LEVERAGING THE DIFFERENCES: A CASE OF REVERSE MENTORING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe reverse mentoring process within the scope of Social Exchange Theory, to explore how it is applied practically and the outcomes it creates in a foreign-owned bank in Turkey. To this end, following a literature review, information is gathered from secondary sources, such as the website of the bank, annual reports, interview videos on the web and articles in the national media organs. Additionally, in the context of single descriptive case study method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two mentors being employed in the bank and nine research issues were investigated. The findings state that reverse mentoring has started to be perceived as a valuable tool to manage generational conflict. Besides, it allows mentees to gain insight about young generations, social media (the terminology, the range of different platforms and their impact), technological improvements and their effects on the banking industry. In addition to these positive outcomes, mentors benefit from reverse mentoring in terms of industry practices, leadership development, participation in decision-making, developing a network of executive-level contacts and observing problem-solving techniques from executives of different backgrounds. Despite the high level of power-distance in Turkey, it is anticipated that reverse mentoring applications will be used as a silver bullet in the near future of Turkish banking industry, due to the benefits it creates for organizations and participants.

KEYWORDS: *mentoring, reverse mentoring, banking, knowledge sharing*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M10, M12, J24*

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations improve contemporary management tools to adapt to their rapidly changing environments. One of the relatively recent tools used within this scope, mainly stems from generation gap among employees in the workplace, is reverse mentoring. It involves efforts to close the gap not only inside the organization but also outside of it to understand new generation customers (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). In opposition to traditional mentoring, which conventionally involves a top-down flow of knowledge, reverse mentoring is defined as mentoring of a young and less experienced employee (junior) to an experienced supervisor (senior) (Murphy, 2012). In other words, reverse mentoring starts with flipping the traditional mentor-mentee relationship (Emelo, 2012).

Depending on the constant technological improvements, the contribution of reverse mentoring practices is particularly evident nowadays. Thus it is a matter of high concern (Chen, 2013). Because rather than just benefiting from traditional mentoring, by instituting a reverse mentoring program, younger employees as the "digital savvies" may provide valuable technological knowledge to older generations in the workplace and give insight into the demands of employees and customers belong to Millennials and Generation Z, also known as Post-Millennials or igeneration (Brack & Kelly, 2012). This approach leads the junior employees in an organization to

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share their knowledge about social media (DeAngelis, 2013; Meister & Willyerd, 2010; Gibson & Sodeman, 2014), new electronics (Keener et. al., 2012; Dixit & Palke, 2015) and even niche topics such as Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (Royle & Laing, 2014), the issues that juniors are intentionally more aware of and invest energy to learn to use. Additionally young generations, as the newcomers in the business life, create close relationships with their supervisors and observe their problem-solving methods by participating in reverse mentoring programs. Besides, they experience a leadership development process by playing a role in decision-making. Reverse mentoring also encourage the older-generation, senior managers or even top-level managers to learn recent improvements from Y-Generation (Ramesh & Vasuki, 2013). It is an opportunity for the seniors who strive to build effective communication with both customers outside and subordinates inside the organization. By participating in a reverse mentoring program, mentees not only keep in touch with the demands of the market consisting of young customers but also identify and overcome barriers to communication with their younger colleagues.

In general terms, technological improvements, diverse customer expectations and the need to build a bridge between employees from different generations pave the way for reverse mentoring practices. A large number of businesses which are in the Fortune-500 have been using reverse mentoring and state the outcomes as positive (Biss & DuFrene, 2006). In Turkey, similar to Fortune-500, the use of reverse mentoring programs created positive results, according to the annual reports and statements by the top-level executives of corporations and even holdings (e.g., Zorlu, 2016; Garanti, 2015). Although a great many of research is conducted to examine reverse mentoring and its practices, there is a limited number of studies that specifically analyze the subject in Turkey (e.g., Keleş-Tayşir & Ülgen, 2017; Ülgen & Keleş-Tayşir, 2016; Vatansever & Çalışkan, 2015a; Vatansever & Çalışkan, 2015b). Besides, considering the fact that culture is a crucial determinant that may facilitate or hinder a smooth reverse mentoring program (Napier, 2006), reverse mentoring practices may create unintended consequences in a different culture compared to the USA. Thus, despite the findings of the studies mentioned above, little is known about reverse mentoring practices in Turkey, and it is considered as an ambiguous field. This study, as one of the few studies in this field, aims to contribute by exploring how reverse mentoring is implemented in a foreign-owned bank operating in Turkey. It is hoped that findings of the study, which was performed by using a single descriptive case study method, will help practitioners to benefit from 'the clash of generations' among the workforce. Additionally, the findings may be useful in removing the obstacles that stand in the path to predict customer expectations and trends, a prerequisite that will lead to imply a high level of customer satisfaction.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Mentoring

The term *mentor* goes back to antique Greece. According to the epic of Odyssey by Homer; before going into war, Odysseus, king of Ithaca, entrusted his son Telemachus to his reliable and wise friend Mentor (Tran, 2016). In the absence of his father, Telemachus was mentored and got prepared for the future by Mentor (Miller, 2002). As this relationship was repeated over time, mentoring has had its place in various fields historically. In the context of business administration, taking the informal practices into account, mentoring has been applied in organizations for almost 40 years (Murray, 2001). The initial efforts were experienced in USA and mentoring was described as "an American management innovation" (Odiorne, 1985).

