational decision-makers is only provided by few mentor
Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Only mentors describe protecting protégés by hindering them from exposing themselves to situations that may put their career at risk ➤ Protection does not seem to be present in mentors' mind as a way of supporting their protégés in advancing their careers ➤ Reactive style in dealing with problems
Sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Protégés need to ask for support in applying for lateral moves, promotions or engaging into activities of interest for them, then mentors react ➤ If a protégé's position becomes obsolete, mentors try to help and identify other possibilities

Figure 4: Table providing a summary of the empirical findings concerning the enactment of the five SCM sub-functions.

5.2. Mentoring Perceptions

In this section, empirics regarding the interviewees' perceptions of the mentoring relationship will be presented. It builds on the previous section by adding an understanding of how the interviewees explain the behaviors they exhibit and observe. The categories have been inductively constructed by means of pattern discovery. Statements regarding the perceived cause or meaning of mentoring actions were identified and grouped by similarity. Even though mentoring behavior was described similarly by the mentor and protégé groups, this need not, and indeed is not true for the way that they explain the enactment. Thus, this process was kept separate for the two groups. The findings are presented first from the mentoring supervisor perspective, then from the subordinate protégé perspective and are analyzed in greater detail in the next section.

Mentor's Perspective on Mentoring

For the mentoring supervisors group, the pattern discovery process produced five areas by which the determinants and shape of the mentoring exchanges were explained: i) the formal process, ii)

self-motivation, iii) experience and perspective, iv) network on- or offsite, and v) being able to relate.

The formal process. The formal process for personnel development plays an important role in the explanation that mentoring supervisors offer for how they work with the SCM sub-functions Coaching and Challenging Assignments, i.e. developing their subordinate protégés' skills. It governs skills development both in terms of what is developed and, to a large degree, when. Further, it is interpreted as assigning the supervisor the role of offering guidance to the subordinates, rather than teaching them.

In Mars, every employee is subject to the Personnel Development Process (PDP) process, a kind of Management by Objectives scheme under which employees are followed up and evaluated on a number of development objectives each year. Some interviewees make it clear that the process holds a special role in their eyes, e.g.:

"I think that Mars is an organization where not a lot of processes are formalized, and the PDP process is one of the things that is quite formalized..." (Sup. 2)

It is an exception in a company that generally avoids formal processes, a testimony to its importance.

From the mentors' descriptions, it indeed occupies a central position in their work with developing protégés' skills. When asked how he or she is supporting subordinates in realizing their strengths and shortcomings, one of the interviewed mentoring supervisors explains:

"I would say that the formal periodic check-ins, are the things that pin together the rest." (Sup. 1)

The process is used as a guideline for what skills to develop and how to drive and follow up on this development.

Each employee at Mars has his or her own individual development objectives in terms of competencies to improve. They are largely chosen by the employee alone, from a comprehensive list of competencies available to all employees. Their mentoring supervisors should basically only interfere if the objective does not seem suitable to the position. The mentoring supervisors serve as guides in the process, making competencies in the competency framework clear to the subordinate protégés and relating the requirements to those who wish to develop into a different role. As one of the mentor explains:

"Of course, I can explain [the competency framework], to show them the benefits of that. But it is never negotiable that I am the teacher (or a teacher-students relationship) – that is not the case." (Sup. 1)

The statement also shows the mentor's perception that he or she should retain the role of offering guidance, rather than managing, throughout the entire process of development. This is something where most of the mentoring supervisors seem to agree. They emphasize the importance of self-motivation in the formal process and do not see themselves as in the role of checking up on or being the teachers of the subordinates.

Self-motivation. According to the mentoring supervisors, the guiding principle not only for the formal process, but also for personal and professional development in general, is self-motivation. The mentoring supervisors are guides, available whenever they are needed, but the subordinate protégés need to show the initiative. Due to this sentiment and the great importance that they attach to individual self-motivation, the mentors enact a mentoring style based on being passive and waiting for the protégés to proactively approach them, before offering guidance and leaving the protégés to find the detailed resolution on their own. Thereby, this belief has an impact on nearly all mentoring functions.

The mentors describe that they should not proactively approach the subordinate protégés and attempt to direct them into a certain direction. Rather, the relationship is one of cooperation, as one mentoring supervisor explains when asked about how he or she works with fulfilling the mentoring function challenging assignments, i.e. assisting subordinate protégés in finding projects that may allow them to develop their skills:

“That is going to be a joint effort, it is not like I am going to push anything – there also needs to be some intrinsic motivation from the subordinates, the people in my team need to want to do [it].” (Sup. 2)

All the interviewed mentoring supervisors described themselves as having a mentoring style based on a hands-off approach. Their *“door is always open”* (Sup. 2) and, they all agree, it is the responsibility of the subordinate protégé to step inside. Development requires self-motivation, but not everyone wants to develop, the mentors argue and offer two overlapping yet different explanations for why. Firstly, people have different ambitions and thus hold different interest in developing e.g.:

“It depends on who you are talking to in my team, some people really like having projects that go beyond the day-to-day business. Other people have less interest in developing new skills, because they have been doing the same job for the last 20 years and that's what they want to do.” (Sup. 2)

Some of the mentors go further, explaining their view on the relationship between age and motivation for development, e.g.:

“I think, probably we need to be a little bit careful with age. I think it is [about] career aspirations. You could say that those two correlate, which I am sure they do.” (Sup. 1)

The mentoring supervisors argue that many of their older subordinate protégés are content with what they are doing and prefer to avoid change, which includes avoiding development.

