



MASTER THESIS

INFORMAL MENTORING THROUGH OUTSIDERS' GLASSES

A qualitative study about how outsiders describe and perceive an informal mentoring dyad within their team and what they think about the possible consequences.

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Preface

In September 2013 I started thinking about how to shape my master thesis. That was a kind of problematic in the way that I liked all kind of subjects. After weeks of puzzling and thinking about what to do, a topic came by about informal mentoring. Because of my interest in internal processes, this topic got my attention immediately and I decided to go for it. And now, after spending lots of hours in the library, drinking liters of coffee, reading tons of articles and desperately looking for participants, this is the result of 10 months of research.

I couldn't have done this all without the help of some people. First of all my supervisors Suzanne Janssen and Mark van Vuuren. Suzanne, it was a pleasure to have you as my supervisor and I would like to thank you for your ideas, your critical look, your time and your feedback during the process. Mark, thank you for being my second supervisors and although I didn't have seen you as much as I've seen Suzanne, you're feedback was always useful. Second, I would like to thank Leonie, my girlfriend. Leonie, thank you for helping me and thank you for being my second coder. But most of all, thank you for your endless support when I was complaining about all those little things which didn't go the way I wanted. Third, I really would like to thank my parents for their endless support through the years. Without you I wasn't standing here. And last, but not least: thanks to those who participated in my study and those who helped me recruiting participants. Without you, this was a senseless mission.

Enjoy reading my master thesis, which marks an end of a phase in my life.

Joël Tahitu

September, 2014

Abstract

Various studies in the past have shown that the outcomes of a mentoring relationship can be very successful for the protégé, mentor and organization (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Fagenson, 1989). However, barely any study has focused on the perception and consequences of an informal mentoring relationship on outsiders (a third-party) within the same team. But, studies in the past have shown the importance of good relationships among coworkers and between leaders and employees (e.g. Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Kramer, 1999). It is also shown that a deterioration of a workplace relationship has influence on emotional stress, less ability to perform tasks well, intentions to turnover and the perception of the role of workplace relationships (Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva & Fix, 2004). For that reason, it is important to get more insight in the perception and the possible consequences for outsiders of an informal mentoring relationship because being an outsider of a relationship might have consequences for both the outsider (on personal level) and the organization.

Twenty-one outsiders were qualitatively examined using semi-structured interviews which consisted of parts: general questions about mentoring, mentoring experience, description of the mentoring dyad within the team, perception of this dyad and the possible consequences of the dyad.

The study shows that, in line with research about parallels like friendship at work LMX, outsiders perceive organizational injustice. The results show that outsiders are frustrated, envious and feel social excluded. For outsiders, an informal mentoring relationship has more negative (bad atmosphere, the influence of the mentoring dyad, trust issues, decreased work motivation and counterproductive work behavior) than positive consequences (using the dyad in decision-making processes and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)). Implications of the findings and suggestions for future research are presented.

Keywords: Informal Mentoring; Organizational Justice; Third Party perception.

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Introduction

In scientific literature, mentoring is defined as the interpersonal relationship between an experienced employee (mentor) and the less experienced employee (protégé or mentee) (Fagenson, 1989; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). In this relationship, the mentor strongly supports the protégé and gives him or her feedback regarding career plans and personal development (Kram, 1983).

Mentoring can be distinguished into two specific forms: *formal* and *informal* mentoring. Formal mentorship as a training and as a developmental tool is not a new concept at all. Back to ancient Greece, Odysseus entrusted the education of his son Telemachus to a trusted counselor and friend, Mentor, who had to coach, support and sponsor his protégé (Hunt & Michael, 1983). There are some important differences between formal and informal mentorships. The differences between the two involve in the way the relationship is initiated, the structure of the relationship and the processes involved in the relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Another important difference pointed out by Ragins and Cotton (1999) is the frequency of meeting with the mentor. A protégé of an informal mentorship meets his mentor when it is desired. Contradictory, the meetings in a formal mentoring relationship are scheduled. Besides, the goals of both mentoring relationships differ. The goals in an informal mentoring relationship differ over time and meet the needs of the protégé, while in a formal relationship the goals are specified at the start of the relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Various studies in the past have shown that the outcomes of a mentoring relationship can be very successful for the protégé, mentor and organization (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Fagenson, 1989). The present study goes beyond the possible successes for the protégé and mentor. Barely any study has focused on the perception and consequences of an informal mentoring relationship on outsiders (a third-party) within the same team. But, studies in the past have shown the importance of good relationships among coworkers and

between leaders and employees. For example, Dirks & Ferrin (2001) and Kramer (1999) showed that a trusting relationship among coworkers has direct or indirect effects on a several number of desired outcomes such as organizational commitment, work performance, turnover intentions and work group performance. Thereby, Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva and Fix (2004) showed that a deterioration of a workplace relationship has influence on emotional stress, less ability to perform tasks well, intentions to turnover and the perception of the role of workplace relationships. For that reason, it is important to get more insight in the perception and the possible consequences for outsiders of an informal mentoring relationship because being an outsider of a relationship might have consequences for both the outsider (on personal level) and the organization.

As said, the purpose of the present study is to get more insight in the perception and consequences of an informal mentoring relationship by colleagues of the protégé. The main research question of the present study sounds as follows: *How do outsiders of an informal mentoring relationship describe and perceive this relationship and what do they think about the possible consequences?* To address this question, a qualitative research was conducted. Before discussing the method, first a theoretical framework will be given.

Theoretical Framework

Mentoring success

The outcomes of mentorships can roughly be divided into two categories. First, there are the outcomes associated with mentoring relationship for the protégé. The outcomes in these categories can be further classified into two sub-categories: *objective career outcomes* and *subjective career outcomes* (Allen et al., 2004). The first one (objective career outcomes) consists of achievements like promotion and financial compensation. Subjective career outcomes consist of more affective outcomes, like job satisfaction and organizational commitment and the intention to turn over. Koberg, Boss and Goodman (1998) concluded

that subjective outcomes of a mentoring relationship have beneficial consequences for the protégé as well as for the whole organization. That is because of the increased job involvement, the increased self-esteem at work and the decreasing intention to turn over. The results of this study are in line with some components of the Mentorship Model, developed by Hunt and Michael (1983). They stated that former protégés are better educated, better paid and more satisfied with their work so they have less intention to turn over. Also Fagenson (1986) conducted a study about the experiences of protégés, compared with the experiences of non-protégés. She found that protégés were more satisfied with their job, had more career opportunities and recognition. Also, she concluded that there was a higher promotion rate among protégés, compared with the non-protégés. Besides, mentorship relationships contribute to the development of managerial talent for the organization (Hunt & Michael, 1983).

