

“Reverse Mentoring” Designs of Banking Sector in Turkey

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Abstract

Reverse mentoring has some significant impact on building relationship between generations. This study represents one of the first attempts in Turkey to examine this instrument's application process in real life. The purpose of this study is to gather information and describe the implementation of banking sector's reverse mentoring process in Turkey. Multiple case study method was used in this study in order to gather further information about the reverse mentoring process. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three banks; Akbank, Garanti Bank, and Denizbank; training and human resources supervisors who took an active role in reverse mentoring process. The findings of this study help us to present current information about the reverse mentoring designs of companies and highlight the importance of reverse mentoring as a valuable instrument for managing generational diversity.

Keywords: Reverse mentoring, Mentoring, Generations, Banking sector, Mentor, mentee.

Türkiye Bankacılık Sektöründe “Tersine Mentorluk” Uygulamaları Özet

Tersine mentorluk, kuşaklar arası ilişkilerin düzenlenmesi açısından büyük önemi olan bir uygulamadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de tersine mentorluk uygulamasının nasıl hayata nasıl geçirildiğini ortaya koymayı hedefleyen ilk çalışmalar arasında yer almaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye bankacılık sektöründe “tersine mentorluk” uygulamasının tanımlanması, uygulamanın aşamaları ve detayları hakkında bilgi sunmaktır. “Tersine mentorluk” uygulaması ile ilgili derinlemesine bilgi sunabilmek ve analiz yapabilmek amacıyla çoklu örnek olay yöntemine başvurulmuştur. **Çalışmamızda üç bankanın;** Akbank, Garanti Bankası ve Denizbank, insan kaynakları ve eğitim departmanlarında görev alan ve “tersine mentorluk” uygulamasının hayata geçirilmesinde aktif görev alan uzmanlarla yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. **Çalışmanın sonuçları ile yeni bir uygulama olan “tersine mentorluk” kavramı hakkında bilgi sunmak ve kavramın farklı kuşakların yönetimi konusundaki önemini vurgulamak amaçlanmaktadır.**

Anahtar Kelimeler : tersine mentorluk, mentorluk, kuşaklar, bankacılık sektörü, mentor, mentee.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's challenging business life, managing multi generational workforce poses new challenges for the organizations. Increased generational diversity in organizational environment has given rise to the new forms of mentoring programs. Additionally, today's fast paced world has created a twist to traditional mentoring concept. As a result, organizations develop new and innovative methods of training employees. One method, called reverse mentoring, has gained popularity in recent years. Reverse mentoring defined as an "arrangement in which younger workers serve as mentors to senior employees to teach new skills in technology and other areas"¹. Numerous companies are using this new arrangement in their organizations. Companies such as General Electric, Best Buy, 3M, Siemens, Procter&Gamble, Philip Morris, have established and implemented reverse mentoring programs. In Turkey there are also very well known companies such as; Akbank, Garanti, Denizbank, Yıldız Holding, Danone Turkey, Total Oil Turkey, Bosch, Unilever² TEB which declared they have used reverse mentoring programs in their companies. Despite its popularity in business life, less attention has been paid in the academic environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of mentoring has a long history, in contrast with traditional mentoring, reverse mentoring is an innovative and alternative form of mentoring in which younger/junior employees as mentor share their knowledge and ability about the new trends, concepts, approaches and technological developments with older/senior employees as mentee³. Murphy (2012) states that "reverse mentoring turns traditional mentoring formula on its head"⁴. Reverse mentoring can be defined as a professional development⁵ and social exchange tool which includes knowledge and experience sharing based on the different needs, value systems, and work demands of both junior and senior employees⁶. According to Coles and Gardner (2001), "whether organized on a formal or casual basis, reverse mentoring can offer businesses an opportunity to improve internal communications processes"⁷.

In 1999 Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric introduced this new mentoring style to increase Internet expertise among his 500 top managers⁸. In progress of

1 Judith L. Biss, and Debbie D. DuFrene, An Examination of Reverse Mentoring in the Workplace, *Business Education Digest*, p.30.