Secondly, the mentoring supervisors described that older subordinate protégés often are so experienced that further development is not strictly necessary. The main difference with having older subordinate protégés, as compared to younger, is the distribution of experience and knowledge. Whereas with younger protégés, the mentors would take on the role of the knowledgeable and experienced senior, the older ones have extensive experience and do not require as much guidance:

"I think the difference [to guiding younger people] is the perception for the people. When I am leading people that are younger than me, I expect myself to be [more] knowledgeable on things that I am talking about than they are, so that I am more able to direct them and to take certain decisions – I can take decisions for them. But, in the position that I am in now, it was clear to me from the beginning that the people that work for me have more knowledge about the things that they are doing than I will probably ever have – they have been doing that for the last ten to fifteen years, while I am probably only here for a year and a half or two years." (Sup. 2)

"So far that one, I would say I am a still a bit lazy in that matter, because I, specifically with the people in my team who are from a different generation, because they are already so developed, of course, they can develop a little bit here and a little bit there, but the core is really there." (Sup. 3)

The mentoring supervisors appear to see ample reason to believe that their older subordinate protégés may not be interested in development. Since learning can only take place when the subordinate protégés are motivated, directing them to it does not offer anyone any benefit. Thus, it is better for the mentoring supervisors to wait for the subordinate protégés to approach them with the outspoken wish to develop.

Experience and perspective. The mentors' ability to coach their subordinate protégés is described as limited by their level of insight into day-to-day work. They can only engage as guides to open subordinate protégés' eyes to the wider context of issues when assisting them in finding strategies to realize their work objectives. Furthermore, they have to deal with judging in what cases the protégés' experience is more important than the mentor's knowledge and intuition, and in what not.

The distribution of knowledge and experience between mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés was mentioned as another reason why the mentors would focus on supportive hands-off, instead of directive, mentoring. While they, in their position as supervisors, have greater knowledge in the broader functional area, i.e. finance in general, they lack the detailed process or system knowledge that the subordinates hold by merit of their narrow field and longer experience.

In fact, the mentoring supervisors commonly described that they do not know what their subordinate protégés are actually doing on a day-by-day basis:

“... Because I have limited technical knowledge of what they are actually doing on a day-to-day basis – because it is very transactional and system-driven and I don’t have that [competency]. I am more looking at the bigger picture, trying to identify the “why?” behind why they are doing stuff, or what the objective is ...” (Sup. 3)

This limited knowledge does not mean that the mentoring supervisors cannot support their subordinate protégés, however. They do, by means of providing a wider perspective on the business and assignments. Being in a role where they are not stuck in the details gives the mentors a unique birds-eye-view of the business, which they gladly share with the subordinates when these ask for support.

The older subordinate protégés’ generally longer experience, compared to the younger supervisors’, also sometimes may prove an obstacle. While protégés’ experience is generally described as a resource, providing stability as one of the mentoring supervisors explains:

“A team can only function, if there are some people who have done the job for 15 to 20 years, to give stability, to teach people who come in new.” (Sup. 4)

Protégés who are significantly older than the mentoring supervisors usually have also been in their roles for a long time and thus know the history of how situations have been resolved in the past, they are able to teach new-comers the ropes. However, as the same mentor reveals, this very factor may also prove to be an obstacle:

“It usually goes with something like ‘Yeah, but that didn’t work in the past’ or ‘But we have always done it like this’, those are the classics.” (Sup. 4)

The subordinate protégés can, based on their longer experience, argue that certain strategies do not work, even though the mentoring supervisors believe they will. What did not work in the past may work now, but without comparable insight, the mentors argue, it can be difficult to convince the protégés.

Network on- or off-site. A topic that is related to that of experience is business networks, which are very important when it comes to the SCM function of providing Exposure and Visibility. The younger mentoring supervisors are often put in something of an unusual situation as the somewhat older employees frequently have much more local experience and consequently have a larger network, locally, than them. On the other hand, the older subordinate protégés’ networks are usually very local, while the mentoring supervisors, due to their career development, have rotated and thus are experienced in different areas. This allows the mentoring supervisors to leverage their experience and network off-site to assist the subordinates, establishing contact with people from outside:

“Now, for example, I said to one of my guys: ‘You understand this side now, but you have not been to the factory down in Nottingham. Go down there, arrange a date to speak to their finance team, understand how they do their processes and what their challenges are, because they will give you more perspective.’” (Sup. 1)

The mentoring supervisors can, through their off-site contacts, provide the subordinate protégés with new perspectives and experiences.

Being able to relate. Communicating with the older subordinate protégés is described as perhaps more challenging. While the mentoring supervisors in many cases do not explicitly admit that age may be a problem in the relationship, most of them will still avoid the subject. They describe three different strategies in communicating with their older protégés: do not mention age, focus conversations on common interests and acknowledge experience.

When asked about the impact of age on the relationship, the interviewees provided different responses, yet they generally agreed that it is just a matter of how you communicate. While one of the mentoring supervisors simply concluded that age does not matter:

“But I am also not sure how much age is important, it could be very naïve. I would say we have never really had an issue, I would have never really thought about an age issue.” (Sup. 1)

Another argued that it has little impact, as long as you do not bring age into the conversation:

“Never ever make generations or age a topic. Because I think once you are down that road, it is too late. You should always focus on the fact, the situation.” (Sup. 4)

Yet, others admit that there is an impact:

“Yeah, I mean [the subordinates being older than me] makes a difference. One is that some of the things that they are talking about doing, I cannot really relate to – they are from a different generation...” (Sup. 2)

However, the latter group also stresses that it is something they can deal with. The subordinates being older than them means that they are in different life situation, which may initially make it more difficult to cooperate. But, by identifying and focusing on commonalities in their exchanges, it becomes possible to relate to one another, as the mentoring supervisor continues:

“... It is only a matter of being able, or making sure that you are able to relate to the people and that they feel comfortable with the relationship that you have, and make sure that it is clear to them what my objective is and that I am not here just to be their boss, but that I am also here to learn from them and that I value the experience that they have and the time that they spent doing their work and the time they spent with the company.” (Sup. 2)

Besides ensuring that communication is focused on common interests, some of the mentoring supervisors also mention acknowledging subordinate protégés' experience as a second strategy. They describe that the subordinate protégés may feel that their experience is not valued by the organization:

"Acknowledge the experience. [...] if you acknowledge the experience, it is not so much an issue. I think people start having a problem when you walk in and have to change something, but you never acknowledge that they have done great things in the last 15 years." (Sup. 4)

The protégés will be more accepting of the mentors if they can credibly show the protégés that their long experience carries value and is not forgotten.

