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Exploring the Impact of Mentoring Relationships on the Development of Self-Initiated Expatriate Employees Working in China

THESIS SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this thesis is to develop a greater understanding of how mentoring relationships exist between self-initiated expatriate (SIE) employees (employees who decided themselves to work and live abroad without a pre-determined timeline for returning to their home country) and how these relationships facilitate development. Mentoring relationships have been shown to have many positive benefits for employees, but the characteristics of mentoring relationships and the development benefits of these relationships between SIEs has not received much attention. This thesis contributes to this gap in the literature by elaborating on the characteristics of mentoring relationships and discussing their implications for development for Western SIEs working at a Chinese company in China.
Methodology - A participatory action research (PAR) method is used in which participants and the researcher work together in the design, data collection, and data analysis. This was achieved through grouping six participants into three mentoring pairs and then exploring the mentoring experiences of the individuals, pairs, and group of participants during three PAR cycles. Data triangulation is achieved through collecting data from multiple sources including one-on-one interactions, observed pair interactions, and focus groups. Social exchange theory was used as a guiding theoretical model to understand mentoring relationships.
Findings - The data has evidenced that three major themes characterize the mentoring relationships of self-initiated expatriate employees: communication, trust, and value. These themes were then discussed in terms of the benefits of mentoring which have previously been identified by researchers. These themes are also discussed in terms of social exchange theory which contributes to a more refined understanding of how mentoring relationships can be viewed as socially constructed cost-benefit exchanges involving varying perceptions of value.
Implications for Practice - This thesis contributes to practice by highlighting the importance of communication, trust, and value in both the development of mentoring relationships between self-initiated expatriates and in facilitating professional development for SIEs. By emphasizing the identified themes and the creation of a mentoring program for SIEs, this thesis offers firms employing SIEs an important tool that can facilitate professional development. Future research is suggested to explore the professional development benefits of mentoring relationships between SIEs in different countries.

Keywords: mentoring, mentor relationships, self-initiated expatriates, participatory action research

Declaration of Own Work

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Chapter 1: Exploring the Context of Mentoring – Uncovering the Issues

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the mentoring relationships of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) working at a Chinese company in China and to better understand how they exist and their characteristics. This thesis also answers the calls from Jannesari and Sullivan (2019) and Yao et al. (2020) for more research about SIEs working in China. The insights gained into what emerge as the themes of mentoring relationships will help in the organization being studied in the present and the future, create new knowledge for publication to contribute to academia, have a developmental impact on participants through their cooperation in the participatory action research process, and illustrate the skills and scholarship of the researcher in pursuit of his doctorate degree. The main genesis of the study is the researcher's passion for creating developmental and mentoring relationships and the experiences of expatriates while living an SIE lifestyle himself (self-initiated expatriates are those who have decided to work abroad of their own volition and were not sent abroad like traditional expatriates). Mentoring has been a key factor leading to the researcher's success in life thus far and a better understanding the relationships involved will be actionable and applied to current and future workplace settings to improve organizational operations, relationships between employees, and, in doing so, the world itself. The personal developmental relationships which the researcher has developed with a variety of colleagues over the years through informal mentoring has led to more informed decision making, lifelong learning, a network of highly skilled and likeminded colleagues, and global friends. By choosing specific areas of interest to the researcher, the goal of developing employees at the organization is combined to include the benefits of future applications of the research findings and the lifelong impact of participating in the research process will have on participants, in addition to the personal growth of the researcher. While the origin of the study was the researcher's altruistic and academic interests, the significance of the study ranges from developing SIEs at the organization to creating an actionable pathway for similar organizations around the world that employ SIEs to improve employee development opportunities through a better understanding of mentoring relationships. This study hopes to explore mentoring relationships through identifying what the themes are involved in their creation, real world examples of what those themes look like, using social exchange theory to better understand those themes, and then through outlining how organizations can operationalize these themes as a means to develop employees.

Mentoring has been widely practiced and praised over centuries as a way for knowledge and skills to be transferred from a more experienced person to a less experienced person (Kovnatska, 2014). The positive outcomes of this practice have been explored along many dimensions including employee: more rapid career advancement, greater organizational commitment, higher rates of compensation, greater job and career satisfaction (Kammeyer-Muller and Judge, 2008); employee's self-improvement: enhanced self-esteem, physical health, professional competence, positive work relationships, and recognition within one's profession (Eby et al., 2008); mentor benefits: increased mentor productivity and organizational commitment and positive feelings (Holt et al., 2016); and organization: development for employees, stronger relationships between employees resulting in improved operations, and higher employee retention rates and the creation of a more resilient workforce (Montag et al., 2014; Aora and Rangnekar, 2014). Retaining valuable employees is one of the most critical factors in today's business world that confronts leaders as employee retention has emerged as the most significant workforce management challenge (Mwasaru and Kazungu Kingi, 2015). Research has also shown some potential pitfalls of mentoring to be destructive and dissatisfying (Kram, 1985), lead to negative interactions between mentor and protégé resulting in dysfunction and challenges for the organization which have received far less attention (Scandura, 1998). As research vastly supports the notion that mentoring can be positive for the individuals and organization(s) involved, defining, understanding, and conceptualizing mentoring relationships has become more important. Kram's (1985) work remains instrumental in understanding mentoring relationships in terms of involving professional and psycho-social challenge and support, while also providing a framework to understand the phases of mentoring relationships: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition. Additionally, modern views of mentoring relationships have been articulated by scholars in terms of formality: formal and informal (Herbach et al., 2011); number of participants: dyadic, many to many, one to many, many to one, and peer group mentoring (Zachary, 2014); and in terms of episodes: through closely examining the interactions between mentor and mentee (Fullick-Jagiela et al., 2015).

While mentoring relationships have been researched in a variety of different manners and different contexts, the marginalized group of self-initiated expatriates has received very little attention. Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), also called self-selecting expatriates or self-directed expatriates, represent a unique group of people who have found their own employment overseas without any pre-decided return schedule (Cao et al., 2012). SIEs differ from traditional expatriates, also called assigned expatriates and organization expatriates, because they were not sent to other countries by their employing organizations (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2013), and their decisions to move abroad are based on their own reasons (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). This particular subset of expatriates are people who decide to go abroad and work in countries other than their countries of birth; unlike traditional expatriates, SIEs rarely have support structures, training programs, or career plans which most multinational organizations provide to employees who are relocated for work. Shao and Ariss (2020) note that multinational corporations are using increasing number of SIEs to provide organizational flexibility while also striving to avoid the negative outcomes involved with organizational expatriates who fail their assignments. Since SIEs must change their work identities to fit the local requirements, demands and circumstances of the cultures and tasks they encounter, their career concept can be described as protean (Mezias and Scandura, 2005). The protean career concept does not conform to traditional viewpoints about careers; instead, it shifts the responsibility of career planning to the individual from the organization (Hall, 1996). Protean expatriates identify their own developmental needs, shape their own careers, and seek many mentoring relationships to meet these needs (Yan et al., 2002). While some have argued that employees who are more passive and who work within traditional career approaches rely on support from their employers, King (2004) noted that one possible explanation for the self-management behavior of SIEs might be an outcome for people who are naturally more skilled and highly motivated.

There are two main reasons why studying the mentoring and the development of SIEs in China is important: the shift to SIEs and the popularity of China for SIEs . First of all, there is a trend for organizations to shift away from assigned expatriates in favor of self-initiated expatriates hoping to reduce costs, improve retention, etc. The second reason why this study is important is because China ranks

Organizational Context

While the benefits of mentoring have been outlined in various studies, the specific organizational context of this thesis is unique. The publicly traded company is Chinese and focuses on teaching English online through their teaching platform using native English-speaking teachers from the US and Canada. While Chinese staff make up most of the technical workforce, a small number of Western English-speaking expatriates from the US and Canada make up most of the teacher management, training, quality assurance, and English content development manager roles. Since the online teaching workforce is between 2,000-3,000 online teachers, the number of expatriates working with the organization at the headquarters in China to manage and support teachers is very limited (approximately 12-16 expatriates). In addition to the challenge of finding qualified expatriate staff who have experience or expertise in the specific niche of online education, retaining the expatriate staff presents a significant obstacle to the organization's operations and future success. This is partially due to the industry landscape of rapid progress and almost hourly changes in the field of online education. As operational problems are identified through analysing numerical data about teacher and student interactions from tens of thousands of online classes every day, the one-sided creation of "solutions" without the input of expatriate experts often leads to the creation of more problems. An example of this is how teacher absences were problematized. The "solution" to teacher absences, one created without consulting expatriate employees, was to charge teachers a financial penalty for every class on their schedule that they did not attend regardless of the reason. The backlash from teachers was severe and resulted in increased teacher turnover, negative social media for the organization, and even several legal issues being raised by law firms.

The importance of the expatriate team cannot be understated in terms of the morale, effectiveness, and job performance of the North American independently contracted teaching staff. Since the number of expatriates in China was so low compared to the total population of native English-speaking teachers working online, each person at the HQ in China filled a vital role and was needed for both daily operational efficiency and long-term strategic planning. Considering this context, turnover in the expatriate team in China, especially before completing a one-year contract term, often had devastating effects on operational performance and profitability for the organization. Training and developing this team to work cohesively together was paramount to achieving organizational business objectives in terms of growth, quality control, and training contracted teachers. Specifically, the expatriate team served as the middle-management glue that held the organization together through bridging the vast divide between Chinese executives and a remote North American workforce.

Introduction of the Problem

SIE development, impeded by turnover, a lack of organizational investment in professional development, and the scarce number of SIEs was a create a significant organizational challenge due to the importance of the key roles and workflows that SIE staff have at the organization. The importance of the SIE staff can also be seen in the backgrounds, knowledge, and skills they possess from working in the online education industry in China which presents a unique experience that's impossible to replicate. While new SIE staff can be hired, the selection process is often costly, lengthy, and the new hire's lack of relevant company and potentially industry-specific information makes them noticeably less desirable than existing SIE managers.

The technological nature of the work presents one example of how industry and company work experiences are unique. There are different programs and platforms used to teach online, communicate, track, monitor, and share ideas with colleagues and online teaching staff. WeChat is a Chinese messaging service which works on smart phones and computers that allows people to share texts, pictures, videos, contact cards, etc. with individuals or groups of individuals. The organization itself built a business by providing the online platform through which online English classes are taught. While both of these examples may seem like mere technological programs that are understood once you read the specs and watch a walkthrough video, the truth is that they are constantly evolving through updates, new features, and more functions. Therefore, when someone new is introduced into the role of being able to influence product development without knowing the history and rationale used for their development thus far, suggested changes might actually make the online products worse or bring back problems which were solved by the current version. One example of this is the student-facing lesson feedback survey that pops up at the end of each class; it can be changed to be one question which will result in a higher response rate, or it can include more questions to improve the quality of the information gathered which would also reduce the response rate. This change has implications for quality assurance, training, and teacher experience (since they also see this feedback), but there are also technical components here which are not obvious like the database which stores this data and how changing the inputs affect how past data can be read and the other tangential student reports, lesson statistics, and performance tracking sheets which are affected by this type of change. This level of detail in a technical capacity is not something that having a higher educational degree or even other relevant industry experience will prepare employees to handle because most Chinese online education companies build their own platforms and thus the internal technical requirements and workings are unique for each company. This level of specialized industry and organizational specific knowledge and understanding highlights the importance of employee development for SIEs who must manage the functional areas of the organization.

In this context, the researcher seeks to explore ways to help the organization by means of developing SIE employees who provide the key to the organization operating effectively and maintaining a competitive advantage. Mentoring relationships, by definition, are developmental relationships, but the extent of their effectiveness and realization between SIEs and the elements of mentoring relationships in this context have not yet received enough scrutiny from academia. The research question this thesis strives to answer is: How do mentoring relationships shape the experiences and development of self-initiated expatriates?

This research question will be supported through the following objectives:

- Identify participants' past and current experience with mentoring
- Observe mentoring experiences between participants
- Explicitly explore mentoring relationships with participants

An emergent process will be used to explore these relationships, so a preconceived step by step approach of how data is collected is not possible at the onset (beyond an initial assessment of the existing mentoring relationships of participants).

Aim of the Study

This study will explore SIEs' mentor relationships and the characteristics of those relationships over a three-month period. While the problem that has been introduced involves SIE development at a Chinese company in China, the solution may not be as simple as "apply mentoring". Even though studies have shown that the benefits of mentoring are numerous, realizing a mentoring program and developing high-quality mentoring relationships might be difficult considering the unique disposition of and transient nature of SIEs.

While the identified problem of SIE development is very clear from the perspective of the researcher in the role of teacher engagement and communication manager (and even the vice president of North American operations who authorized this research project agreed), it might not be significant at all from the perspective of the CEO. While the negative impacts caused by this problem on the business are undisputed, the circumstance that there exist more urgent problems, that the CEO allocates more resources towards fixing, is also a possibility. Therefore, when considering the problem introduced above, it's important to consider that the viewpoint used to describe this problem, and create this research project, is that of a middle manager in a very specific part of a large organization. Notwithstanding, the problem is also recognized as significant by all participants of this research project as the small SIE community at the organization often discussed challenges that were faced working at the organization.

SIE development is such a significant organizational problem because of the roles and workflows that SIE staff have at the organization. On the one hand, there is the obvious challenge of staffing SIE positions because of the limited supply of skilled and qualified labor willing to relocate to a new country, but the challenge of operating in a developing country and in an online industry that is constantly evolving without the support demonstrated by organizational development initiatives can lead to SIEs feeling undervalued, unmotivated, and uninterested in work and employment in that setting. The result of these feelings experienced by SIEs often leads to voluntary turnover. This leads to the challenges of hiring a replacement for a departing employee and there is also the possibility that the organization will eliminate that position, temporarily or permanently, in which case the tasks and job functions might be reassigned to others or overlooked completely; this outcome leads to decreased productivity and significant operational hurdles which can occur once the absence of specific job functions that are noticed by the organization. An example of this can be seen in the organization directly after the resignation of the expatriate Director of Recruitment and Training; immediately several key job functions were reassigned, as no replacement could be found, but other tasks which this person performed, such as overseeing contract revisions and service agreement changes went unattended to and created the later operational challenge of updating these important legal documents without the expertise of the person responsible for creating and maintaining them in the past. This lack of SIE development creates a feedback loop which leads to increased turnover, which in turn changes job roles and responsibilities, thus furthering the need for SIE development.

Positioning the Scholar-Practitioner Context

The researcher has worked as an expatriate in 6 different countries at 10 different organizations over the past 14 years. Through working in different roles in management and leadership in the education industry from the business English lessons in Moscow to Country Academic Director of an English teaching company in Saudi Arabia, Isaac has moved up the ranks and solidified his work experience in the field of international management. His work at a start-start up in Shanghai and his work at a publicly traded company on the NYSE in Beijing exemplify Isaac's experience as an expatriate that informs his views and understanding of people and contexts of working abroad.

The primary research's motivations for solving the organizational issue of employee development are to help the organization, improve the lives of all the expatriate employees working there, to enhance the researchers' own understanding of developmental relationships to for future applications, and to complete the requirements for this thesis. The success and failure of organizations employing SIEs and SIE development have been topics of interest to the researcher for many years and exploring the impact of mentoring relationships on SIE development affords the researcher an opportunity to better understand SIEs while also contributing to colleagues, the organization, and academia.

Drawing Insights to the Research

Now that an overview of the fundamentals of this research project are clear, the structure of the thesis will be presented. In order to find the answer to the research question in a way that is consistent with a doctoral thesis, this thesis is divided into six chapters. The current chapter provides an introduction to the context of mentoring through presenting the organization and uncovering the issues involving SIE development. The following chapters discuss the existing literature involving mentoring and SIEs, the method of inquiry into the research context, the story of cycles of action, reflection, and sensemaking, evaluation of outcomes, the scholar-practitioner, and finally conclusions, reflections, and implications. The naming convention for these chapters is consistent with action research norms for DBA programs which are similar to theses written for PhD programs except for more of a focus on being action oriented.

Following this introduction chapter, there will be a literature review to provide an overview of the relevant existing research relating to mentoring relationships and SIEs. After reviewing the existing literature, the methodology that is used to inquire into the research context is outlined in terms of introducing the methodological framework which inform the design of the study, data collection protocols, and the phases of data collection. A justification for the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of qualitative inquiry which are used, in addition to the constructionist paradigm, are also included. The rationale for the sampling frame, the selection criteria for participants, data analysis methods, and finally the topics of validity and reliability are outlined. Next, the story of cycles of action, reflection and sense making are discussed as the common themes involved with mentoring relationships are introduced. The development of these themes are outlined with specific references to data generated through the action research cycles. The process of how data is collected is also emphasized, noting the participants' involvement in the action research process and the specifics of how each cycle was built on the previous cycle at the direction of the participants and researcher. The following chapter is the evaluation of outcomes and it is where the research findings are linked back to the existing literature. This linking of the developed themes to existing literature helps to strengthen the discussion by building upon the research done by others. First a more contextualized overview of the research topic is outlined, then the process of how evidence was gathered during participatory action research cycles is explained. The principal findings of this study are then presented. Here the themes are revised to be more clearly articulated using the language which exists in academia to describe the ideas of communication, trust, and value which are identified as the core components of mentoring relationships between SIEs. The implications of these themes are also discussed in terms of SIE development and mentoring programs for SIEs.

This thesis continues with a chapter about the scholar practitioner's journey through discussing it from the first person, second person, and third person practice lenses. Finally, the conclusions, reflections, and implications chapter then outlines ways the discussed findings can be applied to organizations and operationalized. The implications for practice of developing employees' communication, trust, and perceptions of value are outlined as an option to increase the chances of employees forming high quality (formal and informal) mentoring relationships. In addition, limitations are also identified and suggestions for future research are presented.

Chapter 2: Reviewing The Nature and Dynamics of Mentoring in the Workplace and Self-Initiated Expatriates

Introduction

Before designing a research project to study mentoring relationships between SIEs, it's necessary to first investigate what academic research already exists and the insights gained about these concepts. The central purpose of this chapter will be to convey the ideas and knowledge of specific topics which have already been published (Adedayo, 2015). In line with Emerald (2012), the focus will be on identifying gaps, strengths and weaknesses, and opposing views in published knowledge. Since the workplace-based problem centers around SIE development, existing research about SIEs will be discussed first, followed by a thorough review of the existing literature about mentoring. Expatriates, especially self-initiated expatriates, also represent a sizeable gap in the literature, and the specifics of how mentoring relationships lead to development for this marginalized group have not yet received much attention from academia. While mentoring has an extensive history dating back thousands of years, mentoring relationships have been studied far less.

What is Mentoring?

The origins of mentoring go back over 3,000 years to the time of Homer's Odyssey in Greek mythology (Kovnatska, 2014). During that tale, "Mentor" was a friend and teacher of King Odysseus who entrusted him to take care of his son Telemachus while he went away to fight in the Trojan War (Bynum, 2015). This role of a mentor as a wise elder, trusted advisor, surrogate parent, an educator and a guide communicate the importance of the relationship attached to this concept (Colley, 2002). If you think of the adjectives used here, "wise", "trusted", and "surrogate", for most people you could apply these descriptions to a grandparent or parent. This sentiment of a familial relationship speaks to the importance placed on mentors historically as well as during modern times. The concept of mentoring covers a wide array of interactions which all involve a developmental experience, and are typically called "a relationship", between people. In general, mentoring has been found to be a widely celebrated practice which includes a plethora of benefits.

Meta-analytic reviews across professions of these mentoring relationships have found that some of the benefits of this type of relationship include enhanced professional identity development, greater organizational and career commitment, more rapid career advancement, higher rates of compensation, and greater satisfaction with both job and career (Kammeyer-Mueller and Judge, 2008; Eby-et al., 2008). Kovnatska (2014) also pointed out that 70% of Fortune 500 companies use mentoring as a way to attract, develop, and retain good employees and Eby et al. (2008) found that other benefits of mentoring in professional contexts include improved self-esteem, physical health, professional competence, positive work relationships, and recognition within one's profession. Additionally, Holt et al. (2016) found that mentoring also increases productivity and organizational commitment for the mentor through the positive feelings resulting from the development of the mentee. From the organizational perspective, mentoring provides development for employees, encourages retention, and may also improve how organizations operate through stronger relationships between employees (Montag et al., 2014); in addition to enhancing productivity and creating a resilient workforce (Aora and Rangnekar, 2014). To summarize, existing mentoring literature agrees that there are many benefits associated with mentoring on the individual and organizational levels. But how does mentoring create these benefits? If mentoring is such a great thing, why isn't it mandatory in every organization?
To help answer these questions and develop a well-rounded view of mentoring, this chapter will outline mentoring from many perspectives to show the extensive ways in which this developmental relationship has already been researched and published (Adedayo, 2015).

Starting with the topic of mentoring, there are ubiquitous articles, studies, and findings, but when considering research about the mentoring relationships of expatriates, scholars seem to agree that this topic deserves further attention (Mezias and Scandura, 2005). The employees in this study are not only expatriates, they are self-initiated expatriates. That means that they were not relocated by an organization to a new country. These individuals decided themselves to relocate to a new country for work. The idea of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) is rather modern and has not received much attention by academia. When it comes to mentoring and SIEs, this topic has received scant attention by scholars. This chapter will discuss existing literature regarding mentoring, mentoring relationships and self-initiated expatriates to provide the context of the research and share insights into what has already been learned through research.

Views of Mentoring Relationships

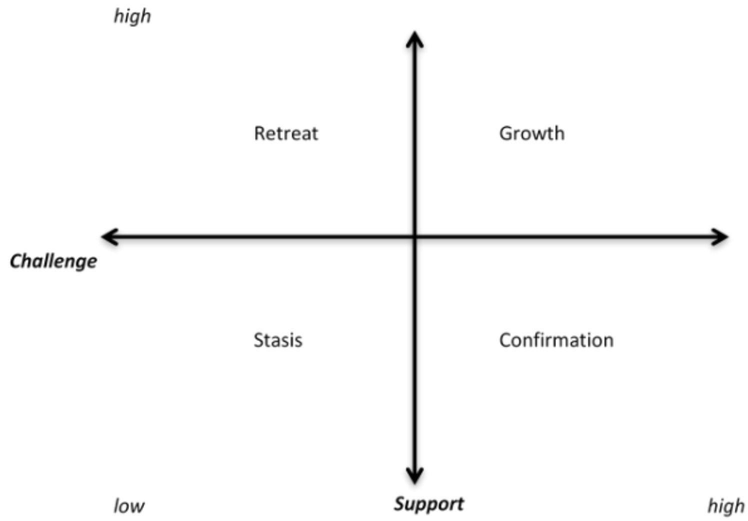
Traditionally, a mentoring relationship has been dyadic, involving two people, which has also been described as exclusionary, hierarchical, and elitist (Hunt and Michael, 1983). As a craftsman passes along a specific skillset to an apprentice, Southworth (1995) noted that traditional mentorship reinforces and protects existing traditions and role orthodoxies. This approach to understanding mentoring relationships focused on the people involved, their role in relation to others and the outcome, but the actual relationship itself received little attention. In modern times this traditional approach can be viewed as a way to exclude marginalized groups, like women and people of color, due to the power dynamics and hierarchical structure, which may limit social mobility and produce inequalities, as a result of not being included in workplace mentoring programs or other mentoring opportunities in informal settings like sporting events, private clubs, and golf courses (Mott, 2002). Johnson-Baily and Cervero (2002) also point out societal hierarchies which can also impeded cross-cultural and cross-gender mentoring which also results from the power dynamics and hierarchical nature that is inherent in traditional mentoring. This traditional conceptualization of mentoring, with regard to hierarchy and power, has been found to be an inadequate lens through which to examine mentoring due to constraints regarding time, geography, and culture which limit the accomplishment of deeper and multiple demands needed for career development and growth (Mullen et al., 2000). Having an awareness of the traditional viewpoint of mentorship, and its limitations, is important as the perception of mentoring, be it traditional or otherwise, plays a key role in the expectations involved with participants in mentoring relationships. In professional spheres, including education and management, mentoring has been used for centuries, and continues to be used, to train, pass on skills, knowledge, and wisdom (Sorensen, 2016). In this context, mentoring can be defined as “a personal development relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps less experienced ones” (Arogundade, 2011, p.180). Mentoring distinguishes itself from other developmental relationships like supervising, managing, role modeling, coaching, and advising, through the intentional and strategic use of challenge and support which result in development (Daloz Parks, 2000). Unlike mentoring relationships, developmental relationships which involve supervisors have the added responsibility of monitoring the work and progress of the employee and also ensuring the employee’s behavior conforms to company policy (Raabe and Beehr, 2003). Supervisors are also expected to produce more immediate results from their subordinates in addition to developing them as employees and they have the added advantage of being involved with the performance appraisal and employee reward systems (McManus and Russell, 1997). A comparison can also be drawn between mentoring relationships and coworker relationships, in which coworkers lack the hierarchical advantage, would wield only informal social influence, would likely not see developing a coworker as a role, socially reinforce good or bad work behaviors, and would likely have more frequent contact with coworkers (Raabe and Beehr, 2003). Kram (1983; as cited by Kroll, 2017) believed that the two vital ingredients: challenge and support, are integral components of mentoring relationships. Considering mentoring relationships from a qualitative lens has played a key role in developing these lenses that can be used to better understand it.

Kram (1983) is credited with defining mentor relationships in terms of the two components of support and challenge. Support has been defined in terms of psychosocial support and career-related support. Psychosocial support functions involve improving the mentees' confidence and self-esteem and can include counseling, role-modeling, and friendship (Tepper et al., 1996). Earnshaw (1995) explains that validation, recognition, and creating a sense of belonging are additional examples of providing support through mentoring. Daloz and Parks (2000) extend this understanding of support to the mentoring relationship by describing mentors as those who serve as "guides to resources and sources of comfort and healing" (Kroll, 2017, p.79). Career related support functions included exposure, protection, and sponsorship in which mentees were prepared for promotions and advancements (Tepper et al., 1996). Starr (2015) points out an important distinction between manager relationships and mentor relationships with regard to support; managers have more of a sense of personal agenda (Ex. They need to be better at planning and scheduling) and managers' "support" focuses more on "doing" and tasks, while mentors' "support" involves discussion of personal believes, values, and principles (p.20). The social elements discussed when articulating "challenge" and "support", as activities that involve interactions between people in mentoring relationships, further exemplify why it is important to consider the relationship as a key area of focus to understanding mentoring relationships.

Regarding the "challenge" element of mentoring relationships, this has been identified as a necessary ingredient to develop mentee growth (McNally and Martin, 1998; Burgess and Butcher, 1999; Butcher, 2002). In this context, challenge refers to conflict or creating dissonance without which there cannot be actions for change, improvement, or learning and the development of new insights (Kroll, 2017). Challenge has also been defined as "any mentoring activity that challenges proteges to think or act differently"; such as engaging in a discussion, setting tasks, mentor modelling for the protégé, setting high standards, or offering a map for growth (Certo, 2005, p.396). McGowan et al. (2007) explain challenge as confirmation (i.e. affirming, supporting, and acknowledging the protégé's evolution) and contradiction (i.e. challenging a protégé to change a stationary balance). It is noteworthy that the challenge involves both participants in the relationship to the ends of "validating the capacity to know and offer wisdom, situating the mentoring engagement in the experiences of the participants, and defining learning as mutually constructed (Baxter Magolda and King, 2004, as cited by Kroll, 2017, p.79). This approach to understanding challenge acknowledges that the experience will be socially constructed, but that also introduces the complexity of how to evaluate the mentoring experience as both participants might have differing viewpoints, even though the experience was shared. The outcome of learning in mentoring relationships involving the mentor and mentee is also noteworthy, as there is little research surrounding this topic, but for the purpose of this thesis, the focus will remain on the nature of the mentoring relationship itself.

While challenge and support are identified as key ingredients to mentoring relationships, it's useful to see that these elements are present to a certain extent instead of an all or nothing view. Daloz (1986) described the relationship between challenge and support in mentoring relationships along the matrix of challenge and support which show (see chart below): low challenge and low support leads to stasis; high challenge and low support leads to retreat and disengagement; low challenge and high support leads to confirmation and affirmation; and high challenge and high support leads to growth and effective mentoring.

Figure 1 Relationship Between Challenge and Support in Mentoring Relationships



Through viewing mentoring as interactions resulting in growth and development through challenge and support, the importance of the interactions between participants becomes more central to the mentoring process and ensuring the mentoring relationship results in growth. The limitation of this approach is that it's two dimensional; since mentoring experiences are socially constructed by each participant, then there can be situations in which the mentor might believe something about the interactions, yet the mentee might have a different experience and take-aways from the same interactions. Additional limitations to this theory, from the context of educational organizations, noted by researchers are that while "support" is widely recognized as present in most mentoring relationships between experienced teachers and new teachers, the elements of "challenge" are often not present and perceived as less-important than "support" (Certo, 2005). This might be due to a lack of training or experience in effectively "challenging" others to the ends of helping them grow and develop, or possibly the avoidance of disharmony that might be created by challenging someone to move outside of their comfort zone. Merriam (1983) also suggested that the phenomenon of mentoring represents different things to different fields, which also causes one to question the universality of any mentoring approach or theory when considering the applicability between professions and industries. Even though there remains debate over the universality of Kram's (1983) framework for mentoring, this perspective of mentoring, involving support and challenge, provides a succinct view of two major components involved with mentoring relationships.

While the view of mentoring as a developmental relationship which involves challenge and support is prevalent, there are other ways in which some scholars think of mentoring. Eby (1997) presents two primary dimensions of mentoring as the form of the relationship (hierarchical or lateral mentor mentee relationship) and also the type of skill development obtained as a result of a mentoring experience. Through this lens mentoring is split into two parts: "relationship" and "development". The advantage of such a perspective is that it allows for these two ideas to be studied separately while also challenging the assumptions that a relationship is needed for development or that development must occur in a relationship. "Development" here is split by Eby (1997) into job-related (providing opportunities to develop technical expertise, advance within the organization, and improve their performance on the job) and career-related skills (staying up to date on the industry and field, making contacts inside and outside an organization, and developing a large number of skills). A more comprehensive list was organized by Eby (1997, p.128).