2 <http://www.ekonomist.com.tr/yonetim-kariyer/artik-gencler-ceolara-mentorluk-yapiyor.html>

3 J. C., Meister, and K. Willyerd, Mentoring Millennials. *Harvard Business Review*, 88 (5), 2010, 67–72.

4 W.M. Murphy, Reverse Mentoring at Work: Fostering Crossgenerational Learning and Developing Millennial Leaders. *Human Resource Management*, 51 (4), 2012, 549–574.

5 Murphy, 549–574.

6 S. Chaudhuri, and R. Ghosh, Reverse Mentoring: A Social Exchange Tool for Keeping the Boomers Engaged and Millennials Committed. *Human Resource Development Review*, 11(1), 2012, 55–76.

7 Coles, M., Gardner, D. (2001). Young Apprentices Prove That They Are The New-age Masters. *Sunday Herald, Business*, 24; Carol Baily, "Reverse intergenerational learning: a missed opportunity?", *AI & Society*, 23 (1), 2009, p.112.

8 S. Greengard, S. Moving Forward With Reverse Mentoring. *Workforce*, 81 (30), 2002, 15.

time, the application of reverse mentoring has gained widespread popularity in some other organizations such as General Motors, Unilever, Deloitte & Touche, The Wharton School of Business at University of Pennsylvania⁹, IBM and Burson-Marsteller¹⁰, Dell¹¹ and Time Warner¹². Procter and Gamble is one of the companies which has successfully applied reverse mentoring in their organizations in diverse ways. For instance, staff scientist who has a Ph.D. in toxicology provided a reverse mentoring support to Chief Information Officer in the area of biotechnology to increase his awareness and knowledge of the relationships between business and science¹³. The other one was "Mentoring Up" program in which upper level male managers were mentored by middle level female manager in order to improve cross-gender communication¹⁴.

Applying reverse mentoring program creates diverse benefits from an individual and organizational point of views. Harvey, McIntyre, Heames, and Moeller (2009) define reverse mentoring as a valuable instrument for senior employees to learn new technical knowledge, understand new trends and approaches, to realize the generational differences and to reduce their assumptions and negative stereotypes about younger generations¹⁵. In return, junior employees acquire or gain knowledge about some organizational issues, job responsibilities, their own career plan or some adaptation clues to organizational culture¹⁶ and they also learn intra-organizational communication styles and protocol behaviors in formal relations from senior employees¹⁷. From the organizational point of view, reverse mentoring is a cost-effective method for talent management, personnel selection and retention, diversity management, driving innovation and reducing gaps and prejudices between generations especially by highlighting similarities¹⁸.

Despite all positive contributions of this new mentoring method, it has some barriers related with both senior employees/mentee and junior employees/mentor. In general from senior employees perspective, it's not so admissible to learn something from juniors whose age are much the same with senior employees' own child. In their opinion knowledge and wisdom closely related with maturity and amount of

9 Chadhuri, p.55.

10 Y.C. Chen, Effect of Reverse Mentoring on Traditional Mentoring Functions. *Leadership and Management in Engineering*, 13 (3), 2013, 199-208.

11 M., Harvey, and Buckley, M. R. Assessing the "Conventional Wisdoms" of Management for the 21st Century Organization. *Organizational Dynamics*, 30, 2002, 368-378.

12 S. A., Hewlett, L. Sherbin, and K. Sumberg, Let Gen Y Teach You Tech. Retrieved from http://blogs.harvardbusiness.org/hbr/hewlett/2009/06/let_gen_y_teach_you_tech.html, 2009.

13 M. Solomon, Coaching the Boss. *Computerworld*, 35 (5), 2001, p:42; A. S.C. Leh, Learned From Service Learning and Reverse Mentoring in Faculty Development: A Case Study in Technology Training. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 13 (1), 2005, p. 29.

14 Leh, p.29.; D. Zielinski, Mentoring up. *Training*, 37 (10), 2000, pp.136-140.

15 M., Harvey, N. McIntyre, Heames, J. T., and M. Moeller, Mentoring Global Female Managers in the Global Marketplace: Traditional, Reverse, and Reciprocal Mentoring. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20, 2009, 1344-1361.

16 Murphy, p. 549-574.

17 Lankau, M., and Scandura, T. An Investigation of Personal Learning in Mentoring Relationships: Content, Antecedents, and Consequences. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45, 2002, 779-790.