Subordinate Protégé Perspective

The subordinate protégés' explanations mirror those of the supervisors to some degree, but a few differences are visible. Again, five areas of explanation for the observed mentoring behavior were derived in the inductive analysis of the interview transcripts: i) the formal process, ii) self-motivation, iii) knowledge and experience, iv) outside network and v) being able to relate.

The formal process. From the subordinate protégés' descriptions, exchanges with mentoring supervisors are largely limited to formal settings. The mentors are strongly guided in their work by the formal process and are perceived as doing just what is expected of them. They are approachable outside of formal meetings, but because of subordinate protégés' independent tasks and mentoring supervisors' lack of reachability, these exchanges are still rare.

According to the subordinate protégés, the formal process and requirements are central to how the mentoring supervisors work with their development. In fact, most of the interviewees explained that, in terms of communication and assistance, the mentoring supervisors were doing quite exactly what the protégés thought the company was expecting of the mentors, e.g.:

"I think I would say that it is what I would expect. We have got a few things where he has actually gone that extra mile, [...] But, the more business-type things, I think [my supervisor] provides the support that I would expect the company [expects him or her] to provide." (Sub. 1)

Still, the subordinate protégés tend to describe emphasize that their mentoring supervisors are very approachable. Most of them explain that they sit together in one office and that his or her mentor is very open, e.g.:

"We all work in open space [...] it is easy to go to her and ask questions..." (Sub. 4)

They explain that they can go to the mentoring supervisors anytime to ask questions and get help.

At the same time, interactions outside formal arrangements, passed greetings at the coffee machine, are described as fairly rare. Many of the interviewees explained that their work tasks are quite independent. They do not often need assistance from their mentoring supervisors and so only bring up issues at formal team meetings. Another reason was offered by one of the subordinate protégés when the authors asked how the mentor assists him or her when uncertain about reaching work objectives:

“Well, it was kind of difficult, because [my mentoring supervisor] was in many meetings. [He or she] was like 90% of the time away from the desk.” (Sub. 3)

The mentor is easy to approach but maybe not very easy to reach.

Self-motivation. The subordinate protégés relate that the supervisors’ mentoring style strongly depends on the protégés’ own motivation. In areas such as finding strategies to overcome problems or developing skills, the SCM sub-functions of Coaching and Challenging Assignments, mentors offer guidance, but leave finding solutions to the protégé.

The subordinates describe that supervisors, in accordance with the formal processes, attach considerable value to intrinsic motivation to develop. Instead of presenting the subordinates with explicit directions, what direction to go or how to develop, they provide ideas. Making decisions and designing resolutions are left to the subordinates themselves. This allows the subordinates to step into their stretch zone and develop:

“I think [my supervisor] will try to leave me to solve [work issues] myself by guiding me in the direction I would need to go, giving me [his or her] opinion. Instead of just giving me the full answer, and say that is the only way, [he or she] would try to get me to think about the problem – you are really stuck solving the problem yourself.” (Sub. 1)

Some of the subordinates further stress their roles as drivers of development. These describe the mentoring supervisors as a resource to turn to in fulfilling your own goals:

“Managers are there to help us on our quest of development and growing that way. So that is their responsibility.” (Sub. 2)

Knowledge and experience. Subordinate protégés explain that they are highly experienced in their area, compared to the younger mentors who often lack detailed experience. This poses some kind of an obstacle in coaching the protégés. However, the mentoring supervisors generally bring experiences from other places and can assist the protégés’ development with ideas influenced by those experiences.

That the subordinates are very independent also has to do with the distribution of knowledge and experience between them and the supervisors. The mentoring supervisors lack insight into the everyday dealings of the subordinates and thus usually can only provide somewhat limited support in that area. Some of the interviewees mention a sense of insecurity among the supervisors

in this regard, a feeling which reflects on the subordinates' perspective on the mentoring supervisor as well e.g.:

"When you were dealing with [my previous, more senior supervisor], as opposed to dealing with [my current supervisor], you could tell there was a big confidence difference. Probably, that would also be reversed – my confidence in [my previous supervisor] would be greater because of that knowledge [he or she] possessed." (Sub. 1)

However, the supervisors have good knowledge of the functional area, often described by merit of their higher or more recent education in the field. Furthermore, some of the subordinate protégés emphasize the mentors' experience from other settings or sites, describing it as a valuable resource, e.g.:

"[My mentoring supervisor] has a lot of experience leading people and from different company sites, in different countries. [He or she] can teach a lot of things given that [he or she] made experience in other countries." (Sub. 5)

The mentoring supervisor brings in outside experiences that complement the protégés' detailed experience and allows him or her to better lead the development with new ideas.

Outside network. That the mentoring supervisors usually have a wider business network outside the local office allows them to both help the subordinate protégés in widening their networks and connect the protégés with peers who can coach them.

Most of the subordinate protégés also mention that the mentoring supervisors have passed through other sites as part of their career. These experiences provide the mentors with valuable connections, a network that complements the local network of the subordinates. This is often described as one of their major assets, e.g.:

"You see, [he or she] has a very good network in terms of knowing people and knowing links that can help us." (Sub. 2)

The mentor is able to facilitate contact with others who hold similar roles and may have run into similar issues in other places.