Figure 2 Comparison of Job-Related Skill Development and Career-Related Skill Development Functions

Job-related skill development

- Clarifies protégé's job duties
- Provides advice on how to complete assignments more quickly and efficiently
- Discusses strengths and areas for opportunities on the job
- Suggests specific strategies for advancing within the organization
- Supports or sponsors protégé's attempts to advance within the organization
- Provides advice on how to operate within the organization's political climate
- Provides information about career opportunities within the organization
- Provides challenging job assignments to enhance specific technical skills
- Shelters protégé from situations that could be detrimental to his or her career within the organization
- Increases exposure and visibility of protégé to top management
- Encourages protégé to experiment with new ways of approaching organizational tasks
- Shares job-related information or technical expertise relevant to the organization
- Discusses career options and dilemmas

Career-related skill development

- Provides assignments that develop a broad repertoire of new competencies and skills
- Encourages continuous learning and cross-disciplinary experiences
- Encourages protégé to develop diversified contacts within and outside the organization
- Encourages protégé to stay informed of trends and developments in his or her professional field
- Informs protégé about the realities of organizational life within and outside the organization (e.g., less job security)
- Counsels protégé on how to engage in career planning that will enhance internal and external marketability
- Advises protégé to obtain information on internal and external job opportunities
- Promotes protégé's efforts to develop both an internal and external reputation
- Introduces protégé to external contacts
- Encourages protégé to become involved in his or her profession
- Discusses alternative careers for protégé
- Informs protégé about pending organizational changes to help prepare protégé for exit from the organization if necessary

While considering mentoring in terms of the two dimensions of relationships and skill development has the upside of breaking up the concept into two fundamental component parts, Eby (1997)'s model also limits the types of relationships to be either hierarchical or lateral and the types of skills considered with mentoring to be either job skills or career skills. This division might be challenged by skill development which exists outside of these two areas, such as skills relating to family, which might be an outcome of mentoring. In addition, both relationships structures and skill types are very subjective and not always distinguishable; for example, the job skill development function of "discusses career options and dilemmas" and the career skill development function of "counsels protégé on how to engage in career planning that will enhance internal and external marketability" might both take place during the same meeting or conversation (Eby, 1997, p.128). It's also key when considering mentoring relationships to note that human relationships are complex and constantly evolving, so assigning specific labels and classifications to describe them might only be accurate for a limited time. Therefore, qualitative research would seem to be the more appropriate for inquiry into human relationships.

Now that Kram (1983) has defined mentoring relationships in terms of challenge and support and Eby (1997) has noted that there are relational and developmental aspects of mentoring, it is helpful to look at the context of mentor relationships from different perspectives, like formal mentoring and informal mentoring. Formal mentoring programs are those which attempt to cultivate developmental relationships between employees that are meaningful through help from the organization in terms of outlining guidelines, establishing the parameters for the relationships, and clarifying the responsibilities and roles involved (Burke and McKeen, 1989). Vries, Webb, and Eveline (2006) describe formal mentoring programs as an effort to re-create informal partnerships that have always existed in workplaces. Despite having a clear developmental goal, research shows that as mentoring becomes more formal, the quality of information shared and the level of interaction also decreases (Johnson and Anderson, 2009). This evidence would suggest that people might resist forced-friends or mandatory work relationships, possibly due to the removal of choice and limitation of social freedom. Research has also found that formal mentoring programs result in fewer long-term advantages for mentees, mentors, and organizations, when viewed next to informal mentoring programs, in terms of interpersonal comfort and perceived competence (Eby et al., 2007; Underhill, 2006; Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Chao et al., 1992). Since the formal mentoring programs are often found to be less effective for the mentor and mentee, it seems that the forced pairing and required relationship has a higher propensity for less positive and even negative outcomes for both people in the relationship. When formal mentoring is not believed to be completely effective, mentees frequently seek an informal mentor, in addition to the formal mentor, to help realize the benefits which are not being gained from the formal mentoring program (Holt et al., 2016). This trend can be explained by the apparent value of effective mentoring relationships, which is understood by the mentee, and perhaps the importance of interpersonal comfort and perceived competence in that relationship as understood by the mentee.

As the name implies, informal mentoring is mentoring that exists outside of a formal mentoring program. Informal mentoring has less limitations in terms of the relationship itself because it is not arranged by others as in cases of formal relationships. Qian et al. (2014) define informal workplace mentoring as a development relationship that is voluntarily started and continued between a more experienced employee and a less experienced employee with the goal of personal and professional development. Informal workplace mentoring relationships often form by chance, do not involve a pre-arranged agenda or schedule (Cox, 2005), are less structured, more spontaneous, not recognized by the organization, and more self-directed (Herbach et al., 2011). Research has shown that informal mentoring provides greater psychological support and can have longer term effects on mentees (Linnehan, 2003). Informal peer mentoring refers to mentors who are in similar positions or ages (Holland et al., 2012) and is described as a coequal relationship which allows for both participants to have a mentoring experience (Mullen, 2009). Sambunjak et al. (2010) found that informal peer mentoring resulted in connections and interactions between coworkers which lead to emotional and moral support, and allowed for advice to be given regarding topics like work-life balance and professional responsibilities. When considering informal mentoring, the “development” elements of the relationship often also adopt a more “informal” tone, and can include a more holistic dialogue which extends beyond work and the professional sphere.

In addition to the degree of formality of mentoring relationships, the number and role of participants also directly affects the context and the mentoring relationships themselves. Kroll (2016) outlines the principal difference between group mentoring and dyadic mentoring as the group structure and different roles of participants. Dyadic mentoring refers to a fixed structure of two people, in which there can be two roles of participants: mentor-mentee or mentor-mentor, which is also known as peer mentoring. Mentor-mentee mentoring can be traditional and involve a more senior employee developing a more junior employee; or mentor-mentee mentoring can involve a more junior employee developing a more senior employee, an idea that is known as reverse mentoring and typically involves developing skills related to new technologies (Cismaru and Iunius, 2020). Peer (lateral) mentoring, using the structure mentor-mentor, has been noted to also be more relevant in modern and more participative organizations (Kram, 1985; Isabella, 1985). Maurer and Palmer (1999) note that employee development relationships between coworkers involve exchange as a relevant topic. Hackman (1992) also explains that peers' effects on colleagues can be strong and effected through various means including sharing information about advancement opportunities, influencing good and bad work behaviors, and offering information and advice about achieving goals. Group mentoring, while still in its infancy with regard to scholarship and research (Kroll, 2017), has been defined in several ways based on group structure: many to many, one to many, many to one, and peer group mentoring (Zachary, 2014). There are many different names and titles used to describe these structures: mentoring circles (Darwin, 2000), collective mentorship (Kroll, 2016), collaborative mentoring (Mullen, 2000), interteam mentoring (Eby, 1997), co-mentoring (Bona et al., 1995), and mentoring communities (Daloz Parks, 2000). Despite having different names, the experiences of participants fall within the realm of having a guide, advocate, or sponsor, that teaches, critiques, advise, trusts, and supports others in order to pursue, express and finalize goals (Lick, 2006).

Ultimately, when individuals engage together towards a common goal, energizing experiences and synergistic relationships are created, even though there may be exceptions to this when the common goals are not positive pursuits (Mullen, 1999). Regardless of the names or structures associated with group mentoring, it is described as a complex learning process (Kroll, 2016). Learning more about some of these group experiences can shed some light on the mentoring relationships of those involved in them, even though these groups do not seem to focus specifically on work or relationships between people in a workplace.

Making Sense of Mentoring Relationships

While the underlying ontological perspective of constructionism has already made itself quite apparent in the viewpoints of researchers understanding relationships, there is also a prevailing theoretical framework that has been frequently used to understand mentoring relationships: social exchange theory (Allen, 2007; Majiros, 2013). Even though the origins can be traced back to the study of market relations, the application to social exchanges, like personal relationships and friendships was largely developed by Blau (1964) who also differentiated between economic exchange and social exchange by using undefined favors that represent benefits to be paid out at some future time, the type of which to be determined by the person owing the favors as a way to understand the social exchanges of human interactions. This concept has since been articulated more clearly as social exchange theory, in which relationships are broken down into a subjective cost-benefit analysis in which alternatives are considered. (Allen, 2007). Homans (1985) also drew attention to how the genesis of social exchange theory originated from exchange theory in which Homans and Blau identified the use of "the self" and "the other" as a way to understand the creation of expectations, obligations, and reciprocity (p.396). Ritzer (2010) noted that Emerson's presentations of power and social influence contributed to the advancement of this framework; and Lawler and Thye (1999) defined two types of social exchanges as negotiated exchanges, "agreement with specified terms and obligations", and reciprocal exchanges, "sequential giving with unspecified terms and obligations" (p.219). Four types of exchange that structure social relationships were elaborated by Fiske (1991) to include communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing as outlined in the chart below.

Communal Sharing	The relationship involves a social exchange where everyone contributes to the commuinty and then takes what they need from the community.
Authority Ranking	This relationship strcuture is based on inequity and views a linear ranking hierarchy from the most important at the top to the least important on the bottom.
Equity Matching	Peers in this relational structure are considered equal and each person gives up and gets the same things.
Market Pricing	This is also an equivalent exchange, but the value of the exchanged items is determined by the market and rational and highly structured rules are agreed upon by a group of members.

Rutti et al. (2012) also note that multiple frameworks above can exist simultaneously between two or more people and that both parties must agree to the expectations in order for the relationship to continue.

The norm of reciprocity is widely considered a universal approach to understanding relationships between people as people will respond in like kind to positive or negative stimuli (Amah, 2017), Foa and Foa (1974) note that to maintain balance in the social exchange, both parties in the relationship must give and benefit equally. Social exchange theory also builds on reciprocity based on the assumption that individuals who are in a social relationship have the goal of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs (Holdbrugge and Ambrosius, 2015). Foa and Foa (1974) defined the tangible or intangible currencies in the relationship which are exchanged typically fall into the categories of love/emotional support, information, money, status, goods, and services. Emerson (1976) explained that examples of benefits of social exchanges can include information, support, companionship, friendship, and fun while examples of costs can include time, money, and effort.

When viewing mentoring as a social exchange, there are typically three forms of social support that are involved: psychosocial support, role modeling, and career-related support; of these three forms of social support, psychosocial support and role modeling can be linked to love/emotional category, while support that is career related involves more status, services, and information types of social exchange (Holtbrügge and Ambrosius, 2015). It’s also noteworthy that there is typically organizational asymmetry which characterizes mentoring as a form of social exchange due to the different levels of experience, organizational status, and the possession of more valuable intangible and tangible currencies on the part of the mentor. Perception and expectation is vital to the exchange of these currencies as mentors’ expected costs and benefits have been shown to be positively related to the intentions of forming relationships with mentees in the context of managers and executives (Ragins and Scandura, 1993). When the perceptions and expectations of the exchanges are different between those involved with the relationship, the relationship will start to break down, and if that mismatch isn’t corrected, the relationship will terminate (Fiske, 1991).

Relational Learning Through Experience

The benefits of mentoring have inspired many evolutions of this concept in modern practice. Several of those evolutions which have received attention from researchers will now be examined to provide a complete overview of how mentoring relationships have been realized in modern times. Mentoring circles are group mentoring experiences that involve multiple experiences which have diverse perspectives resulting from co-learning through authentic dialog, and power-sharing across genders, cultures, and hierarchical levels (Darwin, 2000). These multiple experiences are characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, and trust between each participant, who are called mentoring collaborators

(Murphy and Kram, 2014). The common theme of reciprocity in mentoring relationships is joined by mutuality and trust, which may be other defining characteristics of effective relationships.

Co-mentoring refers to several connected individuals providing supportive assistance to each other in a nonhierarchical and reciprocal way (Bona et al., 1995). Instead of being viewed as a method, Southern (2007) asserts that co-mentoring is a relationship; one marked by a developmental experience in a safe-space in which there is vulnerability, and those who participate decide to mentor each other. In this concept, it is not clear whether participants work in the same organization since it may be difficult to create a "nonhierarchical" environment with people at the same workplace.

Mentoring communities were designed around young adults with a view of investing in the future through inspiration, challenge, support, and recognition aimed at allowing participants to see themselves as a part of a specific community or the globe itself (Deloz Parks, 2000). The "community" is seen as a space in which mentors, colleagues, and friends can join together for internal examination and outward action through reflective exploration and intentional encounters with otherness (Kroll, 2016). While this concept has great theoretical potential, the development of this type of community in a work environment would almost begin to describe a mentor oriented organizational culture model.

Collaborative mentoring has been defined as an opportunity for more than one professional to become directly involved with the learning of a protégé (mentee) by sharing the mentoring responsibilities (Mullen, 2009). Collaborative mentoring was designed as a way to help build ties between schools and universities and to create a forum in which mentoring could be assisted, encouraged, and supported by participants (Mullen and Lick, 1999). This model uses mentoring as a catalyst towards inspiring institutional change and new possibilities in human relationships through the creation of a developmental and growth-oriented workplace culture (Darwin and Palmer, 2009), organizational structures and synergistic relationships (Mullen, 2000). This approach to mentoring also reduces the possibility of a single mentor not being able to provide enough support or being able to form a mentoring relationship which is helpful (Hansman, 2002). In order to have a successful collaborative mentoring relationship, there must be three elements: shared decision making, systems thinking, and collaboration (Kochan and Trimble, 2000).

An alternative way to view mentoring relationships (besides formality or number of participants) is from the behavioral level and involves considering the relationship as a series of episodes or interactions between people and the effects they have on people. Fullick-Jagiela et al. (2015) approach cultivating mentoring relationship from the perspective of psychological empowerment in mentoring episodes. Psychological empowerment is defined as a state in which increased intrinsic task motivation creates beliefs about how the performance of tasks is meaningful, is accomplished through personal choice, has impact, and is competently performed (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995). Most existing empowerment literature has focused on bettering task-based motivation, but relationships also contribute to psychological empowerment, especially those resulting from high-quality mentoring episodes (Fullick-Jagiela et al., 2015). While there is still discussion regarding what mentoring actually is, beyond developmental interactions or relationships; Megginson et al. (2006) started investigating what specific elements of these interactions can lead to "transformation in the mentoring conversation or in the spaces between dialogues" (p.3). This very specialized view attempts to identify specific characteristics of mentoring and mentoring relationships through closely examining the interactions between mentor and mentee. In like fashion, Fletcher and Ragins (2007) attempt to clarify what specific elements define mentoring relationships or interactions through studying the developmental relationships from the level of a single "mutually enhancing growth interaction" (p.381, as cited by Fullick-Jagiela et al., 2015).

While this very granular and detached approach can allow for a very focused analysis, it also ignores the wider context of mentoring across interactions and thus might be difficult to interpret with regard to quality and the relationship as a whole. This lack of context is addressed through incorporating the within-person performance work of Beal et al. (2005), from which Allen and Poteet (2011) suggest that mentoring relationships are made up of a series of behavior episodes which then can be analyzed individually in order to determine the quality of the relationship. The ideal outcome of relational mentoring episodes is the fostering of mentee confidence and psychological empowerment which have been shown to be leveraged and used to transform such episodes into mutually beneficial and high-quality relationships (Maynard et al., 2012).

While viewing relationships as episodes may seem to ignore the connections between those episodes, researchers have also attempted to study mentoring relationships based on the phases of the relationship instead of episodes. The seminal work of Kram (1985) continues to be relevant in many ways which involves four distinct phases of mentoring relationships: 1) initiation – when the mentor and mentee come together, 2) cultivation – the period when mentoring functions begin and reach their highest level, 3) separation – when the mentor-mentee relationship ends, and 4) redefining the relationship – becoming colleagues, something new, or terminating the relationship. While the three phases of initiation, cultivation, and separation are largely accepted by scholars, researchers have also focused most of their attention on the initiation and cultivation stages as they provide more insights into successful mentoring relationships.

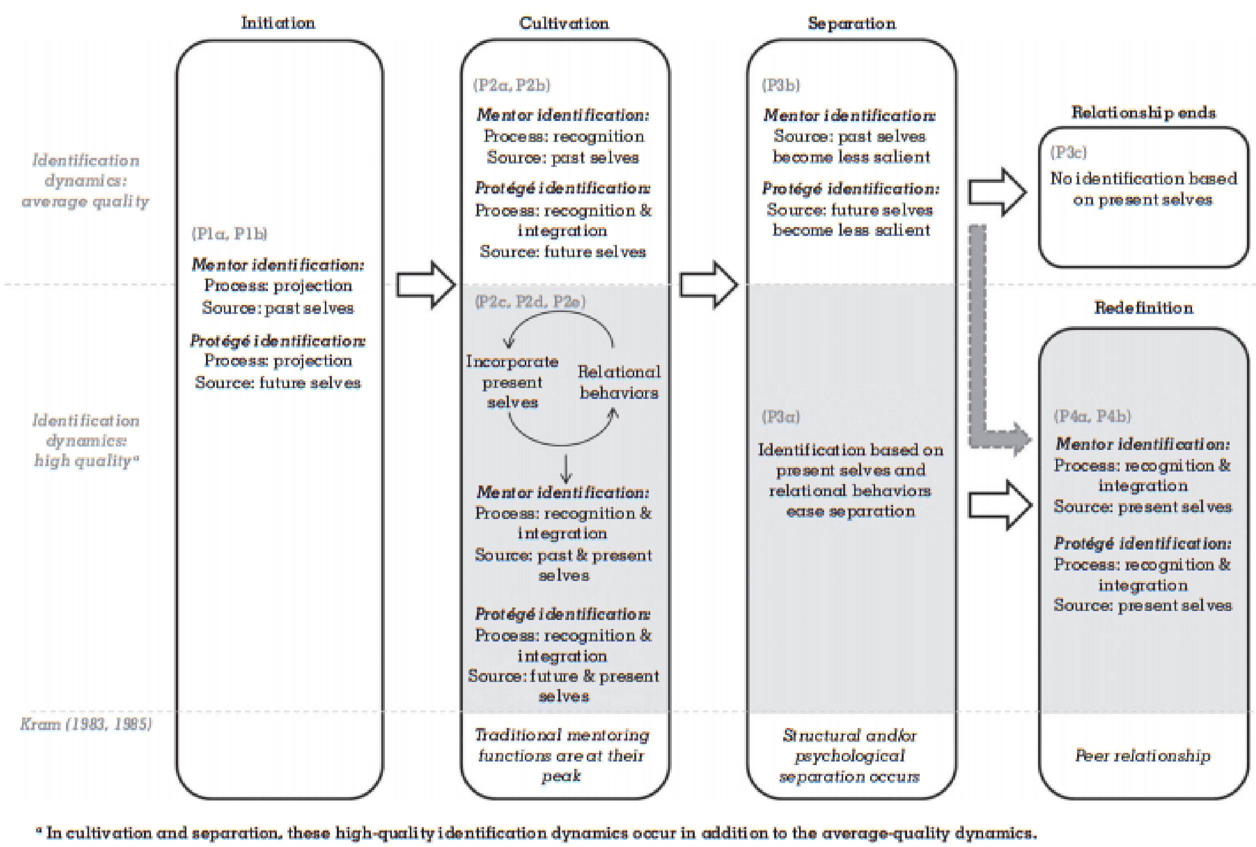
The first phase of mentoring relationships is initiation and many researchers have found that identifying a mentor is critical to both the formation and sustainment of the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985; Ragins and Kram, 2007). Humberd and Rouse (2016) developed this idea further by outlining four constructs which relate to identifying mentors and mentees: personal identification, source of identification, identification mechanisms, and strength of identification; these ideas are a explained below (p.440).

Figure 3 Overview of Personal Identification in Mentoring

Construct	Definition	Applied to Mentoring
Personal identification	A process by which individuals realize cognitive overlap between the self and other over time in a relationship	Interactions that involve discovery and disclosure propel the process of personal identification throughout the phases of mentoring.
Sources of identification	The repertoire of selves from which one identifies with the other *Past selves:* An individual's view of who he or she used to be *Present selves:* An individual's view of who he or she is now *Future selves:* An individual's view of who he or she might become	For the protégé: Future and present selves are most salient For the mentor: Past and present selves are most salient
Identification mechanisms	The mechanisms that explain how cognitive overlap between self and other is realized *Projection:* An individual ascribes aspects of him/herself onto the other. *Recognition:* An individual recognizes shared aspects of self with the other. *Integration:* An individual incorporates aspects of the other into his or her own self, changing his/her sense of self to be more similar to the other.	Each identification mechanism is available to both the protégé and mentor throughout the relationship; however, the phases of mentoring, the person's role within the relationship, and the quality of the mentoring relationship itself likely influence which mechanisms are available to whom and when.
Strength of identification	The amount of cognitive overlap one perceives between the self and other, which relates to behavioral indicators of quality	*Overidentification:* Too much identification, which leads to dysfunctional mentoring relationships *Underidentification:* Too little identification, which has little, if any, impact on the quality of the mentoring relationship *Optimal identification:* Enough identification to enable and reinforce average- and high-quality mentoring relationships

While the personal identification, sources of identification, identification mechanism, and strength of identification are all developed concepts with rational explanations and examples; culture, and the biases and assumptions which it involves must also be considered when discussing personal identification in mentoring, especially considering concepts like “self” are often created within the context of culture (Fletcher, 2012). Additional research has found that from a mentee’s perspective, the observational learning from mentoring influences their behaviors and activities to more closely match those of their mentors, which essentially turns mentors into role models that mentees want to be like in the future (Campbell, 2007). From the perspective of a mentor, mentees can be seen as younger versions of themselves if they can identify with them enough (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Humberd and Rouse (2016) have created a model for personal identification of mentors which also outlines the phases of informal mentoring relationships (p.444).

Figure 4 A Model of Personal Identification in the Phases of Informal Mentoring



Again, being mindful of culture at the identification stage of the mentoring relationship is important; as an ethnocentric phenomenon, being highly sensitive to cultural and societal differences between participants is needed to avoid potential mis-matches and the resulting low-quality mentoring relationships (Schlosser et al., 2011

After a mentoring relationship is initiated, usually something happens between the mentor and mentee. This time after initiation is often called “cultivation” and is researched in terms of quality and the behaviors involved. The “cultivation” phase can exist in many different ways in which a mentor and mentee interact; thus instead of attempting to define the abundance of ways interactions can happen, researchers have strived to identify the characteristics of these interactions in terms of quality. Dutton and Heaphy (2003) explore the quality of mentor relationships and define quality in this context as “the degree of positivity of the subjective, emotional experience of both parties in the relationship” (as cited by Humberd and Rouse, 2016, p.436). This positive experience refers to the sustainability of the relationship over time and the effort exerted by partners in the relationship (Allen, Eby, and Lentz, 2006). Ragins (2012) proposes three categories: dysfunctional, traditional, and relational, to describe the quality of mentoring relationships based on relational mentoring theory. To be classified as dysfunctional, a mentoring relationship must be of low quality, this type or relationship might also include sabotaging or bullying (Eby and McManus, 2004). Average quality is expected from traditional mentoring relationships, which are characterized by the mentee receiving career and psychosocial support from the mentor (Kram, 1985). Finally, relational mentoring relationships are those of high quality, in which both mentees and mentors benefit in terms of mutual learning, growth, and career development (Ragins, 2012). Even though there are different levels of quality, since quality is dynamic, it can change with time and also with the different mentoring interactions which occur between the mentor and mentee.

Instead of thinking about quality of relationships in terms of categories, others have investigated the components of the relationships such as the strength of the ties, taking into consideration interests and preferences (Deutsch and Spencer, 2009), emotional attunement (Allen et al., 2003), and a context of being goal-oriented and achieving tasks (Rhodes, 2017) in terms of explaining the quality of mentoring relationships. Opengart and Bierema (2015) explore the role of emotional intelligence with regard to successful mentoring relationships to find that there are theoretical and practical synergies which can be applied to mentors and mentees to the ends of improving the quality of mentoring relationships. Amah (2017) has also found that relational energy, defined as the increased levels of psychological resourcefulness which comes from interpersonal interactions which can enhance someone's ability to do work, is another key factor in high quality mentor relationships. The complex nature of how humans interact will always involve a margin of error when considering definitions of "quality" for a social construction such as a relationship since peoples' feelings, experiences, and memories are unique and constantly subject to change. Even though these components to ensure mentor-mentee compatibility are important, it's also noteworthy that having a specific goal, outside of creating an emotional connection, can help prevent mentor relationships from being counterproductive (Hamilton and Hamilton, 2005). This also helps to bring the understanding of "quality" into practical terms of creating, producing, or developing something outside of the realm of emotions and feelings.

Another way to learn about the cultivation phase of mentoring relationships, besides looking at the relationships in terms of quality, is to consider the behaviors involved between the mentor and mentee. On the behavioral level and within formal mentor relationships, there have been several studies which have identified effective and ineffective mentor and mentee behaviors. While DeCastro (2013) provided the general personal characteristics of accessibility and altruism for good mentors, Cull (2006) provided more specific examples of effective mentor behaviors which revolve around "positive mentoring"; these highlight specific desired behaviors for mentors: offering a safe place where mentees can share their interests and goals, supporting by listening, able to ask the right questions, guiding the mentee to find the answers to their own problems, and offering wisdom, tools and techniques, cutting-edge thinking, knowledge, mental models, creative ideas, challenges, and stimulation. These behaviors are similar to those described by Devojine and Harris (2001) as: creating a safe atmosphere, listening and not judging, concentrating on listening, agreeing on objectives instead of approaches, and being appreciative of differences. Instead of looking at the behaviors involved in mentoring relationships, Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) identified the abilities and skills which good mentors should possess: awareness of self and behavior, using trust, focus, empathy, empowerment, and congruence to manage the relationship, building and keeping rapport, communicating effectively by means of listening, silence, observation, parallel processing, projecting, observing and exiting, in addition to goal clarity, flexibility, conceptual modelling, and active listening and questioning. Other characteristics desired in mentors include encouraging the voice of the mentee, recognizing the mentees' developmental space, emphasizing positive development, celebrating the mentee throughout the mentorship experience, and the ability to engender trust and the ability to tactfully introduce conflict (Daloz, 1999). While these behaviors may be viewed as guidelines or suggestions for mentors to keep in mind during the mentoring process to help improve the chances of a successful mentor-mentee relationship, it is not clear how important these behaviors are individually or in groups when considering their contribution to the success of a mentoring relationship. These lists do provide insights into the behaviors, abilities, and skills of (successful) mentors, but the context of the mentor relationship is excluded from this approach. Healy (1990) points-out the potential biased sampling in research involving positive behaviors associated with mentoring experiences as people tend to focus more on relationships with positive outcomes. It is not clear if the absence of these behaviors will lead to an unsuccessful mentoring relationship or simply shift the degree of "success" of the relationship. It is also not clear the importance of these specific behaviors with regard to the phases of the mentoring relationship or if they change over time.

As the process view of mentoring relationships started with initiation, then cultivation, and finally separation, there is a final stage known as redefining the relationship. This acknowledges an end to the mentoring relationship and leaves the door open for another type of relationship, such as collegial, or not, in which case there is no relationship. For this research project, this stage will not receive a lot of attention, because it is beyond the scope of the study.

Self-Initiated Expatriate Workers

While mentoring has widely been accepted as a time-tested approach to development and received regular attention by scholars, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) have not received much attention by academics because nearly all expatriate academic research has mainly been conducted through business organizations which send employees abroad (Suutari et al., 2018). While there is existing research regarding SIEs, most modern scholars acknowledge that there remain vast areas regarding SIEs that can be researched further (Doherty, 2013; Brauch et al., 2016; Andresen, Wilson, and Hippler, 2020; Suutari et al., 2018). Suutari and Brewster (2000) note that there are primarily two ways of gaining international employment: through being relocated abroad by your existing organization as an assigned expatriate (AE) or through independently becoming employed abroad and working directly for a new employer abroad as a self-initiated expatriate (SIE). The number of SIEs in the workforce have been increasing as a result of online recruitment systems that reduce the cost and increase the ease of advertising posts internationally, increasingly international job markets, and an overall increase in people getting international experience through traveling, working and studying abroad (Suutari et al., 2018). Organizational benefits of selecting SIEs instead of using AEs include lower costs, increased retention, that SIEs are more likely to be internationally oriented, and SIEs have reduced risks associated with failed assignments (Furusawa and Brewster, 2019; Jannesari et al., 2020). While limited, much of the existing SIE research focuses on the definition, organizational support, and development involved with this unique group of expatriates.

Defining and Making Sense of SIEs

In contrast to AEs, who are relocated abroad by their organizations, SIEs are defined as individuals who make the decision to leave, of their own initiative, and to work and live-in foreign countries (Suutari and Brewster, 2000). Crowley-Henry (2007) add to this definition that SIEs seek employment abroad of their own initiative and are then recruited, in the host country, as local hires. The choice that SIEs make to move abroad (Hussain and Deery, 2018) has been studied in terms of understanding the key role that "initiative" plays in making sense of SIEs (Andresen and Margenfeld, 2015). SIEs have been considered a special form of expatriation which includes sojourners, retirees, students, work-non-workers (Pedersen et al., 2011), migrants (Andresen et al., 2014), and international business travellers (Mayrhofer et al., 2012). Further research to better understand SIEs, especially in terms of initiative, is widely desired as the characteristics of being self-starters, proactive, and persistent have been attributed to SIEs as defining characteristics already (Frese and Fay, 2015; Andresen, Pattie, and Hippler, 2020).