18 Murphy, p. 549-574.

experiences. On the other hand they may consider the lack of knowledge as a threat for their status in the organization¹⁹ and they may fear to lose their jobs. Applying a comprehensive training program about reverse mentoring and making some rearrangements or changes in top level management approach and organizational culture may prevent these barriers²⁰. There are also some other barriers come from junior employees side. They may have knowledge on some specific issues but they may not transfer this knowledge to others effectively because of their insufficient teaching skills or lack of self-confidence. Besides junior employees' soft skills such as listening, communicating may be weak due to characteristics of their generation, and they might not easily build a strong communication with senior employees²¹. Some of these barriers can be solved by recruiting correct candidates whose abilities and characteristics are appropriate for reverse mentoring process. Also some training programs organized by organizations may be helpful to develop junior employees' soft skills that influence their success in reverse mentoring.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study multiple case analysis was preferred due to the need of gathering in-depth data about the reverse mentoring. First secondary data was analyzed in order to understand which companies have been using this instrument in Turkey. It has been realized that majority of the companies are in banking sector; Akbank, Garanti Bank, TEB, Denizbank. The data used in this study was gathered by primary data collection method through semi-structured interviews with three banks' training and human resource supervisors who took an active role in reverse mentoring process. Semi-structured interview has chosen because "it consists of several key questions that help to define the areas explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail"²². Fifteen main questions were posed and according to the answers related questions asked in order to get further information. Interviews lasted an hour and all of them were tape recorded and transcribed to paper.

3.1. Case 1: Akbank

Akbank is one of the largest banks in Turkey which offers a wide range of retail, commercial, corporate, private banking and international trade services. The company

19 M., Coles, Listen to the voice of youth. Reverse mentoring is a new business concept whereby young recruits advise their elders and betters with a youthful take on the world. *Evening Standard*, General, 2001, p. 7.

20 Baily, p.112.

21 S.P., Eisner, Managing Generation Y. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 70 (4), 2005, 4-15; N. Pekala, Conquering the Generational Divide. *Journal of Property Management*, 66 (6), 2001, 30-38; Baily, p:112.

22 P., Gill, Stewart K., Treasure E., Chadwick B. Methods of Data Collection in Qualitative Research: Interviews and Focus Groups. *British Dental Journal*. 204, 2008, 291-295.

started reverse mentoring called "Switch" as a pilot program in 2014. The number of mentors-mentees per year is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Akbank's Mentor-Mentee Numbers Per Year

	Mentor	Mentee
2014	5 Management Trainees	5 Executive Vice Presidents
2015	15 Management Trainees	3 Executive Vice Presidents 11 Vice Presidents 1 Region Manager
2016	13 Management Trainees	1 Executive Vice Presidents 11 Vice Presidents 1 Region Manager

The Process of Applying Reverse Mentoring Program in Akbank

Akbank's reverse mentoring program is called "Switch" and it was built upon a previous successful practice called "HR Young Executive Board". "HR Young Executive Board" is composed of 12 volunteer young professionals outside the company. Since the end of 2011, Akbank's Executive Vice President in charge of Human Resources and Strategy has been having regular meeting with this board in order to incorporate younger generation's point of view in revising HR systems and processes, and designing Y generation friendly HR practices. As a matter of fact, Akbank was applying a very similar program with reverse mentoring and the company's academic consultant recommended them to apply reverse mentoring program as an alternative to traditional mentoring.

Phase 1: Planning Reverse Mentoring Topics

The company has selected 6 reverse mentoring topics such as *digitalizing, new age banking, Y generation leadership, Y generations expectations and, open agenda* which mentor and mentee decided on a topic.

Phase 2: Mentor-Mentee Selection

First of all Akbank has selection criteria for mentors and mentees. The main criteria for mentee selection is their managerial status in organizational structure but reverse mentoring program is for the employee who is willing to participate to the program. Akbank's Executive Vice President in charge of Human Resources and Strategy send e-mail to the potential mentees and ask them whether if they are interested in participating to the program. In the pilot program Executive Vice Presidents have cho-

sen as a mentee, and in the following years Vice President and Region Managers get involved.