Being able to relate. The subordinate protégés perceive their relationship with the mentoring supervisors as quite relaxed. Communication is not an obstacle, not a source of stress, as conversations are largely focused on expressing similarities. Further, the protégés point out that the mentors can carry authority even though they are younger.

The subordinate protégés when asked about how they perceive the communication with their mentoring superiors describe the exchanges as very informal and relaxed. Conversations are focused on similarities rather than what might be differences:

“A very healthy sort of social conversation goes on, really. We have a few interesting topics, sport is probably one of the big ones.” (Sub. 1)

Even though their ages are different, they can still find topics that interest them both.

Some of them also discuss that the difference in age or experience does not impact the way that they look at the supervisors, they do not see age as an issue in their relationship or an obstacle in communication. One of the protégés explained that:

“I don’t see [my mentoring supervisor] as a little [boy or girl], it is not like ‘[he or she] is so young, [he or she] doesn’t understand anything’”. (Sub. 5)

Even though the mentor is young enough to be the protégé’s child, he or she can still be capable.

Concluding this section, it has been shown that the interviews paint a picture of the enactment being largely confined to formal requirements. Most of the exchanges appear to take place in formal meetings and within the formal process. In fact, the subordinate protégés showed consensus in the perception that the mentoring supervisors acted in accordance with their belief of what the company expected of them, not more. The interviewees’ accounts are summarized in Figure 5 below.

Determinants	Mentors' Perspective	Protégés' Perspective
Formal Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Formal process is important for how they mentors work with Coaching and Challenging Assignments ➤ Used as a guideline for skill development and related follow-ups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Formal processes central in guiding mentors in developing the protégés ➤ Mentors considered very approachable ➤ Few interactions outside of formal arrangements
Self-Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Guiding principle for formal process, and personal and professional development is self-motivation by protégés ➤ Mentors not responsible for pushing protégés, therefore their self-motivation to develop is important ➤ Mentors engage in hands-off mentoring style characterized by passivity and reactive actions ➤ Relationship of cooperation between mentors and protégés ➤ Belief that not everyone wants to develop and especially older subordinate protégés may not want to be developed anymore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Supervisors' mentoring style and hence also development strongly depends on protégés' own motivation ➤ Mentors offer broad guidance and ideas in finding solutions, protégés need to detect them themselves
Experience and Perspective / Knowledge and Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mentors' ability to coach protégés limited by their level of insight into day-to-day business. Mentoring supervisors therefore can only engage into issues concerning wider contexts ➤ Knowledge and experience distributed between mentors and protégés: Mentors have greater insight into the broader functional area, whereas protégés are familiar with detailed process and/or system knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Protégés highly experienced in their field of expertise, which mentors lack insight in ➤ Mentors provide support based on broader, outside experience and education
Network On- or Offsite / Outside Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Protégés usually have strong local networks, mentors therefore can leverage the off-site networks to assist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mentors have wider offsite network which allows them to help protégés widen their networks and connect them to helpful contacts ➤ Knowledge gained at other company sites is considered as mentors' 'biggest asset' by protégés
Being Able to Relate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Communication with older subordinate protégés more challenging than with younger ones ➤ Mentors may admit that age has an impact, but it is manageable ➤ Mentors have three strategies in communicating with older protégés: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Do not mention age 2) Focus conversations on common interests 3) Acknowledge experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relaxed relationship between mentors and protégés given that conversations are focused on similarities

Figure 5: Table summarizing empirics regarding the explanations behind mentoring behavior, as offered by mentors and protégés respectively-

5.3. Impacts of Age Reversal and Coping Strategies

This section first presents the identified impacts of age reversal on the mentoring relationship between mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés: perception bias and latent conflicts. Next, two coping mechanisms are identified that mentors employ to mitigate these issues, as well as how they impact the enactment of mentoring.

Impacts of Age Reversal

Perception bias. The empirical findings point to a negative bias in perception of older subordinate protégés among the mentoring supervisors, which may explain the limited SCM enactment. A number of mentors described that they saw a negative relationship between age on the one hand, and development willingness and the willingness or ability to change, on the other. They emphasized the need for intrinsic motivation, not primarily to ensure a high degree of development, but rather to avoid “wasting their time”.

Among the subordinate protégés, however, no reciprocation of such a negative bias was perceived. Rather, it appears as though the protégés are inclined to a positive bias. They appear to evaluate their younger mentors' experience in a surprisingly positive light. Take, for instance, Subordinate 1 who has been working in his or her area for over six years, yet readily explains that the mentoring supervisor who only a few years earlier came out of university is more knowledgeable in the area. In the same fashion, lack of knowledge is rarely addressed in detail by the subordinate protégés. When asked about the difference between the previous, very experienced, mentoring supervisor and the current young mentoring supervisor, the subordinate protégé admits that the former by merit of experience held deep insight, while the latter oftentimes cannot help as he or she does not know:

"Usually if you asked [my previous supervisor] a question, [he or she] would give you a straight answer – it was not an 'I will find out'." (Sub. 1)

Yet, Subordinate 1 is quick to explain that:

"But, then again, time will solve that problem." (Sub. 1)

Downplaying the mentoring supervisor's lack of knowledge and asserting that it is only a temporary obstacle that the mentor will be able to get over soon.

Thus, the authors find indications that the reversal of age may have an asymmetric impact on mutual perception. There appears, in line with previous research into career timetables, to be a negative bias to the perception that the mentoring supervisors have of subordinate protégés.

However, this does not seem to be reciprocated. Previous research has not established a clear understanding of what impact to expect from the contrasting influences of the young mentor, on the one hand, being perceived as a fast tracker and, on the one hand, occupying a higher position in conflict with age norms. It appears that in the case studied in this thesis, the subordinate protégés' perception may be influenced more strongly by the mentor's status as fast-tracker ahead of schedule, than by the norm-conflicting reversal of roles, resulting in a positive perception bias.