But, in investigating the topic of mentoring, the role of the third party is often ignored. Although mentoring can be very successful for the protégé and the mentor, it is also important to take a closer look at the role of a third party (an outsider).

Third-party and Organizational Justice

Organizational justice refers to employees perceptions that they are treated fairly by the employing organization (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). It can be divided into three categories: distributive-, procedural- and interactional justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). By distributive justice is meant the employees' perception of the fairness of the outcomes the employee receives, for example the salary an employee receives (Scandura, 1997).

According to Folger (1977), *procedural justice* refers to the perceived fairness of the means used to determine that final outcome. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) state that individuals define fairness not only in terms of outcomes (like it is the case with *distributive* justice), but

also in terms of the procedures. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) cited Leventhal, Karuza and Fry (1980) who suggested that procedures within a company are fair to the degree that the process of decision-making demonstrates consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness and ethicality. Having a voice in the system is perceived as having a form of participation in the decision making process by expressing one's own opinion (Folger, 1977). The last form of organizational justice is called *interactional justice*. This form refers to the treatment that an individual receives as decisions are made and can be promoted by providing explanations for decisions and delivering the news with sensitivity and respect (Bies & Moag, 1986).

There might be a potential risk in an informal mentorship, which lies in the phenomenon of organizational injustice. Organizational injustice in a mentoring environment can be perceived in several ways. First, a protégé has to be 'chosen' by a mentor. Besides, mentors are looking for a protégé in which they can identify themselves (Erikson, 1963), protégés also need to have certain characteristics. A study conducted by Allen, Poteet and Russell (2000), showed that mentors are more likely to select protégés based on their ability and potential, rather than based on the need for help. Female mentors selected protégés more on the basis of the protégés' capabilities than male mentors. Besides, the social exchange theory is an important theory when it comes to selecting protégés by mentors. The social exchange theory suggests that an interaction between two people is strongly influenced by the input/output-ratio. A relationship is seen as an exchange where the input and the benefits are compared (Allen, 2004). Thus, according to this theory, a mentor is more willing to select a protégé whose he or she believed to have enough competences and capabilities. Kram (1988) also stated that mentors are more willing to select protégés who have more competences and perform better. Concluding it can be said that for an outsider, an informal mentoring dyad can

be adversely. In scientific literature, barely any studies have focused on the topic of organizational injustice and informal mentoring.

Furthermore, the equity theory plays an important role as well when it comes to organizational injustice. The theory has four main assumptions (Folger, 1986). First, relationships between two people are being evaluated (in this case by the non-protégé) by comparing the amount of input to the relationship and the outputs of the relationship (input/output-ratio). Second, when this ratio is unequal (more input, less output) then inequity exists. Third, the bigger this gap is (underrewarded or overrewarded) the more distress the individual feels. Last, the more distress a person feels, the more he or she will do to compensate the distress. In other words: The person will try to restore the equity. Thus, it is suggested that when a non-protégé perceives injustice because of the unequal input/output-ratio (also compared with the input/output-ratio of the protégé) a gap might exist which can affect the non-protégé in a bad way.

Finally, the interpersonal relation between the mentor and protégé can have an impact on the outsider. Scientific literature barely paid attention to this topic but there are some parallels which can be made. Although the research on leadership is not identical to the mentoring literature there are definite similarities. The LMX-theory is one of the most clearly dyadic leadership theories, and mentoring is also a dyadic function. McManus and Russell (1997) suggested two similarities between LMX and mentoring: (1) they are both developmental relationships in the workplace and (2) they are subject to a role-making process connected to a negotiating latitude about the nature of the relationship. The Leader-Member-Exchange-theory (LMX-theory) suggests that a leader has a unique relationship with all of the members. By doing this, other members may perceive organizational injustice. Vecchio, Griffeth and Hom (1986) showed that employees with a high LMX perceived more fairness than employees with a low LMX. Manogran, Stauffer and Conlon (1994) and Moorman (1991)

found a positive relation between LMX and perceived organizational justice as well. Besides, according to the social exchange theory, mentors prefer some protégés above others, which might give a feeling of exclusion. As said, LMX literature is not the same as mentoring literature. Barely any study have focused on the perception and consequences of an informal mentoring relationship on outsiders within the same team. The only study about mentoring and organizational justice was conducted by Scandura (1997). She wanted to investigate mentorship built upon the assumption that organizational justice is an important consideration in the development of effective mentorship relationships in the workplace and concluded that mentees perceived a higher level of procedural justice than non-mentees. Mentoring might create some feelings among the non-mentees that some procedures in the organization are unjust. Employees, who have a mentor, might get more access to certain information, which might lead to an unfair feeling to the non-mentee. Scandura (1997) did not find a difference between protégés and non-protégés when it came to distributive justice. The outcome of a procedure is perceived as fair by protégés and non-protégés. It can be concluded that organizations are thus fair in overall reward distribution (Scandura, 1997) and there is not a real problem. However, several studies showed that in many situations employees attach more value to the procedures rather than the distribution (Alexander & Ruderman, 1987; Folger & Konovsky, 1989). McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) stated that procedural justice may be a more important predictor than distributive justice when it comes to organizational commitment and trust in the supervisor.

Third-party Consequences

About the possible consequences of the perception barely anything is known. However, according to scientific literature, there are some concepts which might be the result of being an outsider of an informal mentoring relationship.

Counterproductive work behavior. Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is defined as intentional employee behavior that is harmful to legitimate the interests of an organization (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) add to that that CWB can include overt acts such as aggression and theft or more passive acts, like purposely failing to follow instructions or doing work correctly. There are some studies which have linked CWB to organizational justice. An analysis of Skarlicki and Folger (1997) indicated that employees may respond to perceptions of unfair treatment with negative emotions, such as anger, outrage, resentment, desire for retribution and a range of direct and indirect behavioral responses such as theft, vandalism, sabotage, reduction of citizenship behavior, withdrawal and resistance. Fox, Spector and Miles (2001) found in their study that perceived injustice among employees was related to both negative emotions and CWB.