Organizational and other Support for SIEs

Organizational support has been identified as a key factor which helps to mitigate the chance of failure for expatriates (Merignac and Roger, 2012; Khedher and Asadullah, 2020). Chaiburu and Harrison (2008) note that the three main domains for support can be understood as work (organization), family, and the community, in terms of social support agents. Three main sources of organizational support for expatriates have also been identified as: the employing organizations, host country national supervisors, and multinational enterprises (McDonnell and Scullion, 2013; Singh et al., 2021). Assigned expatriates are often supported by the multinational organization through their relocation for their overseas assignments (Andresen, Biemann, and Pattie, 2015); while SIEs are charged with arranging new employment for themselves overseas without organizational support from the start (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Bernaud et al (2016) note that the perceived organizational support is directly linked to the behaviors and attitudes adopted by employees in the workplace.

Other scholars have also found that when organizational support is perceived as positive expatriates have increased organizational commitment (Guzzo et al., 1992), improved adjustment to the country and to work (Kraimer et al., 2001), and intentions to stay on the assignment (Gillet et al., 2012). The lack of organizational support from the sponsoring organization has made it more relevant for the role of bonding capital (co-cultural colleagues, family, etc.) to understand the support SIEs have in their psychological adjustment and success on their assignments (He et al., 2019). After a meta-analysis of social support literature, van der Laken et al. (2019) note that the research involving SIEs is underexplored.

SIE Development

As the concept of SIEs is still relatively modern, there remains very little research exploring SIE development. Jokinen et al. (2008) note that while SIE professional development is considered positive, SIEs still might face more limited opportunities for advancement and career development than AEs. Due to SIEs deciding themselves to move abroad and work for a new employer, they are considered to show substantial career agency (Suutari et al., 2018). SIEs often are more motivated to understand the local culture and to interact with host country nationals than AEs which leads to greater cross-cultural adjustment in SIEs (Furusawa and Brewster, 2019). SIEs have also been found to display higher levels of worldly competences as a result of their experiences working and living in various cultural environments (Bozionelos and Singh, 2017).

The literature available for review regarding SIEs is limited due to the lack of attention that this growing branch of expatriate employees has attracted, but many scholars now identify the increasing popularity and importance of SIEs and the need for increased research relating to SIEs (Meur et al., 2019; Zhang and Lauring, 2019; van der Laken et al., 2019). Considering an estimated two thirds of expatriates in the Western world are self-initiated, the growing importance of understanding this group of workers continues to increase (Khedher and Asadullah, 2020).

Summary

The goal of this chapter is to review the existing literature regarding mentoring and self-initiated expatriates in order to create a robust awareness of what scholars have already found regarding these topics. After reviewing the history of mentoring, two prevalent models used to make sense of mentoring relationships are presented: a developmental relationship involving challenge and support and another model which includes the two elements of the type of relationship (hierarchical or linear) and the type of skills development that is achieved. Then the characteristics of mentoring relationships are outlined in terms of formality (formal and informal), hierarchy (traditional mentoring, peer mentoring, reverse mentoring), number of participants (dyadic mentoring and group mentoring), a key theoretical model used to make sense of mentoring (social exchange theory), and modern conceptualizations of mentoring (circle mentoring, co-mentoring, mentoring communities, collaborative mentoring).

Next, mentoring relationships were discussed in terms of individual episodes, and then as relationships which have an initiation (personal identification, source of identification, identification mechanisms, and strength of identification), cultivation (quality of the experience, characteristics of successful mentors and mentees). The marginalized group of self-initiated expatriates has only received scant attention with respect to mentoring by scholars. This thesis strives to remedy this gap in the literature through exploring the mentoring relationships between self-initiated expatriate employees through participatory action research. Next, the approach to exploring mentoring relationships will be outlined through presenting the ontological foundations and the selected methods to highlight how inquiry into the research context will occur.

Chapter 3: Inquiring into the Research Context, Stories of Cycles of Action Research, Reflection, and Sensemaking

Introduction

While the previous chapter reviewed the literature and provided examples of how researchers have created new knowledge about SIEs and mentoring relationships, this chapter will provide an overview of the research paradigm and theoretical foundations that inform the "the research design, validity, reliability, sample population, test instruments, and implementation phases" involved with inquiring into the research context (Faryadi, 2019, p.769). More important than listing what the methods that are used is why those methods were chosen. The rationale for why a qualitative research methodology is used is discussed, in terms of the research paradigm, in addition to the reasons why a social constructionist approach is used. Then participatory action research is discussed as a method of inquiry, the implications of being an insider researcher, and the emergent process of data generation and collection are also outlined. The topics of rigor, reliability, validity, and triangulation are then introduced, followed by a summary.

Selecting the approach to inquiry, the research methodology, begins with outlining the theoretical underpinnings of the research so that the context, especially in social scientific research, can be clear. All research methodologies have the goal of facilitating the finding of answers to the study's research questions (Faryadi, 2019). Bell (2010) asserts that the decisions which lead to choosing a research methodology depend on the type of inquiry and what type of information is explored. Punch (2009) offers the two viewpoints of the positivist and interpretive, which broadly differ in terms of understanding the nature of philosophic inquiry, and are defined by their own assumptions and key characteristics. While traditionally, a specific ontology, epistemology and methodology accompany these two perspectives (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), a more modern approach is to view such paradigms as belief systems which link researchers to a specific worldview (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Smith et al. (2009) also note that different paradigms exist relating to research, specifically in matters of epistemology and ontology, describe beliefs, perceptions, assumptions and the nature of truth and reality. Considering research papers and theses are mere representations of research processes, experiences/experiments, and findings, clarifying the researchers' beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and how the researcher regards truth and reality is a vital part of the sensemaking process involved with evaluating the research and verifying that researcher biases are exposed, understood, and minimized (Smith et al., 2009).

A thorough understanding of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research project are essential, because as noted by Hatch and Cunliffe (2006), different paradigms are what lead researchers to study phenomena in different ways and result in the creation of different types of knowledge. For research involving social sciences, the idea of ontology can refer to the nature of reality in terms of an objective reality that really exists or a subjective reality which is created in people's minds (Blaikie, 1993). Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) further elaborate on this concept by asking if reality only exists through the experience of it (subjectivism) or does reality exist independently from those who live it (objectivism). These perspectives of reality have profound implications for research in terms of how research is approached and the assumptions involved; therefore, it's vital to share the researchers' ontological orientation with research so that the reader can understand the context and the choices made during the research design, implementation, and write up. While there are various options which can be considered in terms of the worldview and methodology for academic research, socially constructed ideas like relationships (which are created in the mind of the individual based on one's own experiences, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs) are inherently subjective as the reality of relationships' existence is very difficult to prove independently from those who live it.

Accepting this subjectivism as a fundamental aspect of what this thesis strives to explore invites an interpretive paradigm because it facilitates seeking insights into experiences and the perceptions and understandings of participants through uncovering their realities (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). This worldview also lends itself to qualitative methods due to the nature of qualitative inquiry which involves interpretation, contextualization, and understanding the perspectives of participants (Faryadi, 2019). The researcher's thinking along these lines is informed by how existing research publications have approached understanding mentoring relationships. Qualitative methods have been recognized by numerous studies as the most appropriate way of inquiring into how mentoring involves enabling individuals to enhance self-esteem midcareer, providing opportunities for personal and professional development, and transferring values and experiences to others; understanding and identifying emotions and feelings occurring in mentoring relationships; fostering the personal and professional growth and learning of mentees, inspiring, empowering, generating synergy, increasing innovation, greater individual performance, productivity and achievement (Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka, 2009; Cypress, 2020; Maritz et al., 2013). These examples provide a clear justification for the use of qualitative methods to explore mentoring relationships' impact on employee development.

Approaches to Researching Mentoring

The decision to use qualitative methods is appropriate for not only the research paradigm, but also to answer the research question since they involve exploring relationships between people which can be complex and nuanced. This decision was also aimed at remedying the identified lack of qualitative research in the field of human resource management (Al-Emadi et al., 2015). Qualitative inquiry also allowed for the consideration of personal elements like feelings and emotions, which may not easily be measured accurately using quantitative methods. In addition, qualitative methodologies are gaining popularity in commercial research due to their more in-depth analysis and the provision of additional context (Esomar, 2008).

There is open acceptance that commercial qualitative research inevitably involves interpretation, judgement and business advice on the part of the researcher and, in this sense, it is reinforcing its role as research consultancy rather than "pure" research (Keegan, 2005, 2006, 2008; Ereaut, 2002). This shift in mindset for research in commercial and business contexts is highlighted by the departure from "expert researchers" who are expected to be entirely unbiased and neutral when researching consumers to the more current perspective which involves a researcher-consumer relationship centered around co-creating research outcomes (Keegan, 2009*).* This shift from the empirical "unbiased observer" model to a social constructionist approach in which people interpret the world, instead of passively absorbing facts and reality, creates the foundation for modern research methodologies and practical research outcomes. This thesis furthers this qualitative trend in commercial and business research by adopting a social constructionist approach and methodologies which are compatible with this paradigm.

How can you start to understand a relationship between two people? You can start by defining what a relationship is, but even the definition from Merriam Webster of "a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings" is very abstract and open to interpretation. The two people involved in a mentoring relationship could have completely different experiences in the relationship. As social science explores the realm of people's thoughts, opinions, beliefs and feelings and away from scientific facts, so too must shift the approach of how knowledge is created. Social constructionism offers an appropriate lens through which to explore mentoring relationships and their effect on development.

Knowledge itself, which originated from human relationships considering what is true, scientific, rational, and moral, cannot be determined unless there is more than one person to provide a dialogue and a context (Bradbury, 2015). This idea, known as social constructionism, traces its roots back to the

19th Century in response to the dominating positivist view of science which was prevalent after The Enlightenment which was explicitly based on the assertion that there is no knowledge beyond individuals' interpretations of reality which are completely subjective and intersubjective (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2007). This ontological position, according to Cunliffe (2008), states that the only way to interpret societal processes is to interpret them based on how people understand and construct their own actions and reality and thus rejects the idea that true and objective facts and laws on human behavior can ever be realized. This bears relevance to this study because throughout the data collection process, the participants and researcher do not seek a set of rules which, if followed, always lead to development; instead, the research is seen as an exploration of topics and sensemaking through increasing awareness of one's own actions and reality; thus, leading to a better understanding of oneself and others. The individuals' sense-making of reality involves one's surroundings (ways of talking about experience, language used) and negotiating some type of collective meaning and the impact and nature of that collective meaning (Rosenthal and Peccei, 2006).

This view allows the research to explore SIE development and mentoring relationships through striving to understand the experiences and perspectives of the individuals involved by acknowledging that social interactions are defined by the people who experience them and understood in the context of the society, or social structures around them. Social constructionism allows for such a perspective as it provides "a philosophical framework which focuses on the processes of understanding and addressing social change in the postmodern society" (McNamee, 2006; as cited by Camargo-Borges and Rasera, 2013, p.2). The introduction of social change here moves beyond the theoretical benefits of research into the practical outcomes of such lines of inquiry; in this thesis, the social change refers to how exploring mentoring relationships will lead not only to changes in how people understand mentoring, but also in how they practice it. Gergen and Gergen (2012) note that through using this approach, meanings can be socially constructed through the coordination of people in their various interactions, thus making meanings constantly fluid and dynamic. This idea is exemplified in how people use social comparisons to other people, events, and situations to frame and contextualize their experiences; thus, the bad advice given by a mentor might later be viewed as good advice depending on circumstances and other variables, and vice versa.

Some of the results of this deconstruction of fixed beliefs and using a social constructionism approach to understand how knowledge is created parallels how self-initiated expatriates must adjust and adapt to new cultures and work environments. This process of adaptation can involve innovative outcomes which include an emphasis on diversity of perspectives (and not commonalities of ideas), transdisciplinary teams, focusing on what is working well instead of problems and how to solve them, decentralized decision making, and additional flexibility in terms of policies and approaches, all the while being informed by an environment that is both polyphonic and multicultural (Camargo-Borges and Rasera, 2013). For this thesis, it will be necessary to shift away from proving and persuading others that one interpretation of a phenomenon is correct, which opens up the possibilities of improved understanding through dialogue, communication, and the integration of perspectives among participants (Camargo-Borges and Rasera, 2013).

In line with using a qualitative lens of enquiry in a social constructionist approach, the belief prevails that knowledge is not discovered, but constructed by everyday life's subjective and intersubjective realities (Andrews, 2012). This approach and this theoretical foundation is suitable for researching mentoring relationships because it recognizes that reality is not constructed in isolation from within a person, but from the social realm (Burr, 1995). The setting for the research is a firm in China and as Kemeny (2002) has noted, an organization is like a society itself, because through interpersonal interactions it changes, evolves, and sustains. The goal of researchers using this approach is not to focus on what social reality is (because a fixed, universally shared understanding of reality doesn't exist), but to understand how people use dialogue and shape meaning between themselves

(Cunliffe, 2008). Now that the theoretical foundation of social constructionism has been discussed, the research design will be presented.

Insider Action Researcher

While considering the method of participatory action research used in this thesis, it's important to note the implications for insider action research in terms of preunderstanding, role duality, and organizational politics (Coghlan, 2007). It's also noteworthy that insider action research differs from insider research in that the focus is not only on observations and analysis conducted by an insider researcher, but also an emphasis on intervention and change (Alvesson, 2003). A key advantage for insider researchers is their access to participants and pre-existing trust which can result from existing relationships with participants. This allows for the unique opportunity to research mentoring relationships without the complications encountered by outsiders in terms of first becoming familiar with the contexts of the organization and participants. This has been referred to as "pre-understanding" which includes the background knowledge of the organization, daily work life, and the shorthand language used in the industry and organization (Coghlan and Casey, 2001). The benefits of collecting data as insider researchers are vast and include the amount of information which insiders already possess about social constructs, what is taboo and legitimate to talk about, what colleagues think about, who to turn to for information and gossip, the critical events in the organization's history, an awareness of goals and objectives beyond the superficial, and the ability to observe and participate freely without creating suspicion or drawing attention to themselves (Coghlan, 2007). While the benefits of such an intimate knowledge of organizational and social culture are many, there are also drawbacks involved with being an insider action researcher in terms of assuming too much and not probing deeply enough, being presumptive and thinking they have the answer without reframing thinking, possible hierarchical, functional, or departmental boundaries; all of which require rigorous reflection and introspection on experience on the part of the insider researcher (Argyris et al., 1985).

Another element of the insider action researcher is role duality which can involve conflicts between job goals and research goals, in addition to desired organizational outcomes and actual research outcomes (Coghlan, 2001). These have been described by Coghlan and Brannick (2001) as identification dilemmas, behavioral claims, and being caught in loyalty tugs between insider researchers' roles as a member of an organization and the role of a researcher. Adler and Adler (1987) have found that involvement with these two roles influences the relationships with fellow organizational members by adding a new dimension which sets researchers apart. The intertwined and complex network of affiliations and friendships will be influenced by the act of researching which is why managing organizational politics is one of the most important topics for insider action researchers who want to remain and progress with the organization (Coghlan, 2007).

The implications of conducting action research within one's organization can be daunting as examining everything, listening, questioning, endorsing democratic participation, and inciting action might be considered subversive in the context of organizational politics (Coghlan, 2007). The aim of action research is generating useful and valid information to the ends of facilitating informed and free choices and change, but the idea of valid information has been considered by some to be intensely political (Kakabadse, 1991). Buchanan and Badham (1999) have created a solution for this problem called becoming a 'political entrepreneur', which combines a behavior repertoire of political tactics and strategies with a self-critical and reflective perspective on how such political tools are deployed in terms of performing and backstaging. Performing in this context involves building participation for change and pursuing the change agenda publicly, rationally, and logically. Backstaging, on the other hand, involves the recruitment and maintenance of support and the reduction of resistance through intervening, influencing, and negotiating in political and cultural systems (Coghlan, 2007).

The benefits of being an insider researcher for this project outweigh the challenges; especially since development is a focus in the research, an outsider would have been under a great deal of pressure to collect data before participants left the organization. The insider's unique familiarity with understanding the existing context, also allows for the quality of collaboration and the quality of the PAR process itself and its outcomes to be higher (Shani and Pasmore, 1985); bearing in mind that constantly challenging one's own assumptions was a recurring practice both by the researcher and participants during interactions and when reflecting. In this research project, the obstacles presented by organizational politics were tempered by the organization's general disorganization and lack of staffing, which resulted from high turnover. It was also very beneficial that participants are all approximately at the same level on the organizational chart too, without any major hierarchal differences. This was able to prevent organizational politics from playing a more disruptive role in the insider action research. While a new Vice President might have come in and caused political obstacles for data collection, the absence of a replacement left a void and resulted in a lack of top-down organizational political involvement. This could have created potential problems with participant involvement, but engaging participants and keeping them motivated and interested is a convenient overlap in role duality as the researcher's position was teacher engagement and communication manager, which he implemented with an added focus on engaging and promoting communication between HQ staff as well.

While participants and the researcher work together to co-create new knowledge and action, it is the researcher who gives value to the written or oral texts and language used to understand 'reality' in the written product of research (Polkinghorne, 1988). It is through use of these data that we can understand the context, through acknowledging the personal experiences and opinions (not to be mistaken as bias), passion, explanations, and emotions which allow for a closer understanding of social relations and life (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015). To help convey a more holistic representation of the research which includes the insider researcher's perspective in terms of preunderstanding, role duality, and organizational politics, the researcher has included vignettes in this thesis. The goal of including personal experiences, thoughts and opinions is so that the reader can develop a closer understanding of the social relations, research process, and mentality of the researcher. PAR, involving insider practitioners as researchers, further advances this approach by providing a much more in-depth awareness of social relations and life within an organization through the time that the researcher/practitioner has spent living and working in that environment; the added challenge for the researcher then becomes keeping an open mind and being able to see beyond the limitations and accepted systems and norms which exist there.

Scaffolding Methods / Research Design

Participatory action research (PAR) is an approach to research which is based on reflection, data collection, and action that aims to solve a problem and create knowledge at the same time (Baum, MacDougall and Smith, 2006). PAR strives to understand the world and simultaneously make it better through action. To achieve these dual goals of creating knowledge and improvement through action, PAR creates a situation in which the researcher and participants work together to complete action research cycles which involve identifying a problem, planning, action, observation, and reflection (Hyrkas, 1997).

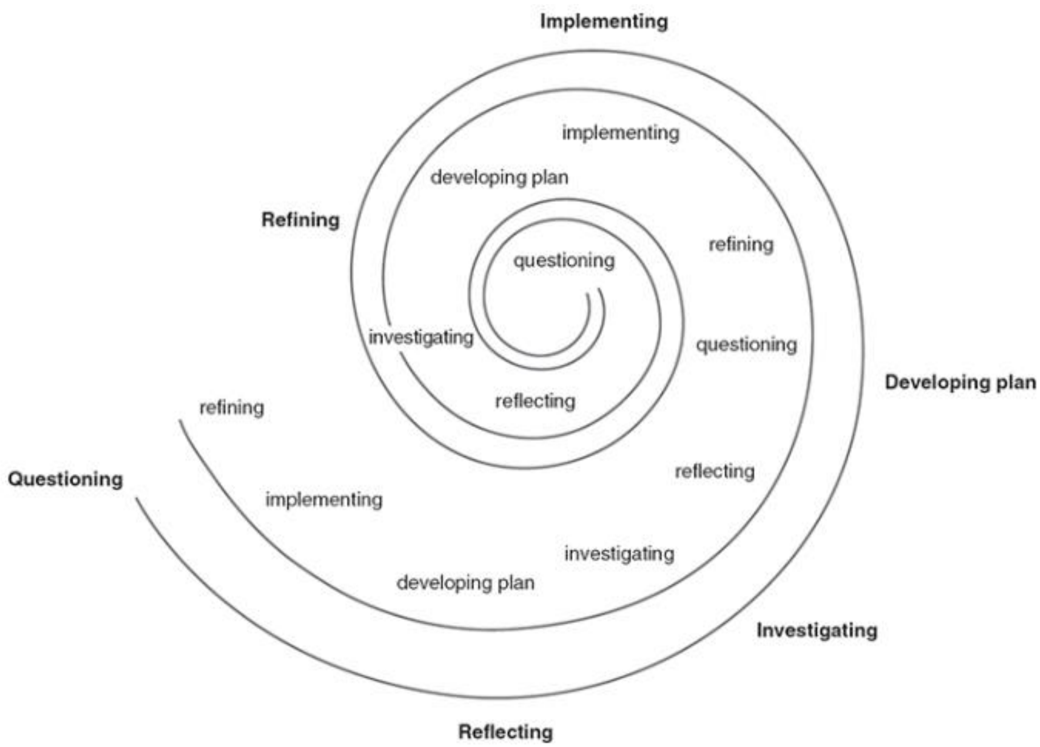
In spite of PAR not having an overarching theoretical framework, McIntyre (2008) has identified four underlying tenets which are consistent within almost all PAR projects:

- an agreed upon commitment to investigate a problem or issue
- an aspiration to engage in collective-reflection and self-reflection to better understand the problem under investigation
- a mutual decision to engage in collective or individual action that brings about a useful outcome which benefits those involved

- the cooperation between researchers and participants in the research process including planning, implementing, and distributing research tasks.

These four tenets of PAR are present in the research design of this thesis in terms of, but not limited to: participants agreeing to take part in the research project, willingness to participate in different types of interactions involving different participants, a desire to describe those interactions and make changes to them, and finally, being a part of the research process itself, including planning, analyzing data, problematizing, and seeking solutions. This process of planning, analyzing data, problematizing and seeking solutions is a recursive process in PAR that is marked by a spiral which is described by McIntyre (2008) as questioning a specific issue, reflecting on and investigating said issue, creating an action plan, and implementing and improving that plan (as outlined in the figure below).

Figure 5 Visual Depiction of the Spiraling Recursive Process in Participatory Action Research



Bergold and Thomas (2012) have also identified four fundamental principles of PAR which are democracy as a precondition of PAR, the need for a “safe space”, how the “community” of participants is defined, and the different degrees of participation. Unlike more traditional research approaches which clearly separate researcher from what’s researched, for this democratic process to be realized, collaboration and shared decision making must occur and trust is a prerequisite. In order for participants to be willing to share their personal views of the situation, their own experiences, and opinions, without fear of attack or being marginalized, a “safe space” or conflict-free space is needed (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). This is an area where being an insider researcher can have significant benefits because the preexisting relationships, and presumably trust, that can facilitate the creation of a “safe space” for research. Who the participants are and how community is defined in PAR are two other elements which vary depending on what is being studied and the scope or data collection.

A fundamental tenant of PAR is the empowerment of stakeholders, especially marginalized groups, who might normally be ignored when conducting research using a more traditional method. The degrees of participation in PAR is another aspect which involves decision-making situations in the research process and how participants participate exactly (v. Unger, 2012). Different models for participation have been created including the ladder model which stipulates that there is a continuum in which people can participate in different ways, from interviews to helping to make research decisions (Cook, 2012). While it's clear that participants must take part in the research process, one challenge of PAR is that the degree of participation is very flexible, so the onus is on the researcher to decide the appropriate ways and degrees of participation and then to be explicit in the design, implementation, and write up of the research to explain how exactly participants participated.

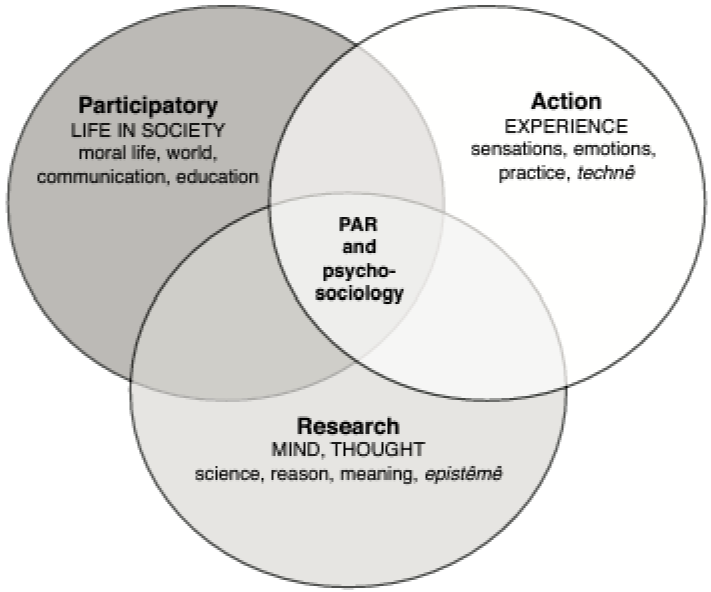
There are several distinctive features of PAR including material prerequisites, challenges, reflection, production and analysis of data, representing findings and ethical concerns (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). The idea of material prerequisites has been developed to include compensation for PAR participants, especially those who are marginalized and low-income groups, but not to the point that paid participation turns into a job (Goeke and Kubanski, 2012). This presents another advantage of insider action research, in which the researcher and participants are all employed at the same organization; the topic of payment for participation becomes less pressing since participants are already being compensated (provided that their participation occurs within their work timetable). Challenges facing PAR include replacing the presumed objectivity and neutrality of traditional research methods with an equal footing between participants and researchers which then involves reflective subjectivity. This shared participation between researchers and participants also places a large burden on participants to be able to change considerably on a personal and cognitive level during the PAR process (Evans and Jones, 2004). Reflection is a concept which has been closely tied to education, as Ryan and Ryan (2013) note, it is a key issue in both transformative and successful learning, for learners and also teachers. In the context of this thesis, the obstacles to participants embracing the idea of reflection and change on a personal and cognitive level is likely reduced because all of the participants (and the researcher) have worked in the education industry for years and "reflection" is not a new concept.

Scholars have also identified four focuses for reflection with relation to PAR including reflecting on the personal and biological dispositions and attributes of participants, reflecting on the social relationships which exist between participants, the structural reflection in the social space of the research project, and reflecting on the research process itself (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). Another distinctive feature of PAR is how data is produced and analyzed taking into consideration the co-researchers (participants) might not all have an awareness of the rituals of academic research; Cook (2012) suggested incorporating new methods of data collection as a result, including blogs, diaries, photography projects, and mapping processes, in addition to interviews focus groups, and questionnaires. Russo (2012) also notes that the multivocality and the multi-perspectivity of the representation of the findings should involve more than the traditional third person narration which is common to academic writing in an attempt to create an air of objectivity around the findings.

Finally, ethical concerns regarding PAR have been noted to include the danger of PAR being used for different purposes than stated and on an individual level the trust and closeness involved with PAR also facilitates access to deeper layers of the minds of participants and the real world which might also pose a danger if misused (Wohrer and Hocher, 2012). There are also ethical challenges associated with PAR in terms of authority, defining the issue to be explored, relationship building, addressing research questions, access to resources, deciding who will participate, who is the owner of the data generated through PAR, and how outsiders will learn about PAR projects are all examples of issues that can arise in PAR projects (McIntyre, 2008).

In addition to being a democratic approach to research based on inclusion, PAR is used in this thesis because it complements a social constructionist viewpoint through highlighting the elements of life in society (participation), experience (action), and thought (research) as illustrated by Chevalier and Buckles (2013, p.10).

Figure 6 Visual Depiction of the Elements of Participatory Action Research



This approach is effective for studying mentoring relationships because the relationship itself requires participation by those involved to exist, the experience (or episodes) between the mentor and mentee can be viewed as the action, and co-creating new knowledge and ways of understanding mentoring relationships through collaboration between researcher and participants constitutes research in this model. The shared focus on narratives of progress, improved dialogue, communication, and integration of perspectives are also attributes that PAR and a social constructionist view have in common (Camargo-Borges and Rasera, 2013).

The benefits of using PAR in this thesis are that it connects theory with practice in that the researcher can play the role of a catalyst in contributing to the creation of new academic knowledge and empower participants at the same time resulting in positive change on many levels (Milofsky, 2006). From an organizational perspective, PAR is also highly regarded due to its ability to demonstrate contributions to institutions, employees, and communities through the participation of stakeholders in research (Pain, 2006). The application of PAR as a methodology which calls for democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, and citizenship is not widely practiced in China, which adds to the importance of using PAR for this thesis as a way to achieve goals on an individual, group, and organizational level and to exemplify the benefits of inclusion in all aspects of research (Taylor and Fransman, 2003).

The Benefits of PAR to Study Mentoring Relationships

Since its inception, the goal of PAR is to empower people and communities which participate in projects through making sure their voices are heard and their goals lead the research process and outcomes (Webster-Deakin, 2020). In the context of researching mentoring relationships, the departure from the positivist research perspective that states the goal of researchers is trying to find a "god's eye view" of complete truth and objectivity, creates a space for self-exploration for the researcher and participants. Instead of a figure of authority and power, the role of the researcher shifts to that of a facilitator or a guide for the exploration of the group.

The combination of the "knowing" from the researcher and the "practicing" from the practitioner leads to a space for collaborative dialogue which has the potential to be more focused and productive as a result of insider researchers' background knowledge of the problem and participants (Marcos and Denyer, 2012). There are numerous other benefits of PAR for the researcher, participants, and the larger community/organization and academia when considering the exploration of mentoring relationships. The instant applicability of the experience of action research, for which the approach builds new knowledge in practice through "conventional wisdom", is an immediate advantage (Aguinis et al., 2009). This was noted by Pratt (2000) as PAR's goal being not to just analyze or describe social reality, but to actively change it; so it's not only about learning more about mentoring relationships, this research will strive to develop these relationships in practice. In terms of PAR in this thesis, the benefits include academic value and the practical application of the knowledge created by this thesis, the collaborative efforts between researchers and participants/practitioners throughout the participatory action research process (design, implementation process, and analysis) which allow for both researchers and practitioners (and the organization) to benefit from improved decision making, raising awareness, collaborative working, and empowerment (Harris and Callan, 2013; Hansson et al., 2017). Even the role of researcher does not need to end with the research itself; through engaging and interacting with the participants in the research, the researcher can also have a significant impact on research participants themselves which extends beyond the thesis itself (Parsons and Brown, 2002).