Latent conflicts. Nevertheless, even though negative perception bias may be limited to one side, there still appear to be latent conflicts in the relationships. As previous research within the similarity-attraction paradigm reveals, increasing dissimilarity, e.g. in age, is expected to lead to greater obstacles in communication and cooperation among individuals. The presence of such obstacles could contribute to explaining the present behavior, as unwillingness to cooperate would arguably lead to a lack of incentive to invest time into developing the subordinate protégés outside of formal requirements.

While most interviewees readily acknowledged that the difference in age leads to differences in communication, none explicitly described that there would be any relational issue arising from this factor. Indeed, both mentors and protégés, while describing that their exchanges outside of

team meetings and similar occasions are very limited, also emphasize that they work in an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

The authors argue that these apparently contradictory findings, lack of extensive cooperation but a perception that the quality of the relationship is good, are produced by two coping strategies utilized by the mentoring supervisors. Firstly, the mentors engage in a strategy of hands-off mentoring, which allows them and protégés to act their respective roles with minimal communication. Secondly, the mentors communicate in a way that reduces the risk of stressful situations. These two coping strategies will be elaborated on in greater detail in the following sub-sections. Figure 6 provides a summary of the aforementioned impacts of age reversal.

Impacts of Age Reversal	Findings
Perception Bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mentors perceive a negative relationship between age and development willingness/ willingness or ability to change ➤ Protégés do not reciprocate negative bias. They are inclined to a positive bias, evaluating younger mentors' experience more positively ➔ Asymmetric impact on mutual perception
Latent Conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Differences in communication as a result from different ages are acknowledged, yet, any kind of relational issues are denied ➔ Contradictory findings point to activities that deal with the latent conflict

Figure 6: Table depicting the two identified impacts of age reversal

Coping Strategies Employed by Mentors

Hands-off mentoring. The authors argue that the strategy of hands-off mentoring, described by all interviewees as the norm in their respective mentoring relationship, may be a key factor in explaining these seemingly unexpected findings. Passive leadership, where the door is always open, but the mentoring supervisor avoids proactively approaching subordinate protégés, minimizes the time spent together and thus conflict, while at the same time allowing both parties to enact the roles expected of them in the organization.

The mentors can act their role, as is expected of someone in their position, without investing significant time into the relationship or the protégé. Firstly, by leaving “the door open”, i.e. assigning the responsibility for action to the protégé, they only need to act, if a protégé does find the resolve to step inside. Secondly, even in the case that a subordinate protégé does bring up an issue, the mentoring supervisor can quickly resolve the issue by either referring the protégé on to someone else, such as one mentor explains about issues raised in team meetings:

“The only input to that I usually give is ‘who can we ask, who can we ask to help us to do that?’” (Sup. 1)

Or the supervisor can only provide the minimum guidance and allow the protégé to work out the details on his or her own.

At the same time, the hands-off mentoring allows the older subordinate protégés to act their roles largely without interacting with the mentor past formal requirements. The independence given to them, which appears greater than that given to younger protégés, is interpreted as an acknowledgment to their experience. They are also, to a large degree, in control of how much effort they put into development, allowing those that have the resolution to keep developing, while giving those without the freedom not to.

One protégé's story may serve as an example. This interviewee (Sub. 4) at first had a good relationship with his or her mentoring supervisor, who also worked by the hands-off mentoring strategy. However, the mentor at one point changed to a more directive mentoring style, which included pushing the protégé towards development. This change led to a sharp deterioration of the relationship, as described by the subordinate protégé. The problems lasted until the mentor was succeeded and the new mentoring supervisor again took on a mentoring style marked by lack of proactivity from his or her side towards the protégé.

In summary, hands-off mentoring may be a deliberate choice that the mentors make to avoid awakening latent conflict, a conflict they expect based on age-based beliefs. However, this strategy also minimizes interaction and, consequently, the SCM sub-functions. This may explain the pattern of content, yet scarcely interacting mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés visible in the interviews.

Communicating to relate. The authors find further support for the argument of latent conflicts in the effort put into maintaining relationships as a coping measure. Nearly all interviewees in some way mentioned the need to relate to their counterpart. Especially the mentoring supervisors described devising strategies of finding and addressing commonalities, leading attention away from differences, when interacting with their older subordinate protégés. Furthermore, the avoidance of teacher-student relationships or being seen as “checking on”, i.e. controlling, protégés can arguably be viewed as an attempt to avoid deeper involvement, situations that may produce stress in the relationship.

Communication from the mentors seems to follow an ostrich-type strategy that what you are not aware of cannot do harm. The mentoring superiors avoid the topic of age (and related topics such as generational differences), arguing that as long as it is not mentioned it will not have any impact. They attempt to steer attention away from dissimilarities onto similarities, making sure that they identify topics of common interest which they can discuss with their protégés.

Similarly, both protégé and mentor accounts indicate a great reluctance of engaging in deeper involvement with the protégés. The mentoring supervisors attempt to stay away from situations that may cause stress in the relationship, such as engaging in teacher-student relationships, even though these may be suitable, as when one mentor explains:

“There might be certain elements to that in the PDP, but [...] it is never really me sitting down saying ‘you can improve on this by doing XYZ’, it is more about trying to seize the opportunities, ‘what would you like to exploit, how do we fix that up?’” (Sup. 1)

Even though he or she perceives that the formal process contains elements of creating these teacher-student situations, he or she still tries to completely avoid them.