Organizational citizenship behavior. Although scientific literature has shown the opposite (e.g. Gerstner & Day, 1997), being an outsider can also lead to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCB is described as individual behavior that is *discretionary*, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and contributes to the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1997). Based on the equity theory, Adams (1965) suggests that the tension (as a result of the injustice) perceived by the employee has to be resolved. Adams (1965) stated that OCB can be seen as an input for an employee to resolve the inequity. So, organizational injustice, caused by an informal mentoring relationship, might result in an employee who is more willing to work harder.

Trust. Trust is an important issue within organizations. Tan and Lim (2009) stated that trust is the basis of the quality of interpersonal relationships and a source of competitive advantage for organizations. In scientific literature there are several forms of trust: Trust in the direct leader or supervisor, trust in the organization as a whole and trust in coworkers. The difference between the first two forms and the latter form lies in the fact that there is no

power imbalance in the latter one (Tan & Lim, 2009). The relationships among coworkers are in a horizontal line, despite of a vertical line, which is the case in the first two forms. Lau and Liden (2008) mentioned that trust in coworkers is a very important thing for three reasons. First, because organizations are nearly always divided in teams, employees are forced to work together. This requires trust in each other to accomplish the main goals of the organization (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2006). The second reason is mentioned by Lau and Liden (2008). They stated that nowadays rewards and punishments are often team oriented. It may happen that an individual employee does not get a reward for his good work because of a coworker's failure. The last reason (Blau, as cited in Lau & Liden, 2008) is that trust in coworkers creates a social exchange relationship. When coworkers trust each other, they are more willing to help each other. Helping a coworker will result in appreciation and willingness to help back in the future. So, trust is an important factor in the success of an organization. Question is whether the relationship between a protégé and a non-protégé is influenced by trust issue. No research has been conducted on the topic of the influence of an informal mentoring dyad on the trust relationship between the protégé and non-protégé. In general, there are two options: On the one hand, it is possible that the relationship between the protégé and the non-protégé will deteriorate because the non-protégé feels excluded by the fact that the protégé has an informal mentoring relationship. On the other hand, it is possible that the relationship between the protégé and the non-protégé will improve. The protégé might get trusted by the non-protégé more and more because the protégé is seen as a coworker who can affect employees with a higher function in one way or another.

Friendship. The protégé and the non-protégé are working very close together. According to Kram (1983), mentoring has several psychological functions. One of them is friendship. The relationship between two team-members might even lead to a *close* friendship (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Sias and Cahill distinguish three transitions which might take place: (1) from

coworker to friend, (2) from friend to close friend and (3) from close friend to almost best friend. These friendships at work can be very beneficial. A study conducted by Jehn and Shah (1997) showed that friendship groups performed significantly better than non-friendship groups on decision-making task and motor tasks. They state that the degree of commitment within a friendship group is higher and besides that, friends can cooperate better than non-friends. Being an outsider of an informal mentoring dyad can be disadvantageous for the relationship and friendship between the protégé and non-protégé.

Method

The purpose of the present study was to get more insight in the perception and consequences of an informal mentoring relationship by colleagues of the protégé. To investigate this topic, the researcher interviewed employees who met the requirements to participate in this study. In this section, the participants will be discussed as well as the interview scheme and the data-analysis.

Participants

Participants in the present study were selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 1990). Participants were recruited by (1) using the researcher's network and (2) by publishing a call on several websites. Participants had to meet to a number of requirements. First, participants of the present study had to be a part of a team within an organization. This was because the aim of the present study was to investigate the perception and consequences of a relationship as outsider within the same team. Second, the participant had to be an outsider of the informal mentoring relationship between the mentor and the protégé. In the present study the definition of Chao, Walz and Gardner (1992, p. 620) was used (translated in Dutch). They described an informal mentoring relationship as follows: "Informal mentorships are not managed, structured and formally recognized by the organization. Traditionally, they are spontaneous relationships that occur without external involvement from the organization." Ragins and

Cotton (1999) add to that, that the goals in an informal mentoring relationship differ over time and these goals meet the needs of the protégé. So, when a potential participant recognized a relationship like this, because a colleague of him or her was in a relationship like this and the potential participant him- or herself did not have an informal mentoring relationship, than he or she could be defined as an outsider.

Table 1
Overview of the participants

N	Gender	Age	Industry	Function	Team Tenure (in years)
1	F	25	Mental healthcare	Socio therapist	5
2	F	37	Healthcare	Advisor quality and safety	2,5
3	F	53	Healthcare	Nurse individual health	7
4	M	28	ICT	Senior consultant	1,5
5	M	28	ICT	Senior consultant	7
6	F	47	Healthcare	Secretary	2
7	F	55	Healthcare	Works Chairman	20
8	M	36	Healthcare	Project assistant	5,5
9	M	29	Catering	Cook	4
10	F	55	Education	Teacher	13
11	M	40	Electrical Engineering	Field service engineer	7
12	F	25	Retail	Commercial office staff	3
13	M	27	Government	Policy advisor	1,5
14	M	64	Electrical engineering	Instrumentation engineer	9
15	F	27	Healthcare	Teaching assistant	4,5
16	F	51	Healthcare	Nurse	2,5
17	F	54	Healthcare	Hotel care employee	1,5
18	F	26	Dental care	Dentist	2,5
19	M	56	Construction	Painter	5
20	M	47	ICT	Consultant	5
21	M	49	Education	Teacher	7

In total, 21 participants participated in the present study (10 men, 11 women). The ages of the participants varied between 25 years old en 64 years old (average = 41 years old).

Participants represented different industries, including healthcare, ICT and education. Most of the participants were employed in the health-care industry but within the health-care

industry participants represented a broad range of job categories, such as nursing and advisor in quality and safety of patients. An overview of the functions of the participants can be found in Table 1. All participants are full-time workers and worked at least one year within the same team. The average tenure within a team was 5.5 years, with a range from 14 months to 20 years. The average tenure within a function was 11.7 years, with a range from 2 years to 41 years.

Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were held to get more insight in the outsider's observation, the perception and possible consequences. Interviews were the most appropriate method to use in the present study because it left space for detailed answers given by the participant. This was important because barely any study had focused on this topic before and since the aim was to get an as complete view as possible on the topic, open answers were the most suitable.

The interview started off with an introduction of the researcher. In this introduction, the interviewer told the interviewee more about the study. Also, the researcher made clear that the collected data would be treated completely anonymously and discretely and the fact that (with the permission of the participant) the interview was taped.

Each interview started with the general question what participants think of mentoring in common, through the glasses of the protégé, as well as through the glasses of the mentor and the organization as a whole. Topics as advantages, disadvantages, preferences, and risks were discussed. Next, participants were asked if they had a(n) (informal) mentor themselves in the past and how they have experienced this mentoring period to see whether past experience had influence on the perceptions. Participants were also asked about their experience as being a(n) (informal) mentor.

After this general part of the interview, participants were asked to keep two colleagues in mind who have an informal mentoring relationship, following the definition of informal

mentoring relationships mentioned before (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Raggins & Cotton, 1999). Participants were asked why they think that those two colleagues have an informal mentoring relationship, how they express this relationship at work and how deep their relationship goes (from colleagues to good friends).

The next part of the interview was all about what participants think of the relationship between the mentor and protégé. Participants were asked how they perceive the relationship and what they feel when they think about the relationship between mentor and protégé. This part of the interview the researcher did not pose too many questions. Questions started very broad and further the researcher only asked questions like “why do you feel this way?” Also, participants were asked how they think other team member perceive the relationship between mentor and protégé and why they think so.

Each interview ended by questions about possible consequences of the relationship between the mentor and protégé. Consequences could be positive as well as negative. Participants were asked if the relationship between mentor and protégé might have consequences for them, for other team members, for the team as a whole and for the organization.

Data-analysis Procedure

The 21 interviews were transcribed verbatim, which led to 167 transcript pages (A4). The interviews were analyzed with the help of Atlas.ti software. In the first coding round, the researcher created a coding scheme by reading the transcribed pages and generated a list of main categories: *mentoring attitude*, *mentoring experience*, *description of the relationship*, *perception* and *consequences*. These categories were chosen on the basis of the structure of the interview. Via open coding the subcategories and codes were generated. Examples of subcategories included *negative attitude: protégé sees everything through mentor's glasses*, *protégé and mentor have similar interests* and *frustrations towards the relationship*. A

complete overview of the coding scheme can be found in Appendix A. Second, the researcher randomly selected three quotations per code and put them together (mixed). Then, the second coder had to code the list with quotations on the basis of the coding scheme of the researcher. The first coding round resulted in initial kappas of .72 (*attitude mentoring*), .79 (*experience mentoring*), .90 (*description of the relationship*), .78 (*perception*) and .75 (*consequences*). After discussing the kappas it turned out that some quotes were unclear for the second coder because of the lack of context. For example, one quote sounds as follows: "I notice that I am not the only one. More colleagues think of that the same way as I do". In this case, the second coder did not know exactly what this was about. So after making sure all the quotes are clear (e.g. by replacing words as 'it' and 'that' by for example '[the informal mentoring relationship]'), the second coding round resulted in (unweighted) kappas of .86 (*attitude mentoring*), .92 (*experience mentoring*), 1.00 (*description of the relationship*), .90 (*perception*) and .89 (*consequences*).

Results

During the interviews, the focus was on the perception and the consequences of the informal mentoring relationship. On the forehand, participants were asked to keep an informal mentoring relationship of their colleague in mind. Of the 21 informal mentoring relationships, 8 relationships were (according to the participants) arisen because mentor and protégé known each other already, 6 relationships because mentor and protégé were in the same phase of life (e.g. are pregnant, are the same age, etc.), 4 relationships because they had the same interests (e.g. sports, hobbies, etc.) and 3 participants reported that the mentor and protégé had the same expertise.

Table 2:

Description of the mentoring dyad according to the outsider

N	Reason	Expression	Type of relationship
1	Known each other	Having fun / Gossiping	Friendship
2	Known each other	Drawn together	Mainly business
3	Similar expertise	Having fun	Mainly business
4	Similar expertise	Drawn together	Mainly business
5	Similar interests	Having fun / Drawn together	Mainly business
6	Known each other	Having fun / Drawn together	Friendship
7	Similar life	Having fun / Gossiping	Friendship
8	Known each other	Having fun	Friendship
9	Similar interests	Drawn together	Friendship
10	Similar life	Having fun	Friendship
11	Known each other	Having fun / Drawn together	Friendship
12	Similar interests	Drawn together	Mainly business
13	Known each other / Similar expertise	Having fun / Drawn together	Mainly business
14	Similar life	Language / Having fun / Drawn together	Mainly business
15	Known each other	Having fun / Drawn together / Similar working style	Mainly business
16	Similar life	Having fun	Mainly business
17	Known each other	Having fun / Gossiping	Friendship
18	Known each other	Having fun / Drawn together	Mainly business
19	Similar interests	Having fun	Friendship
20	Similar life	Having fun / Gossiping / Drawn together	Friendship
21	Similar life	Having fun / Drawn together	Friendship

According to the participants, the relationship between the mentor and protégé was expressed in several ways. Having fun was reported the most (17 times). Drawn together was reported as second most (13 times) and furthermore, participants reported that mentor and protégé were gossiping (4 times), talking another language (1 time) or had the same style of working (1 time).

Finally, participants were also asked what they thought about the deepness of the informal mentoring relationship. Twelve participants reported that they thought that the informal relationship has lead to a friendship between mentor and protégé. For example, one participant reported that the mentor and protégé are friends and he added to that: "they are

very close friends. Even that close that one of the two was the others best man at his wedding. Well, if that's the case, I think you can call it friendship" (n9). The other 9 participants reported that the relationship between mentor and protégé was mainly business, but in a very informal way: "I think they are mainly colleagues. Maybe they talk about their private life during the day, but they don't see each other in private time I think. When there is an outing, they will draw to each other, but in our organizational culture it is not usual to see each other in private time" (n13).