Challenges of PAR in the Context of This Research Project

As with any research methodology, there are challenges; one common drawback of using participatory action research is that while it may have one clear starting point, it does not include a clearly defined end point (Mertler, 2011). To address this issue, a clear starting point and ending point have been included in the research design. Based on the high-turnover rates of SIEs and the limited sample size of SIEs, a three-month period was selected for data collection to have the highest chance of involving the most SIE participants possible with the highest chance of completing data collection. Another noteworthy challenge is that action research requires a dual role of researcher and change facilitator, which can result in difficulty balancing staff participation and enhancing professional learning, with conducting rigorous research (Roth et al, 2007; Marshall et al., 2010). To help mitigate this challenge, the researcher has strived to read about other examples of PAR and coordinated closely with the doctoral tutor who also had excellent suggestions involving most recent literature to guide the researcher through this process. To mitigate ethical considerations, the codes of behavior and guidelines created by professional organizations to assist community-based research projects and the ethical considerations below have been referenced in the participant information sheet and discussed with participants (Trimble and Fisher, 2005).

- Participants engage in all aspects of the project.
- Practitioners have an appreciation of the capacity for individuals to work together to effect change.
- Practitioners participate with participants in the overall PAR process, contributing resources and knowledge when necessary.
- Attention is given to reducing barriers between participants and practitioners of participatory action research. That includes co-construction of consent procedures, documentation of data, and ensuring that the language used in the research project is understood by participants.
- Participants are encouraged to learn about research methods that are appropriate to the project.
- Practitioners make a distinction between professional ethical considerations and contextually specific ethical considerations, which can be negotiated and modified to best serve the participants.
- Practitioners take every precaution to protect the confidentiality, privacy, and identity of participants.

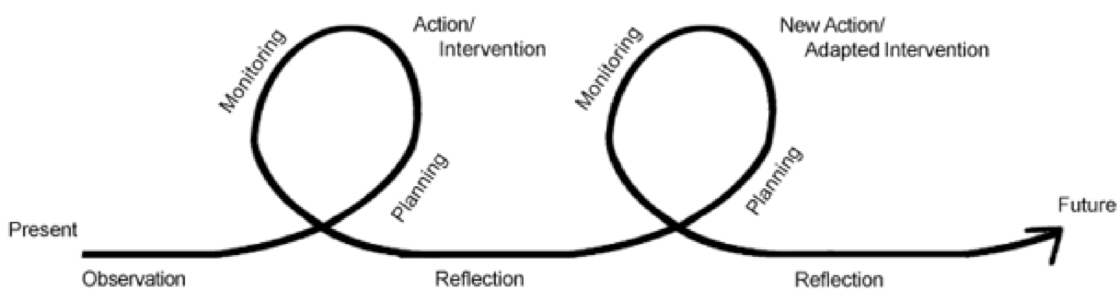
- Practitioners do not disseminate any research data without the explicit consent of those involved.
- Practitioners are trustworthy; scrupulous in their efforts to give primacy to participants' goals; responsible for the well-being of all involved; fair, just, and willing to relinquish their agendas if they conflict with participants' desires.

Even though there are challenges associated with PAR, the guidelines provided by the University of Liverpool as part of the ethics approval process contains a significant overlap in terms of these considerations and also provides support to the researcher, participants, and supporting institution through a very thorough and well documented ethics approval process.

Modality of Data Capture PAR

Now that the history, benefits, and challenges associated with PAR have been discussed in the context of mentoring relationships, the modality of data capture will be introduced. As noted, PAR is a model which uses several planned interventions (actions) to help a group understand and explain a social phenomenon (Myers, 1997). During this repetitive process, the researcher and participants continuously diagnose, intervene, and reflect to create knowledge on an individual and organizational level (Nosek, 2007). This has been articulated visually by Lukusa et al. (2015) in the visual below.

Figure 7 Visual Depiction of the Repetitive Process of Participatory Action Research



Participatory action research was the best way to explore mentoring relationships' impact on SIE professional development due to the personal, complex, and dubious nature of the relationships involved and the ability of action research to create knowledge or theory from action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001). Furthermore, due to the inclusion of the participants in the planning, taking action, evaluating that action, and repeating these steps of the process, the creation of knowledge has been largely guided democratically by the participants and researcher (Hyrkas, 1997).

Data Collection

In the realm of qualitative data collection, it's important to consider that people experience the same set of circumstances differently. A popular reference to this is the film Rashomon, in which four people witnessed a crime yet each had contradictory descriptions of the event (Kurosawa, 1950). It is widely accepted that how data is collected should take the ontological, epistemological, and methodological approaches into consideration. In the case of PAR, it's important to realize that data can generated from a variety of sources like conversations, interviews, focus groups, notes, and emails (James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam, 2008). This more holistic approach to data collection and analysis recognizes that when participants share in the PAR research process, different tools must be used to delve deeply into the social environments to understand human motivations. James, Milenkiewicz, and

Bucknam (2008) note that these approaches are especially effective when used to answer questions about meaning (the significance of situations held in people's minds), context (which always influences understanding whether in terms of a personal or community context), understanding of process (the planning and implementation phases must both be considered when evaluating success and failure of programs), and casual relationships (life within a community is made up of complex situations involving cultural and societal mechanisms and understanding how these relationships are connected requires a range of diverse opinions and a strong chain of logic).

In this thesis there are three primary sources of data collection which occur cyclically for three months: one on one interviews, focus groups, and observations of mentoring meetings. In addition, participants are encouraged to write reflective journals and the researcher maintains field notes and a reflective journal throughout the PAR process. In-depth interactions are developed to help provide the initial direction for planning the actions of the PAR cycle. They also serve as a way for participants to reflect on their experience and discuss notes from their reflective journals. These interactions range from semi-structured, using broad questions: *What does the word "mentoring" mean to you? Why would you say that there is or isn't mentoring happening in this organization?* to involving spontaneous questions created to explore participants' perceptions and ideas regarding their experiences with the actions involved with the research project and topics of mentor-mentee interactions, level of formality with mentoring, self-initiated expatriates, and professional development (Brown et al., 2015). It's noteworthy that these interactions are different from interviews in that collaboration and sharing is not one-sided. The researcher contributes to the dialogue established during these interactions through active listening and sharing insights and his own experiences as well. The focus group meetings with all participants provide an opportunity for member checking, to ensure descriptive validity, and to serve as an opportunity to develop emergent themes, identify conceptual boundaries, refine ideas, and to decide the actions to be undertaken as a collective group with the focus of exploring mentoring relationships (Charmaz, 2000). The primary sources of data are collected through audio recordings of the interactions (which were transcribed later), artifacts involved with preparation for interactions, field notes from interactions with participants, and several computer files which participants and the researcher developed during interactions as part of the data analysis process.

Developing Rigor, Reliability, Validity (Trustworthiness) and Triangulation

Research is predicated on finding answers to questions. The degree of quality in those answers is often demonstrated through rigor, reliability, and validity. Reliability and validity have been viewed as central components of qualitative research, and as Morse et al. (2002; as cited by Cypress, 2017) suggest, that to actively attain validity and reliability, "strategies for ensuring rigor must be built into the qualitative research process per se not to be proclaimed only at the end of the inquiry" (p.256). Before rigor can be built into the research process, it must be defined. Rigor is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as the quality or state of being very careful, exact, or with strict precision or the quality of being accurate and thorough; Morse et al. (2002) noted that without rigor, research becomes fiction, loses its use, and is worthless. There exists a debate regarding the relevance of rigor in qualitative inquiry, due to the inherent subjectivity involved with qualitative research, the quantitative bias involved with the concept of rigor (Davies and Dodd, 2002), and the inherent alignment of validity and reliability with the positivist viewpoint (Rolfe, 2006). Some researchers, like Krefting (1991), were completely opposed to using quantitative labels because qualitative research involves such a different process than quantitative research. A more widely accepted alternative was that the ideas of reliability and validity, in the context of qualitative research, should be replaced by the idea of "trustworthiness" (Lincoln and Guba, 1982).

While conceptually, trustworthiness referred to authenticity, quality, and truthfulness of qualitative research findings, the goal was to instill confidence and degrees of trust for the readers examining the results (Cypress, 2017). Others have viewed trustworthiness as a rubric to judge the quality of research design (Yin, 1994), a way to address methods to ensure that the research process is carried out correctly (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), and as parallel to the empiricist ideas of reliability, external validity, and objectivity (Manning, 1997). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness, also described as reliability and validity, will take into consideration the four criteria of trustworthiness: transferability, confirmability, dependability, and credibility.

Cyprus (2017) highlights the common techniques for validity in qualitative research are regarding design considerations, how data are generated, analytic procedures and the presentation, all of which have been incorporated into this action research project. As the debate continues regarding how validity and reliability are defined, renamed, and reimagined in terms of qualitative research; very specific obstacles, like researcher bias, allowing one's personal views to affect how research is conducted and how data is interpreted, must be acknowledged. Reflexivity is a strategy used in this thesis to combat researcher bias through actively engaging in critical self-reflection about potential predispositions and biases brought to the qualitative study (Cypress, 2017).

By gathering first-hand information from one-to-one interactions, making researcher notes during observed pair interactions, and facilitating focus group interactions with all participants during each action research cycle, triangulation of data is achieved since multiple sets of data are gathered using different methods at a specific cycle and are used towards the same investigative ends (O'Leary, 2019). As Kaplan and Duchon (1988), note "collecting different kinds of data by different methods from different sources provides a wider range of coverage that may result in a fuller picture of the unit under study." (p.575). These main benefits of data triangulation are validation and the creation of a more robust understanding of what is researched, and this was especially useful since the research involved complex and fluid topics such as relationships. In addition, member checking (Merriam, 1998), an approach similar to bracketing Husserl (1931), will be used as a way to separate biases and assumptions from what is being researched by means of presenting the coded and analyzed data to participants so that they can evaluate if the narrative is a true reflection of what they have experienced. This thesis will allow for a thorough description of the entire research process, allowing for rigor and trustworthiness, to be considered good quality while pursuing qualitative inquiry through including the researcher's thoughts and feelings in the form of reflective vignettes (Cypress, 2017). The concept of triangulation will also be revisited again in later chapters from the context of PAR data collection in action.

Understanding the Organizational Context

On the surface, the researched organization is a Chinese online education company that is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and has its headquarters in Beijing, China; behind an impressive public profile highlighting the organization's noteworthy accomplishments are the very real and hidden problems which an insider is very aware of. While the organization boasts to be the largest online English teaching company in the world with approximately 7,000 independently contracted English teachers in the Philippines and 2,000 contracted North American English teachers teaching English through the online platform; SIEs occupy key middle management positions in the company's HQ in Beijing and their development and job functions are vital to the successful operation of the company. The importance of SIE development can be seen in the shifting job roles and responsibilities, that result from a high turnover rate, for which SIEs are not always prepared for or trained for. The problem of high turnover is not uncommon for SIEs because of the transient nature of their professional identity, but the organization can help to mitigate the challenge of = the loss of talent, skills, experience, and tacit knowledge within the organization by better understanding ways to continually develop SIEs like with mentoring relationships.

Of the roughly 300 employees working in the Beijing HQ, in areas like English lesson material development, quality assurance, teacher training, teacher engagement and communications, marketing, and management, only around 7 to 10 are not Chinese nationals. These expatriate staff members are often in middle management roles. The expertise of these expatriate foreign managers in terms of contribution to the business's competitive advantage overall is substantial; the combination of communication and English-language skills, experience in the teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) industry, and management experience are what make the expatriate staff so valuable. From proofreading and developing the English curriculum, to training, engaging, and communicating with the English speaking (and not Chinese speaking) contracted online teaching staff, to ensuring the quality of the product (online lessons), the expatriate management team are key to the business unit's ability to create and sustain a quality product. Specific examples of how this team of expats improve the product are ubiquitous and often involve communication, cultural, and detail-oriented issues. Before the expat lesson material development manager took over, there were many small issues with online teaching content which caused parent complaints, one example was the inclusion of a picture of a chemistry set on a map of a town with the words "meth lab" written below it. Apparently, a Chinese designer had selected the picture without the English skills needed to recognize that this picture was inappropriate for young learners. From the teacher training side, the initial online teacher training program consisted of five 2-hour online Skype sessions with 40+ participants in which a Chinese trainer would read PowerPoint slides in English for the entire 2 hours with limited, if any, interactions with trainees. The SIE training manager revamped the teacher training approach to include self-study autonomous resources and smaller group meetings which occurred less frequently.

SIEs often make up a unique group of individuals who have decided to leave their home countries to work abroad without a specific return date in mind. The researcher has worked as an SIE since 2008 and experienced a variety of organizations and groups of SIEs across Asia in Saudi Arabia, Russia, and South Korea before moving to China. The other SIEs employed at the researched organization also had varied backgrounds living abroad in different contexts and in different companies. At the start of the data collection phase, the average tenure for SIE staff overall in Beijing was identified as a significant organizational problem which the organization was unwilling to address directly. The highest position occupied by an SIE in Beijing was a senior vice president who departed just before data collection was set to begin, making his tenure only 6 months.

The lack of employee retention is not especially impressive for an organization that was founded in 2011, but by employing SIEs for key positions, the organization was able to benefit from their experience and expertise while the SIEs were employed there. With instability at the management level that was created by persistent turnover, the organizational problems rising from maintaining the day-to-day operations to the dubious reputation of the organization with contractors resulted directly from the lack of coordination and communication between managers and departments and the lack of required knowledge and skills needed for the constantly changing roles and responsibilities of SIEs.

In the absence of a wide-spread informal or formal mentoring program, the systemic problems with communication, internal political struggles (leading to issues like entire teams moving workspaces every few months), cultural misunderstandings, dealing with stressful situations, and feelings of isolation were common topics of discussion in passing between the SIE staff before and during this research project. The feelings of being marginalized and largely unappreciated were shared between SIEs in different departments and common in discussions and forming opinions about the organization itself. These conversations would often compare current working conditions to previously held positions in different organizations and commenting on the pros and cons of both. Even though there was a widely shared belief among the expatriate staff that the organization did not do a good job of creating a positive work environment, the status of the work environment affected some SIEs more than others. There are many possible explanations for why some SIEs employees were more able to adapt to the shifting organizational landscape better than others, but the conditions described by Ren et al. (2015) of thriving, in which a motivational state consisting of both vitality and learning experiences, was not achieved at this organization by most SIEs sustainably. While having a formal or informal mentoring system might not be able to solve all of the organizations problems, the positive aspects of mentoring involving a developmental relationship are what led this study to the question: How do mentoring relationships shape the experiences and development of self-initiated expatriates?

The Shared Context of an Insider Action Researcher – Dualism in Data collection

Insider researchers have unique considerations in terms of what Coghlan (2017) has outlined as the three major elements of insider action research which are pre-understanding, role duality, and organizational politics. Before discussing the findings in more detail, it is worth exploring the context of the insider action researcher and dualism involved in these three areas with some specific examples to illustrate how the researcher's awareness of the implications of being an insider played a role in data collection. This level of detail also supports the rigor and trustworthiness in this thesis by instilling confidence and degrees of trust through being authentic, representing quality, and being truthful (Cyprus, 2017).

Being an insider action researcher created a significant advantage in terms of pre-understanding with respect to the job, organizational context, and participants. One example of this is the "Free Trial Mentor Program" which all new overseas contractors must participate in. An outsider researcher might consider this a mentoring program worthy of time and exploration; but in reality, it involved a superior training a subordinate which is better described as "manager" or "trainer" role opposed to a mentor. This teacher training session was a single meeting designed to teach specific work skills to new contracted teachers using a slide deck and there was no preparation or follow up meeting afterwards. Anecdotal evidence from colleagues and participants was also a source of insight the insider researcher had been acquiring from the first day of employment. While this information was often questionable, it provided a clear advantage to the researcher by creating starting points for inquiry and conversations with participants. Professional and personal challenges faced by SIEs needed to be uncovered or at least acknowledged, before having hope to address these challenges. Being an insider provided almost limitless access to colleagues and participants, side conversations, social gatherings, and friendships. The relationships created within the organization by the researcher prior to and after data collection were a significant source of much more than data, but also understanding. Only when researchers can develop a holistic view of participants can they begin the sensemaking process with participants about concepts, like relationships, which participants construct.

In addition to working at the same organization which facilitates communication and understanding between insider action researcher and participants in terms of pre-understanding, there was also potential for a communication gap between researcher and practitioners, if the researcher was not an insider, (Kieser and Leiner, 2012) as discovering underlying values, conflicts, and interests might not be immediately understandable to an outsider (Nowotny, Scott, and Gibbons, 2001). On the one hand, the ubiquitous acronyms like 1v1 (one-to-one online classes), GC (group online classes), TG (teacher's guide for lessons), AA (American Academy English Teacher Program), and PH (Filipino English Teacher Program) were a language that all participants and the researcher were intimately familiar with. This facilitated communication about workplace-based problems, topics, and opportunities during the data collection process. Other concepts like "mentoring", "reflection", and "intervention" were discussed and developed throughout the data collection process to allow for a mutually agreed upon meaning of these ideas to emerge from the group (with the guidance of the researcher who helped organize participants' contributions into coherent definitions, through democratically allowing everyone to participate and then by helping to separate ideas from examples, and facilitating discussions resulting in agreed upon language to describe these ideas). This process of collaboration is essential for dispelling assumptions and making sure that the insider researcher's perceptions and opinions are elaborated and tested.

Role duality is typically understood in terms of scholar practitioner; in this instance it involves the researcher wearing two different hats of doctoral candidate conducting academic research and teacher communication and engagement manager employed by the organization. In the context of this research, there was a significant overlap in the two roles as the goal of the thesis is to create action to improve the organization and my role at the organization was to improve employee communication and engagement. The external challenge of duality was also marginalized by the disorganization of the company and the poor oversight and management of the SIEs. After the VP of North American Operations resigned and was not replaced, there was a leadership vacuum for the SIE staff. This reduced potentially disruptive organizational politics and also shocked the SIE employees who understood the importance of this research more than ever as employee turnover and changing job roles and responsibilities seemed to be a problem that even the executive level was not immune to. Internally, the researcher sought to find harmony between the two roles by seeking balance in terms of time and energy spent on work and research. Role duality also existed in the eyes of the participants. In a more literal sense, the researcher was frequently asked the question, "Who's asking?" as participants sought clarification between data collection and non-research interactions with the researcher like casual conversations at work. The structure of organized meeting dates and times for data collection helped participants to understand the dual roles of scholar practitioner as well, as the researcher was able to suggest participants talk about specific topics relating to data collection during a time allocated for data collection. In the end, role duality was mitigated by the nature of PAR in aligning workplace action and improvements with academic research, a lack of organizational politics intervening, and by having a defined timetable for data collection.

Organizational politics at Chinese companies operating in China are complex. For companies like the one researched which employ hundreds of Chinese staff and have global operations, there is the requirement for the Communist Party of China to play a role in institutional governance (Xu, 2020). In this way, the formal structure of CEO, COO, CFO, etc. has an almost duplicate structure which is called "HR". HR in this context refers to the Communist Party of China's installation of a sympathetic group of employees who play a major role in hiring, performance management and monitoring employees. Non-Chinese staff are rarely involved with this part of the organization with many not knowing that it exists at all since most events to register for the Communist Party and volunteer for Party events are all in Chinese and aimed at Chinese nationals. The implications for organizational politics are that there are two systems within most large Chinese companies, the private organizational structure and the government's Party personnel; each system has its own goals and priorities which can sometimes conflict. For SIEs working at Chinese companies, organizational politics rarely ascend to the level of involving government Party personnel. With regard to this thesis, organizational politics was limited to the SIE managers and their colleagues and reports, which included the VP of North American operations until he resigned. Without executive leadership involvement, the participants and researcher were all at approximately similar levels of authority in different departments in the organization, so organizational politics was more lateral than hierarchical. Participation was also voluntary, and the ethics approval process required participants to acknowledge that they were aware that they could cease participation at any time without any consequences.

While writing about the context of research is essentially inexhaustive when it involves people working at an organization, especially in international and intercultural situations due to the depths of technical and cultural characteristics involved, using Coghlan's (2017) three major elements of insider action research of pre-understanding, role duality, and organizational politics presents an adequate introduction to the context of research here.

Sampling Frame

When considering the research population is a limited number of SIEs at an organization, the sample must be considered carefully. Purposeful selection was used to collect data that "fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints being faced" (Patton, 2002, p.242; as cited by Reybold et al., 2013). Overall, there were approximately 15 SIEs working at the Beijing office at the start of data collection. There was a Vice President of North American Operations, a teacher training manager, teacher quality assurance manager, marketing manager, content manager, curriculum design manager, a marketing events coordinator, a marketing specialist, a quality assurance specialist, two curriculum proof-readers and three teacher trainers. From these SIEs, those who voiced intentions to leave, or who were facing other significant employment issues (unable to get a work visa) were removed from consideration. This removed seven potential participants. The Vice President of North American Operations authorized the research project but declined to participate citing a hectic work schedule and frequent travel. Excluding the researcher from the count, that left six potential participants: two from each department: content development, teacher quality assurance, and teacher training. Participants had worked at the organization already from six months to two years. Having an even number of participants was helpful so that participants could work in pairs while exploring mentoring relationships. From the 15 expatriate employees working at the organization at the start of data collection, 8 had left the organization by the end of the three-month period, one of whom was a research participant (who departed directly after data collection concluded), and two more participants had indicated their intention to leave within a month of completing the data collection process. If the duration of data collection was any longer than three months, the sample size of participants who completed all the action research cycles would have been less than 6. It is also noteworthy that all participants were male SIEs who had been living in China for 2-7 years.

Coding and Data Analysis

Thematic coding, a form of template analysis, was used to analyze data during the stages of the action research data collection process. Coded data and the initial analysis were shared with participants so they could participate in the analysis process. The themes and templates were used after data collection had ended as the basis for discussing the findings.

In qualitative inquiry, a code is a short phrase or word that can be used to symbolically assign a salient, summative, evocative, and/or essence-capturing attribute for a section of visual or language-based data (Saldana, 2016). In this action research thesis, data consisted of interview transcripts, researcher's field notes, the researcher's reflective journal, electronic documents, artifacts, and photographs of artifacts. From the very beginning, the analysis and interpretation of the study, will reflect concepts, constructs, models, language, and theories, that helped structure the study from the start (Merriam, 1998). Template analysis was selected, not only because of its uses in the "fine detail of how language constructs social reality in interaction", but also because it allows for social constructionist work to be viewed in a broader context using thematic analysis which facilitates researching emergent connections like how mentoring relationships between SIEs form and what the shared characteristics of those relationships are (Brooks et al., 2015, p.205).

The coding plan was to use a form of thematic coding called template analysis to focus on the specific themes and ideas which appeared in the transcripts of the interactions between the researcher and participants through building and developing templates which include codes and themes from different sources in all three different types of meetings throughout the action research process. The significance of action research with regard to the coding plan is that coding and analyzing data was part of each action research cycle as the participants reviewed the codes and analysis as the start of a discussion in addition to providing further coding and analysis during the group interactions. This was especially useful considering the sources of data collection involved textual transcripts (Lockett et al., 2012), focus groups (Brooks, 2014), and journal entries (Waddington and Fletcher, 2005). The analysis of the themes and codes began with the researcher and then those results were shared with the group, both for confirmation and for discussion and further analysis and development which resulted in developing, clarifying. and sometimes changes the codes. The exploration of mentoring relationships and understanding their characteristics, in terms of SIEs, provided a very complex topic to investigate. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that qualitative researchers will code data during and after collection as a tactic for analysis, because coding *is* analysis (p.56, as cited by Saldana, 2016).

Coding Implementation

In line with the procedural steps outlined by King (2012) for carrying out Template Analysis, the following steps were followed:

1. All one-to-one interactions were analyzed in terms of reviewing data from different sources, including transcripts, audio recordings, and field notes. During this process, field notes and observations were used in tandem with transcripts and audio recordings to critically evaluate interactions, concepts, and themes.
2. After preliminary coding of data (highlighting things in the text that provide understanding), themes were developed and a priori themes were used when applicable. The researcher consulted the reviewed literature for guidance during this step as well.
3. As the emerging themes were debated, clarified, and reframed during group interventions, mapping them in terms of their relation to mentoring relationships involved grouping them into clusters which related to different aspects of the mentoring relationships (communication, trust, etc.).
4. An initial coding template was designed during each action research cycle. The template was then reorganized and adjusted to show changes in clusters, themes, and codes, after each focus group intervention in each PAR cycle. The updates were then incorporated into a new template.
5. The template was then modified again during the observed pair interactions by the researcher as there was an opportunity to confirm and elaborate on the findings and to further develop the concepts in the themes. As new data was added, some themes were redefined and adjusted to better describe and categorized the ideas.
6. Next, the final version of the template for that cycle was the product of several stages of revision which included participants and the researcher's observations of participants in several settings which allowed for additional refinement to the coding for the researcher's analysis which would become the initial starting point for the continued development of the template in the next PAR cycle. In line with Brooks et al. (2015), the development of the template can be seen as sufficient when there remain no further substantial uncoded sections of data which are clearly relevant to the research question.

Participatory Action Research Implementation

Participatory action research's cyclical design, in which questioning, reflecting, investigating, developing plans, implementing, and refining occur over and over throughout the data collection process, was the best way to explore mentoring relationships in this context (McIntyre, 2008). The participants and researcher worked together to collect, analyse, and evaluate data at each step of the PAR process to the ends of co-creating new knowledge. One of the key challenges with PAR from the researcher's perspective is that it is an emergent process so where the research will go is often unknown at the start.

PAR Cycle 1

Pre-Step

Prior to the start of data collection, the ethics approval process was completed which involved participant information sheets, participation consent form, documenting authorization on behalf of the organization to conduct research, and the University of Liverpool's ethics response form. Prospective participants met with the lead researcher for half an hour each to discuss the participant information and consent forms. After participants agreed to take part in the research project, the first audio-recoded one-to-one interactions were scheduled.

Constructing the Problem: One-to-one Interactions

From the first one-to-one meetings, the goal was to get a baseline reading of participants' current experience, understanding of, and thoughts about mentoring and mentoring relationships. After establishing that no formal mentoring system already existed at the organization, many participants could share their own experiences with mentoring at previous organizations. After reviewing the transcripts of the one-to-one interactions, a thematic coding template was created which focused on making sense of mentoring, describing mentoring, and talking about specific past mentoring experiences. This initial template was created by the researcher reviewing transcripts of the one-to-one interaction with Subject 1 and highlighting specific sections and summarizing the ideas. Specifically, comments about mentoring, past work experience, current work experience, and development were used as codes for the template creation process. These codes were then used to help organize the template as information from the other transcripts was added. During the interactions, it was apparent that the discussions allowed for the elaboration of more details and examples from ideas shared by participants. In one example, a participant noted that he had learned a lot from a previous boss at work, but she used manipulation and office politics to get what she wanted. The exchange then added a focus on the themes values and ethics to get a more complete picture about past and present work experience. While that method of guiding discussions during interactions helps to gain insights into specific themes, it's the analysis of the subsequent transcript which used constant comparison analysis to create and reorganize codes and sub-codes. This process involved reviewing chunks of text from transcripts and then categorizing and organizing them. For example, mentoring was described by Subject 2 as someone "going out of their way to sort of help you get better at something" which was coded as informal mentoring/development. And a developmental situation described by Subject 5 which involved membership into a highly cohesive group of 5 people who worked together at the same organization (a previous employer) and constantly motivated and challenged each other to learn more and complete innovative projects together for 8 years was coded as "group mentoring/thriving", based on the academic definition from the context of mentoring.

After reviewing all the transcripts, the researcher organized the template using different colors to represent different participants and add examples and specific texts underneath the codes. The four codes were identified as: definition of mentoring, elements of mentoring relationships, context of mentor relationships, and elements of professional relationships with colleagues. For the definition of mentoring, sub codes included: work related, not work related, learn new skills, help others through feedback, shared personal experience, and hierarchy. The sub-codes for the elements of mentoring relationships were trust, respect, challenge, shared interests, and opportunity. For the context of mentor relationships, sub-codes included: hierarchical, attitude (open to being mentored), conflicting goals, passive participants, keep work relationships about work, and interest in learning. The sub-codes for elements of professional relationships with colleagues, based on participants' experiences, included friendliness, degree of comfort with people, regular interactions, degree of formality, shared interests, and supporting development.

Figure 8 PAR Cycle 1 One-to-one Interactions Outcome: Template Analysis Codes and Sub-Codes

Code	Definition of Mentoring	Elements of Mentoring Relationships	Context of Mentor Relationships	Elements of Professional Relationships with Colleagues
Sub-Code	work-related/not work related	trust	hierarchical	friendliness
Sub-Code	learn new skills	respect	open to being mentored	degree of comfort with people
Sub-Code	help others through feedback	challenge	conflicting goals	regular interactions
Sub-Code	shared personal experience	shared interests	passive participants	degree of formality
Sub-Code	hierarchy	opportunity	separation between work and non-work relationships	shared interests
Sub-Code	-	-	-	supporting development

Overall, the construction of the problem centered around participants' past developmental experiences at a workplace, the lack of developmental opportunities at the current workplace, and the acknowledgement that turnover exists among SIEs and is often discussed at work.