Despite its usage for a long time, no consensus has been reached yet about the definition of mentoring (Rodriguez, 1995; Zimmerman & Danette, 2007; Poldre, 1994). Cotugna and Vickery (1998), who discuss mentoring in an organizational and managerial perspective, states that "guide, preceptor, advocate, sponsor, advisor and role model" are the commonly associated words in the definition of the term. A typical mentoring relationship consists of two parties. The first one is the mentor, the older and more experienced actor, and the second is a mentee or protégé; the younger or

less experienced actor. A mentor is perceived as a role model for the mentee and aids mentee to become professionally competent. Mentoring is considered as a paternalistic concept (Kanter, 1977). Hunt and Michael (1983) point out that mentoring is like a father-son relationship and it is as important as the parental relationship. In numerous professions, senior employees guide junior and less experienced ones.

In an organizational context, mentoring is considered as a vital career resource in organizations nowadays. A mentor supports junior colleagues to develop their skills and guide them to their career decisions (Ragins & Scandura, 1994). Mentoring helps new hires to develop an identity, succeed in a job, demonstrate competence, participate in social life by socializing in the workplace and it also provides solutions for experienced employees to contribute to their organization and public welfare by training mentees that have potential to be more successful than themselves (Kram 1983). Two main benefits of mentoring for the mentee are highlighted in the literature. The first one is the contribution to the mentee's career development. Kram (1983) explains career functions as sponsorship, coaching, exposure-and-visibility and challenging work assignments. The second benefit of mentoring is the mentor's positive and essential psycho-social influence over mentee's sense of competence. Role modeling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counseling, and friendship constitute the psycho-social benefits.

Along with the characteristics of mentor and mentee such as age and gender, the *context* is a crucial determinant of the mentoring process. The context refers to working conditions, organizational properties, and social networks. Hunt and Michael (1983) developed the framework in Figure 1 to depict the elements in a mentoring process.
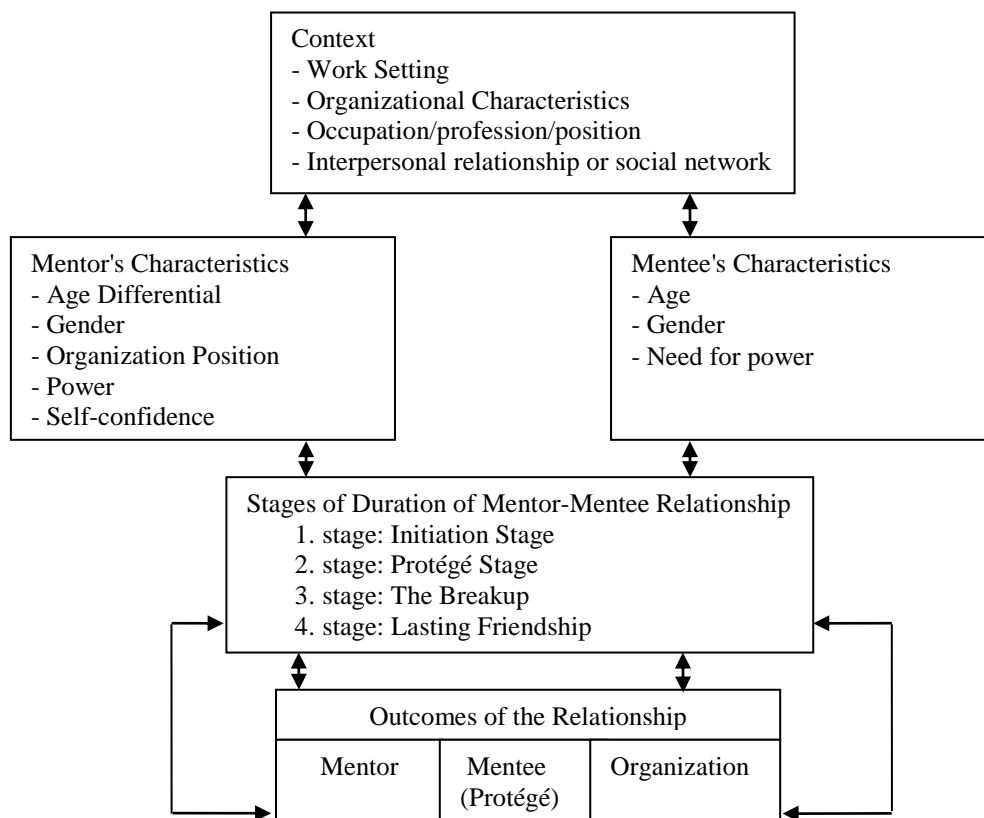
Figure 1. A Suggested Framework for the Study of Mentorship
Source: Hunt & Michael (1983)

It has been widely discussed that mentoring creates positive outcomes for the mentee. In addition to this, it is also argued that mentors gain from mentoring as well, specifically in terms of personal learning, support from mentees, social status, in-role job performance, and recognition by others