Mentoring Attitude

Formal or informal mentoring? In general, mentoring is seen as very positive by the participants. When participants had to choose between formal and informal mentoring, 14 participants think that informal mentoring is a better way of learning. Although they are aware of the hazards of this form of mentoring (e.g., unclear limits), the main reason for choosing informal mentoring above formal mentoring is the fact that both the mentor and protégé get along very well and that the protégé discloses him- or herself more: "I think that informal mentoring is better because when the mentor and protégé like each other in one way or another, the protégé will feel much safer and to me that's the most important thing. Because talking to someone you feel safer with is easier than when you do not" (n2). Wanberg, Welsh and Kammeyer-Mueller (2007) showed that protégé self-disclosure in formal mentoring relationships was related to protégé outcomes, including mentoring received, satisfaction about the relationship and a positive influence of mentoring.

Being a mentee. Nearly all participants had a positive attitude towards mentoring through the glasses of a protégé. For participants it was easier to come up with the advantages of mentoring compared to the disadvantages. Participants reported that mentoring is very important for a new employee when he or she enters an organization. Main reason was that it is very important for new employees to get used to the new organization, new colleagues and

the way of working as quickly as possible. A participant noted that “especially for new employees who have less experience because they just left school, it is very helpful to learn from a colleague who is very experienced” (n₁). Another participant added to that that “when the new employee has a specific job like I have, it is very important to be mentored because the main tasks we do at work are not the things you have learned at school” (n₁₁). Also ‘feeling comfortable’ is mentioned many times by participants. By being mentored, new employees feel comfortable and do not need to be afraid of making mistakes: “I think that it is an advantage for a new employee that he or she can lean on his or her mentor. I think new employees are less afraid to make mistakes, something which gives the new employee more self-confidence” (n₁₅). Furthermore, participants see mentoring as a way to grow into the organization as well as personal growth.

However, participants mentioned that there is a risk in having a mentor. Participants think that when having a mentor, a protégé probably focuses on his or her mentor. A participant reported that “that can be a disadvantage [...] because the way the mentor works does not have to be the best one. Besides, when the protégé is focusing on one person, he or she won’t develop an own style of working” (n₁₀). In line of this risk of tunnel vision, several participants also reported that when having a mentor there is a risk to feel oppressed and to feel being ‘cornered’. One participant reported that “it can be a disadvantage when the protégé has to do it the mentor’s way. Than it is a burden because the protégé has to think like the mentor but would have done it another way when he or she could make a choice him- or herself” (n₁₃).

Being a mentor. The attitude towards being a mentor has been judged both positive and negative. Participants were easily able to mention the positive and the negative sides of being a mentor. It is notable that participants think that having fun in mentoring is less important than learning from being a mentor. Besides enjoying mentoring, mentoring is also useful for

the mentor's personal development. Two types of learning were mentioned many times by participants because on the one hand some say that "technically seen it can be very interesting to be a mentor because a mentor can work on his competences as being a leader" (n₅). Furthermore, being a mentor also leads to new knowledge because a mentor also learns from a protégé. The biggest disadvantage of being a mentor, according to the participants, is the fact that it costs very much time and energy. However, participants believe that this time and energy must be seen as an investment, rather than a disadvantage.

Organizational benefits. Similar to the previous sections, participants judged mentoring for an organization as a whole as very positive. Participants see mentoring as an investment for an organization and they think that "mentoring makes an organization stronger. [...] Because all the basics you have to know will be learned much quicker when you have a mentor and for a strong and powerful organization it is an advantage if new employees are incorporated quickly" (n₂). Besides being stronger, mentoring can be good for an organization's image, according to several participants: "for our school, mentoring is something important. Parents and other stakeholders will get the feeling that new teachers will be taken care of and in that way the change that they will send their children to our school will increase" (n₁₀). In this way, mentoring is a tool to increase the perceived external prestige of the organization (Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetten, 2006), because the organization thinks that stakeholders will judge the organization more positive when new teachers are mentored well.

Mentoring Experience

In total, 15 participants reported to have had a mentor in the past. Most of them (11) were formal mentoring relationships. Eight of these participants reported not to be satisfied with their mentor because they experienced their mentoring period as a period in which they had to learn everything by their own. One participant reported that, while he had much experience

in his working field, he was thrown in at the deep end: "I had a lot of practice experience, but even then I had the feeling to be on an island and to learn everything by my own" (n₁₄).

Another participant did not feel committed at all and even quitted her job prematurely because of the lack of good mentoring: "because I was on my own, I left the organization pretty fast" (n₁₀). This is in line with earlier research of Burke, McKenna and KcKeen (1991) and Viator and Scandura (1994) who concluded that protégés are highly and more committed to the organization than non-protégés. Two other participants who had a negative experience with formal mentoring reported that their mentoring period was useless in their opinion. One participant reported as follows: "My formal mentor was complete useless to me. For me it was nothing more than a duty and I didn't get any satisfaction or something. My mentor wanted to do things in a certain way and that wasn't the way I wanted to handle these things. We didn't agree and we had another style of working I think" (n₂₀).

Only three participants reported to be satisfied with their formal mentoring period. They are satisfied for two reasons: (1) participants reported to have learned a lot from their mentor and besides that they reported that (2) there was space for their personal development, something participants value a lot: "I had my own plans and I had my own ambitions. Together with my mentor I developed myself and I enjoyed it very much" (n₂₁).

Feelings about Other's Informal Mentorship

Participants in the present study reported more negative feelings about the informal mentoring relationship than positive feelings. Overall, six negative (frustrations, envy, exclusion, unfair, arrogance and conservative) and only two positive perceptions (no suffering and 'grant-factor') were mentioned. However, *arrogance* and *conservative* were only mentioned one time and nearly all participants who reported not to suffer themselves, reported that other colleagues do suffer or reported that they can imagine that other colleagues do suffer. Only three participants did not mention negative perceptions. They

reported not to suffer from the relationship between the mentor and protégé. The most negative participant mentioned four negative perceptions, but it has to be said that during the interview it became clear that the participant and the protégé had a fight in the past so that could be influential on his perception towards the informal mentoring relationship.