Planning Action: Focus Group

In order to validate the codes, member checking was used in the form of a focus group meeting in which participants were presented with the initial codes and sub-codes and asked to contribute further analysis and clarification with the group. This was a setting where participants could voice their opinions based on their experiences, share examples to support ideas, and discuss the topics presented (defining mentoring, mentor relationships, elements of relationships and stages of professional relationships). The focus group meetings were also an opportunity for the researcher to help guide the conversation to avoid getting off topic (like discussing lunch or a current work issue that's not relevant to the topics) and to share academic research through helping participants to articulate ideas into categories and enabling the use of more precise vocabulary. For example, when participants talked about the elements of a mentoring relationship being shared interests, the researcher wrote "cognitive overlap" in his fieldnotes because this is how this idea is often referred to in academic literature. During the meeting participants clarified their description of mentoring relationships by focusing on the elements of mentoring relationships and adding more details to the existing template. During this focus group it was interesting how the ideas of mentoring relationships and professional relationships with colleagues started to look similar, possibly as the participants began to visualize having a mentoring relationship with a colleague and imagining that as an extension of an existing relationship. It was also telling that separating the elements of the mentoring relationship from the context of the work relationship was not always possible as characteristics like hierarchy can describe the context of mentoring, in which a senior employee mentors a junior employee, and play a role in the elements of the relationship as there is a clear power distance between participants. These observations underscore the abstract nature of relationships, how they are constructed by individuals, and how individuals make sense of relationships.

Figure 9 PAR Cycle 1 Focus Group Outcome: Updated Template for Elements of a Mentor Relationship Codes and Sub-Codes

Topic	**Guiding Questions**
Elements of Mentor Relationships	What are important parts of mentor relationships? What do mentor relationships need to work?
Code	**Description/Example**
trust	comfortable sharing sensitive information
honesty	honest with one's self and others
respect	admiration of behavior/language
commitment	to others and to development
work/relevance	SIEs are "guided by work" to new countries so work must be what SIEs are interested in.
hierarchy	mentoring vs management, the onus for mentoring is on others
fate/chance	Proactively seeking a mentor vs not opposed to being mentored

At the end of this meeting, the template was updated to incorporate participants' contributions to the data analysis process with regard to the elements of mentoring relationships. While this was not an exhaustive list, it was the list generated by participants who all agreed that all or most mentoring relationships are impacted by these components. From the focus group the elements of mentoring relationships described by participants using their past experiences in mentoring relationships were more clearly articulated. Since no participants were currently in a mentor relationship, the next step to explore mentoring relationships would involve creating a situation in which participants did have a mentoring relationship. This first involved designing a formal mentoring program and pairing up participants so that they could create formal mentoring relationships with each other. The dual goal of this mentoring program was for employees to be developed and to allow employees to clarify the elements of mentoring relationships while they are currently experiencing such a relationship. A lack of hierarchical structure between participants is that mentoring here resembles peer mentoring, collaborative mentoring or co-mentoring, which is defined as "a practitioner centered, experiential… reflective model used by peer co-mentors with the shared purpose to form 'partnership support groups' that generate professional contributions" (Mullen, 2000, p.4, as cited by Deptula and Williams, 2017). The design of a formal peer mentoring program first involved matching peer mentors, who mainly worked as managers and supervisors across different departments and creating guidelines and schedules for meetings. These interactions involved a pair of participants creating action together while the researcher observed and contributed to the experience. The first such meeting was an observed pair interaction in which the phases of mentoring relationships, as outlined by Kram (1985), were used to create the first action: initiation of mentoring relationships. Specifically, participants were asked to develop a professional relationship with their partners with the understanding that this relationship would become a mentoring relationship.

While typical mentoring relationships involve a more "experienced" person developing a less experienced person, this was complicated by the 6 participants not having a clear hierarchical difference. Even though some participants had worked at the organization for more time, by working in different departments, those who had an earlier start date did not necessarily have more relevant experience. That was the reason why peer mentoring had to be used and why development was still possible because different participants did have different experiences in terms of general and specific professional skills, knowledge, awareness, and attitudes. Since this study did not bring any a priori assumptions about pre-existing experience involving mentoring, as with most PAR studies, it relied on emergent codes, themes, and findings.

Implementing Action: Observed Pair Interactions

While planning for action involved sharing current perceptions, beliefs, and experiences about mentoring relationships on an individual level and then reviewing and analysing the data as a group, the implementation of action to learn more about mentoring relationships involved a mentoring interaction between pairs of participants that was observed by the researcher. The first observed pair interaction task given to participants was to "build a professional relationship" with their partners during a one-hour meeting (which could be at the workplace or away from work). These interactions were audio recorded and the researcher made observations to inform later discussion of these sessions.

The outcome of the first observed pair interaction was that participants had a chance to start creating a mentoring relationship by introducing themselves to their partners and by starting to learn about areas of cognitive overlap. This also presented an opportunity for the researcher to evaluate the participants in the context of how they interact one-on-one with someone when the goal is to develop a formal mentor relationship. This was especially important in terms of data triangulation to test the previously analysed data in a different context. Subjects 1 and 4 discussed family visits to China and found common ground with a previous employer and discovered that they knew a lot of the same people (expatriates) who worked in Beijing. Subjects 2 and 3 spent a short time on small talk and then shifted to discussing work topics, periodically pausing to ask the researcher what they were supposed to discuss next. An unexpected outcome was that Subjects 5 and 6 already had a very developed personal and professional relationship which was not mentioned by either participant in the prior one-to-one interactions or the focus group (which indicates that neither participant considered this to be a developmental relationship) even though these two participants frequently discussed topics relating to work, the industry, life as an expatriate, and sports during pre-existing work and non-work meetings that happened on a regular ongoing basis. After this starting point towards developing mentor relationships through having a session specifically dedicated to building a professional relationship. The data, field notes, and insights collected by the researcher would be used to start the next PAR cycle after first revisiting the existing literature and exploring identification constructs with participants in the next round of one-to-one interactions (Humberd and Rouse, 2016).

Evaluation and Reflections on PAR Cycle 1

After ensuring that participants were informed of the requirements of participating and the ethics approval process was completed, data collection began. The baseline for participants' existing knowledge, awareness, and experience about mentoring and mentoring relationships was first established from the one-to-one interactions which also revealed that no participants were currently involved in any formal or informal mentoring relationships already. This was instrumental in the direction of the research, because if participants already had mentoring relationships to explore then it might not have been necessary to create a formal mentoring program to gain more insights into these relationships and their impact on development. It's also noteworthy that participants were selected based on the researcher's expectation that they would be able to complete the 3-month data collection process and not leave the organization during the data collection process. The downside of such an approach of selective sampling might be that the participants involved have already decided to remain with the organization regardless of mentoring, but the alternative, which might have included participants who were less likely to remain with the organization, would also have led to less data being collected as the employees more likely to leave the organization might have left before the 3-month period was complete. After the findings from the one-to-one interactions were compiled, they were reviewed and analysed with participants during the focus group. This analysis yielded valuable insights because it exposed assumptions made by the researcher and allowed for discourse to direct the analysis to not only confirm codes from the researcher's initial analysis and it also allowed for a dialogue which resulted in clarification of those codes and provided specific examples and reasoning from participants. Participants were then paired together and they had an initial mentoring meeting. Peer/co-mentoring allowed participants to experience both the role of being a mentor to someone else and the role of being mentored by someone else. While the initial mentoring meetings varied greatly between participants who already knew their partners to those who had only seen them around the office once or twice, the importance of matching mentors and mentees together is paramount to the formation and sustainment of mentoring relationships (Kram, 1985; Ragins and Kram, 2007). The pairing will be a consistent obstacle to realizing formal mentoring programs for expatriate employees due to their rarity in most workplaces. Now that the creation of mentoring relationships has begun, future cycles will be able to focus on the development of these relationships over time.

PAR Cycle 2

Pre-Step

Before starting PAR cycle 2, as part of the dual role of being a colleague and a researcher, I found there were some advantages to using the company scheduling platform Microsoft Outlook to send meeting notifications to participants at the start of cycle 2. Since the research project, including all of the participants and meetings, was approved by the Vice President, there were no ethical concerns with using company platforms to facilitate research. Using company platforms like email and meeting notifications also helps participants to see the importance and value of this project for themselves, the researcher, and the organization

After the first observed pair interactions that centered around the initiation phase of mentoring relationships, it was important to review the existing literature again surrounding how mentoring relationships start. To better understand how partners would begin building relationships Humberd and Rouse (2016) found that there were four main constructs involved: personal identification, the source of identification, identification mechanisms, and strength of identification (Humberd and Rouse, 2016). These theoretical constructs were defined by Humberd and Rouse (2016, p.440) as:

Figure 10 Theoretical Constructs of Mentoring Relationships

Construct	Definition
Personal Identification	A process by which individuals realize cognitive overlap between the self and other over time in a relationship.
Sources of Identification	The repertoire of selves from which one identifies with the other
	Past selves: An individual's view of who he or she used to be
	Present selves: An individual's view of who he or she is now
	Future selves: An individual's view of who he or she might become
Identification Mechanisms	The mechanisms that explain how cognitive overlap between self and other is realized
	Projection: An individual ascribes aspects of him/herself onto the other.
	Recognition: An individual recognizes shared aspects of self with the other.
	Integration: An individual incorporates aspects of the other into his or her own self, changing his/her sense of self to be more similar to the other.
Strength of Identification	The amount of cognitive overlap one perceives between the self and other, which relates to behavioural indicators of quality

This concept of past-self, present-self, and future-self for identifying with someone else was incorporated into the researcher's approach to inquiry for the one-to-one interactions for PAR cycle 2 to help participants make sense of their initial mentoring meetings with their partners and help them to reflect on their experiences. In addition, the researcher's doctoral tutor suggested a variety of different approaches to future observed pair interactions that would involve action in more structured ways, in terms of role plays, collaborative tasks, and clearly defined roles for the researcher and participants.

Redefining the Problem: One-to-One Interactions

At this point in the research process, the organizational problem of SIE development had been clearly established, as participants have seen people departing the organization regularly and new roles and responsibilities were distributed with alarming frequency. It's also clear that no pre-existing mentoring programs exist, and participants stated that they did not have any pre-existing informal mentoring relationships at the organization prior to the start of this research project. The main focus of the problem for this cycle is the development of peer mentoring relationships between the paired-up participants in the context of the formal peer mentoring program which was started. There was already an initial meeting, now participants must continue to build on that experience to develop their relationships in what Kram (1985) referred to as the cultivation phase. Once again, the one-to-one interactions are audio recorded and the transcriptions of those recordings are used for the initial analysis performed by the researcher.

The researcher started with the revised template from cycle 1 and then revised the template after analysing the transcripts in PAR cycle 2 by first coding the transcripts and then building on the template by adding more codes and themes until all the 6 transcripts had been analyzed. While there was a fair amount of "I don't know him well enough" and "he was not willing to share", participants were able to provide insights into their progress building mentoring relationships from PAR cycle 1. The sub-codes identified by the researcher were: communication, shared interests and qualities, trust, honesty, conflict avoidance, influential assumptions, learning from others, first impressions, reciprocity/investments and returns, opportunity to teach/learn and past self/changed behaviors.

Figure 11 PAR Cycle 2: Focus for One-to-One Interactions

Topic	Guiding Questions
Elements of Mentor Relationships	How would you describe your relationship? Why is your relationship like that?

The table below includes the codes, a description or example, and the number of participants who mentioned this code in some way during the one-to-one interactions. During the one-to-one interactions, the researcher had an unscripted dialogue with each participant to better understand their individual experiences and takeaways from the observed pair interaction in the previous PAR cycle. For codes like "communication", all participants mentioned this idea in some way, while other ideas like "reciprocity/investments and returns" was only mentioned by three participants. Some items from the first template for PAR cycle one were omitted in the revised template if participants did not mention these codes or themes in the one-to-one interactions from cycle 2.

Figure 12 PAR Cycle 2: Template Analysis from Researcher Based on One-to-One Interaction Transcripts

Codes	Description/Example	Number of Participants who Touched on this Topic
communication	frequency, channel, and formality of communication	6
shared interests	complementing personalities, values, shared interests and shared experiences	6
trust	willingness to share information, level of comfort sharing feelings	5
honesty	telling the truth	5
conflict avoidance	avoiding negative people, avoiding conflict in communication by letting someone else lead it	4
influential assumptions	self-identified differences, assigning feelings and thoughts to others	4
learning from others	there are many things we can learn from others: knowledge, experience, skills	4
first impressions	impressions from the first meetings or previous first impressions from at work	3
reciprocity/investments and returns	give and take in a relationship, you reap what you sow	3

Planning Action: Focus Group

The codes the researcher identified above were then brought to the group of participants in order for them to share in the analysis by discussing and clarifying the ideas and then through talking about the implications for the codes in relation to developing mentoring relationships. It was through this collaborative process that the idea of shared interests was extended to include shared interests and qualities, like personalities and values too. Trust and honesty were connected, and it was agreed that honesty would fall under the umbrella of trust because the two ideas were so similar. The ideas of comfort and conflict avoidance were discussed and then combined as these ideas were connected in terms of how socially at ease people were with discussing a variety of topics including sensitive topics like politics, religion, and sex. The themes of learning from others and opportunity to teach/learn were combined into opportunities for growth. The idea of first impressions was also removed as participants found that it fell under the umbrella of influential assumptions. Next, participants were tasked with organizing the codes in the order of the most important to the least important in their opinion with regard to developing mentoring relationships. Participants completed this section on a piece of paper individually, and then discussed their opinions and explained the rationale for doing so until the group reached a consensus on the codes involved with developing mentoring relationships ranked by importance as outlined below.

Figure 13 PAR Cycle 2: Codes Involved with Developing Mentoring Relationships Ranked by Importance

Most Important	Communication
	Trust (including honesty)
	Reciprocity/Investments & Returns
	Shared Interests/Qualities
	Comfort/Conflict Avoidance
	Opportunities for Growth
	Influential Assumptions
	Friendship
Least Important	Changed Behaviors

After elaborating on and ranking the themes involved with developing mentoring relationships, the researcher invited participants to participate in a role play simulation of a mentoring experience with their partners so that more insights into the identified themes could be gained through practical experience. The researcher provided the topics for each participant to prepare for the mentoring simulation based on insights shared in the one-to-one interactions. The participants were required to prepare a mentoring session to help their partner learn more about, improve, or develop the assigned skill, talent, or ability. One participant would simulate mentoring their partner for approximately 15-25 minutes, and then they would switch roles. As the observer, the researcher would pause the interactions by saying the word “pause” periodically to ask clarifying questions and help uncover feelings and thoughts in the moment as needed.

Implementing Action: Observed Pair Interactions

The breakdown for each observed pair interaction session for Cycle 2 involved the following overview (shared with participants before the sessions):

Figure 14 PAR Cycle 2: Observed Pair Interaction Role Play Instructions

Intervention Overview:

5 minutes – Small talk

10 minutes – Reviewing previous task of building a relationship and following-up with interviews

15 minutes – Introducing the next task:

1. Prepare to "mentor" your partner regarding the given topic (which you have experience or perceived experience with)
2. Participants can decide how to help their mentees learn these or about these new skills.
3. I will "pause" the interactions periodically to ask questions to both sides about what's going through their head so that we can explore the exchange.
4. Then, we will switch mentor and mentee roles and repeat steps 1-3.

The outcome of this session will be for all participants to have the experience of mentoring someone and the experience of being mentored by someone.

10 minutes – Questions and scheduling for the following meetings

The mentoring topics were also shared based on participants' skillsets and the interests expressed by their partners. Participants were also given the option of choosing their own topics or changing the assigned topic if they wanted to.

Figure 15 PAR Cycle 2: Observed Pair Interaction Role Play Participants and Topics

Participant Mentoring	Participant Mentored	Topic to be Mentored on
Subject 1	Subject 4	How to get promoted in China
Subject 4	Subject 1	How to appear unstressed
Subject 2	Subject 3	How to build a strong personal network at work
Subject 3	Subject 2	How to appear knowledgeable about a topic
Subject 5	Subject 6	How to build a charismatic and humorous persona at work
Subject 6	Subject 5	How to plan for your financial future

Cycle 2 is when the mentoring program moved beyond the initiation phase to the cultivation phase (Kram, 1985) in which developing the mentoring relationship took center stage. These mentoring sessions were examined using the criteria developed and prioritized by participants and the researcher during the focus group. Using this criteria, the researcher's field notes, reviewing the audio recordings themselves, and the transcripts of the audio recordings were analyzed to evaluate the mentoring relationships.

Using the definition of quality for mentoring relationships as stated by Dutton and Heaphy (2003) as how positive the emotional experience of both participants in the relationship was; the relationships between participants can be evaluated by the researcher based on perceived experiences as understood by triangulated sources and by participants as they articulate their relationships based on this criterion. highest quality mentoring relationships, in terms of communication, trust, and reciprocity, existed between Subjects 5 and 6, who had a very strong collegial connection at work and a working friendship outside of the workplace. They both went to brunch on the weekends together and frequently visited pubs after work during the week. Communication was present in many forms and occurred frequently at work and outside of work on a regular basis (even prior to this research project). On a personal level, communication habits seemed to be well developed as participants shared turns talking and listening and each could anticipate the conclusion of the other's thoughts and talking points by the length of the silence after speaking. Trust was evident by a willingness to discuss sensitive topics like personal finance and to address personal topics like social skills and being liked by others. This degree of comfort communicating about a range of topics seemed to facilitate a light-hearted atmosphere of engagement as both participants used humor drawn from shared experiences to make the interaction enjoyable. Examples of reciprocity and an investment/return on investment for this relationship included shared interests of sports, hobbies, socializing, and work (in terms of type of work, work history, work experience, being SIEs, and job roles). It was clear that both participants valued their (pre-existing) relationship and this seemed to facilitate the mentoring activity as both participants were at ease discussing and challenging each other with respect to their mentoring topics even though their informal relationship up to this point might not have been developmental. In the end, Subject 5 agreed to keep track of his spending habits during the week to begin to address his poor spending habits and Subject 6's task was to pay special attention to charismatic individuals in social situations to look for patterns and helpful strategies for being more likeable.

The mentoring relationship between Subjects 1 and 4 was of lower quality, as noted by participants and researchers based on the established criteria for mentoring relationships from the focus group of communication, trust, and reciprocity. The only communication which existed between participants occurred in the setting of the formal mentoring program; while Subject 4 invited Subject 1 to a social event outside of work, this invitation was declined. Evidence of trust between participants was not evinced. Actually, Subject 4 seemed to not be honest during the sessions on several occasions. He literally said, "Wait, I lied." to correct trivial misstatements and he was unwilling to discuss some topics as he changed the subject to avoid them. Subject 1 brought in a high amount of positive energy and enthusiasm and was very open about his personal life, family visit, and feelings as shown from the initial meeting. During the mentoring episode, participants did not seem to have shared interests or goals as Subject 4 approached the activity reluctantly noting his last-minute preparation and explaining that he was not sure that his mentoring episode would be well received by Subject 1. In reality, Subject 1 was very open to the topic of being less stressed at work and engaged in the episode, which seemed to surprise Subject 4. Subject 1 agreed to make a checklist of all of his daily tasks each day and check them off as he completed them to reduce the stress he felt by being overburdened. Then when they switched roles, Subject 1 asked a lot of questions to understand Subject 4's specific job situation to advise him on how to be promoted, but Subject 4 seemed to downplay his answers and lacked enthusiasm. Again honesty, or a lack thereof was an obstacle for Subject 4. But the conclusion of this mentoring episode was that Subject 4 agreed to have a conversation with his immediate manager about being promoted.

Finally, Subjects 2 and 3 had the lowest quality mentoring relationship at this point in terms of their self-reported positive emotional experiences relating to communication, trust, and reciprocity. Communication between these participants was limited to scheduled interactions except for a handful of text messages sent without any meaningful follow-up. Even communication during the observed pair interaction mentoring activity was not ideal, in part due to Subject 3 being on a business trip and connecting remotely, but also participants did not seem to communicate well about the ideas being discussed. Subject 2 started his mentoring session by stating "I'm not an expert on this topic, so don't raise your expectations" even though the advice and experience that he shared were practical and well received by Subject 3. The tone of Subject 2 could also be characterized as condescending or patronizing because he used phrases like "This is probably the pinnacle of you know obviousness…" and "There is obviously…” Subject 3’s experience as the mentor was also not especially warmly received as the researcher paused the interaction during Subject 3’s mentoring session to ask Subject 2 what his thoughts were about Subject 3 as a mentor and Subject 2 answered, “I think what he tried to do is great and I think it's even better that he later realized that why it didn't work.” This assessment of the session seemed superficial in that it was a characterization of what Subject 3 had presented in the context of how he had learned to appear knowledgeable by not writing paragraph emails but by writing short emails which contained solutions and visuals as much as possible; there was no thought, by Subject 2, put into how this might be applied or even relevant to Subject 2’s work as he seemed to view the experience as outside of the realm of development. There was no evidence of trust in the interaction as there was no small talk at the start and only questions about the session itself. During the session, technical details from work were abundantly shared, on both sides, but there was nothing sensitive or personal discussed which might indicate evidence of self-disclosure. Finally, there did not seem to be any shared interests between participants that they had identified and even the opposite might be true where values and personalities differed to such an extent to alienate the other in the relationship in terms of reducing communication as a means of conflict avoidance. The final tasks for this pair were for Subject 2 to communicate via email using brief messages and meeting with people face-to-face to discuss complicated topics and Subject 3 was supposed to smile more at work and greet everyone at work, whether he knew them or not, by saying “hi” to build his personal network at work.

The final task involved with PAR cycle 2’s mentoring episodes was for the participants to agree on a course of action to continue the development objective beyond the meeting and into the coming weeks. These tasks are outlined below.

Figure 16 PAR Cycle 2: Observed Pair Interaction Role Play Follow up Tasks

Participant	**Follow Up Development Task from Mentoring Episode**
Subject 1	Use discussed strategies for prioritizing work tasks to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
Subject 2	Try different approaches to presenting ideas in emails and in face-to-face presentations which include more dialogue instead of one-way communication.
Subject 3	Greet all colleagues you see and engage in small talk with at least 3 people every day.
Subject 4	Have a discussion with your supervisor about opportunities for advancement.
Subject 5	Pay close attention to what charismatic colleagues do during conversations with others and how others react to what they say and what they do.
Subject 6	Write down and check spending habits on a daily basis and make adjustments in spending behavior as needed.

Evaluation and Reflections on PAR Cycle 2

The second PAR cycle moved beyond the initial mentoring phase between paired participants into the cultivation phase of the mentoring relationships through role plays simulating peer mentoring episodes with each person being both a mentor and a mentee. The template analysis product from cycle 1 provided a starting point for understanding what mentoring relationships are for SIEs based on their past experiences. In cycle 2, this template was updated to focus on the present experience of mentoring relationships being experienced by participants. While some ideas appeared in templates from both cycles such as trust and honesty. The ideas being developed in the templates from cycle 2 were much more specific and included specific examples. It’s possible these new ideas like, shared interests, were taken for granted in participants’ recollections of past mentoring experiences, or perhaps they were overlooked or weren’t made explicit or noticed by the participants in those past relationships.

A challenge that is appearing is that participants can describe ideas like trust and honesty, but it seems that some participants are struggling to develop these characteristics of mentoring relationships successfully. It is possible that creating trust takes time, but the disconnect between knowing what a relationship should have and what one is able to develop seem to be different things. It almost seems like "trust" is an idea that SIEs value and believe in but are also unable to easily create or develop in a relationship.

The lack of communication between participants outside of the scheduled formal mentoring meetings is another potential cause for concern when building relationships. Participants ranked communication as the most important component of mentoring relationships, but outside of the required communications two out of three pairs fails to communicate. Communication is also a broad topic which can include understanding others, dialogue, methods of communicating, and frequency of communication. It seems that frequency of communication is the most important of these as the absence of instances of communication can completely prevent communication. With communication and trust identified as key areas of mentoring relationships, the next PAR cycle will need to explore these ideas in greater detail as communication plays a key role in SIE performance and development at work

PAR Cycle 3

Pre-Step

The data collection, analysis, and action from the first two cycles determined the direction of the third PAR cycle. In the first cycle, the participants and researcher identified important themes from past experiences in mentoring relationships and then created a formal peer mentoring program. Participants were paired up and had an initial meeting to start to build mentoring relationships. In the second PAR cycle, the researcher and participants updated the thematic coding template again to include perceptions about mentoring relationships from building their own. The characteristics of mentoring relationships were ranked in order of importance during the focus group. Then pairs of participants continued to build on their mentoring relationships through participating in a role play of a mentoring simulation to further explore these elements of mentoring relationships. There were also "homework" tasks for participants to follow-up with and continue their mentoring experiences beyond the observed pair interaction.

Since participants and the researcher had updated the template to include the most important characteristics of mentoring relationships as communication, trust, reciprocity, and shared interests, the researcher investigated these ideas more closely prior to meeting with participants one-to-one. Communication in mentoring relationships has been explored in terms of dialogic discourse in which two people take turns speaking and listening to each other. Trust has been defined as truth in word and deed which provides a clear way to conceptualize this idea in terms of predictability. If you trust someone, then you believe you can predict what they will say or do. This review of existing research regarding these concepts will help to facilitate the one-to-one interactions through providing existing frameworks and paradigms to help participants articulate their thoughts and feelings when they are unable to.

Redefining the Problem: One-to-One Interactions

The current problem is that the mentoring relationships in the formal peer mentoring program that was started are not deemed high-quality by the researcher or participants themselves (considering they lack most of the criteria developed by participants and the researcher which rank the most important characteristics of mentoring relationships); which could prevent mentoring relationships from leading to employee development. The problem seems to be a disconnect between understanding what a mentoring relationship should involve, and the ability to create and develop a mentoring relationship that involves those things.   The solution for this problem is to for participants cultivate communication, trust, reciprocity, and shared interests in their peer mentor relationships. This is relevant for SIE performance and SIEs ability to develop. This PAR cycle will strive to develop the specific characteristics of SIE relationships in the relationships between SIEs.

The codes for what a mentoring relationship should involve were created in cycle 1 and revised several times in cycles 1 and 2 to become a prioritized list of elements of a mentor relationship. Since two out of three pairs did not exhibit the same degrees of the identified elements in cycles 1 and 2, which were represented by very broad codes including communication, trust, reciprocity, and shared interests/qualities; during the one-to-one interactions for cycle 3, the researcher returned to the question: what are the most important parts of a mentoring relationship? The answers to this question had changed considering the participants had created new mentoring relationships and the researcher had observed participants and interacted with them in several contexts including when the pairs were first building mentoring relationships and during their role play mentoring activity. Again, a template was created by the researcher which involved the existing components of mentoring relationships which were identified by participants and included codes (from the cycle 2 template) and sub-codes from the one-to-one interactions from PAR cycle 3. This analysis was the starting point for the focus group interaction's discussion which would further analyze this information.

Figure 17 PAR Cycle 3: Template Analysis from Researcher Based on One-to-One Interaction Transcripts

Code	Sub-Codes
Communication	professional communication
Communication	personal communication
Communication	frequency of communication
Communication	method of communicating (face to face or digital)
Communication	building rapport
Shared Interests/Qualities	recommending readings, podcasts, academic articles
Shared Interests/Qualities	drawing on shared experiences / cognitive overlap
Friendship	awareness about the other person and their job / career goals
Shared Interests/Qualities	similarities in type of work
Friendship	awareness of the other person's personal life
Comfort/Conflict Avoidance	power dynamics (information, experience, hierarchy)
Communication	awareness of strengths and weaknesses
Communication	sense of humor
Comfort/Conflict Avoidance	avoiding offending someone
Communication	comfortable discussing weaknesses
Trust	willingness to be honest and volunteer information
Communication	answering questions
Reciprocity/Investments & Returns	perceived value / good use of time
Reciprocity/Investments & Returns	respect
Friendship	being friendly
Reciprocity/Investments & Returns	encouragement
Comfort/Conflict Avoidance	aware of your own feelings
Comfort/Conflict Avoidance	controlling your emotions
Opportunities for Growth	choice / lack of choice (forced relationships)
Friendship	personal connection

Planning Outcome: Focus Group

Before analyzing the codes and sub-codes, the researcher reminded participants of their journey to get to this point. Participants shared their perceptions and thoughts about mentoring from previous positions at different companies, then participants were inducted into a formal peer mentoring program at their current organization, after which they were paired up and tasked with building a relationship. As each analyzed template sheds light on how and what is involved with participants' construction of mentoring relationships, the progression and evolution of ideas over time help to clarify what the fundamental components of peer mentoring relationships between SIEs are in the context of this group of participants at this organization. The analysis for this focus group begins with separating codes from sub-codes and then reorganizing connected ideas in a way that allows for sensemaking for all participants.

The first discussion point centered around the codes. Communication and trust were still self-explanatory and considered very important which led to participants suggesting sub-codes be reclassified. "Comfortable discussing weaknesses", "avoiding offending someone", and "awareness of the other person's personal life" were decided to be more connected to trust since they deal with vulnerability and trusting another person. The participants discussed and debated the other codes aside from communication and trust too. There was no consensus about the role of friendship, shared interests/qualities, comfort/conflict avoidance, or reciprocity/return on investment in terms of requirements for all the participants' mentoring relationships. At this impasse, the researcher suggested that everyone take a step back, and attempt to consider what these debatable elements of mentoring relationships could be called or an umbrella term that could be applied here. It was decided that what all these different elements had in common was "value". Some participants valued friendship, while others reciprocity from their mentor relationships, and this component seemed to play a deciding role in the cultivation of that relationship. Thus, the final template was updated to:

Figure 18 PAR Cycle 3: Template Analysis from Researcher and Participants from Focus Group Interaction

Code	Sub-Codes
Communication	professional communication
Communication	personal communication
Communication	frequency of communication
Communication	method of communicating (face to face or digital)
Communication	building rapport
Value	recommending readings, podcasts, academic articles
Value	drawing on shared experiences / cognitive overlap
Value	awareness about the other person and their job / career goals
Value	similarities in type of work
Trust	awareness of the other person's personal life
Value	power dynamics (information, experience, hierarchy)
Trust	awareness of strengths and weaknesses
Value	sense of humor
Trust	avoiding offending someone
Trust	comfortable discussing weaknesses
Trust	willingness to be honest and volunteer information
Communication	answering questions
Value	perceived value / good use of time
Value	respect
Value	being friendly
Value	encouragement
Value	aware of your own feelings
Value	controlling your emotions
Value	choice / lack of choice (forced relationships)
Value	personal connection

While "value" is a very personal construct, it can differ widely from person to person and change itself depending on internal and external factors, it seems like a fundamental component of mentoring relationships because without value, the motivation to maintain the relationship might not exist which would result in not having a mentoring relationship. Thus, the three main components of mentoring relationships have been identified as communication, trust, and value.