The HR department has met potential mentors one on one and give further information about the "Switch" program and try to understand whether if the candidate is willing to participate to the program. In this one on one meetings HR department also determine if a candidate is a good fit. Mentors have been selected according to their age and length of time spent in the organization. Management trainees who have been in the organization less than 3 years have chosen, in 2014 mentors that have chosen were born later 1985, in 2015 mentors that have chosen were born later 1985, in 2016 mentors that have chosen were born later 1988.

"Until this year, we were making the selection, actually we were asking the candidates whether they would wish to be considered for this program... but this year we gathered requests..."

Akbank's reverse mentoring program is for the mentors-mentees who work in Istanbul, but it is mentioned that they are planning to cover other cities in the near future.

Phase 3: Mentor-Mentee Pairing Process

In this process the human resources and training supervisors generate the pairs of mentors-mentees. Pairing process between mentors and mentees are organized depending on different educational background, experience, and department.

"First we interview with the mentor candidates in order to understand their strengths, in which area they want to improve themselves... then we decide together with our advisor which pair will get best results... we are matching people who have least common, we are not pairing people who have similar background, school and the most important thing is we are not matching people from the same department"

Phase 4:Preparation

Paired mentors and mentees attend an orientation session before beginning of the program. This session prepares them for their respective roles in the mentoring relationship.

"...we have an orientation session to mentors and mentees. In this session we give general information about the content of the reverse mentoring program and also there is a training session which covers the basic concepts of generation theories."

Phase 5: Mentoring Sessions

After the orientation session, mentors and mentees meet one hour per month over a period of six months in any place outside of the work environment.

“We recommend them not to do it in the workplace, because office reminds hierarchy... especially not mentee’s office...we recommend to do it anywhere outside of the office such as a coffee shop...”

Phase 6: Assessment and Evaluation

At the final part, the HR department is conducting a survey in order to understand the generational perception.

“In the very beginning we are asking our mentees ‘When you hear the Y generation which three words come to your mind?’... and we ask the same question at the end of the program and try to understand the change of their perception... we are also doing the same for our mentors, we are asking our mentors’ opinions about the older generations”

In addition to the generational perception test, both mentors and mentees provide evaluative feedback of the reverse mentoring program to human resource department.

3.2. Case 2: Garanti Bank

Garanti Bank is Turkey’s second largest private bank which established in 1946. Garanti is an integrated financial services group operating in corporate, commercial, SME, payment and investment banking together with its subsidiaries in pension and life insurance, leasing, factoring, brokerage, and asset management. In 2014 Garanti has developed a reverse mentoring program, in the same year 38 mentees (Executive Vice President, Senior Vice President, Regional Managers, Loan Region Manager), 17 mentors have attended the program. In 2015, 57 reverse mentoring sessions and in total 107 reverse mentoring sessions have completed. The number of mentors-mentees is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Garanti Bank’s Mentor-Mentee Numbers

Mentor	Mentee
17 Mentors from talent pool	2 Executive Vice Presidents 12 Senior Vice Presidents 11 Regional Managers 14 Loan Region Managers

The Process of Applying Reverse Mentoring Program in Garanti Bank

Garanti Bank implements various learning activities according to needs of the company’s digitalization strategy. Digital summits, digital training programs both in class and online (webinars, e-learnings, videos) has realized. Reverse mentoring

program is one of these learning activities. Garanti Bank's EVP who is responsible for Digital Banking is the sponsor of reverse mentoring program.

Phase 1: Planning Reverse Mentoring Topics

In this phase the company has made a benchmark with national and international companies about the practices of reverse mentoring program. Depending on the benchmarking results, the company designed the program with an academic consultant. The company has selected 4 reverse mentoring topics such as *effective usage of social media, mobile applications, digital intelligence and digital expression*.

Phase 2: Mentor-Mentee Selection

Garanti Bank's reverse mentoring program has not got any geographical limitation. Technological tools like telepresence and videoconferencing have been used for sessions. The company has built a mentor list from talent pool. Before mentoring sessions Garanti Bank has offered supporting programs to all mentors in order to improve their mentoring skills and technical knowledge in digital area.