Participants who did not have had a mentor in the past reported to be more negative and less positive. These participants ($n = 6$) did not report any positive perceptions at all.

Organizational justice. Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions that they are treated fairly by the employing organization (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). The perceptions of the participants in the present study show that employees think that an informal mentoring relationship leads to unfair treatments and procedures. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) state that individuals define fairness not only in terms of outcomes (like it is the case with *distributive* justice), but also in terms of the procedures. One participant reported that because of the mentor and the protégé are always together, they always have more power because they are with two. "The point is that when I say that they have given me wrong information, they always will deny. They will say that I didn't understand them. And because I'm on my own, they have more power. [...] In my boss' view, there are always right" (n_{15}). Another participant reported that she was treated unfair because she had to do tasks of the protégé, but because of the informal mentoring relationship, these tasks remained undone and so the participant had to deal with it. "In situations like that I feel very frustrated. I'll take care of the tasks, but it's not fair in my opinion" (n_1).

Another facet of organizational justice has to do with exclusion. The informal mentoring relationship between mentor and protégé can lead to the feeling of social exclusion. In total, 8 participants reported to feel excluded in one way or another. Most of the time, participants feel excluded in the way that they have the feeling that if mentor and protégé are gossiping about them or team members. "They give you the feeling that you are not allowed to know

what they are talking about. In one way or another I feel excluded at that times. I think they do not talk about me, that's what I assume, but it is a strange feeling" (n₁₄). Other participants feel excluded, but not because of the relationship itself but because of the protégé learns a lot from the mentor: "The protégé learns a lot from the mentor, things which I can learn from as well but because those two stick together the information the mentor shares with the protégé won't reach the rest of the team" (n₁₃).

Frustrations. When asking how participants perceive the informal mentoring relationship, most of them reported that there are a lot of frustrations. The word 'frustration' is mentioned more than 50 times during the interviews and from the 21 participants, only 6 participants did not mention the word. The level and the way of frustrations differ per participant, from "It frustrates me that those two speak their own language to each other at work" (n₁₄) to "in the past their relationship lead to big frustrations. There was a job and we went to the job with 4 of 5 colleagues, including the two of them and during the working days they really stuck to each other and act if they are the best, and trust me: that frustrates a lot" (n₈). Having inside jokes and having fun is reported the most when participants talk about their frustrations. Other frustrations follow because participants reported that because of having fun at work, tasks remain undone at the end of the day. "During the day there is enough time to have fun and to make jokes so I do not understand why you would act like they do during working time. And next, at 5 o'clock sharp they go home while there are enough tasks undone" (n₂₀). Another notable thing is that many participants who reported to be frustrated, also mention that they are certainly not the only one within the team: "I am definitely not the only one. Everybody frustrates about them. Some more than others, but what we want is to point in the same direction as a team should do and carry out the same vision. And if two people are working their own way without any considerations for others, it becomes impossible to point in the same direction" (n₁₅).

Envy. Besides frustration, envy is mentioned several times as well. The fact that mentor and protégé have a relationship and which expresses itself in the way of learning from the mentor, having fun, making jokes and which even may lead to a friendship can be hard for other team members. Some participants reported that they sometimes feel envious about the mentor and protégé. The difficulty in being an envious person is that envious persons cannot bear to face another's success, enjoyment and pleasure (Joseph, 1986). One participant noted that "when you look around and you notice how easy other team members work together and develop a bond with each other, it sometimes is hard and a pity that you do not and yes, sometimes I feel envious in that way" (n₅).

Although several participants reported to be envy, it is worth noticing that many other participants reported not be envious themselves, but around them, other team members are envious in their view. One participant reported that she notices that "some team members are in need for a strong bond with a colleague. [...] In our organization there is a person who is on her own quite a bit and for her it is hard to see that there are colleagues who have a strong bond together. I think, or no, I know that she is envious" (n₃).

Do not suffer him or herself. Although participants are mostly negative about the informal mentoring relationship between the mentor and the protégé, there are also participants who do not suffer the relationship or facets within the relationship (e.g. suffering from the unfair treatment but do not suffer from the fact that mentor and protégé having fun). However, almost all of the participants who do not suffer (facets) the relationship between mentor and protégé, report in one way or another that other colleagues do suffer. On the one hand, there are participants who reported that indeed, other colleagues suffer from the informal mentoring relationship. On the other hand, there are many participants (who reported not to suffer from the informal mentoring relationship) who reported that they can imagine that other colleagues suffer, but in fact, they do not know for sure. For example, one

participant noted that “the mentor and protégé have a strong bond and they can get along very well, but it’s not disturbing to me. [...] But it might be that other colleagues do suffer because they have the feeling of being excluded, something which I can imagine” (n₉). In psychology, this also is called psychological projection, a concept which is already known for centuries. The concept assumes that it possible that (in the present study) participants are trying to shift their feelings and emotions from their own (by denying them) to other colleagues (Murstein & Pryer, 1959).

Consequences

Atmosphere. Determining the atmosphere is mostly mentioned by the participants as a consequence of the informal mentoring relationship. Being frustrated and the fact that mentor and protégé stuck together is reported as being the cause of determining the atmosphere. Nine participants mentioned that the atmosphere within the team is determined in a negative way. Most of them reported that when mentor and protégé are together, the atmosphere capsizes (e.g. “The influence within the team is often determined by them. When they having or have a longer break than the rest” (n₆)). Two participants however, reported that the atmosphere capsizes when the mentor is absent and the protégé is alone. That is because when the mentor “has a day off or he is on holiday, the protégé is afraid to ask us questions. She does not know what to do, leaves tasks undone and gets frustrated. And so are we” (n₂₀).

Influence. Influence is mentioned as second when it comes to the consequences of the informal relationship between mentor and protégé. Participants who mentioned influence mean that protégé (and mentor) has a strong influence of power because the protégé always has his or her mentor to cover his or her back and in that way during meetings or whatsoever the two can have a big influence in e.g. decision making processes: “It’s so obvious that those two always share the same opinion. And because we are in a team of 6 members, two votes are pretty influential” (n₇).