During the focus group participants acknowledged that communication was an important part of any relationship, but also that communication was not something they did spontaneously with their mentoring partners outside of the scheduled interactions. When we explored this topic deeper to understand this disconnect, participants shared that communication was not as simple as having a conversation. Factors such as a lack of awareness of the other person's personal life, strengths and weaknesses, a lack of willingness to be honest and volunteer information, and concerns about offending the other person, were identified as the main reasons why natural communication between participants outside of the structured mentoring program did not exist. While participants knew what would need to happen to make their mentoring relationships successful, regular, and authentic communication, they did not do it. While the excuses above explained the reasons participants gave for not communicating, the researcher interpreted this obstacle in terms of insufficient trust existing in the relationship (which explains the lack of willingness to be honest and share information and the fear about offending the other person, as they might retaliate) and also a lack of value associated with the relationship (the potential benefits of investing time and effort into increasing participants' awareness of their partners' personal lives, strengths, and weaknesses did not outweigh the choice for inaction). As these two ideas were discussed among the group, it was decided that focusing on communication, building trust, and creating a sense of value must be objectives for the next observed pair interaction to help develop the mentoring relationships between participants.

Implementing Action: Observed Pair Interactions

The action which participants and the researcher agreed should happen next would both strengthen trust and create a sense of value in the relationship through dialogue to improve communication. To achieve these aims, I created two mentoring activities to increase trust (through encouraging self-disclosure) and to create a sense of value (by focusing on participants' careers and personal development). Both activities were designed to be dialogues which involve an exchange of information in which each participant plays an active role in speaking, listening, and responding. The two activities were Career Mapping and North Star/Destination Statement.

Figure 19 PAR Cycle 3: Observed Pair Interaction Activity: Career Mapping

Career Mapping:

Instructions: Lead a dialogue about the career progression of your partner. Focus specifically on the development and learning that happened in each position. Write down significant skills and abilities that were learned at each position. When the discussion reaches your partner's current position, discuss which skills / abilities your partner wants to develop now, write them down on line A. Then discuss people your partner knows who he thinks have these skills / abilities and can mentor him and write their names on line B.

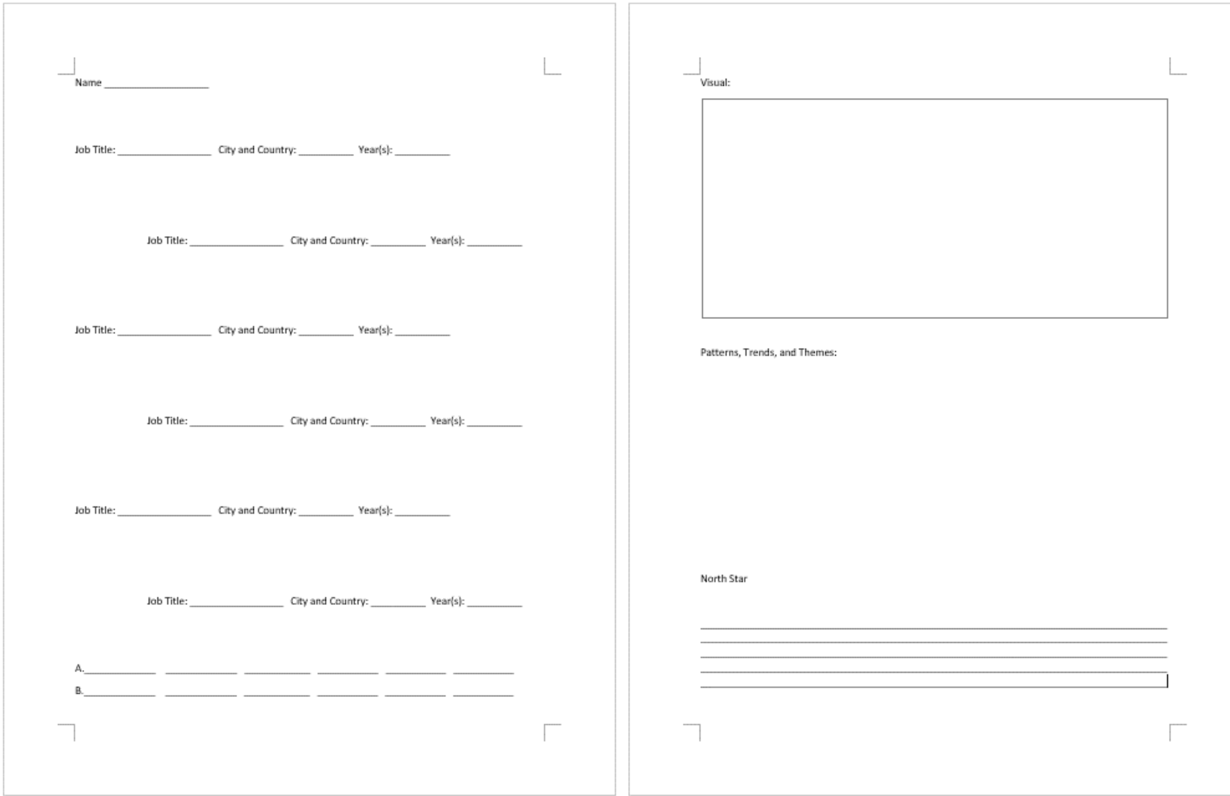
Figure 20 PAR Cycle 3: Observed Pair Interaction Activity: North Star / Destination Statement

North Star / Destination Statement:

Instructions: Lead a dialogue about career progression of your partner. Focus specifically on the patterns, trends, and themes which your partner notices when reviewing past and present positions. What caused the job changes? What motivated the decision to accept the new job? Based on the discussion, you should be able to write a short statement which explains your partner's decision-making process with respect to changing jobs. You should be able to include the most important factors involved with this decision ranked in order of importance.

In addition to these instructions, each participant was provided with a sheet of paper for taking notes during the dialogue as seen below.

Figure 21 PAR Cycle 3: Sheet for Taking Notes for Activities



Both activities were designed to be participant-centered to allow each pair to create an authentic dialogue by drawing on their own lives and experiences. In both activities participants were comfortable talking about their past work experiences and accomplishments and answering clarifying questions about them while their partners listened and asked questions to better understand employment histories, work skills development, and future professional aspirations. The reflective nature of these tasks facilitated the dialogue and encouraged self-evaluation of work experience. The Career Mapping activity focused on positions and skill development, and then examined participants' current positions and skills they are developing, before moving to future desired positions and the skills they will need to develop; then their partners asked them to think of each skill they needed to develop and to think of a person who can help them develop that skill. The North Star/Destination Statement activity gave participants an opportunity to reflect and search for patterns in their employment, decision making process, and motivations. The results were a better understanding of participants' own values, decisions, motivations, and insights into the past positions and accomplishments and then their partners challenged them by sharing their thoughts and opinions about patterns of past employment decisions and their implications for future employment decisions. Both activities accomplished the goal of creating an authentic dialogue between participants due to the desire to share personal work accomplishments and moments of pride and the listening for purpose aspect involved with trying to find the answers to questions about the past which might yield insights into the future.

Evaluation and Reflections on PAR Cycle 3

By the third PAR cycle it was clear that participants had a firm grasp of the action research process and how the three interactions of each cycle were connected in the larger context of investigating the impact of mentoring relationships on SIE development. The one-to-one interactions again asked about participants' communication with their partners outside of mentoring activities and participants again did not seem to be communicating frequently or for any duration of time outside of the occasional text message sent or brief SMS chat conversation. During the focus group, participants could not explain the disconnect between having already identified the most important characteristics of mentoring relationships (from PAR Cycle 2) and their inability to create mentoring relationships which possessed these characteristics. The exceptional pair, out of the three, was able to demonstrate the most important characteristics of communication, trust, and a sense of value, but those two participants had known each other for years and already had a well-established professional and personal relationship prior to this research project.

The action involved with the observed pair interaction was well received by participants, possibly because they played a role in the direction of the research or because the activities were very participant-centered in which they were required to discuss their past employment, skills learned, and future employment through a dialogue with their partners. The researcher considered this activity successful because all participants completed it and participants seemed to genuinely share their honest experiences and opinions (which were explored deeper through partners and the researcher asking clarifying and sometimes probing questions). The level of comfort with the final activities can be explained by the development of the relationship between participants and also by their increased familiarity with the PAR process and cycles. Ultimately, the three most important characteristics of mentoring relationships that were identified (in cycle 2) after participants were tasked with creating a professional mentoring relationship (in cycle 1), were the central focus of cycle 3 was creating a dialogue (communication) with the specific purpose of building trust and a sense of value in the relationship as the focus. The implications are that even though SIEs might know what the most important characteristics of mentoring relationships are they might not know how to realize these aspects of relationships without guidance and support.

Concluding Thoughts: Final One-to-One Interactions

The final one-to-one interactions between the researcher and participants were an opportunity for the participants and the researcher to reflect and share their thoughts, opinions, and feelings about mentoring relationships, development, and the action research project overall. It is noteworthy that Subject 4 completed his final one-to-one interaction after officially resigning and working his last day, but before flying back to be repatriated in the US. Subject 5 also repeated his desire to leave the organization during the final meeting. Other participants noted their discontent with the organization, but most expected to continue working at the organization for the foreseeable future.

When discussing mentoring relationships, the researcher drew a direct comparison between participants' relationships with their partners and with the researcher over the period of data collection. This strategy allowed participants to have a frame of reference to use to evaluate their experiences and feelings which provided them two examples to compare and contrast. At times, participants were unable to articulate the differences between their relationships with the researcher and their partner; this typically involved an inability (or perhaps a desire not to) articulate feelings. This was especially present in terms of abstract ideas like trust and a sense of value in the relationship as "gut feelings" are not always easy to elaborate or explain.

By the end of the final one-to-one interaction, it was clear that four of the six participants did not believe they had created a high-quality mentoring relationship with their partner, as described by Dutton and Heaphy (2003) in terms of the how positive the emotional experiences of participants in the relationship were, and the two who felt they had a high-quality mentoring relationship were the two participants who had known each other for years and already had a developed relationship characterized by regular meetings outside of work and shared interests in sports and professional topics.

Figure 22 A summary of the data collection topics during action research cycles and their interactions:

Cycle 1	**Cycle 2**	**Cycle 3**
Defining and understanding mentoring relationships	Developing Mentor Relationship through Formal Mentoring	Developing Mentoring Relationship through Formal Mentoring Using Dialogue
One-to-one Interactions	**One-to-one Interactions**	**One-to-one Interactions**
What is mentoring to you? What experience do you have with it? What is a mentoring relationship?	Reflect on efforts to develop a professional relationship. What is something that you admire about your partner?	Reflect on mentor-mentee role play mentoring task. Describe the mentoring and being mentored experiences.
Focus Group Intervention	**Focus Group Intervention**	**Focus Group Intervention**
What is a professional mentoring relationship? How do you start one? What are the important components of this relationship?	Prioritize the important aspects of how to develop professional relationships in terms of requirements, strategies, and communication.	Group the analyzed data in terms of the parts of a mentoring relationship. Consolidate codes into three themes.
Observed Pair Interactions	**Observed Pair Interactions**	**Observed Pair Interactions**
Task: Begin to develop a professional mentoring relationship with your partner.	Task: Each participant was assigned a topic and asked to mentor their partner with the aims of developing their partner. Each participant was then also mentored by their partner as they changed roles.	Task: Participants participated in a formal mentoring session focused on a dialogue regarding career mapping and their North Star/Destination Statement.

Figure 23 Key Themes and Findings

SIE Mentor Relationships Theme	**Thematic Elements/Clusters**
Communication	-Channel (face to face, text message, phone call, etc.) -Contact Frequency -Formality -Voluntary vs mandatory

Trust	-Honest with yourself & with others
	-Reciprocity
	  -Self-disclosure
	  -Vulnerability
	  -Avoiding conflict

Value	-Emotional bond
	  -Entertainment/humor
	  -Shared experiences/empathy
	-Value on a professional level
	  -Organizational politics
	  -Professional development
	-Value on a personal level
	  -Shared interests and hobbies
	  -Developing (Non-work-related) Life Skills
	-Social/Networking benefits

The main three themes associated with mentoring relationships of SIEs were found to be communication, trust, and value.

Summary

The underpinning view of reality and knowledge is of vital importance towards the goal of understanding and evaluating research. This chapter has outlined the ontological and epistemological paradigms used to help guide the selection of the methodology of PAR for this inquiry. In keeping with PAR norms, this thesis centers around a qualitative research design and also implores a social constructionist approach to explore the impact of mentoring relationships on SIE development. PAR is used to gain insights into experiences, opinions, and thoughts of participants because mentoring relationships are very personal social phenomenon and to understand them requires participant involvement. The role of the researcher as an insider is also discussed in terms of preunderstanding, role duality, and organizational politics. The research design includes cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting over a period of three months and data will be collected primarily through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and observations of mentoring meetings. Reflective journals, field notes, and other artifacts will also support data collection. Finally, rigor, in terms of reliability and validity, was part of this thesis through a focus on trustworthiness, which was achieved through the researcher's openness in sharing thoughts, opinions, and feelings through reflective vignettes and also through data triangulation. Triangulation of data was a key element of research design which was implemented by using multiple sources to collect data, which also included member checking to account for validity. More details about the implementation process will be introduced in the following chapter; and further insights into the methodology specifics, especially data analysis, were not known before completing the PAR project due to the emergent nature of PAR, which is why they will be discussed in context in subsequent chapters.

In order to investigate how SIE mentoring relationships impact employee development, it's necessary to study them closely. Following the PAR method, three cycles of action research were completed which followed the development of a formal peer mentoring program and closely monitored participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding their mentoring relationships. Template analysis, a type of thematic coding, was used to analyze one-to-one interactions, after which focus groups involving all participants continued the analysis democratically. Following the focus groups, an observed pair interaction was used as an intervention to make action explicit in constructing a mentoring experience. Even though participants could articulate what they thought were characteristics and elements of mentoring relationships based on their previous experience and current experience mentoring, most participants were unable to realize those characteristics in their mentoring relationship without specific guidelines and activities designed to address or improve those specific elements of the relationship. Three themes emerged from the participants' analyses over the three PAR cycles which are fundamental components for all mentoring relationships between SIE participants: communication, trust, and value. In the following chapter, these three themes will be discussed as evaluating the outcomes in the context of existing literature which will help to frame how SIE mentoring relationships can be understood and thus realized which will be necessary for the anticipated outcome of SIE professional development.

Chapter 4: Evaluation of Outcomes

Introduction: Developing the Themes of Peer Mentor Relationships

This chapter discusses findings from the study and shows the connections between existing literature between mentor relationships and the mentor relationships between SIEs explored in this thesis. First a there is a brief overview of how the themes were created, then the three main themes of peer mentoring relationships of communication, trust, and value are explored and set in the context of existing literature. Then the connection between the themes and SIE professional development are made explicit. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented.

The purpose of this thesis is to help remedy the gap in existing literature by exploring the mentoring relationships between SIE employees working abroad and the outcome of those relationships in terms of development. This thesis finds that there are three main themes involved with the construction of formal peer mentoring relationships: communication, trust, and value. Equally important as the product of these themes themselves is the process through which they were developed. A series of three participatory action research cycles were followed over a three-month period to gain insights into mentoring relationships in collaboration with participants. The first cycle focused on past mentoring experiences in constructing and articulating the idea of a mentoring relationship, first individually, then as a group, and finally through action involving pairs of participants attempting to realize their ideas through starting a peer mentoring relationship. This experience of trying to start a mentoring relationship was the starting point of PAR cycle two. Participants shared their thoughts, opinions, and experiences regarding their peer mentor relationship building experience individually with the researcher; then these ideas were refined and reorganized in a focus group, and finally there was action involving a peer mentoring role play to simulate being a mentor and being mentored. The third PAR cycle focused on the identified similarities between participants' peer mentoring experiences to find commonality through one-to-one interactions with the researcher, which were then developed together through the focus group, and finally used to create action through a peer mentoring activity involving creating a dialogue and encouraging trust and value in the experience. It's noteworthy that participants played a key role in the analysis of data and refinement of concepts throughout each PAR cycle working in tandem with the researcher as co-creators of knowledge. While the themes of communication, trust, and value were emergent from the PAR process, they also existed in some form from the initial discussion about past mentoring experiences from PAR cycle 1 at the very start of data collection. The role of these themes in peer mentoring relationship can best be understood through examining the subthemes in both the context of research and the context of existing literature. After discussing the themes and sub-themes, the relationships between participants will be examined and the implications for professional development will be explored in the next chapter.

Themes and Sub-Themes of Mentoring Relationships

Before discussing the themes, it's important to understand why the themes and sub-themes of mentoring relationships are being discussed. The identified themes and sub-themes help to provide a way to understand, analyze, and evaluate mentoring relationships through outlining the components and characteristics of mentoring relationships of SIEs. It is only after this more complete understanding is presented that the notion of quality in terms of mentoring relationships can be conceptualized and the connection between high quality mentoring relationships and development of SIEs can be considered. Each of these elements existed throughout each phase of the action research cycles and was identified by participants as important in the creation and cultivation of peer mentoring relationships.

Figure 24 Final Themes and Sub-Themes of SIE Peer Mentoring Relationships

Theme	Sub-Theme
Communication	Communication Channel
"" ""	Contact Frequency
"" ""	Formality of Communication
Trust	Reliability in Word and Deed
"" ""	Emotional Trust
"" ""	Honesty
Value	Professional Development
"" ""	Personal Development
"" ""	Social Networking Benefits
"" ""	Emotional Value

Next, each theme will be outlined, and the sub-themes will be discussed in the context of existing literature. These sub-themes provide greater detail into the three themes by providing examples and insights from the peer mentoring relationships which were generated by participants and the researcher. Some excerpts from interview transcripts which are highlighted below to help illustrate these themes and sub-themes, while others are referred to and can be found in the appendix. Please note that the dialogue is formatted to identify the speaker first (Ex. R: is for the Researcher, S1: Subject 1, etc.) so that reading the excerpts from the transcriptions can be more easily understood.

Theme: Communication

The importance of communication in mentoring relationships has been widely explored in mentoring literature across many fields (Dutton et al., 2019; McMorris et al., 2018;). Communication between mentor and mentee has been described as "connection" through being available, accessible, and approachable (McKinsey, 2016); findings suggest that having regular communication that was honest and open leading to trust improved the quality of mentoring relationships (Barrett et al, 2017); communication has also been classified as "connectedness" in terms of feelings of cohesion, spirit, trust, and interdependence (Baranik et al., 2017). The quality of communication in mentoring relationships has been found to lead to a greater understanding of mentor and protégé's messages which facilitates mentoring support (Kramer and Martin, 1996). While exploring the important role of communication in peer mentoring relationships, three main sub-themes of communication emerged: communication channels, contact frequency, and formality of communications. Even though these three sub-themes are distinct, the idea of communication is so fundamental to relationships (peer mentoring or otherwise) that these sub-themes can all be considered characteristics which influence the richness of the dialogue between peer mentors. The narrative of the PAR research process will now be presented through highlighting examples of SIE communication during the process, emphasizing sub-themes where they were noted, and by drawing connections between existing literature about communication in terms of mentoring relationships.

One way to evaluate communication between SIEs is through communication channels; this refers to how participants communicated with each other via face-to-face communication and non-face-to-face communication (virtual meetings, text messaging, etc.). The main communication channel expected from the research design was face-to-face interactions. In practice, business trips and participants preferences for communicating with each other resulted in a variety of channels being used to communicate during data collection. All the scheduled interactions were conducted face-to-face, with the exception of one observed pair interaction and one focus group intervention, each which included participant 3 through the use of a virtual teleconferencing system while he was traveling.

WeChat (an SMS/Text messaging platform popular in China) was also used to organize meetings, share pictures, and communicate in non-face-to-face situations. The use of WeChat exemplifies how SIEs must adapt and be flexible to adopting local customs, practices, and technologies when it comes to communication.

Approaches to communication in peer mentoring relationships specifically have been evaluated in terms of being entirely online, entirely offline, and a combination of online and offline (Christofides et al., 2017), but the specific role that technology plays in communication to the ends of the development of peer mentor relationships remains largely unexplored. The idea of "connection" described by Baranik et al. (2017), when considered in terms of communication channel, helps to illustrate why feelings of cohesion, spirit, trust, and interdependence might not develop the same way in virtual communication channels as they do in face-to-face interactions as a result of being less "connected", physically and otherwise, with someone else.

Face-to-face exchanges involve two or more people communicating face-to-face. The formal face-to-face communications organized as part of the action research data collection process were all audio recorded and transcribed, while the informal face-to-face communications, often in outside social settings which is common for SIEs, were captured through the researcher's field notes. During the first focus group it was agreed that face-to-face communication was valued more than other channels of communication in terms of effectiveness in relationship building and connecting with others. While there were many face-to-face interactions throughout the day, some related to this research project and some not, participants were more involved with their partners and the group during the arranged meetings than spontaneous meetings around the office. There seemed to be three underlying reasons for face-to-face communications between participants: 1) work related, 2) social – not necessarily work related, and 3) this research project. The social elements here are noteworthy as opportunities to socialize as SIEs are limited depending on the availability of people with a knowledge of their language. The challenge which presented itself at times was when there was overlap between two or more of these reasons: Did you want to go have lunch together because you didn't want to sit alone or did you invite me to discuss a problem at work, or is this part of the research project? One of the key benefits for the researcher of face-to-face communications was the inclusion of body language which helped facilitate communication, especially in situations where a participant seemed uncomfortable by a question or topic. Merritt and Havill (2016) note that face-to-face communication often allow for faster back and forth communication between mentor and mentee because non-verbal cues like facial expressions can be personalized and replace some spoken text.

The attitude of participants towards face-to-face meetings consistently showed their preference for this channel of communication for SIE relationship building than compared to other communication channels as it best facilitated rich dialogue between participants during PAR interactions. This is likely due to the multiple cues of face-to-face communication which includes intersubjectivity including language, body language, and other clues to help one person decipher how another person is constructing meaning from the interaction like tone, attitude, and emotions (Walther, 1992). An example of how face-to-face meetings were valued more than text messaging by SIEs can be viewed from the exchange below.

R: Was it just a WeChat or was it a meeting with him?

S3: No, I mean 'actual meetings', not just WeChat.

The complexities of peer mentor relationships in terms of trying to differentiate between friendship, a work relationship, and a mentor relationship with someone also played a role in evaluating SIE peer mentoring communication. Even from the first PAR cycle's one-to-one interactions, participants agreed that face-to-face communication was superior to other forms of communication in the context of mentoring, but it was difficult for them to articulate how or why it was better (see Appendix 1). Research has demonstrated that face-to-face interactions often yield stronger mentor relationships when they include more emotional disclosure, on the part of the mentee and on the part of the mentor, and reciprocated disclosure (Ryan et al., 2016).

When tasked with building a professional relationship with their SIE partners, all the participants preferred to meet outside of work during the workday to "get to know their partners". Leaving the workplace during the workday to go and talk adds a level of informality to the experience in which personal topics can be more easily broached and disclosed. While this allows for the potential to develop a stronger relationship through privacy from other colleagues and supervisors in which a conducive ambiance for self-disclosure can be created; these social interactions might also just be purely motivated by a need to socialize as two expatriates feeling isolated and wanting someone to talk to who understands them over lunch. Both the substance and the interaction patterns were scrutinized during the first observed pair interaction. Subjects 1 and 4 struck up a casual conversation about family visiting China while walking to a restaurant for lunch, and then had an exchange at the restaurant as the first observed pair interaction (see Appendix 2). Throughout this interaction between Subjects 1 and 4, the constant changing of subject without any real deep conversation seemed to be very superficial and seemed to lack significant emotional disclosure, as evinced by participants changing the topic frequently and not asking many follow up questions. While this might be explained by participants seeking cognitive overlap, to discover things they had in common, even when they did realize they worked for the same company prior to the current one, their questions seemed to focus on learning if they knew the same people and sharing short random anecdotes and rumors about those people (Ghosh, 2018). This is a common occurrence within the SIE communities abroad as the social networks are often limited to other SIEs and thus the chances of one SIE knowing another SIE is very high because they work in the same industry and the small number of SIEs overall. On the other hand, Subjects 5 and 6 were two participants who apparently already frequently interacted outside of work and had a more clearly defined relationship with expectations for what should happen during face-to-face communications to build professional relationships. Instead of probing to search for shared interests, these two participants were happy to share a summary of their current shared interests, habits, and common conversation topics. (See Appendix 3).

Face-to-face communication was also the primary channel of communication during informal meetings and gatherings which occurred between research participants when acting in the role of colleagues and not in an official research capacity. During these informal meetings between SIEs, such as pubs to attend weekly "quiz nights" or celebrating a birthday party at a Korean or Texas BBQ restaurant, expatriates often took advantage of the opportunity to socialize with others in English (language can be a big source of isolation when living abroad) and to discuss cultural interests. The researcher participated in these events on many occasions and according to field notes, Subjects 3, 4, 5, and 6 also participated in quiz nights and restaurant events, while Subjects 1 and 2 participated in informal lunch meetings on workdays but did not interact with their colleagues after working hours or during the weekends. On one occasion, the participants wanted to discuss SIE mentoring data collection at one of these events, but the researcher reminded them that they could share what they felt comfortable with, but he would not get involved with any conversations about research in this informal setting due to confidentiality and ethical concerns.

A key benefit of face-to-face communication that the researcher recognized while reviewing transcripts was that body language adds significantly to the context of communication. While as a reading of the transcript below, discussing the self-assessed undeveloped nature of the SIE peer mentoring relationship between Subjects 1 and 4 and their lack of communication, might seem to color

Subject 4 as someone who is outraged or very upset; since he was smiling while sitting relaxed in his chair while speaking, the context illustrates that his expletives were more in jest than anger.

S4: And I have tried to get him out, I tried to get him to the quiz the other day, he said he didn't want to go, so...I tried.
R: Did you ever volunteer to go to the gym with [Subject 1]?
*S4: F*** that. F*** everything about that.*
R: Do you think he feels the same way about going to the bar?
S4: Probably.
R: Interesting. So, in that part like it sounds like there is a stand-off or that neither of you wants to compromise and you are happy with that.
S4: Yeah, I'm happy with that.

While face-to-face communication was the primary channel used in the formal peer mentoring program design and considered superior, in terms of communication, by the researcher and participants; it was not the only channel used to communicate during data collection. As previously mentioned, Virtual Teleconferencing and WeChat were also used. The most common forms of non-face-to-face communication were VTC and WeChat. The closest alternative to face-to-face communication was through Virtual Teleconferencing (VTC). The company offices in Beijing and Shanghai, and many other cities across China, were already wired for this channel of communication. SIE participants noted that interactions using a virtual teleconferencing system through a phone or at the office were not as effective as face-to-face communication, largely because of poor internet connections which disrupted communication through preventing understanding. When words or sentences are cut out of conversations, it is not always easy to understand them. This is consistent with e-mentoring literature which identified that there are distinct challenges with computer mediated communication (CMC) with respect to mentoring including misunderstandings in communication and hardware and software issues (Ensher et al. 2003).

S2: It was a little bit difficult to get to know him over the phone especially like the internet connection was kind of like dropping.

Using virtual teleconferencing also led to some other side effects like an inability to gauge reactions.

S2: Yeah, once was I think WeChat and the other time was through Zoom. But the internet was like on and off. Which kind of sometimes sucks because you know like a lot of times you can tell how interesting what it is what you are saying based on how people react.

VTC was only used on a few occasions and primarily between Subjects 2 and 3, due to Subject 3's travel schedule. While research has explored various communication mediums for peer mentoring, the distinction has been made between synchronous and asynchronous communication; in which synchronous communication like face-to-face or VTC and asynchronous communication like email and instant messaging, both can contribute to communication and the development of peer mentoring relationships (Christofides, 2017).

WeChat is a Chinese instant messaging platform for phones and computers. It was also the backbone of asynchronous communication at work, even more popular than email due to its ease of access through the cell phone application (App). All teams and all departments use this platform to communicate with superiors and laterally throughout the organization. WeChat was used frequently as a communications channel between SIE participants for shorter messages and communications between participants. One of the first things participants did at the first meeting was to exchange WeChat contact details.

S2: Sure, I think we can exchange WeChats right and then we can talk a little bit, break the ice...I'll send you some jokes and you can fake laugh at them.

WeChat was also used as a way for SIEs to cultivate peer mentoring relationships using short interactions that sometimes involved humor (See Appendix 4). The platform itself facilitates sharing short videos, images, and messages from others so that users can easily forward messages to others. The researcher previously created several WeChat Groups with colleagues, outside of this research project, with the sole purpose of building a positive work environment, sharing humor, and helping to provide psychosocial support to the expatriate community. Since everyone at work was required to use WeChat, it was a way to gauge the amount and degree of communication between participants.

R: That's cool. Did...so, after the meeting, did you have any other meetings with [Subject 1] last week or the week before?
S4: No. We haven't talked.
R: Okay. WeChat?
S4: Not since I saw him...no WeChat or anything.
R: Okay.
S4: Nothing. No follow up.

Not even sending someone a WeChat messages shows a complete absence of communication as this channel is used with such frequency at work, that employees often send hundreds of WeChat messages during their workdays communicating with colleagues in the office, across China, and overseas. After the second PAR cycle highlighted the importance of communication and participants' communications (or lack of communication), Subject 4 communicated more with Subject 1, even if it was only through WeChat.