The coping strategies are summarized in Figure 7. By making the mentors focus on being able to relate and avoiding interaction that may pose stress for the relationship, the age-based beliefs they hold may contribute to the limited enactment of SCM sub-functions. It appears as though the mentoring supervisors spend significant time on communicating to relate. Further, their influence on the subordinate protégés is limited by a wish to avoid being too involved in their work, whether it is operational or with development. Such distance limits the mentors’ ability to perform the SCM sub-functions.

Coping Strategies	Findings
Hands-off Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Passive leadership applied by mentors, avoiding proactively approaching protégés ➤ Mentors provide minimum guidance, letting protégés work out problems independently ➤ Time spent together, and thus conflict, is minimized while both parties are able to enact the roles expected of them in the organization ➤ Protégés perceive independence as appreciation of their experience, allowing them to decide for themselves whether to develop further or not
Communicating to Relate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Both, mentors and protégés stress the importance of relating to their counterparts ➤ Finding and addressing commonalities stressed, drawing attention away from differences and avoiding a “student-teacher”-relationship ➤ Age omitted in conversation along an ostrich-type communication strategy – what you are not aware of cannot do harm

Figure 7: Table providing an overview over the two coping mechanisms used to deal with the impacts of age reversal

6. Conclusion

The present thesis has sought to address a gap in the literature concerning the effect of age reversal on the mentoring by supervisors of subordinates. Previous studies have so far only established that there are mixed effects on a number of performance and development related variables. This thesis builds on and elaborates the present research in two areas: firstly, how SCM functions are enacted in a young supervisor-older subordinate setting; secondly, how age impacts the enactment of these functions.

This chapter is organized into two sections, according to the two parts of this thesis' research question. First, Section 6.1 summarizes the findings on what behavior is exhibited to enact the five SCM sub-functions in the Finance departments of Mars Europe. Next, in Section 6.2 the role that age plays in shaping this behavior are discussed.

6.1. Enactment of SCM

In the first part of the research question, the authors ask how and to what extent the SCM sub-functions are enacted in reverse-age supervisory dyads in Mars Europe. Despite the low volume of interactions between mentors and protégés due to an independent work style, at first glance the five sub-functions of SCM found in academic research all, to some extent, seem to be enacted. Coaching was described by all the interviewees, whereas only a few mentioned actions related to Challenging Assignments, Exposure and Visibility and Sponsorship. Protection was the least visible sub-function, both in terms of interviewees who mentioned it and the actions they described. However, this thesis finds that even among the more frequently mentioned sub-functions, often only a part of the components is mentioned and the enactment of these is mostly limited to the formal process. Extra-organizational investment, as SCM is defined, is hardly visible in the accounts of the interviewees.

6.2. Impact of Age on Enactment

The second part of the research question asks how the age difference impacts the enactment of SCM sub-functions. This thesis found that there appears to be a negative perception bias among the studied mentoring supervisors of their older subordinate protégés. These seem to be believed to be unwilling to develop and change and consequently not in need of active mentoring by the supervisor. In contrast, the thesis finds that older protégés seem to be inclined to a positive perception of the mentors, downplaying their lack of experience and instead attaching high value to the limited experience that their mentoring supervisors hold.

Further, the authors find signs of latent conflicts in the relationships and that they are marked by considerable distance, i.e. a level of interaction largely dictated by formal requirements. These latent conflicts may be caused by the negative perception of older protégés among mentors due to age-based beliefs. However, the authors find that these latent conflicts seem to be contained by two coping strategies that simultaneously, as a by-product, confine the enactment of SCM

sub-functions. The mentoring supervisors engage in a passive mentoring style, “hands-off mentoring”, which effectively minimizes mentoring of any, but the most persistent subordinate protégés. They also modify their communication in a way that avoids producing stress in the relationship, but also inhibits their role as guides by focusing conversations on protégés’ strengths, rather than weaknesses, and avoiding deeper involvement in their work.

These strategies, the authors argue, are effective in containing conflicts within the relationships, but at the cost of suppressing mentoring. They create a contrasting picture of seemingly satisfied mentors and protégés, who nevertheless only engage in limited interaction and only enact a small selection of mentoring behaviors.

7. Contributions

This section presents the thesis' contributions to theory (Section 7.1) and practice (Section 7.2). Further, it discusses the limitations of the study (Section 7.3) and provides suggestions for areas of future research (Section 7.4).

7.1. Theoretical Contributions

Previous literature has indicated that reversal of age appears to have a mixed impact on the performance of mentoring functions, including SCM sub-functions, ranging from negative to positive. However, how these outcomes are produced has so far only been discussed based on theoretical models, qualitative empirical studies capable of addressing this question appear to be missing.

This thesis has contributed to beginning to fill this gap by investigating not only the behavior exhibited in the SCM relationship, but also how the reversal of age impacts this behavior. Thereby, it provides a better understanding of the link between relative age as an antecedent, and work performance development as an outcome that has been investigated in the previous literature. It is the hope of the authors that this improved understanding of the SCM behavior and how the relationship enactment is impacted by reversal of age, can inform future research attempting to investigate the mixed results achieved in previous studies. The thesis goes beyond a simple prediction of negative effects on all outcomes due to conflicts in the relationship, to investigating how the individuals employ strategies for dealing with their counterpart and how these strategies may be influenced by age-based beliefs. These insights may be used to extend the theory and develop better informed predictions to test in larger studies.

Further, the thesis adds to the research on the perception of fast-tracking mentors by the behind-schedule protégés. While the career timetables paradigm offers a rather clear prediction of the perception that the former group holds of the latter, the opposite has been discussed without a solid conclusion. In the case studied in this thesis, support was found for an asymmetric influence of age norms conflict. From the perspective of age norms, this indicates that the protégés' perception of mentors as competent fast trackers had a stronger positive influence than the negative influence from reversal of roles.