Trust. More than one third of the participants reported to have trust issues according to the relationship of the mentor and the protégé. Because of the informal relationship between the two, participants tend to not trust either the mentor or protégé. Some participants are aware of the danger that once they tell the mentor or protégé something private, the other one will know soon as well (“I think that I am more careful sharing private things with them because I know that they have that bond together. I’m not sure to what extent things will be kept secret and that’s why I am very careful” (n₁)). Other participants definitely distrust the mentor and protégé and that has partly to do with the negative experiences he had in the past: “I assume that colleagues, whether they like you or they do not, will give you the right information anyway because we work for the same organization. And if they do not and because of that I am the one who get blamed, why should I trust them anyway?” (n₁₁).

Motivation. Work motivation is also mentioned as one of the consequences. Participants reported that because of the bad atmosphere while mentor and protégé are present, work motivation decreases. Several participants noted that when it is clear that the participant has to work together with the mentor and protégé, the motivation decreases. For example this participant who really likes her job “but when I check the schedule and I see that I have to work with them, I get a strange feeling which I can’t place, but I know that I rather stay at home” (n₂₀). Another participant even tries to reschedule his tasks so that he do not have to work together with the two of them.

The consequence of a decrease in motivation is that the productivity decreases as well. Anyone who reported a decrease in working motivation also mentioned that the productivity decreases. The participant who tries to reschedule his tasks reported that “the productivity is decreasing when people get annoyed and frustrated. Because of that their motivation is low and the consequence of that is that the productivity will decrease” (n₁₈).

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The informal relationship between the mentor and the protégé can also lead to CWB. Five participants reported that they, or other colleagues, sometimes show some counter productive work behavior. This behavior varies from non-working tasks like “when I see that the mentor and protégé are laughing all the time in our little kitchen by the end of the day, but they refuse to (un)pack the dishwasher and think that others will do, I’m really not the one who does” to CWB during the working day: “I had a colleague who was so frustrated by their long chat after the break, that he thought: screw them, I go out for a smoke. If they do not have to work, neither do I” (n₁₄).

Positive consequences. On the other hand, a positive consequence is mentioned as well by several participants, which has to do with using the relationship of the mentor and protégé. Four participants reported that although the relationship of the mentor and the protégé has negative consequences, there is also a positive one. Participants use the relationship in the way that in a decision-making processes, it is useful to convince either the mentor or protégé of your opinion. Once one of the two is convinced, the other often will follow blindly, according to four participants.

Another positive consequence who were mentioned had to do with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Although this consequence is only mentioned by one participant it is worth noticing. This participant reported that he sometimes felt on his own, envious and excluded, but nevertheless he felt extra motivated because he realized that “you started with an enormous challenge and the fact that two other colleagues have a strong bond which I have not, you will work twice as hard to prove yourself. I think that is the other side of being envy” (n₄).

Discussion

Theoretical Contributions

The purpose of the present study was to investigate how outsiders of an informal mentoring relationship describe and perceive an informal mentoring relationship of one of their colleagues and what they think about the possible consequences. The results show that informal mentoring is overall perceived as negative by non-protégés. Participants in the present study perceived feelings of frustrations, envy and organizational injustice. As a result, the informal mentoring relationship leads to a deterioration of the atmosphere, trust issues and work motivation, which leads to a decreased productivity. The present study makes several theoretical contributions to the mentoring and relational literature. First, (as can be read in the results) the word 'frustration' is mentioned more than 50 times during the interviews. When looking for reasons why participants are frustrated, a distinction can be made which is already known from organizational justice: *distributive frustration*, *procedural frustration* and *interactional frustration*. Distributive frustrations are frustrations about the outcomes of the informal mentoring dyad (e.g. speaking another language with each other, having a longer lunch break, etc.). In the present study, distributive frustrations is mentioned 8 times. Procedural frustrations are about procedures which lead to the outcomes which are mentioned before (e.g. having fun, chatting a lot, etc.). Procedural frustrations are mentioned 7 times in the present study. Finally, interactional frustrations are frustrations which are caused by the fact that the non-protégé is not involved in certain (decision-making) processes. This form of frustration is mentioned two times in the present study.

First, the present study makes clear that not having an informal mentor can have serious consequences (compared to colleagues who have an informal mentoring relationship). Parallel to the present study, previous studies have shown that employees who do not have close friends on the work floor showed lower productivity (Song, 2006). However, in that

study, Song did not mention the reasons why employees are less productive. However, the present study shows that not having an informal mentor (while a colleague does have one) leads to feelings of frustrations, envy and organizational injustice, which lead to less work motivation, trust issues and a bad atmosphere. This could be reasons for being less productive. All these consequences lead to a decreasing productivity, which is in line with earlier research (e.g. Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Kramer, 1999; Shepperd, 1993). Thereby (although LMX literature and mentoring literature are not completely the same, there are similarities (McManus and Russell, 1997)), the LMX-theory suggests that employees who have a good relationship with their leader (high LMX) have a high level of goal commitment and are more willing to exert extra efforts in the workplace. Employees who have a poor exchange relationship suffer more work problems and receive less support, consideration and communication (e.g. Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1995). Furthermore, Sherony and Green (2002) investigated how the extent of coworker exchange (CWX) is influenced by the extent of LMX. They formed couples with a similar LMX and couples with a different LMX and concluded that couples with a similar LMX developed a better coworker exchange than couples with a different LMX. Thereby, Kim, O'Neill and Cho (2010) showed that employees with a low LMX show a higher level of envy. Drawing the line back to the present study, it is suggested that being an outsider of an informal mentoring dyad has an influence on the relationship between the protégé and the non-protégé.

Second, the present study shows that non-protégés are mostly negative about the informal mentoring relationship of their colleagues. That is contradictive with their overall attitude about mentoring, this is rather positive. The only explanation the researcher has found is that participants who have no experience with being a protégé perceive the informal mentoring relationship of their colleagues as more negative. According to the Social Identity Theory people have social identities and with those identities they develop favoritism towards

ingroup people, and derogation towards outgroup people (Brehm, Kassin and Fein, 2005). So the fact that non-protégés are negative about the informal mentoring relationship from their colleague suggests a derogation of the outgroup. The fact that non-protégés who have never had a mentor are more negative can be explained by the fact that non-protégés who have had a mentor in the past know how it feels to be in the ingroup. The derogation of non-protégés is therefore higher than the derogation of non-protégés with protégé-experience.