S4: No, I haven't talked to him since.
R: Okay.
S4: Although we did connect on the phone, he forwarded a Podcast about leadership to me.
R: Really?
S4: I listened to it.
R: Okay. When did you do that?
S4: I guess I did talk to him after the meeting.
R: Okay.
S4: But it was only WeChat.

WeChat messages also provided a unique way to review some specific examples of communication between participants as they tried to build peer mentoring relationships. This allowed for actual dialogue between peer mentoring participants to be read and discussed with the researcher in the context of one-to-one interactions. This provided the researcher with insights into communications outside of the scheduled interactions and set the stage for critically reviewing these communications in terms of relationship building like in the example below.

R: When you asked this question about the work question - what was like his, it was email right?
S3: No, WeChat.
R: WeChat. What was the start of that like chat?
S3: Oh, let me see. Let's see, let's see. [Subject 2]. Ok. See this is it. I said, 'Hey [Subject 2], do you know teachers...
R: Not 'how are you doing?', 'what's the weather like?'

In this example, the direct nature of the WeChat communication, devoid of any interest in the recipient of the message, was brought to the attention of the sender. The tone of the message was described as "transactional" as there was no effort or interest in the recipient involved, just the needed information was solicited. This led to a discussion about an opportunity to improve communication between these two participants through acknowledging that showing more interest in the other person with the aims of building the relationship could be viewed as a way to improve the relationship. While it can be helpful to review instant message communications and text messages, this has also been flagged by Ensher et al. (2003) as a concern in terms of privacy with e-mentoring.

WeChat, like VTC, can also lead to miscommunication because of the limited nature of the communication channel which does not allow for the recipient of the message to ask for clarifications or accurately assess the tone of the messages (See Appendix 5). While Ensher et al. (2003) note that miscommunication is a challenge with computer mediated communication, specifically using a channel like WeChat can lead to miscommunication due to the limited context and inability to communicate complex thoughts, tone, and ideas efficiently through typing messages. In this specific example with Subject 6, it also showcases the benefit of insider action research as the researcher has past experiences with participants to use as a frame of reference to create meaning and explore ideas relating to peer mentoring relationships and communication. Merritt and Havill (2016) explain that less-rich media, such as emails and instant messages might not be very good at conveying respect, support, and concern. Appendix 6 contains an example of how the background knowledge and experience within the organization, provided by the dual role of scholar-practitioner, and with the research participants specifically can be beneficial to data collection.

Ultimately, participants considered face-to-face communicate more effective than through WeChat (SMS/Text messages) or virtual teleconferencing software because they provide more context and more possibilities to communicate in more ways than just the words and language used. This is consistent with research involving mentoring communications Ensher et al. (2003, p.276) which note that using technology to communicate can lead to the following challenges (some of which face-to-face communication often avoids): misunderstandings in communication, slow pace of building up relationships, technical and written communication skills, hardware and software problems on computer, and privacy issues. In addition, face-to-face communication has been identified as the richest mode of communication and found to be the most effective way for mentors and protégé's to communicate (Daft et al., 1987).

In addition to communication channels, participants identified contact frequency as an important way to evaluate communication in mentoring relationships. Contact frequency refers to how often participants communicated, whether through CMC (computer mediated communication) or face-to-face (Tanis and Barker, 2017). How often participants communicated is indicative of the strength of the relationship between participants (Gaddis, 2012), although relationships are dynamic and may change over time. In one case, participants were friends and colleagues with well-established patterns of almost daily contact, while in other cases, participant pairs may have previously met, but not had any contact since their first meeting before participating in PAR. A minimum frequency of contact was defined by the PAR interaction schedule between participants, including the one-to-one interactions, focus group interactions, and observed pair interactions. As the PAR cycles progressed, participants who had more contact frequency had more developed mentor relationships in terms of trust and the value of the relationship. To provide a frame of reference for participants with which to measure contact frequency, the researcher intentionally went out of his way to communicate with all participants in both formal and informal, research and non-research contexts throughout the data collection period (and beyond). This allowed for the comparison of contact frequency for participants with their partners and with the researcher when discussing communications and peer mentoring relationships.

Communication outside of scheduled meetings was not a requirement, but it provided a good tool for evaluating the health of the mentoring relationship. The less contact between participants outside of the formal scheduled communication was identified by participants and the researcher as a sign of a lower quality peer mentoring relationship. Even after communication and specifically "follow up" was identified as a key element of mentor relationships in the second focus group; during the third observed pair interaction, it was clear that the participants with the weakest relationship had still not "followed up".

R: Yeah, we had a mentoring session, then, we had individual meetings after that; yeah, what happened next. Did you guys talk about any of the mentoring that happened before?
S1: We did not.
S4: No.
R: Okay.
S4: We do not have that good communication.
R: Aww. Not even in a text message or like anything.
S1: I wasn't really, like...I think I missed that; that I was supposed to follow up with [Subject 4].
S4: Yeah, I think we both missed.

This example of a very weak peer mentor relationship provided a great contrast between the relationship that the researcher had developed with each of these participants; one of the principal differences between the relationships being that the researcher made every effort to frequently communicate with all participants using multiple channels, in multiple settings, regarding research, work, and personal topics. Even almost daily emails were sent by the researcher to all participants prior to this research project in the researcher's dual role as communications and engagement manager. These emails were purely informational and contained entertaining posts made by teachers on Facebook to boost morale of the managers, leadership team, and the expats working at the organization. While the researcher did not consider these communications connected to data collection or the research project, participants did not seem to make that distinction (See Appendix 7). The light-hearted tone of the exchange also demonstrates the strength of the relationship between the researcher and Subject 4 after regular and frequent communications. Frequent communication and interactions might be necessary to attain effective understanding between participants, including a better understanding of who someone else is and what their personality is like (Merritt and Havill, 2016). In addition to emails and the scheduled mentoring meetings, field notes document that the Researcher and Subject 4 attended numerous social events outside of work in the expat community in Beijing together, usually as a part of a larger group.

As had become routine, during the third observed pair interaction, at the start the researcher asked participants if there was any follow up communication that happened since the previous observed pair interaction. The exchange between Subjects 2 and 3 illustrated the nuances of contact frequency as they met informally, but did not discuss anything relating to peer mentoring because they felt they needed to be alone with each other to discuss those things (See Appendix 8). While both Subjects 2 and 3 have discussed and shown interest in follow up after sessions and other efforts to communicate outside of the scheduled interactions on multiple occasions, the "forced" nature of the relationships is evident in the lack of interest in informal communications, which is evidenced by the fact that following up doesn't seem to happen when it's inconvenient, like when other people are around.

Contact frequency only accounts for how often communication occurs, but another dimension involved is the formality of communication. While there was a clear structure to the PAR data collection process including a schedule for the three types of interactions (one-to-one, focus group, and observed pair interactions), communication between participants also occurred outside of this clearly formal setting. Would a meal at a restaurant with both peer mentors discussing peer mentor related topics be considered formal or informal? Participants are assuming the role of peer mentors, but it's outside of the formal data collection structure. This informal mentoring communication involves knowledge and skills being developed in the spaces that lie outside of the formal mentoring system (Austin, 2018). During the final one-to-one interaction, Subject 2 noted that more frequent communication of an informal type, and of a reciprocal nature of communications can lead to better relationship outcomes, as exemplified by his relationship with the researcher.

R: So, if we think about it, it's been about three months so [Subject 3]...you and [Subject 3] had this sort of mentor relationship, I was also kind of here and I also met with you rather frequently, so how would you describe your relationship with me?
S2: As compared to the relationship that I have with [Subject 3]?
R: Yeah.
S2: Well obviously, I think we are a lot closer, obviously we had more chances to talk to each other and more, rather informally than formally, right?
R: Yeah.
S2: We didn't believe, like I don't think we had many times when we met for a certain purpose like, 'Hey, we need to meet because we want to discuss this', like very specific things...
R: Yeah, that's true.
S2: ...but then, with [Subject 3], most of the meetings were because we had to do something, right?
R: Right.
S2: So, that's why I would say the relationship with you, it's a lot easier to talk to you and because you also...like during our meetings, lunches whatever, we just spoke about random stuff, so it was much, much easier to gauge. Some things you might enjoy and some you might not. Things that I could say or things that I couldn't say and...yeah, and I think I think I learnt a bit more about what you do than I learned from [Subject 3].
R: Like professionally?
S2: Yeah, like your work situations and problems you were dealing with, your actual work, right like what...to be very honest, I'm still not sure what [Subject 3] does. Like you know the title, I know he is dealing with feedback or stuff but how he does it like I don't know if there is a lot of technology involved but I'm not really sure where is he placed in this whole process. Like what does he actually do?

To still have a fundamental question like "What does he do?" after three months of organized, formal interactions with someone who works at the same organization as you do is a clear sign that there is a problem with communication, especially considering that almost all the interactions involved discussing work. At the end of the three-month PAR project, it was clear that the relationship between

Subjects 2 and 3 did not develop beyond a superficial "let's help the researcher complete his project by doing the minimum required level". Field notes support the assertion that Subject 2 has a much stronger relationship with the researcher because of WeChat conversations started by Subject 2 with the researcher involving humorous content, invitations to lunch, and work-related messages, in addition to records showing weekly informal lunches with Subject 2. While the informal communications between Subjects 2 and 3 never materialized, it was clear that the formal communications between the two were also lackluster.

On the other end of the spectrum, Subjects 5 and 6 already had a very strong relationship, in terms of regular communication, before starting data collection. Even after the first intervention, Subjects 5 and 6 had already built a solid routine of communicating with each other on a regular basis about their peer mentoring experiences among other things in their informal meetings outside of the scheduled formal sessions (See Appendix 9). Field notes also documented these regular interactions since Subjects 5 and 6 sat very close to each other in the office and the researcher had attended many non-work social events with both participants present and frequently interacting with each other in informal settings. These two examples of formality illustrate the importance of informal communication on the development of mentoring relationships, but also show the inherent challenge involved with implementing an "informal" system; some people get along with others in informal settings, and others less so.

The data collected from the PAR research project and academia agree that communication is clearly a vital part of mentor relationships (Christofides et al., 2017). While the PAR design included only face-to-face communication, a variety of channels were used throughout the data collection process including VTC and WeChat. Frequency of communication can also be linked to quality of mentoring relationships as more frequent communication increases the chances of achieving effective understanding (Merritt and Havill, 2016). The participant peer mentoring pair with the strongest mentoring relationship met daily, while the weakest mentoring relationship, noted by participants and the researcher, only met during the formal mentoring interactions that were scheduled. In addition to the structured formal peer mentoring interactions, some participants also met and communicated informally with each other in pairs and in groups at restaurants and social events. Now that the role of communication in the development of peer mentoring relationships has been discussed, the outcome of the communication in terms of developing trust in the mentoring relationships will be examined.

Trust in the Relationship

The topic of trust was mentioned specifically from the very first meetings with participants and consistently came up as discussions of mentoring relationships occurred throughout the data collection process. Participants noted that "trust" was an important part of peer mentoring relationships during each cycle of PAR. This might not be surprising since emotions and trust are essential elements in any social relationship (Tse and Dashborough, 2008). Mayer et al. (1995) describe trust as a willingness to take a risk or to be vulnerable. But this description doesn't encapsulate the social exchange view which Pratt and Dirks (2007) articulate as a competition between positive aspects, like an anticipation of positive outcomes, and negative aspects, like being vulnerable and possibly hurt. A more comprehensive definition of trust is offered by Rotenberg (2012) which includes reliability in word and deed, emotional trust (protection from criticism and emotional harm and sensitivity to disclosures and the confidentiality), and honesty (both engaging in behaviors guided by benign intent and telling the truth). Trust as an emergent theme in peer mentoring relationships is discussed here in terms of reliability in word and deed, emotional trust, honesty, and self-disclosure. Again, the insider researcher's perspective will be added and a comparison between the relationship participants developed with their partners and the researcher was also invited to provide a frame of reference to participants for describing abstract ideas like trust.

In addition to reliability in word and deed, which participants exemplified in various ways through their participation in data collection, as a way to understand trust, there is also emotional trust. Emotional trust is a uniquely personal concept which can be different for everyone. First, all human experiences have connections to feelings (George, 2000) and Higgins and Kram (2001) also note that the emotional support is important to members in developmental and social relationships. When looking specifically at trust through an interactionist model, it can be viewed as a dynamic and evolving experience in which attitudes, values, moods, and emotions all interact to create an overall state of trust or distrust (Jones and George, 1998). Emotional bonds are at the core of affective foundations for building trust between mentors and mentees (McAllister, 1995). Even as this concept is described, recognizing it in the real world presents challenges as people are not always open about their feelings and some people are not personally aware of their feelings, lacking emotional intelligence (Davies et al., 1998). Trust is discussed with Subject 3, but it is difficult for Subject 3 to articulate where trust comes from, even though the final conclusion that's presented is similar to emotional trust (See Appendix 10). In addition, to a person that "actually cares", emotional trust also includes protection from criticism and emotional harm. Varying levels of sensitivity and awareness to the feelings of others, another element of emotional intelligence, also emerged as an obstacle to building trust in mentoring relationships due to the inability to understand the emotions of others and thus the desire to avoid conflict at times prevented communication (Chun et al., 2010). The exchange between Subject 2 and the researcher examines how a desire to prevent emotional harm resulted in not communicating with someone whose feelings were not easy to understand.

R: I think like you said the challenge of [Subject 3] being in a different city also played a big part.
S2: Yeah, but I don't want to put that because obviously nowadays, it would have been really easy to talk to each other. I mean we have the WeChat, we have Skype, we have all this technology; obviously it's not, I don't think it's the biggest issue. But, because we didn't connect that well, we didn't have that drive to grab the phone and call, you know sometimes. Like, there were times when I wanted to send him a message, but I felt like 'am I weird?', just jumping out of the blue and saying 'hey, how are you?'. You know I think I had these thoughts, you know.
R: But yeah, it could be a good strategy for that, where you said something funny.
S2: I just didn't really dare to do that with [Subject 3]. I just like he...I don't know, I couldn't get a good read on him. Like I don't see he is really into that or something like that and I didn't want to offend him or because I felt like some of the jokes that I like are offensive to a lot of people. I'm not sure if he is one of those people who find...
R: Right.
S2: ...find the humor that I am using to be offensive. So, I didn't want to upset him or...
R: Okay. So, after, kind of three months later...
S2: Yeah.
R: ...do you know what offends [Subject 3] or not?
S2: Hmmm, not really.

The emotional "blind-spot", in which Subject 2 was unable to understand if Subject 3 would feel offended by saying something, seemed to indicate an obstacle to building emotional trust. In another example of a lack of emotional trust, Subject 4 described how he felt before meeting with Subject 1 to lead his first mentoring session with him (See Appendix 11). The peer mentoring relationship between Subject 1 and Subject 4, from both participants' perspectives, was low quality throughout the data collection process due, at least in part, to a persistent lack of trust and honesty.

Honesty is another concept associated with trust. Degrees of honesty are always involved when people communicate with each other, but honestly can become clouded when people are uninformed, or misinformed due to the potential differences between what someone believes to be true and what others believe to be true. This can be especially complicated when it comes to opinions and feelings which are completely personal and subjective. Notwithstanding, Smith (2003) notes that "an honest person refuses to pretend that facts are other than they are, whether to himself of others" (p.518). While a lack of honesty is often used to portray people deceiving others, the idea of self-honesty, in which people may have an inability to see the facts that are related to the self as they are, also emerged (Braginsky, 1970).

In the exchange below during the final observed pair interaction between Subjects 1 and 4, Subject 4 shares the actual reason why he is planning to resign; the tone was very sober and the revelation at the end seemed unplanned, as if even Subject 4 had not articulated his true feelings before, to others or even himself.

S4: Yeah. I believe. Well, I was counting words and I knew it was going to happen 5 months ago. I was just really dragging my feet about it because, I don't know. I don't know, why I was dragging, but I knew it was going to happen and then, yeah, last week I have been like, alright this is really going to happen. I'm leaving next week. I have like two weeks' notice. I gave [supervisor] like a month.
S1: When you say you knew this was going to happen, you decided, right?
S4: Yeah, I decided when me and my girlfriend broke up.
S1: Aah, okay.
S4: was like, if you, the only reason I was still here was because of her. I was planning on moving back to America with her and getting married, I guess.
S1: Wow.
S4: Yeah, she brought me back actually. That's the reason I left [another company] was because I was going over to America kind of. That was the loose plan with her because we met at [another company].
R: She is Chinese or American?
S4: Chinese and she couldn't really get a job on that short a notice in America, so we came back here together, and we said in a year or eighteen months, we'll go back to America with jobs, both of us want jobs, right. A year later, we broke up and I'm still going to stick to the plan of going back to America and get a job. So, yeah.
S1: This changes everything.
S4: Now, the truth comes out.

In addition to being honest with oneself, being honest with others is also an indicator of trusting relationships. Self-disclosure happens when someone intentionally shares personal information with someone else and usually indicates that a high level of trust is present (Greene, Derlega, and Matthews, 2006). All participants and the researcher explored how self-disclosure, especially critical opinions, can result in increased trust in the short term during a focus group interaction. Even though self-disclosure of critical or negative information and opinions was not believed to create trust over time, in the short term, this type of self-disclosure was believed to be a way to build trust (See Appendix 12). During the second one-to-one interaction between the researcher and Subject 1 we can see how the typically positive Subject 1 was comfortable to share his negative feelings with the researcher (See Appendix 13). After this interaction, the researcher's field notes showed that dealing with stress was a significant issue for Subject 1 and would then later be incorporated into the observed pair mentoring interaction as the mentoring topic. It was the trust between Subject 1 and the researcher which allowed for this type of self-disclosure, which the researcher saw as an opportunity for development through an organized mentoring session to bring the underlying issue of dealing with stress to the surface to be addressed.

Valuing the Relationship

The third main theme which emerged in all mentoring relationships with SIEs is the value found in the peer mentor relationship. From an academic perspective, creating a sense of value in a relationship can be viewed through the lens of social exchange theory in which there is an exchange of intangible social benefits and costs (Gefen and Ridings, 2002). These different sources of "value" can be considered "currencies" as elaborated by Foa and Foa (1974) which can typically involve information, status, money, goods, services, and/or love/emotional support which are exchanged. Gutiérrez (2012) highlighted some of the ways to value mentoring relationships as being more productive, having stronger professional skills, being more self-confident, and having large professional networks. Scandura (1992) identified the main types of support associated with social exchange theory when applied to mentoring relationships: vocational/professional support and psychosocial/personal support. It's also worthwhile to also mention the importance of how mentoring relationships are valued, especially in terms of perception, as the expectation and perception of the exchanges between members of the relationship can lead to a breakdown of the relationship if mismatched, which can then result in the termination of the relationship if not corrected (Fiske, 1991).

Mentoring itself has been defined as a developmental relationship in which a more experienced employee challenges and supports a less experienced employee with the goal of professional and personal development (Qian et al., 2014). While development was a central component of this research, participants perceived value in different ways from their experiences. Primarily, participants perceived value in terms of professional/vocational skill and personal/psychosocial skill development. Research shows that mentoring experienced by expatriates abroad can support sharing and knowledge creation, both of which are considered critical to the success of the organization and the expatriate (Nery-Kjerfve and McLean, 2012). While the idea of value can be perceived differently by those involved with the social exchange, there were various indications of how value was perceived based on participant behaviors. The topics of the observed peer interaction sessions from PAR cycle 2 largely involved professional skill development as peer mentors shared their wisdom and experience with their partners. The amount of time and energy spent preparing for these mentoring sessions provided insights into how much value peer mentors associated with these sessions, but the best understanding of perceived value was gained from participants after the session had ended. Mentoring sessions like these between expatriates can take time to realize as Feldman and Bolino (1999) note that mentoring needs to be both designed and implemented in accordance to the individual needs of the expatriate to reach the goal of being considered successful. The participants who felt like they had weaker peer mentor relationships participated, but they were often surprised by the responses of their mentees during these sessions (See Appendix 14) indicating a mismatch of perceived values as shown by the different degrees of interest participants had taken in getting to know their partners. During this observed pair interaction, Subject 4 genuinely did not know that Subject 1 viewed his position as excessively stressful and was open to receiving help to address stress with Subject 4. While value was created during these observed pair mentoring interactions, based on participant feedback, the value seemed mainly confined to the scheduled formal peer mentoring interactions. Most participants did not find enough value in the professional skill development aspect of their relationships to interact with their partners outside of the scheduled interactions. This is consistent with research findings which show that mentoring relationships, in terms of professional skill development, are reciprocal and can only be fully realized, in terms of new skills and greater awareness of different work styles, when both participants are engaged (Crocitto, Sullivan, and Carraher, 2005). With respect to the participants' mentor relationships with the researcher, there was significant value from the researcher's perspective in the relationships, so the researcher made it a point to follow up with all participants outside of the formal interaction schedule and this interest was reciprocated by participants through their continued participation in data collection and in the development of friendships and psychosocial support.

In addition to the formal peer mentoring interactions, professional development also created value in the relationships between the researcher and participants from the participants' perspectives (See Appendix 15). The value created through professional development during PAR was also reciprocated by participants, many of whom made an effort to regularly communicate with the researcher, months and years after the completion of this project and departing the organization.

In addition to developing professional skills, personal development is another way that challenge and support have helped to create value in mentoring relationships. Personal development has been described as a level of commitment in a mentoring relationship that takes communication to a more informal and personal level (Hansen and Rasmussen, 2016). Noe (1988) describes personal development in terms of the psychosocial support involving mentors being, "a role model of appropriate attitudes, values, and behaviors for the protege (role model); conveying unconditional positive regard (acceptance and confirmation); providing a forum in which the protege is encouraged to talk openly about anxieties and fears (counseling); and interacting informally with the protege at work (friendship)" (p.459). Leaving the professional sphere, in terms of mentoring topics, was only explicitly achieved by Subjects 5 and 6 who had a more relational mentoring relationship which was characterized by mutual learning, growth and career development of both the mentor and mentee (Ragins, 2012). Personal development requires a higher degree of trust and honesty in the relationships due to the personal nature of psychosocial support; during these mentoring interactions socializing and financial decision making were the topics for peer mentoring. The exchange between the researcher and Subject 5 from the final one-to-one interaction illustrates this (See Appendix 16). Researcher field notes supported that Subject 6's attitude towards conversing and socializing with others had changed as a result of the peer mentoring session. In non-work social settings, Subject 6 became more likely to start conversations and less reserved and quiet. Alternatively, Subject 6 also added value to the mentor relationships with Subject 5 by mentoring Subject 5 on the personal development topic of how to manage money better (since Subject 6 had prior experience in that industry). Subject 5 reflects on his experience in terms of the value of the relationship below.

R: Let's see and then the last part of kind of perceived value and good use of time in the relationship. So, do you think the time you have spent with [Subject 6] over the past three months is valuable?
S5: I think so, I think I'm, I myself have at least on the path to improve myself, my financial stuff a little bit better and become a little bit better just being aware of it, a little bit better...
R: Yeah.
*S5: ...and knowing that that's a thing because before I didn't give a sh** about anything regarding money...*
R: Yeah.
S5: ...and like I said I think for him, I can see him improving a lot at those...I can see...yeah, I don't want to say 'he's improved and he's capable and all of these areas' but just like me with the finances, I think he's on the path to be able to, in a way like I think he's got direction in how to improve it; like I think he he's got some goals in his mind as far as...improving his networking abilities and stuff like that...
R: Definitely brought things to the surface. To like, look at it under a microscope and then yeah. At first, you are going to ask questions, and something will change.

While personal development topics are another way to build value in mentor relationships, a high degree of trust in the relationship between both partners appears to be a prerequisite before explicit personal development, from mentoring activities involving a clear focus personal development, can be fully realized. In addition, the perceived value of the mentoring relationship also must be understood as equal between participants. An additional way in which value was created in mentor relationships was through psychosocial support and emotional value. While emotions play a role in all relationships through shaping social interactions (Fineman, 1993), the value associated with positive feelings does not need to be linked directly to the development of professional skills or personal development. Holtbrugge and Ambrosius (2015) note that value can be created in mentoring relationships outside of professional and personal development, through a social exchange involving fun, companionship, friendship, information, and support. One of the constructs of Kram was that there exists a large variability considering the degrees of career and psychosocial support in mentoring relationships (Israel et al., 2014). This underscores the separation between skill and personal development and the intangible benefits of mentoring relationships which are specifically connected to feelings and emotions. Mezias and Scandura (2005) note that mentors are connections who can provide emotional and professional support in expatriate workers. Tenenbaum, Crosby, and Gliner (2001) elaborate on how psychosocial support in mentoring relationships can exist as mentors empathize with the feelings and concerns of proteges. The main sources of emotional value and positive feelings from mentor relationships in this study originate from three main sources from the interactions in the study: entertainment/humor, empathy, and emotional support. While elements of entertainment and humor existed sporadically throughout interactions, they were particularly noticeable from Subject 5 who had a high degree of trust in his peer mentoring relationship with Subject 6, and had a reputation at work for being charismatic and a source of both entertainment and humor. Subject 5's humorous attitude and charisma was noticeable from the first focus group interaction in which the researcher posed the question, "What do you need to have a professional relationship?" to which Subject 5 responded "beer". Then the following exchange occurred:

R: So, how do you actually start that relationship that you said, 'beer'? Do you want to expand on that? [Laughter]
S4: Hops and fermentation.
S5: Fluid. No. I don't know. I do think in previous mentor type relationships that I have been in, it tended to be people all on my team and stuff that outside of work we would actually go and get a beer and talk about work and stuff. At least in my situation I don't know if everybody in here drinks. But I think that sort of, that atmosphere like chatting and figuring out what it is we are working on, what our goals are and how we are trying to achieve them because in my past, it has all been good.
S6: Well, I think is useful about that sort of getting outside the office, setting for that discussion is people saying what they actually think - people are like having drinks, they are not worried about saying...like there are some things you can't say in the office, right? Or you wouldn't want certain people to overhear you say them but when people get out into that...they're just blunt and honest about how they feel about things and then, somebody can...maybe a little bit more experienced can give them advice on how they can handle that in the past right and...you get...I think it's more productive because those kind of barriers to honesty are removed.
S2: I think you definitely need honesty, right? In this relationship, you need honesty.
S5: So, [Subject 6] needs beer to be honest.

This introduction of humor was a way for all participants to have a positive emotional experience during the focus group, even if that positivity was short lived for some. When people tend to frequently involve humor and entertainment in their interactions with others, those they are interacting with seem to anticipate and expect it as the habit of being humorous and entertaining others begins to define one's identity and create emotional value.

Empathy was another source of psychosocial and emotional value that was a component of mentoring relationships. Fuchsman (2015) notes that the empathy literature has typically been divided into emotional and non-emotional (cognitive) empathy. Emotional empathy being the affective reaction, sometimes even visceral, that results from another's condition (Davis, 1983). Cognitive empathy, on the other hand, is when someone intellectually identifies with another person's perspective, especially their experiences, actions, and thoughts (Dymond, 1949). Both forms of empathy are considered, "soft skills" and all people possess them to varying degrees. Drawing on the shared difficulties of the circumstances involved with living as an expatriate, empathy was often found in interactions around relatable life and work challenges that were common. During the second observed pair interaction, just mentioning travel by train in China resulted in shared opinions about experiences and elicited cognitive empathy from participants (See Appendix 20). In another example of social networking during a focus group interaction, emotional empathy was experienced through the researcher sharing a very uncomfortable experience with Chinese security at an airport that other participants could relate to and reacted to physically through crossing arms.

R: That whole flight thing was insane though because that [female security officer] was like literally groping me for 35 seconds.
S2: Yeah.
R: Yeah and I was like 'Lady, really?' and then she's like going around my waist going inside my waist like...Then finally I literally said, "OK, that's enough!" and walked away.
S3: Did you have a groper?
R: Yeah.
*S3: Dude, I had a groper at the f***ing train station last week.*
R: No way, which station?
S3: Yeah. Beijing.
S5: They cannot resist [Subject 3].
S3: I think she was more into it than I was to be honest with you.

These often-stressful situations that SIEs experience abroad are a regular source of potential empathy because of the shared experiences involving similar strong feelings. Outside of empathy, another way to create emotional value in a mentor relationship is through emotional support. Higgins and Kram (2001) assert that emotional support for both the mentor and mentee is a requirement for a successful relationship. While reciprocity is commonly understood as doing unto others as you would have them do unto you; Blau (1964) notes that the actions of one person in a social relationship, in terms of support, is interdependent and contingent on the actions of the other person. Even when looking at a low-quality peer mentor relationship, as understood by the perceptions of the participants in that relationship, emotional support can be a limited or temporary element which creates value in the mentor relationships, and that concept of value might also be limited or temporary. Even though Subject 1 and 4 did not establish trust and had no communication outside of the formal mentoring schedule, value was still created through emotional support when Subject 1 decided to go to Subject 4's going away party after the formal mentoring program had ended; it was significant because Subject 1 had always refused Subject 4's invitations to bars and it would be their last face-to-face meeting after being paired together for three months and before Subject 4 returns to the USA. This event was recalled by Subject 1 below:

S1: Yeah. And like it was great to go out and be with everyone especially because like you know how I feel, I got to...I bought him a bottle of beer - I felt like really, I just like, I felt like emotional about that - like we did the mentoring session and like here's a drink like and now hit the road, right? Like I mean but that's like it; it is very much like that's what you do. You go and like I was able to say goodbye, right? Like I said goodbye and...but yeah, I mean... I yeah, I think yeah...
This farewell night. I think it meant a lot to him because he was like - he didn't really expect me to go.
R: Yeah, that's true.
S1: And I was like there and I was like, 'oh what's up? You want a beer?' You are like so, I don't...yeah I think that really, I think, I think that really meant a lot to him. So, certainly even meant something to me, it meant a lot to me. Like, it was a good way to do the right thing...certainly was the right thing to do.