(Eby et al., 2006; Mullen, 1994; Mullen & Neo, 1999; Kram, 1985). Overall, the process is holistic and requires an effective and continuous relationship between mentor and mentee. Depending on the context, not only the mentor and the mentee but the organization take advantage of mentoring, as posited in the literature (Allen et al., 2004; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

2.2. Reverse Mentoring

On the one hand, mentoring practices generate numerous positive outcomes for both the participants and the organization. On the other hand, factors such as flattening organizations, downsizing, faster information sharing and obligation to keep track of technology diversify the expectations from mentoring. As a consequence, reverse mentoring is started to be discussed, which turns mentoring on its head (Chandler & Kram, 2005).

Similar to mentoring, reverse mentoring involves practices that allow junior and senior employees. In reverse mentoring, in opposition to traditional one, juniors mentor to the seniors (Çelik, 2011). It is a relatively recent concept and referred to Jack Welch, now retired CEO of the multinational corporation General Electric Co. (Carter, 2004; Leh, 2005). By applying reverse mentoring, Welch planned to improve General Electric's top executives' internet practices (Greengard, 2002; Murhpy, 2012). He demanded that 500 top executives find themselves a mentor and learn to use the internet more effectively (Carr, 2004). Young mentors were at the age of 20's-30's; whereas mentees were in their 40's or 60's (Biss & Duferene, 2006). Pam Wickham, Welch's mentor, describes General Electric's reverse mentoring program as an informal, fast and easy to sustain the program, in harmony with the spirit of the digital world, shaped between mentor and mentee, focused on mentee's needs. (Madigan, 2000).

Technology is one of the primary components, or sometimes even a backbone, in an organization. Thus, technological literacy is perceived as a critical feature for senior employees, top executives or managers in line for a promotion to top executive positions. However, the level of leaders' technological literacy has become a highly controversial topic (Goldsmith et al., 2003). On the other hand, junior employees, who belong to younger generations and born of technology, are considered as digital savvies. Hence, young employees, who are also called "technology mentors" (Butler & Chao, 2001) and have 2-7 years of experience (Costello, 2000), mentor senior employees regarding the transfer of technological information (Leh, 2005). In the beginning, reverse mentoring practices mainly focused on the internet and e-mail usage (Biss & Duferene, 2006). However later, improving online collaboration and productivity, and trying to enhance structures and processes were stated as the real goals of these practices (Harvey et al., 2009; Brennan, 2003). Similarly, today more than the internet or email usage, the focus is on social media, effects of technological developments on organizations.

Reverse mentoring is comprehended as a useful learning tool, and moreover, it is considered as a knowledge management strategy (Stevens, 2010). As Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) stated many years ago, knowledge is a vital resource in an organization, and it should be managed effectively, from creation or acquisition to storing, sharing and using. In today's world, in which the pace of information creation is increasing, a two-way learning process is needed for organizations to make significant strides (Wagner, 2009). In other words, along with the youngsters, employees with long tenure have the responsibility to learn from the young ones, specifically about technology-focused processes. During this process, technology addicted youngsters teach new tricks to old dogs while gaining experience from the veterans about decision-making styles, negotiation methods, and mental models (Closser, 2000). Murphy (2012), focusing on the information sharing aspect of reverse mentoring, suggests that these implementations are important and initial steps for new generations to become successful leaders.

Reverse mentoring, similar to traditional mentoring, can provide positive outputs not only for the actors involved in this process but also for the organization. Organizations operating in strict competition environments can only gain a competitive advantage by using the system available to motivate the employees to share knowledge. Building a bridge between generations and supporting

social change are positive reflections of reverse mentoring (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012). However, for a proper execution of reverse mentoring, appropriate conditions must be fulfilled. It is similar to the need for an available context (Hunt and Michael 1983) in traditional mentoring.

In the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, which is among particular concepts in organizational behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), it is assumed that people exchange tangible or intangible returns depending on the cost and benefit analysis they conduct, prior to the exchange process (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). As a result of their rational evaluation, based on expected cost and rewards, they choose the maximum gain. The adoption of the theory to reverse mentoring reveals that it involves a reciprocal exchange relationship (Lejonberg et al., 2015) and both mentors and mentees try to obtain maximum benefit (e.g., high level of information) at a low cost (e.g. sparing time), as a reward of this relationship. Similar to the suggestion of Pijpers (2006) regarding the mentoring relation, both mentors and mentees must be volunteers and trust each other to be a part of the reverse mentoring process.

In countries like Turkey, where young population takes an active role in business life, a collaborative work environment is needed for all generations. Considering the fact that as of 2014 the share of the young population (the 15-29 age range) is 24.5% (TURKSTAT, 2015) of the total population in the country, it is understood that the young population will have a strong influence in business life in Turkey. For this reason, it is expected that reverse mentoring, which focuses on communication between young generation and their predecessors, will frequently be discussed in the future. Because employees belonging to different generations make evaluations from the perspective of their generation, through their own "generational lenses" (Twenge, 2006). Hence it turns out that reverse mentoring is an innovative solution that focuses on lacking points of veterans that can be fulfilled by learning from new hires while the youngster gain experience. Additionally, it ensures that inter-generational workforce can be examined as a value and contribute the effectiveness of the organization.