Finally, the present study also shows that non-protégés often reported that they do not suffer themselves, but other colleagues do. Of course, this is possible, but the suggestion is that it has something to do with psychological projection. Projection is the process by which non-protégés attribute personality traits, characteristics, or motivations to other persons as a function of their own personality traits, characteristics or motivations (Holmes, 1978).

Thereby, Dramel (1962) and Secord, Backman and Eachus (1964) concluded that if people know that they possess a certain personality trait (e.g. being envy), they projected the trait on their colleagues with the purpose to convince themselves that although they possess that undesirable trait, they do not deviate from their reference group. This conclusion also showed up in the present study. Many participants reported to suffer from the informal mentoring relationship of their colleague, but they also reported not to be the only one.

Limitations

There are several limitations that should be noted. The first limitation has to do with the selection of participants. As can be read, participants were able to enroll themselves in the study if they think they would meet the requirements. To let them do so, it was necessary to inform the participants about the purpose of the study. With the purpose in mind, participants who have negative experiences might feel more need to express themselves than people who have only positive experiences. During the interviews, participants who were in a negative flow found it hard to switch to positive perceptions or consequences.

The last limitation has to do with the number of participants ($n = 21$). Because the outsider's perception is not investigated earlier, it is recommended to conduct the present study again, with a larger number of participants, so that other possible perceptions or consequences are being exposed. However, it is assumed that in the present study pretty all of the perceptions and consequences were mentioned since there were no new perceptions and consequences reported from plus minus the 15th interview.

Managerial Implications

The present study implicates that for managers and organizations it is important to keep an eye on the informal relationship at work. Although for the mentor and the protégé an informal mentorship might be beneficial, I showed that an outsider perceived this relationship as more negative. The consequences for outsiders become bigger as the time goes by, and being an outsider even leads to a higher turnover intention. Managers and organizations have to be sure that employees don't feel any organizational justice. It is important to listen to the employees and give them space to tell what they feel and they experience. Thereby, managers should talk to informal mentors and make clear that they (as more experienced employee) also have a certain responsibility over other less experienced employees. Of course, informal mentoring is a good thing, but managers and organizations should be aware of the disadvantages instead of only looking at the advantages.

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Appendix A: Coding scheme

Categorie	Subcategorie	Code	Codenummer
Attitude mentoring - mentee	Positief [1.1]	[Zonder reden]	1.1.1
		Persoonlijke ontwikkeling	1.1.2
		Veiligheid	1.1.3
		Inwerken	1.1.4
		Investering	1.1.5
	Neutraal [1.2]	Afhankelijk van de mentor	1.2.1
	Negatief [1.3]	Tijd en energie	1.3.1
		Overbodig	1.3.2
		Beklemmend	1.3.3
		Mentee ziet alles door de bril van de mentor	1.3.4
Attitude mentoring - mentor	Positief [2.1]	Voldoening	2.1.1
		Motivatie	2.1.2
		Leerproces	2.1.3
		Leuk	2.1.4
		Invloed uitoefenen	2.1.5
		Als tussenstap	2.1.6
	Neutraal [2.2]	Afhankelijk van mentee	2.2.1
	Negatief [2.3]	Werkdruk	2.3.1
		Tijd en energie	2.3.2
Attitude mentoring - organization	Positief [3.1]	Investering	3.1.1
		Image organisatie	3.1.2
		Risico op vertrek mentee	3.2.1
	Negatief [3.2]		
Experience mentee	Positief [4.1]	Veel van geleerd	4.1.1
		Ruimte voor persoonlijke groei	4.1.2
	Negatief [4.2]	In het diepe gegooid	4.2.1
		Geen toevoeging	4.2.2
		Mentor had geen tijd	4.2.3

Categorie	Subcategorie	Code	Codenummer
		Geen klik	4.2.4
		Geen ruimte voor persoonlijke groei	4.2.3
		Kan niet tegen autoriteit	4.2.4
Experience mentor	Positief [5.1]	Leerproces	5.1.1
		Leuk	5.1.2
		Werkrelaties	5.1.3
		Kennis delen	5.1.4
	Negatief [5.2]	Tijd en energie	5.2.1
		Verantwoordelijkheids gevoel	5.2.2
Formal mentoring	Voordelen [6.1]	Volgens richtlijnen	6.1.1
		Gepaste afstand	6.1.2
	Nadelen [6.2]	Drempel blijft hoog	6.2.1
Informel mentoring	Voordelen [7.1]	Lage drempel	7.1.1
		Klik is er altijd	7.1.2
		Betere werkrelaties	7.1.3
	Nadelen [7.2]	Werkrelaties	7.2.1
		Onduidelijke grenzen	7.2.2
		Groepsvorming	7.2.3
Omschrijving van de relatie	Reden [8.1]	Gemeenschappelijke interesse	8.1.1
		Gemeenschappelijke expertise	8.1.2
		Gemeenschappelijke situatie	8.1.3
		Kenden elkaar al	8.1.4
	Uiting [8.2]	Trekken naar elkaar toe	8.2.1
		Gezelligheid	8.2.2
		Roddelen	8.2.3
		Zelfde werkwijze	8.2.4
		Taal	8.2.5
	Diepgang [8.3]	Vriendschap	8.3.1
		Zakelijk	8.2.3
Perceptie	Positief [9.1]	Gunfactor	9.1.1
		Geeft voordelen	9.1.2

Categorie	Subcategorie	Code	Codenummer
	Neutraal [9.2]	Zelf geen last van	9.2.1
	Negatief [9.3]	Zonder reden	9.3.1
		Irritaties	9.3.2
		Jaloezie	9.3.3
		Exclusion (Organizational justice)	9.3.4
		Oneerlijk (Organizational justice)	9.3.5
		Collega's hebben wel last	9.3.6
Concequences	Positief [10.1]	Organizational Citizenship behaviour	10.1.1
		Gebruik maken van hun relatie	10.1.2
	Negatief [10.2]	CWB	10.2.1
		Sfeerbepalend	10.2.2
		Nederigheid	10.2.3
		Oefenen invloed uit	10.2.4
		Productiviteit	10.2.5
		Trust issues	10.2.6
		Werkmotivatie	10.2.7