"We preferred to select our mentors from our talent pool...first we gathered requests from both participants then we interviewed with the potential mentor candidates with our academic consultant to evaluate their skills and knowledge level. Afterwards 17 mentors were selected for this program"

Phase 3: Mentor-Mentee Pairing Process

Mentors and mentees choose each other in a self-pairing process. Learning and Development Department shared the list of mentees with mentors. Mentors who are expert in the same topic come together and agree on which mentee they are going to pair with. The mentors select their mentee according to their own expertise and the needs of mentees in four main topics mentioned in Phase 1. In pairing process, one mentor can choose more than one mentee. After self-pairing process, mentors inform Learning and Development Department which is responsible for execution, evaluation and efficiency of the process.

Phase 4: Preparation

Orientation session was organized by Learning and Development Department for both mentors and mentees to share the goals and expectations of the program. Before the first session, mentors and mentees came together in order to talk about detailed need analysis, prepare the reverse mentoring agenda and decide on the number of reverse mentoring sessions.

Phase 5: Mentoring Sessions

Each session takes approximately one hour. There is not any specific time period to finalize the program but Learning and Development Department recommends the minimum number of sessions to mentors and mentees. The time and the number of sessions can be varied according to fulfilling of mentees’ needs.

“We recommend them to have minimum three sessions... there were some cases that exceeded this number, for instance we had cases which had six sessions... actually we consider reverse mentoring program as an ongoing learning platform, the relationship between mentors and mentees are continuing after the sessions finished. Mentees can continue to ask some questions with telephone, mail or face to face.”

Generally, the face to face sessions take place in mentee’s office in Garanti Bank. Since Garanti Bank’s reverse mentoring program covers all geographical areas some of the sessions have realized via telepresence and videoconferencing. Within the scope of ‘digital literacy’ mentors have also designed videos related with reverse mentoring topics and all Garanti Bank employees could reach these videos.

Phase 6: Assessment and Evaluation

In Phase 6, Garanti Bank conducts a survey to mentors and mentees in order to understand the success, strengths and weaknesses of the program. In the survey they are asking mentors and mentees opinion about the program. Garanti Bank uses survey results to improve their reverse mentoring program.

3.3. Case 3: Denizbank

Denizbank was founded as state-owned bank in 1938 in order to provide funding for Turkish maritime sector. In 2012 Sberbank, a leading Russian bank, acquired Denizbank. Denizbank focuses on “retail customers, small and medium size enterprises, exporters, public and project finance and commercial and corporate clients. Denizbank also operates in markets such as agriculture, energy, tourism, education, healthcare services, infrastructure and maritime”²³. In 2016 Denizbank has developed a reverse mentoring program called ‘Bilakis’ which means reverse in Turkish, 13 mentees who are members of Executive Committee, and 39 mentors have attended the program.

The Process of Applying Reverse Mentoring Program in Denizbank

In order to strength their employer brand Denizbank has some projects such as “Open Seas, Open Minds” which support the “ideas have no titles” motto. Reverse

23 www.denizbank.com/en/about-us

mentoring program is one of these human resources projects. In the first step, Denizbank analyzed national and international companies' reverse mentoring programs.

Phase 1: Planning Reverse Mentoring Topics

The company has selected 6 reverse mentoring topics such as *leadership to new generation: leadership preferences of generation Y, being a personal brand in social media, Keep-Improve-Drop-Add tool, corporate social responsibility, new generation banking: Y generation's expectations from a bank and, open agenda* which mentor and mentee decided on a topic.

Phase 2: Mentor-Mentee Selection

Denizbank has selection criteria for mentors and mentees. The main criteria for mentee selection is their managerial status in organizational structure. Executive board members have chosen as mentees. Mentors have selected according to their age, mentors that have chosen were born later 1990.

"we started to receive application last year (January 2016). First we have mailed the potential mentors who born later than 1990... assistants, management trainees and interns (pearls of Denizbank)... over 100 mentor candidates applied for the program, they send one minute videos to us through whatsapp. After receiving videos we have selected 39 mentors for the program... this year executive board members are the mentees but we are planning to expand the program to region managers in following years."