3. METHODOLOGY

In compliance with the purpose of this study, which is to explore how a reverse mentoring program is implemented, a qualitative research method is followed. One of the essential requirements of the reverse mentoring concept is the trust between the participating parties. To analyze this fiduciary relationship (Barnett, 2008), it has been concluded that following a qualitative research procedure is fitting for this particular phenomenon. In contrast to quantitative methods, qualitative ones provide in-depth knowledge and understanding. By using qualitative research methods, it is possible to analyze organizational processes and particularly to examine the relationships between structures and behaviors (Bradley et al., 2007; Myers, 2013; Patton, 1987).

Among the qualitative research methods, case study method is preferred. Case studies are conducted to deeply understand particular instances of phenomena (Mabry, 2008) and to assess "real world" examples (McCutcheon & Meredith, 1993). In case studies, it is available to use data from multiple sources. They allow the researcher explore the issue through different perspectives, rather than a single one (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Since this study aims to analyze the implementation of a reverse mentoring program, descriptive case study methodology is applied (Yin, 1981). Because, descriptive case studies are useful to depict a concept within the real-life context that they take place (Yin, 1994).

According to the suggestions of McDonough and McDonough (1997), descriptive case studies may be in a narrative form. Because as Mabry stated (2008) rather than solely statistical information, other information such as properties of the participants that have attended to a program, their experiences and perceptions needed to be taken into account as well. Considering this advice, triangulation, the inclusion of various data sources within the same study is employed due to its usefulness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Yin (1994) a case study should involve the following steps; design the case study (design a data collection protocol), conduct (prepare for data collection and obtain the data), analyze and conclude (draw conclusions, state recommendations, and implications). In this study, as the initial step, secondary data is gathered from the website of the bank, annual reports, interview videos on the web, and articles in the national media organs. These data provide a basis for the primary data gathering process, which consists of semi-structured interviews. Based on the available information, a semi-structured interview form is prepared, consisting of questions regarding nine research issues, and interviews were conducted with two employees, who participated in the program as mentors. One of the significant benefits of semi-structured interviews, pointed out by McGee & Riley (2007), is the opportunity to obtain more information than intended. In the case that the researcher is attracted by an answer of a participant during the interview, it is possible to go further before passing on to a different question, as experienced in this study.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. General Bank Information

The unit of analysis is Denizbank, a foreign-owned bank established in Turkey in 1938 but acquired by different groups in time. Since 2012, it has been operating under the umbrella of Sberbank Group, the largest Russian bank (Sberbank, n.d.). Denizbank has subsidiaries that are operating in leasing, factoring, asset management services and investment activities. According to its vision, the bank aims to become one of the five largest banks in Turkey (Denizbank, n.d.a). It is the 9th largest bank in Turkey ranked by total assets. The number of branches and employees are 690 and 12,743 respectively, as of September/2016 (The Banks Association of Turkey, 2016). Based on the information on the official website of the bank, it is trying "to create a financial supermarket able to offer various financial services under the same roof", for retail customers, commercial and corporate clients (n.d.b, 2017). More recently, following its marketing strategy, the bank started to use its branches as 'marketing centers', which allow it to operate efficiently with the optimum level of employees.

In 2017, the bank is rewarded with 'Best HR Strategy From Overseas' and 'The Most Innovative Deployment of HR Technology' awards thanks to the implemented innovative practices (Turan, 2017). Besides, the bank shares a great deal of information about the HR practices on its official social media accounts. These are the two primary motivators for the researcher to analyze reverse mentoring implications in Denizbank. Additionally, reverse mentoring has its roots in USA (Odiorne, 1985). However, it is started to be implemented in a Russian-owned bank operating in Turkey. Considering the cultural differences among these countries, it is interesting to examine reverse mentoring practices in Turkey. Added to this, the bank provides an opportunity for every employee in Turkey independent of region. So, along with the cultural differences, diversity inside the country raises the importance of the case. To sum up, Denizbank is preferred as an authentic unit of analysis.

4.2. Reverse Mentoring Program and Nine Research Issues

In accordance with the efforts to operate as a learning organization, to have a strong employer brand and to create a pleasant and productive working environment, human resources department of Denizbank introduced a reverse mentoring program called "Bilakis", which means "on the contrary", in 2016. According to the annual report, the goal of the program was to "allow different generations to learn from each other." The program is primarily targeted younger generations' expectations on social media and current issues (Denizbank, 2017).

To gather data about the perceptions of employees on the reverse mentoring program, interviews were conducted with two mentors, who are called Mentor 1 and Mentor 2 in this study. Additionally, selected parts of the interviews with two other mentors on YouTube (called Mentor 3

and Mentor 4 in this study) are paraphrased as well. Interviewees were asked to explain: how they were informed, how the program began, mentor-mentee selection, mentor-mentee matching, duration of the process, topics of the meetings, the existence of an official program-guide, difficulties they experienced, and outcomes of the program.