In summary, this thesis contributes to research by providing a better awareness of how age-based beliefs manifest in the behavior of mentoring supervisors and subordinate protégés. By shedding light on the strategies employed to suppress conflicts, the thesis establishes a clearer link between age-based belief and mentoring outcomes, thus potentially improving the understanding of the so-far rather mixed findings achieved in the field.

7.2. Practical Contributions

For practitioners, this thesis contributes to a greater awareness of the issues that increasing violations of age norms may generate in organizations. It verifies that this may lead to conflicts and

shows that the kind of independent mentoring that may be enacted in response is not conducive for development of a large part of the older subordinates. Thus, managers need to consider finding other ways to incentivize their employees to develop, or offer other forums to make the SCM sub-functions available, e.g. formal mentoring programs aimed at the older subordinates.

On a more broad level, the results show that organizations who want their employees to engage in continuous professional development need to devise strategies to deal with supervisor-subordinate conflicts, e.g. due to age. This may involve training supervisors to better identify and remedy perception biases.

7.3. Limitations of the Study

In this section, the authors want to point out some limitations to the theoretical contributions of this study. These regard the interrelation between age-related variables and tenure, and the generalizability of findings.

Interrelation of Variables

Relative age is difficult to isolate and studies can easily end up trying to measure complex processes with simple proxy measures, as pointed out in Lawrence's (1997) critique. The interviewees, in describing their experiences, do not make a difference between absolute age, relative age and related factors such as tenure or that an older person may soon be retiring. Further, other factors such as corporate culture may impact the relationships. Great care is necessary to isolate age especially in an in-depth study, with a consequently smaller scope, and the authors have attempted to avoid other factors by drawing on interviewees from different regions and guiding questions towards relative age rather than tenure. However, it cannot be excluded that interviewees' responses may be influenced by other factors than age as these may be indistinguishable in interviewees' interpretations of their coworkers and relationships with them.

Generalizability of Findings

This thesis explores SCM in an in-depth study of participants drawn from a single case setting. The findings should be interpreted as descriptive and may offer guidance to further development of theory. The findings should not be understood as general prescriptions. Instead, they offer insight into the detailed workings in a specific case context and may be transferable to cases with similar contextual factors such as corporate culture or human resource development approach. For further generalizability, the findings may contribute to formulation of theoretical hypotheses to be tested in larger studies.

7.4. Areas for Further Research

Previous research on reverse-age mentoring has been focused on outcomes, basing its propositions mainly on the status incongruence or career timetables framework. As has been pointed out before, further research on the link between antecedent and outcome that can verify the theoretical models and explain the unexpected findings in these outcome-focused studies are needed.

This thesis begins the process of filling this gap, but more studies are needed to further verify and explore the identified behaviors, both in terms of the enactment of SCM functions and the strategies for coping with age-related conflicts. It would be interesting to assess the completeness of sub-functions of SCM, as well as to dive deeper in terms of actions, serving to identify these. In addition, studies on larger scale to test for the degree of conflict, whether it largely remains latent as in the case of this study and how it is kept latent, could further serve to inform theory.

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9. Appendix

Appendix A

Mentoring supervisor interview guideline

1. General Questions

- 1.1. What is your age?
- 1.2. What is your nationality?
- 1.3. What role/position do you hold in the organization?
- 1.4. How long have you had this role?
- 1.5. How long have you been supervising your current team?
- 1.6. How many team members are in the team and how old are they?

2. Career functions – preparing for career advancement

- 2.1. How would you describe a normal day at work in regards to situations where you interact with your subordinate?
- 2.2. **(Coaching)** How do you support your subordinate in developing ideas and strategies to accomplish their work objectives (aside from the formal procedures)?
 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?**(Coaching)** In what ways do you support your subordinate in realizing their strengths and shortcomings, to develop their work performance (aside from the formal procedures)?
 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?
- 2.3. **(Challenging assignments)** Do you assist your subordinate in finding assignments with the potential to develop their skills/ develop new skills (aside from the formal procedures)?
 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?
- 2.4. **(Exposure and visibility)** How, if at all, do you help your subordinate enlarge their business network inside the organization (aside from the formal procedures)?
 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?**(Exposure and visibility)** Have you attempted to provide your subordinate with opportunities to gain exposure to organizational decision-makers (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?

2.5. **(Sponsorship)** Have you made an effort to help your subordinate join projects/ activities of special interest to them (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?

(Sponsorship) Have you overtly sponsored your subordinate for lateral moves and/or promotions (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?

2.6. **(Protection)** Have you attempted to protect your subordinate from assignments or situations that may harm their reputation (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?

(Protection) Have you helped your subordinate finish assignments/tasks or meet deadlines that otherwise would have been difficult to complete (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you act?

Subordinate protégé interview guideline

1. General Questions

- 1.1. What is your age?
- 1.2. What is your nationality?
- 1.3. What role/position do you hold in the organization?
- 1.4. How long have you had this role?
- 1.5. How long have you worked with your current supervisor?
- 1.6. How long were you working with the previous 3 supervisors and how old were they?
- 1.7. Who are your team members and how old are they?

2. Career functions – preparing for career advancement

- 2.1. How would you describe a normal day at work in regards to situations where you interact with your supervisor?
- 2.2. **(Coaching)** How would your supervisor help you when you are uncertain about how to reach work objectives, or need to discuss ideas (aside from the formal procedures)?
 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?

(Coaching) Do you feel that your supervisor supports you in finding directions to improve on your work performance (aside from the formal procedures)?

 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?
- 2.3. **(Challenging assignments)** When you have wanted to develop your skills or develop new skills, how did your supervisor assist you (aside from the formal procedures)?
 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - Did your supervisor assist you in finding assignments where you could develop?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?
- 2.4. **(Exposure and visibility)** How does your supervisor assist you in getting contact with other people inside the organization (aside from the formal procedures)?
 - Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
 - How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?