Phase 3: Mentor-Mentee Pairing Process

Thirteen mentors and thirty-nine mentees have attended the reverse mentoring program. Three mentors were assigned for one mentee. Mentors were attributed to mentees randomly.

"mentees' names have written to papers and mentors have drawn random names, three mentors who have drawn the same name became a mentor team... we think that is "

Phase 4: Preparation

Before beginning the program mentors and mentees had an orientation session separately. Orientation session for mentors had an aim to prepare mentors for their roles in the mentoring relationship and help them for some critical issues such as "how to book a meeting with mentee", and "how to express a different opinion" etc.

Phase 5: Mentoring Sessions

Each mentoring sessions take approximately one hour per month over a period of six months. There is not any rule where the sessions take place, mentors and mentees decide the session place together.

"generally they are doing the sessions outside... we haven't interfere with their decision, they have done the first sessions in the office but then they decide on doing it outside of the office. One day I saw one of our mentee and mentors in the restaurant, they were doing the session, I guess outside is more friendly, they are eating something and also discussing the topics... generally sessions take approximately one hour but for some topics it might take longer 1,5 hours".

Phase 6: Assessment and Evaluation

In Phase 6, Denizbank is planning to conduct a survey to mentors and mentees in order to understand the success, strengths and weaknesses of the program and build the following reverse mentoring program according to the feedbacks.

"the program has finished approximately 2 months ago, we are going to get feedbacks from mentors and mentees this week."

4. CONCLUSION

Reverse mentoring gained popularity in recent years as a management instrument. As the younger generation join the workforce it is important for organizations to effectively manage this generational diversity. Reverse mentoring has some significant impact on building relationship between generations. This study represents one of the first attempts in Turkey to examine this instrument's application process in real life. Multiple case methodology was conducted to explore and describe the implementation process of reverse mentoring. First, secondary data was analyzed in order to understand which companies have been using this instrument in Turkey. It has been realized that majority of the companies are in banking sector. The three cases; Akbank, Garanti Bank, Denizbank, presented in this study highlight the need for systematized reverse mentoring program and essential phases for creating a reverse mentoring program. There are some differences and similarities between three cases.

First of all, the three banks' topics are almost similar, Akbank's topics are *digitalizing, new age banking, Y generation leadership, Y generations expectations and, open agenda*, Garanti Bank's topics are *effective usage of social media, mobile applications, digital intelligence and digital expression*, Denizbank's topics are *leadership to new generation: leadership preferences of generation Y, being a personal brand in social media, Keep-Improve-Drop-Add tool, corporate social responsibility, new generation banking: Y generation's expectations from a bank and, open agenda*.

Secondly, when mentor-mentee selection has been analyzed, in Akbank managerial status is the main criteria for mentee but only the employee who is willing to participate to the program is selected as a mentee. Executive Vice Presidents, Vice President and Region Managers have participated to the reverse mentoring programs as mentees and mentors have been selected according to their age and length of time spent in the organization. Akbank's reverse mentoring program is for the mentors-

mentees who work in Istanbul. Garanti Bank has been using technological tools like telepresence and videoconferencing because program has not got any geographical limitation. The company has selecting mentors from their talent pool and Executive Vice Presidents, Senior Vice Presidents, Regional Managers and Loan Region Managers have participated to the program as mentees. In Denizbank Executive board members have chosen as mentees and mentors have selected according to their age, people who were born later 1990 have chosen as mentors and their status in the organization as follows; assistants, management trainees and interns. In the third phase, mentor-mentee pairing process is one of the critical points of reverse mentoring programs. Each bank has their own preferences, Akbank is pairing mentors and mentees from different educational background, experience, and department. In Garanti Bank, mentors and mentees choose each other in a self-pairing process and in Denizbank, mentors were attributed to mentees randomly. In the fourth phase, all of the banks in this study have been organizing orientation programs before the first session. In the fifth phase, the three banks' mentoring sessions have similar characteristics, in general sessions are approximately one hour, mentor and mentee meet one hour per month for each topic. Finally, all of the banks in this study have been conducting a survey after the sessions in order to understand the feedbacks of mentors and mentees. This study has some limitations since only three cases were presented in the banking sector. Further research is needed in different companies and sectors in order to get in depth information about the reverse mentoring processes and designs.

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