As a prelude, how they were informed and the beginning of the reverse mentoring program was asked to two mentors.

Mentor 1: "*I was informed about the program by e-mail. By the way, our banks' social media accounts were used for the announcement as well. I decided to apply, and they required me to send a video, expressing the subjects that I may be beneficial to the executive committee members. I shot a video and sent it. After I learned that I was selected, I was informed about the aim and content of the project by human resources department. And they say making a connection between Y-Generation and others (referring to X-Generation and Baby Boomers) was of the essence. I think they actually tried to explain Y-Generation to members of executive committee."*

Mentor 2: *"I remember when I first heard about the project, I was really excited. Then I noticed that my peers were also eager to apply. But there was no room for all. Anyway, I applied the project by taking a short video and started to wait. Then, human resources (department) got in contact with us. The program was about the difference in perspectives... I mean the differences among the generations. You know the classification; Y, X and the boomers."*

Supporting the mentioned perceptions of the two mentors, in an interview with Mentor 3 on the banks' official channel on Youtube, it is stated that (Denizbank, 2016)*"...New customers of the bank belong to Y-Generation and it is hard for top-level managers belonging to X-Generation to gain new customers. Thanks to the reverse mentoring program they can better understand how they can connect youngsters..."* Additionally, the announcement of the reverse mentoring program is described as follows in a recruitment platform: "*Your idea is so valuable. Bilakis is just for you! Job description: To participate, no experience is needed. If you were born after 1990, we are waiting for your application. Job type: Seasonal.* Participants have a chance to apply either by LinkedIn by filling a short form (live.peoplise.com/Denizbank/). Thus, every employee born after 1990, independent of geographical area or title, had an equal chance to apply to the program. Besides, the informal language used in the announcement of the program is compatible with the dynamic perspective of reverse mentoring.

Secondly, mentor-mentee selection and matching processes were asked to the participants. Both of the mentors perceived the process as fair, and professional. As fairness and professionalism strengthen trust between the parties, the bank seemed to achieve this by a selection that offers equal opportunity and random matching. The participants explain selection and matching process as follows:

Mentor 1: *"Every three mentee is matched with three mentors. I guess it was randomly done. Hmmm...We were happy and excited about the program at the beginning. Nothing ruined these positive feelings in the starting period. We all had same chance to be in the program; we had the same chance to be matched by any mentee in the project..."*

Mentor 2: *"3 employees are selected to be a mentor to each executive committee member. So, we were a total of 39 mentors and became together with 13 mentees. The matches were done randomly. I think the idea of the reverse mentoring project belongs to human resources department."*

In the interview, uploaded by the career-oriented site "anlatsin.com" on YouTube, one of the employees of the bank (Mentor 4) stated that she was one of the mentors of CEO. She mentioned the astonishment that she, her colleagues and even her supervisor experienced when they learned about the match: *"...Especially throughout the first week, all eyes were on me. Even my supervisor asked me the topics that are planned at our first meeting"* (Anlatsin.com, 2017a). The program was designed to involve all youngsters, as stated by executive vice president of HR, not only the employees but also the interns, who are called Pearls of Deniz. (Elkin, 2016)

Thirdly, duration of the process was discussed. The formal program was scheduled for six months. The participants were informed at the beginning of the program about the duration and number of

meetings that they have to take part. This formal process was also executed by human resources department. It is comprehended that the program was flexible enough to satisfy the expectations and obligations of the parties. These issues were stated by the mentors as follows:

Mentor 1: "*Just six times. It ended in 6 months. So that makes one time in a month. At first, it seemed so long according to me. As being unaware of the person whom I was matched, I was nervous about the topics. I can objectively talk on an issue about our bank but when it comes to generations… All in all, it is a tough issue to discuss with a member of an executive committee, right? Anyway, my mentee relaxed me at the beginning of our first meeting. Then I started to prepare better for the remaining meetings. I searched the net at least… Or talk about my friends from Y-Generation about the topics. This helped me to express my thoughts in confidence.*"

Mentor 2: *At first when we were informed about the number of the meetings as six, I was a little bit disappointed. Cause it was a big chance for me, I had so much to talk about…Will just one time in a month be adequate to achieve the aim of the program? That was the first thing I have thought… On the other hand, in fact, I was lucky and happy for having a chance to be in the schedule of such a top-level executive. Because, you know, it is quite hard to meet and make a discussion with such a person in an ordinary working day in the banking industry. But I had the chance to express myself, actually my thoughts as a representative of my generation, and even make suggestions, face-to-face. It was a lifetime experience and it was like a personal development course to me."*

Fourthly, information is gathered about the topics of the meetings. They were widely linked to the aim of the program, as gaining inside about the younger generations' expectations. Despite the awareness of the participants on the objective and context of the program, middle-level managers' confusion was declared by the respondents. When the topics of the meetings and the existence of an official program-guide were asked, the respondents reported as follows:

Mentor 1: *The topics were determined and informed to us before the meetings began. I felt like I was a little bit guilty. Cause my middle-level manager warned me about the rules and behavioral norms in the banking sector as if I am not serious enough to be involved in the program or I had done something wrong. In fact, I didn't find this so important, cause I thought I would have been ready and behave properly when we met… Still, you know, I was anxious a little… I knew that it was so hard even for my manager to meet with my mentee, but I was going to do that for six times, and for the planned topics… But just after the start of the project, surprisingly, I noticed that mentees were incredibly open-minded, interesting and smart people. Rather than a harsh manager, I met a very warm and kind one. So, I never felt the generation gap that most people expected, including myself. Maybe that is the reason why they are top executives…Or just because we see each other so less (laughing). But seriously, they know to talk with different people. They always negotiate. By the way, I was surprised when my mentee asked some evidence on the topic from an academic research…Can you believe this? Well, as a result, I am almost 30 but I started to take my mentee as a role model. He was also aware of the international practices of reverse mentoring, and so was I (laughing). I searched the net and learned about mentoring, reverse mentoring, G.E and the legendary CEO, Welch. All in all, I guess being a part of an active, international group, accelerates the banks' adaptation of reverse mentoring.*"

Mentor 2*: Social media and current issues such as expectations of generation Y from a bank, being a brand name in social media were among the topics. Generation Y was the hottest topic for me. I talked about Y-Generation both as a customer and an employee. Actually, I can now realize that my mentor was concerned about the customer side too. So the topic of Y-Generation was not restricted to the personnel. By the way, I should say that I find it misleading to classify a whole generation just based on birth years. And that's why there are many differences among us. I think most primary point lies in here. I mean, the whole generation cannot be just classified as less loyal to the organization, or more success oriented. Or all Y-Generation buyers are low on banking brand loyalty. I believe there are many different segments in our generation. I clearly stated this in our meetings. Anyway, we agreed upon that understanding the needs, expectations of even an average Y-Generation member is significant for us.*

When it comes to guidance… HR was responsible and clearly expressed the project. Besides, my supervisor expressed the importance of the program at the beginning and strongly recommended me to be capable of our history, our mission, and vision statements. But we didn't discuss any of them in the meetings.

Added to these, in an interview on YouTube, Mentor 4 states that *"We talked about lots of things like national issues, personal issues along with our planned topics"* (Anlatsin.com, 2017a) and in another video adds that *"When I was going for the first meeting, my supervisors made me write the mission and vision statements of the bank in my notebook and memorize them… I learned all the statistics related to my job… Whereas things were different... We were asked nothing related to our job."* Anlatsin.com (2017b). *"For us, we felt like watching a 'historical period drama' in some ways… They were surprised to what we say or suggest. For them, I guess, they felt like they are watching 'Star-Wars' while listening to us. For the both parties, it was an interesting experience and it was very entertaining."* (Anlatsın.com, 2017c)

Fifthly, the difficulties, in the reverse mentoring program were explained by participants as follows:

Mentor 1: *"I have been thinking about the outcomes too… Well, at first, I thought it was like a ticket for me… To take me away from an ordinary busy working day. But it was much more than that (Laughing). I understood that I had to prepare for the meetings to discuss an issue more comprehensively. All in all, it was not a difficulty, it is a gain for me. But I had some difficulty at first. Well, the core of the project lies in openness but we were filled up with so many formal issues. My supervisor was anxious about the norms in our bank. I was a little bit stressed before the first meeting. As the project progressed, our team members and I were relaxed and motivated to participate the meetings effectively. By the way, getting an appointment, in a busy schedule wasn't so easy, as you can guess."*

Mentor 2: *"The difficulty in practice was taking an appointment from the mentees. Cause we have to arrange the meeting ourselves. Of course, they are very busy and so much to do. And coordination with two other mentors in the team was sometimes a challenge. Because, in our team, one of the two mentors was not close to us. So, you know, sometimes face-to-face communication solves most of the problem. Hmmm… Anyway, we achieved to work in a great harmony and to learn from each other. I mean, not only from our mentee but also from each other, as the mentors."*

Sixthly, when the outcomes of the program asked, the participants replied as follows:

Mentor 1: *"The most important outcome for me was to learn that members of our executive committee may exhibit a father-son relationship. In Turkish culture, the subordinates have less power than the supervisors. Contrary to this, in our bank, even top managers, are eager to learn, negotiate and adapt to the changes. Actually, according to me, open communication is our key success factor."*

Mentor 2: *"It definitely worked because in our industry, if it doesn't work, people don't spend their limited time. And in our bank, the project re-arranged after the first one, with more mentees and mentors. More clearly, I should say different perspectives were declared independent of the hierarchical positions. Actually, I learned that while defending an idea, objective basis and research is necessary. I think when I become a manager; I will give information about the basis of the rules and the orders. I will also give an ear to the youngsters' ideas. This is a win-win situation. For our bank, that was also a declaration of communication and synergy."*