(Exposure and visibility) Does your supervisor provide you with opportunities to gain the attention of organizational decision-makers (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?

2.5. **(Sponsorship)** Have you told your supervisor about interesting projects/ activities you would like to join? How did your supervisor react?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?

(Sponsorship/ Exposure and visibility) Have you expressed interest in lateral moves and/or promotions (aside from the formal procedures)?

(Sponsorship) If so, how has your supervisor supported you in these endeavors (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?

2.6. **(Protection)** Do you believe that your supervisor helps you avoid doing things that would maybe be negative for your reputation or career (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?

(Protection) Has your supervisor helped you finish assignments/tasks or meet deadlines that otherwise would have been difficult to complete (aside from the formal procedures)?

- Can you provide some example of how such an interaction may play out?
- How do you feel that the differences in life situation impacts the way you or your supervisor acts?

Appendix B

Interviewee overview

Due to confidentiality reasons, only very limited descriptions of the interviewees can be disclosed. Most of the interviewees belong to one of two groups: supervisors and subordinates. One interview was performed with a process expert to get a better understanding for the case context including the applicable formal processes.

Interview number	Role	Role number	Age difference to mentor/protégé
1	Supervisor	1	20
2	Supervisor	2	27
3	Supervisor	3	26
4	Supervisor	4	21
5	Supervisor	5	11
6	Supervisor	6	18
7	Subordinate	1	27
8	Subordinate	2	4
9	Subordinate	3	11
10	Subordinate	4	4
11	Subordinate	5	10
12	Process expert	1	N/A

Table 1: Table of interviewees including their relative age (for supervisors with multiple subordinates, the oldest subordinate was focused on in the interview and thus his or her age used for the calculation)

Appendix C

Mars Inc. Overview

The authors decided to study the case of the American company Mars, Inc. which is a global manufacturer of confectionery, pet food and other food products, based in McLean, Virginia. Mars was founded in 1911 and has ever since been a private business, entirely owned by the Mars family. The company operates in six business segments (in order of percentage of sales), namely: Petcare, Chocolate, Wrigley, Food, Symbioscience, and Drinks (Mars, Incorporated, 2014). With its diverse product portfolio, including 11 billion-dollar-brands, the company's annual revenue is estimated to amount to more than \$33 billion for 2014. Mars has operations in 74 countries and employs approximately 75,000 people worldwide.



Figure 8. Mars in a Moment (Mars, Incorporated, n.d.)

The business's foundations lie in five core principles that are central for the organization and guide all actions: *Quality*, *Responsibility*, *Mutuality*, *Efficiency* and *Freedom* (Mars, Incorporated, 2014). Given that these principles also affect leadership at Mars, they are elaborated on more in detail in the following:

Quality: In order to be successful, at Mars, it is of crucial importance to understand and be close to the consumer and to deliver the highest quality in all the work that is done. Moreover, delivering value for money is central.

Responsibility: "As individuals, we demand total responsibility from ourselves; as associates, we support the responsibilities of others" (Mars, Incorporated, 2014, p. 9) At Mars, the word "associate" demonstrates the valuing and recognizing each other's contributions, as well as the egalitarian spirit. All associates are obliged to take direct responsibility for their decisions and consequent results. Ethical people are recruited and trust is put into everyone to be accountable for their own high standards.

Mutuality: Mutuality expresses that business relationships at Mars should be evaluated based on the degree to which mutual benefits are created. These do not necessarily have to be financial in nature. Mutuality also alludes to sustainability, to respect the environment and to work in the most sustainable way. In addition, activities should never work at the expense of others.

Efficiency: In order to achieve maximum productivity, the ability to organize physical, financial and human assets is fundamental. In line with this principle, products and services are produced with highest quality and at the least possible cost, with the lowest possible resource utilization. Moreover, the most efficient decision-making processes shall be used to manage business operations.

Freedom: Family-ownership of Mars since its beginning has always been a deliberate choice in order to maintain full independence and freedom in developing the business, instead of for instance selling stocks or taking on debt which would imply ceding of control. Additionally, it facilitates taking a long-term perspective when making investments.

Underlining the importance of the five principles for Mars, all careers with the company start with the "Essence of Mars" training program, in which new associates are briefed on them (Mars, Incorporated, 2012).

In terms of general learning and development for employees, Mars follows a three-fold approach called "70/20/10 learning model". Mars believes that 70 percent of an employee's learning shall be generated by giving them the possibility to try things out for themselves on a day-to-day basis, acknowledging that this process might entail taking a few risks. 20 percent of the learning is de-

duced from peers, while 10 percent will be composed of formal training in forms of classes and courses (Mars Incorporated, n.d.)

Those take place at the “Mars University”. It can be considered a sub-section of Human Resources, offering a variety of both, cross-functional, as well as fully customized online and classroom courses to employees with the objective of broadening their business perspective, developing their functional and leadership capabilities and providing practical skills. In 2011, more than 40% of all employees were educated by the Mars university (Mars, Incorporated, 2012).

In order to make sure that employees at Mars constantly work on developing themselves towards their long-term career goals, every individual has a *Personal Development Plan* (PDP). It supports in setting definite goals based on a catalogue of competences which was developed in partnership with Lominger® and spans all the functional areas. It triggers dialogues about progression and is often used as a basis for salary reviews.

Mars offers a variety of graduate programs for well-qualified university graduates who, during the program’s duration of about 12 to 36 months, undergo rotations either across functions or within a certain functional area, while special focus is accorded to their training and development as to having them take on a management position afterwards.

One of these programs is the European Finance Development Program (EFDP). During three years, trainees do two rotations, working in three different positions for one year each, within the finance area at Mars. During the program’s duration, trainees undergo special trainings and have to pass yearly assessment centers in order to stay part of the program. After five to seven years with the company, EFDP graduates usually take on a higher management position.