Mentor 4, one of the mentors in an interview on YouTube, stated the contributions of the program as follows: *"I think it adds sincerity a little. The program makes people believe, even those who don't attend to the program that the managers try to evaluate employees sincerely. I have seen this by myself. When I went to the meeting, even the other members of my department were motivated…. Of course, it is great to feel that 'We were being thought by our managers.' One more thing, from the managers perspective, the questions such as why Y-Generation is so crazy, why we can't command them so easily are answered of course. According to me, especially big companies should apply this organization. Because as the hierarchy expands, the distance between the levels increases. And consequently, there appears a wall. It is an effective solution to demolish the wall*

between them." (Anlatsin.com, 2017d). In another video interview, Mentor 4 states*: "Actually, there are two visible outcomes of the project. First, smart casual was allowed for Friday; we are not wearing blue jeans, instead canvas (Laughing). It was nice, and it motivated us. Social responsibility group was established under the roof of HR, called volunteers of Deniz. We started with small projects. So, there were outcomes that made everyone happy."* (Anlatsin.com, 2017e)

Additionally, executive vice president of HR point outs that *"...There were executive committee members who open an Instagram account first the first time and youngster trying to search for academic evidence or even striving to conduct surveys to convince their mentees... The outcomes weren't just limited to the organization. Also, the executive committee members declared that their relationship with their children improved as well* (Elkin, 2016).

As a result of the conducted interviews and other information that is obtained from secondary resources, benefits of the reverse mentoring program for the bank are summarized in Table1.

Table 1. Benefits of Reverse Mentoring Program

For the Mentor	For the Mentee	For the Organization
Self-confidence	Ability to adopt change	Open communication
Personal and career development	Lifetime learning	Learning organization
Contribution to decision making	Positive image management, participative management	A path to a flattening organization
Gaining experience Leadership development	Leadership development (esp. to be a leader for Y-Gen.)	Productive organization, organizational image management
Negotiation skills	Multi-skilling, parental capabilities	Employer brand
Decision-making ability based on knowledge	Learn to gain support of employees	Organization citizenship, strengthen psychological contract
Innovation and creativity skills	Innovation and creativity skills	Attract and retain talent
Decreasing generational conflict	Decreasing generational conflict	Positive psychology, motivated employees
Data-driven decision making concerning different customer segments	Understanding expectations of Y-Gen. consumers	Customer-oriented organization

The main benefits of reverse mentoring can be grouped into three categories. Firstly, for the mentors, reverse mentoring process improves self-confidence through negotiations with upper-level managers. At the same time, the process raises the awareness of youngsters about their 'tacit knowledge' about technology and social media. Reverse mentoring also offers a career development opportunity for the mentors, as it enables to meet and negotiate with upper-level managers in face-to-face. It facilitates to develop a network of executive-level contacts, along with a network consisting of peers. Thus, reverse mentoring creates a chance for gaining experience and leadership development for the mentors. Correspondingly, reverse mentoring contributes to decision-making abilities of the mentors. By using data and statistics, it comprehends mentors' decision choices, allowing to consider different alternatives. Reverse mentoring offers an optimum level of stress for learning by presenting a platform to meet upper-level managers. Hence, this situation may boost innovation and creativity skills of the mentors.

Secondly, reverse mentoring practices arranged by human resources department, increase the ability of managers to adopt change by forcing them to diverge from their routine schedules, meet with the youngsters and receive information. Besides, the program allows mentees to gain insight into numerous topics thanks to young generations. Youngsters' thoughts, suggestions, and challenging ideas may create an opportunity for lifetime learning. Thus, a reverse mentoring program may be

considered as a learning tool. Added to this; executive committee members may create positive perceptions in the eyes of the youngsters by participating in the meetings despite their busy agendas. At the same time, these negotiations with the youngsters enable mutual understanding for mentees' families, as stated in a personal diary. As far as the relation between parental capability and mentoring is discussed in the literature (Rhodes, 1994), the positive effect of reverse mentoring on mentees' family is a new contribution to the literature. Mentees may benefit from reverse mentoring as the program may increase employee support by presenting a platform to meet employees from different generations and hierarchical levels. The mentees, based on their broad experience, gain the ability to assess the information they receive from their mentors, which may yield to innovative and creative solutions. Lastly, it is important to note that the mentees benefit from the reverse mentoring programs regarding both employee and customer relations. Along with the employees from Y-Generation, there is a considerable amount of customers from the same generation. Reverse mentoring programs guide the mentees to build customer-centric strategies to satisfy Y-Generation.

Lastly, it is comprehended that organizations avail reverse mentoring to create a learning organization. Reverse mentoring practices enable the flow of knowledge in two-ways, from up to down and down to up, as well. Accordingly, these efforts make inroads into an open communication system, a path to a flattening and productive organization. Providing more elbow room for the seniors presumably results in a positive organizational image and valued employer brand not only for the employees but also the candidates -students, interns, and the workforce outside the organization. Thus, rather than just retain, it is possible to attract the talented candidates. In sum, inside the organization; organization citizenship behaviors, strong psychological contract, positive organizational image and motivated employees are the remaining advantages. Attracting promising employees and understanding Y-Generation consumers' expectations are among the benefits of reverse mentoring with regard to stakeholders outside the organization.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the reverse mentoring process in Denizbank, a foreign-owned bank operating in Turkey, is analyzed by implementing a single descriptive case study. The purpose was to explore how reverse mentoring is applied and the outcomes for mentees, mentors and the organization in general. To this end, the study focused on 9 research issues as how mentors were informed, how the program began, mentor-mentee selection, mentor-mentee matching, duration of the process, topics of the meetings, existence of an official program-guide, difficulties they experienced, and outcomes of the program for mentees, mentors and the organization as a whole. The significance of this study lies in focusing on the application of a reverse mentoring program in a foreign-owned bank in Turkey, in which a high power-distance culture prevails. Among the reverse mentoring practices in Turkey, Denizbank is preferred as a unit of analysis because it was hoped to add a unique contribution to the literature and practitioners. Because the bank conducted a reverse mentoring program open to all employees born after 1990, independent of region or title. The diversity in Turkey and the application of a USA-originated process in a Russian-owned bank may present an in-depth understanding of the nature of reverse mentoring. Additionally, the bank is rewarded with 'Best HR Strategy From Overseas' and 'The Most Innovative Deployment of HR Technology' awards thanks to the innovative human resources strategies. All these factors were among the motivators to examine the reverse mentoring process in Denizbank.

The program was called Bilakis, means 'on the contrary', emphasizing down to up version of the traditional mentoring process, and it was executed by the HR department. The program was especially targeted at younger generations' expectations, from both the employee and customer perspectives, and social media, social responsibility, and other current issues (Denizbank, 2016). 39 mentors were matched by 13 mentees, and the program lasted six months. Trust between mentees and mentors enhanced the desired outcomes for the organization and the participants. Additionally,

equal opportunity to every employee increased organizational support. Due to its success, the program has been rearranged with more mentors and mentees in 2017, and it played a role in the awards that human resources department has taken. From these aspects, this program can be used as a benchmarking tool for future reverse mentoring practices. However, despite the awareness of the aim and context of the program by the participants, middle-level managers' confusion was declared by the respondents. Thus, as a practical implication, informing the details of the program to middle-level managers of the mentees is suggested.

Overall, it is concluded that reverse mentoring in Turkey is approved as a valuable tool to overcome generational conflicts and even to benefit from it. The advantages of reverse mentoring programs can be grouped into three categories; advantages for mentees, mentors and the organization. For this study, the main positive outcomes for the youngster mentors are; comprehensive decision alternatives with the use of data and statistics, awareness about their 'tacit knowledge' with regard to social media and technology, developing a network of executive-level contacts and peers as well. Thus, reverse mentoring creates an opportunity for gaining experience and leadership development. Added to these, meetings with top-level managers may generate an optimum level of stress for learning. Hence, this situation may boost innovation and creativity skills of the mentors. On the other side, mentees as the seniors gain from challenging ideas as a learning tool. They gain in-depth knowledge from different generations and hierarchical levels, which facilitates managing employees and satisfying customers from Y-Generation. Additionally, seniors may create a positive image in the eyes of the youngsters by participating in the meetings despite their busy agendas. At the same time, these negotiations with the youngsters enable mutual understanding in mentees' families too. As far as the relation between parental capability and mentoring is discussed in the literature (Rhodes, 1994), the positive effect of reverse mentoring on mentees' family is a new contribution to the literature to our knowledge. Lastly, reverse mentoring practices allow the organization for the flow of knowledge in two-ways, rather than upside down. The result will be an open communication system, a flattening, productive, and learning organization.

Autonomy, mastery and to be a part of a whole (purpose) are the motivators for Generation Y (Pink, 2011). If the mentioned elements are considered as motivation factors, then, according to the findings of this study and in the scope of Social Exchange Theory, fairness and trust should be the hygiene factors. If they exist, providing more room by preserving autonomy to seniors results in a positive organizational image and valued employer brand not only for the employees but also the candidates -students, interns, and the workforce outside the organization.

In order to have a successful reverse mentoring relationship, it is necessary to dissolve barriers of status, power, and position. Despite the high power distance in Turkey (Hofstede, 1980), the findings of this study support the positive outcomes linked to reverse mentoring. This controversy situation may be explained by communication. According to Suğur et al. (2004), if only the reason for high power distance is lack of communication between the employees and managers, reverse mentoring may be useful in demolishing the walls between the parties. Besides, the sense of urgency to gain knowledge may overcome the limitations that culture generates.

Considering 24.5% share of the young population (the 15-29 age range) in Turkey as of 2014 (TURKSTAT, 2015), it is predicted that the new generations will play an active role in working life and will shape consumption habits. Thus, organizations are expected to benefit from reverse mentoring, which is perceived as a tool to create synergy and enhance harmony among different generations. It is a prerequisite to learn new skills (Wagner, 2009). Thus, technology addicted youngsters will continue to teach new tricks to old dogs while gaining experience from the veterans. In future research, the effect of culture on reverse mentoring and organizational differences based on industries can be analyzed empirically. Middle-level managers' role must be taken into consideration, due to their power on mentees. Theoretically, the reverse mentoring phenomenon may be evaluated in the context of Knowledge Sharing Theory. As a constraint, findings of a single descriptive case study cannot be generalized to all banking organizations.

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