This compromise from Subject 1, who had previously stated that he was over the "partying and drinking" phase of his life, for the benefit of Subject 4 resulted in the creation of value in the relationship on an emotional level. Both sides benefited; Subject 1 was able to be a role model by "doing the right thing"; even though it required a personal compromise, and Subject 4 was able to feel valued enough by Subject 1 that his invitation to meet outside of work was finally accepted. Field notes show that the attitudes of both participants were very positive during the going away party, more so than was ever observed between the two participants in any other meeting during data collection. This also exemplifies how dynamic relationships can be as one single significant event can have a lasting impact on the quality and perception of relationships in terms of emotional support.

Another way participants associated value with mentoring relationships is through benefits associated with social networking. In addition to Scandura (1992)'s categorization of value for mentoring relationships in terms of psychosocial support/personal support and vocational/professional support, Gutiérrez (2012) highlighted some additional ways to value mentoring relationships including having large professional networks. Mentoring relationships create value for individuals and groups of individuals in organizations through creating stronger relationships between employees (Montag et al., 2014). While the immediate application of stronger relationships refers to those between mentor and mentee, the added connections and stronger relationships also extends the social network of participants in mentoring and to the organization. In the context of SIEs, social networking creates value through the psychosocial support (friendship, unconditional acceptance and confirmation, counseling, role-modeling) which can be found in social interactions between members of a group which may or may not be at work (Kram, 1985). The concept of social networking in the context of expatriate mentoring has been discussed in terms of intra- and extra-organizational ties that have different strengths (Makela and Suutari, 2009). These have been experienced by participants in terms of expanding their social networks through their peer mentoring relationships and their relationships with all participants (intra-organizational ties) and from social interactions and invitations made by participants outside of work in which participants expanded their social networks into the larger expatriate community (extra-organizational ties), both of which have been associated with value resulting from their experiences. For these ties to be successful and sustainable, the perceived value exchanged must be equal between participants (Fiske, 1991).

When considering the individual, in terms of the value of social networking, there was a specific mentoring session led by Subject 3 which dealt specifically with social networking in China (See Appendix 17). Subject 3's experience and practical networking suggestions for China specifically of "never let a relationship die", "always say 'hi' to people", and avoiding conflict through using the "Chinese 'no'" exemplify the practical benefits of how value is created through mentoring relationships with respect to networking benefits which was noted by Subject 2 (the mentee during the mentoring session on networking). These suggestions and practical insights into networking are echoed by scholars who have found that there is a great importance to network diversity in China (Au and Fukuda, 2002) which could be realized in terms of “never let a relationship die” because you never know when you might need it. Social networking has also been found to address another challenge faced by expatriates in terms of promoting psychological well-being (Wang and Kanungo, 2004). Specific examples of this from participants include the friendships and conversation between SIEs when they attend social events outside of work (like the weekly pub quiz) and at work (like the expat lunch group); these opportunities to network allow SIEs to speak freely and candidly, discuss problems and feelings, and gain new perspectives resulting from a dialogue with a broader group.

Career progression for SIEs has been described as protean because it is often not supported directly by organizations (Mezias and Scandura, 2005). Social networks, both in terms of intra-organizational and extra-organizational ties can be vital to SIE career progression, and thus highly valued. After an SIE cultivates strong intra-organizational ties, when SIEs depart, they become extra-organizational ties and can lead to new work opportunities. The researcher and Subject 5 had both worked in the English teaching industry for over 10 years and the value of social networking on career progression for expatriate employees was discussed in that context during the final one-to-one interaction (See Appendix 19). Social networking has also been found to contribute to organizational success when strong ties are present among key employees (Makela and Suutari, 2009). The intra-organizational value of social networking, which can result from peer mentoring relationships, was highlighted in an exchange between Subject 6 and the researcher in which the positive impact on organizational operations as outlined below exemplifying value from an organizational efficiency perspective.

R: Yeah, I have noticed that a lot kind of in myself too because honestly, before this project, I didn't really talk to you very often. Or anybody over there, with [Subject 3], I guess and sometimes [Subject 5]. But, I didn't really talk to [Subject 4] either or [other colleague]. And I guess it was because like I'm not sure that they have that much time. Yeah, but it's weird, right to just start talking to people like you said and share information.
S6: Yeah, I think it eliminates a lot of the complaining about like, 'oh, stupid sales team; why are they always doing this', right?
R: Yeah.
S6: When you talk to somebody in that team you need to understand why they are doing things the way they are doing them and then...
R: Yeah. And then also free up the opportunities to kind of collaborate on projects too.

Social networking can be understood in terms of the strength of ties between people and their connections with each other. In terms of expatriate employees, social networking is an important part of expatriate adjustment (Kram, 1985) and success abroad. Social networking exchanges have benefits for individuals and organizations and can create value in mentoring relationships.

In understanding how value is perceived in the mentoring relationships between SIEs, there are three main categories that have been identified in this thesis as: professional development, personal development, and social networking. These perceptions of value also acknowledge the complexity of SIE mentoring relationships and social exchanges which can include individual and group dynamics, in addition to not being mutually exclusive (as a single social exchange can involve multiple aspects like professional development and emotional value as perceived by participants). Additionally, the idea of value is not constant and is subject to change over time as perceptions can change as new information and different situations present themselves. It is also noteworthy that mentoring relationships between SIEs go beyond Scandura (1992)’s categories of personal/psychosocial and professional/vocational dimensions to also include value in terms of social networks as identified by Gutiérrez (2012). This emphasis on social networking might be explained by the fact that SIEs are more transient and thus must rely on their social networks for career opportunities and to also consider them a noteworthy source of value.

Summary

With the goals of understanding mentoring relationships between SIEs and exploring what characteristics of mentoring relationships between SIEs are involved in development, this chapter has evaluated the outcomes in the context of existing literature to develop the findings. While there is scant research available involving peer mentoring relationships of SIEs, the field of mentoring, mentoring relationships, and mentoring expatriates provide an opportunity for the findings to make connections to existing literature. The three themes of peer mentoring relationships of communication, trust, and value emerged from the data collection process and were elaborated through three PAR cycles. Communication has been found to be a fundamental component of mentoring relationships (Dutton et al., 2019) and three sub-themes of communication channel, contact frequency, and formality of communication were articulated to make sense of the role(s) of communication in peer mentoring relationships. Trust was also identified as an emergent theme of peer mentoring relationships which has been widely researched in existing literature. While the role of trust in peer mentoring relationships of SIEs has not received much attention, the sub-themes of reliability in word and deed, emotional trust, and honesty allow for the understanding of this idea in the context of mentoring relationships. The third theme connected with peer mentoring relationships is value which is how the individuals involved with the relationship perceive the value in the interactions of the relationship. The perceived value created from the mentoring interactions in the studied relationships occurred in the three areas of professional support, personal/psychosocial support, and through social networking support. As noted by Feldman and Bolino (1999), it is important to recognize that the individual needs of expatriates involved in mentoring must be considered to make mentoring successful. Now that the findings have been discussed, the next chapter will outline the concept of a scholar practitioner and specifically examine how action was created in this thesis.

Chapter 5: The Scholar-Practitioner

Introduction

In management discourse there has been a recurring theme of seeking to bridge knowledge and action (Astley and Zammuto, 1993). Doctoral-practitioners, also known as scholar-practitioners, exist in the space between theory and practice and attempt to bridge this divide through the production of actionable scientific knowledge which meets both the criteria of the scientific community and also the organization's business needs (Hay, 2003). The principal goal is that useful research in this context must "advance the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon as well as provide for a better resolution of business problems" (Tenkasi and Hay, 2004, p.178). While this idea might seem simple, researchers have studied at length the connection between theory and practice and the role of action in both. Oliver (2001) notes that attempting to distinguish practice from theory through viewing one as action and the other as an absence of action is problematic. An alternative is to consider action as a "uniting force to understand both theory and practice and their mutual integration" (Tenkasi and Hay, 2004, p.180). Activity theory provides a basis for understanding the role of action in theory and practice. Kaptelinin and Nardi (1997) note that activity theory is in a way a metatheory because it represents a general conceptual system which supports more specific theories; namely it consists of a subject (a person), object-orientedness (the problem the subject is trying to solve), tool mediation (social, psychological, or physical artifacts that mediate the activity), and the development of the activity system over time. This much more complex view facilitates the understanding of how the idea of action can exist within the context of reality, in addition to existing in theory and in practice. It's this deeper understanding of action, and the multiple facets and paradigms involved with interpreting action, especially when it is socially constructed, which has impacted my world during my scholar-practitioner journey. Before elaborating on the role of action in the research and work of scholar-practitioners, explaining what scholars have debated "action" to be was important. To help illustrate the scholar practitioner's journey in a reflexive way, first-person vignettes will be included in this chapter to in italics to give the author a voice in the first person to share thoughts, opinions, and feelings with the reader.

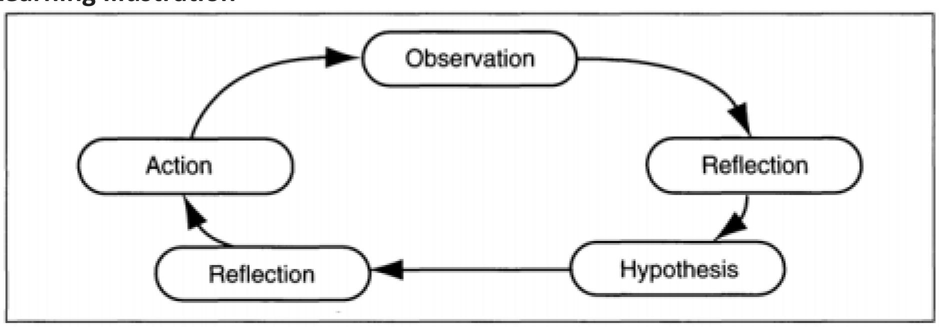
To articulate my own experience with this scholar-practitioner middle path between researcher and practitioner, I will apply Torbert (1998)'s first-, second-, and third-person inquiry/practice model as a way to make sense of the various forms of action along my own doctoral journey. First person will focus largely on action learning and my own study experience through the University of Liverpool Online Doctoral Program. Second person will be discussed in terms of action research through a narrative account of how the plan for creating action was realized with participants during the data collection in this thesis. Third person will place the scholar-practitioner's action in the wider contexts of academia, the organizational culture, and the outcomes of research from academic and business perspectives. The skills of reflection, intersubjectivity, and reflexivity will also be included to provide examples of the tools that scholar-practitioners use when creating action in theory and practice.

First-Person Practice

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) note that first person executive learning in action involves the process of "scholar-practitioners engaging in self-learning in action, learning to reflect, to engage in deep inquiry about themselves, their assumptions, their practices, how they grapple with their understanding of their organizations" (As cited by Coghlan, 2007, p.299). In continuation of the first-person perspective that has been shared throughout this thesis, a brief vignette will help to illustrate the author's scholar-practitioner's journey and highlight the action involved.

My scholar-practitioner journey started by enrolling at the University of Liverpool (UoL)'s doctorate in business administration (DBA) program while I was working as a site director for an intensive English program at a technical college in Saudi Arabia. The design of the UoL DBA program *relied heavily on action learning facilitated through online discussion boards and assignments. We learned that action learning is "a continuous process of learning and reflection that happens with the support of a group of 'set' of colleagues, working on real issues, with the intention of getting things done" (McGill and Brockbank, 2004, p.1). Pedler (1997) elaborates on what getting things done refers to as a "process of taking one or more crucial organizational problems and, in real time, analyzing their dynamics; implementing proposed solutions derived from the constructive criticisms of colleagues; monitoring results; and through being held responsible for these actions, learning from the results so that future problem solving and opportunity taking is improved" (p.21). I found this concept in theory and practice to be extremely effective in terms of collaborative problem solving and personal growth. I was able to simultaneously experience action on a personal level, through understanding a situation or idea differently from a shared perspective of a colleague and generate actionable results from the agreed upon solution to the problem, like a crisis management plan for all of our sites in Saudi Arabia. While the previous sentence alludes to second and third person perspectives, I want to emphasize the first-person value of my own realization that democratic and collaborative efforts towards problem solving not only work but have been studied at length and have generated norms to improve success rates. Specifically, the formula for action learning which has been illustrated by this chart from Pedler (1997, p.31).*

Action Learning Illustration



Reflection to me is a fundamental practice which routinely causes one to challenge their own thinking. When one's thinking is challenged, it directly impacts how we act and the actions we take as we either overcome the challenge and gain renewed confidence or are influenced by the challenge and adapt our way of thinking. One of the most profound impacts of the UoL DBA program's 9 study modules which incorporated action learning cycles, again and again, was that it set the foundation for the principles of action research and emphasized the importance of reflection and democratic decision making.

Repeating this process of action learning for 9 modules provided an opportunity to develop the routine and habit of following these steps when individuals strive to solve organizational problems. Action learning also uses a very similar structure to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model has been used to articulate the process of individuals' learning through the cycle of: a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Sugarman (1985) notes that the combinations of abstract-concrete and active-reflective dimensions are effectively at the core of the "cyclical process of effective learning" (p.264).

Cyclical Process of Effective Learning

In addition to learning how one learns, concepts like reflection, in theory and practice, are other examples of action viewed through the first-person practice. Reflection, the idea that past experiences can be examined with the goal of improving future learning outcomes, is easily understood as action from a first-person perspective by thinking back to how past things and events could have been to inform future possibilities (Carlson, 2019). This can take the form of challenging biases, assumptions, and values through examining what has happened (Cunliffe, 2010). The ideas of action learning, the experiential learning cycle, and reflection all exemplify how action impacts scholar-practitioners on a first-person level through regularly challenging and changing how they think.

Second-Person Practice

One of the benefits of using Torbert (1998)'s first-, second-, and third-person inquiry/practice model as a framework for understanding scholar-practitioners is that the same ideas can be seen from different perspectives. Unlike first person practice, second person practice focuses on when individuals inquire with others into shared problems through face-to-face conversation and dialogue, but the ideas of reflection and action remain vital parts of sensemaking in second-person practice like they do in first-person practice (Coghlan, 2007). There are three examples that will be highlighted of how second-person inquiry has played a role in becoming a scholar-practitioner through UoL's DBA program: action learning, data collection for the final thesis, and the doctoral tutor.

Returning to the nine modules of UoL's DBA program, second-person inquiry can be seen in the action learning sets in which "individuals inquire with others into issues of mutual concern" through conversation and dialogue (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). When workplace-based problems were discussed in small groups, reflective questions were asked to gather more information about the problem and to encourage divergent thinking about the problem itself, the stakeholders involved, and the situation. These discussions and conversations exemplify action as multiple stakeholders collaborated to problematize, reflect, plan, reflect, act, and observe. The outcomes of each module's second-person inquiry were a contribution to both the action learning process (theory) and the creation of a solution to the workplace based problem (practice), both of which involved action.

Second-person practice can be clearly seen in this thesis through examining the data collection process of the participatory action research itself in which one-to-one interactions, observed pair interactions, and focus groups all contributed to involved research-in-action. While not all these examples of data collection involve two people, they still represent the concept of second person inquiry as the focus remains on working in teams from which individuals have dyadic interactions with others, even while in groups (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). The role of action in second person inquiry is clearly identifiable by the method of inquiry used in this thesis of participatory action research (as the word action is in the name). The implementation of participatory action research (PAR) is characterized by the researcher and participants continuously diagnose, intervene, and reflect to create knowledge on both an individual and organizational level (Nosek, 2007). Again, the PAR process exemplifies action in both theory and practice as noted in the PAR cycle steps presented by McIntyre (2008) of questioning an issue, reflecting, and investigating, creating an action plan, and then implementing and improving that plan. Specific skills of scholar-practitioners that are relevant to facilitating second person inquiry include an awareness of intersubjectivity and reflexivity. Intersubjectivity has been described as having three layers involved with making sense of data in terms of language used, physical spaces, and the social elements involved (Unger, 2005). Reflexivity is a more nuanced concept relating to questioning the relationship between researcher, participants, theories, and the social world in real time (Cunliffe, 2010). While these are not the only tools for qualitative researchers to be mindful of while creating action, in this thesis the researcher found these two tools to be instrumental during the data collection process. Both ideas are articulated in the context of the Second-Person PAR cycles from the data collection phases of this thesis.

Another noteworthy example of second-person practice involved with scholar-practitioner development is the relationship between doctoral candidate and doctoral tutor. The dialogue created between these two actors involves a range of interventions with the focus of enabling scholar-practitioners to engage in inquiry, reflection, action and theorizing about their theses through the supervisors' facilitation of action research cycles on the action research project itself (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). Specifically, the doctoral candidate and academic supervisor communicated regularly to navigate the procedural hurdles involved with completing a doctoral thesis (ethics review, approval forms needed, etc.), provide ongoing support and actionable advice during the data collection (strategies for engaging participants like role plays), and finally to contribute feedback and suggestions for the final production of the written thesis (through a through chapter by chapter review even after addressing the concerns presented by the second supervisor). This guidance has been invaluable, and the successful completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the second person practice involving the doctoral tutor and the countless discussions and actions resulting from his involvement in the entire thesis process.

Third-Person Practice

While the first-person practice focuses on the individual scholar-practitioner, and the second-person practice is illustrated through action learning, dyadic and group interactions from data collection, and the action created between the doctoral tutor and doctoral candidate, third-person practice builds on these precursors and involves the contribution that the research makes to the success of the organization and also the contribution to an impartial audience through the extension of learning and dissemination of knowledge (Coghlan, 2005). One way to articulate these two distinct forms of action is through considering one to be a 'core' PAR project and the other to be a 'thesis' PAR project; the 'core' PAR refers to the organizational project that the scholar-practitioner is working on with colleagues and the 'thesis' refers to the doctoral inquiry into the PAR organizational project (Perry and Zuber-Skerrit, 1992). Applying this view to this thesis, the core PAR project involves the organization's efforts to develop SIEs through mentoring. The thesis PAR contributes to academic knowledge by addressing a gap in the literature regarding mentoring relationships between self-initiated expatriates and professional development. Both of these aspects of the third-person practice involve action. The core PAR action can also be viewed in terms of first-, second-, and third- person inquiry/practice in how the project impacts the organization overall.

The organization was impacted on the individual level (first-person) via the researcher own developmental journey with reflection and challenging assumptions. It must also be noted that individual participants also experienced action through participating in the project which manifested through explicit skill development relating to mentoring and relational soft skills (like active listening, emotional intelligence, etc.) which were explicitly developed through the core PAR project. The core PAR action from second-person practice involved the action of working in pairs and teams to start and develop mentoring relationships. This is where the soft skills and mentoring insights were identified and tested and their impacts on work and working relationships were considered. The researcher also experienced this through second-person practice with participants as his working relationships with participants changed as they all worked together to better understand mentoring's role as a professional development tool.

Finally, the core PAR action can be seen in the creation of a formal mentoring program and the outcomes of that program on the organization. The impact of this mentoring program on the organization was increased knowledge transfer between departments, a heightened sense of camaraderie, and SIEs working together to address the organization's need for on-going development in order to deal with changing job roles and responsibilities. Prior to the start of the mentoring program, some participants had not met, even though the community of SIEs at the organization is very small. In addition, the collaboration between departments was explicitly mentioned between the QA department and the content department as a lack of communication had led to conflicts in the past. Finally, the quality of mentoring relationships was not high enough to make a significant impact on the organizational problem of employee turnover due to the limited duration of the study (a three-month period) and the fact that most participants had already formed very fixed opinions about the organization and those working within it. The successful completion of this project did present the organization with a way to professionally develop SIEs and encourage SIEs' future development through implementing a peer mentoring program for SIEs to help change their experiences and perceptions of the organization. It is also notable that the organization did not continue the peer mentoring program upon the completion of data collection for this thesis due to the departure of the SIE Vice President who approved this research project, the researcher's subsequent departure from the organization, and issues relating to employee retention which persisted throughout the SIEs at the organization. Even though mentoring relationships have been better understood as a vehicle for personal and professional development as a result of this research, an organization must first value personal and professional development before such new knowledge can be formally implemented in a sustainable way. Informally, participants have a newly developed sense of awareness about themselves in terms of communication, trust, and value and thus the stage is set for them to participate in informal mentoring relationships in this organization or any organization.

From a thesis PAR perspective, action also occurred in terms of first-, second-, and third-person inquiry/practice. Through participating in this thesis participants were able to learn about mentoring from a variety of theoretical vantage points and the researcher gained a rather thorough understanding of mentoring and professional development through the action of completing a literature review. Second-person practice, from a thesis PAR view, involved the researcher actively practicing new skills such as reflexivity and intersubjectivity which were ways to improve the quality of data collection through awareness and in the moment action. Participants also benefitted from second-person inquiry through experiencing PAR as a research methodology that involves collaboration and democratic decision making while creating new knowledge. Finally, third-person inquiry/practice can be seen through the action of thesis PAR of the final product of this written thesis for the researcher, and participants can discuss their experiences participating in this thesis PAR project with others to extend the impact of the study even further. With respect to the write up of this thesis itself, the value of being mindful of the audience, the reader, also contributes to how knowledge is disseminated and positioned in a way to realize what is actionable (Coghlan, 2005).

Summary

Scholar-practitioners in the field of management are growing in popularity as there is greater interest in bridging the divide between academics and practitioners. The concept of action is at the heart of both advancing theoretical knowledge about management phenomenon and the resolution of business problems. While action may have been associated more frequently with practice than theory, this view has been seen as problematic (Oliver, 2001) and instead Tenkasi and Hay (2004) suggest viewing action as existing in both theory and practice, in addition to being what unites the two. To understand the scholar-practitioner journey of the author, Torbert (1998)'s first-, second-, and third-person practice/inquiry model is used. The author's personal development, first-person practice, began with the UoL DBA program involving experiential learning, practicing specific skills like reflection, learning to challenge assumptions, and engaging in deep inquiry about oneself (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). Second-person practice focused on action learning, the interactions between researcher and participants during data collection, and the relationship between the researcher and doctoral tutor. Third-person practice exemplifies action for the organization, the 'core' PAR project, in terms of the formal mentoring program that was created, and the guidelines developed for peer mentoring and also in terms of creating new knowledge, the 'thesis' PAR project, which involved furthering the knowledge about self-initiated expatriates' mentoring relationships and professional development for academia through the creation of this thesis. Ultimately, action can be seen in both the practice and theory in first-, second-, and third-person inquiry/practice throughout the author's scholar-practitioner's journey.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Implications, and Reflections

Introduction

This study explored mentoring relationships between SIEs in terms of development at a Chinese firm in China. The aim of the study was to better understand mentoring relationships between SIEs and the characteristics of those relationships as a means to develop SIEs. A sample of 6 SIEs (out of 15) were selected using purposeful selection for this study to fit the resources available and the constraints faced (Patton, 2002). Through using a social constructionist lens, the mentoring relationships themselves were acknowledged to be constructed by each individual participant based on their thoughts, feelings, and social interactions with others which they themselves make sense of and interpret. To gain insights and understanding into knowledge that is centered around one's interpretations of reality, participatory action research (PAR) was used as a way to involve participants in a more inclusive way in which the participants and researcher shared the responsibility for generating and analyzing data and for collaboratively deciding which direction the inquiry will follow. The conclusions outlined below were drawn from the findings of this study, the research question explored, and the themes that were identified and developed. It's noteworthy that these conclusions might not be completely generalizable outside of the participants and context of this study.

The theoretical contributions highlight three main themes involved with mentoring relationships between SIEs being communication, trust, and value, the quality of which can be used to determine the quality of the relationship and have implications for development outside of mentoring relationships. In addition, social exchange theory has been used to understand the mentoring relationships that have been formed with a particular focus on how SIEs values govern social exchanges. By identifying and elaborating on what SIE's value, insights into the social exchange can be gained based on an unequal perceived value of the exchange, which results in a breakdown of the relationships; and also, through a better understanding of the intangibles which are valued in mentoring relationships like professional support and personal support, as noted by Scandura (1992). Exploring this foundation further relating to how value is created in mentoring relationships, with respect to SIEs in particular, the topic of social networks is also a key source of value identified by participants due to the important role of connections and contacts in securing future employment and maintaining a social life abroad. The practical applications of the research are to outline how formal mentoring programs for SIEs can be created and developed, with an emphasis on including elements relating to the fundamentals of mentoring relationships, such as communication and trust, and providing insights into how value in the context of professional relationships can be understood.

Participants' Peer Mentoring Relationships

The discussion thus far has centered around the themes developed from the peer mentor relationships between participants throughout data collection and professional development. These themes provide more generalized information that refers to categories (communication, trust, and value) which are present in all peer mentoring relationships studied and provides a lens to better understand peer mentoring relationships between SIEs. It is important not to confuse this better understanding of peer mentoring relationships with better peer mentoring relationships; while this qualitative inquiry has created new knowledge about peer mentoring relationships, it has not created perfect relationships. This distinction is important because learning something new does not automatically lead to mastery, and while the researcher and participants have gained a deeper understanding of peer mentoring relationships and professional development, realizing high quality peer mentoring relationships is not an automatic by-product of learning and exploration. A definition of quality for mentoring relationships which fits this context comes from Dutton and Heaphy (2003) who note that high-quality relationships are based on the subjective positivity of the emotional experiences of both parties in the relationship. Without high quality mentoring relationships which involve positive experiences for mentor and mentee through satisfactory communication, a high degree of trust, and apparent value for the relationship, the goal of improved professional development is less likely to be realized. Even after exploring peer mentoring relationships between SIEs, this new knowledge does not guarantee professional development in practice; while participants can describe their relationships, increasing the quality of those relationships in terms of improved positive emotions through developing communication, trust, and value is not as easy. It is noteworthy that the researcher enthusiastically implemented actions based on PAR cycles, for example, when communication was identified as an important component of peer mentoring relationships, the researcher made a variety of efforts to communicate with participants frequently using various channels and in various degrees of formality. This practice of reflexivity helped the researcher and participants to experience higher quality mentoring relationships throughout the project. This second relationship participants developed with the researcher throughout PAR provided a benchmark that was used to evaluate the peer mentoring relationships they developed with their partners through PAR.

Implications for Practice

This thesis contributes a better understanding of how mentoring relationships impact SIE professional development for firms employing SIEs. The principal contributions are through insights into how mentoring relationships can be created through the development of a formal mentoring program and the specifics of communication, trust, and value and their roles in developing employees. Mentoring relationships can be created through formal programs and can also happen spontaneously through informal mentoring. In this thesis a formal mentoring program was created which paired up participants. The program started with a clear purpose and had a timeline, both features which made on-going evaluation of the mentoring program possible for participants and the researcher. There were three mentoring experiences created for participants, each varying in terms of structure. The most structured experiences, those in which participants were given specific tasks and activities to complete, were considered to be more effective developmental experiences by the participants and researcher as there was less ambiguity involved. Including clear objectives for each formal mentoring experience and explaining what topics and skills would be discussed and developed are also recommended. While creating a formal mentoring program is one way for organizations to encourage mentoring and SIE professional development, another approach is to educate SIEs about the specific themes involved with mentoring relationships to increase the chances of informal mentoring from happening, which has been shown to be superior in terms of quality of information shared and the level of interaction (Johnson and Anderson, 2009). Training SIEs in ways to improve communication, trust, and value in their relationships at work can provide SIEs with vital skills which can lead to higher quality mentoring relationships, which can then lead to increased professional development that also benefits the organization.

This study contributes to a much more detailed analysis of mentoring relationships beyond the three themes of communication, trust, and value to include the subthemes which emerged as well. As the PAR cycles allowed participants to experience peer mentoring and articulate and refine their thoughts and feelings about it, the subthemes of communication channel, contact frequency, formality of communication, reliability in word and deed, emotional trust, honesty, professional development, personal development, social networking benefits, and emotional value all contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of peer mentoring relationships. It is with an awareness of these elements that the creators of peer mentoring programs can understand what to focus on when designing peer mentoring programs while simultaneously providing participants a framework to understand their experiences and their own preferences, behaviors, and values in terms of their experience with a peer mentoring relationship.

The implications for practice can be understood in terms of social exchange theory as applied to SIE professional development. First, the mentoring relationships from the mentoring program support employee development through focusing on how one person affects another via employee-employee interactions (Jepsen and Rodwell, 2010). For these employee-employee interactions to be effective in terms of developing SIE employees, they must involve high quality mentoring relationships which involve communication, trust, and value. Social exchange theory also notes the relationship between the organization and the employee as a factor involving SIE development. In this way, the organization's decision to create and implement a mentoring program could be viewed as ongoing training or career development as long as employees see value in the mentoring program and its implementation (Gentry et al., 2007). While the implications for practice presented above are theoretically sound and based on academic research, it's worthwhile recognizing that implementing a mentoring program and creating high quality mentoring relationships is much more challenging than it seems. As evinced in this thesis, there is a stark difference between knowing what a high-quality mentoring relationship that facilitates development is and actually creating and cultivating one. While the results of this thesis involve the creation of new knowledge, the scope of that new knowledge is limited to an exploration of how mentoring relationships serve as a tool for professional development and does not purport to solve all professional development problems completely through mentoring; instead, this thesis presents a theoretical framework involving the themes of communication, trust, and value which have been identified as essential elements of mentoring relationships. Excerpts from the data collection process for the mentoring program that was created as part of the PAR process are included, but the focus of this thesis was not to evaluate the effectiveness of a mentoring program, instead, the goal was to explore and understand the characteristics of mentoring relationships and their impact on SIE employee professional development in more detail.

This thesis had a visible impact on the organization through creating a mentoring program in which six participants and the researcher experienced professional development in a variety of ways during the research process. Through one-to-one interactions, observed pair interactions, and focus group sessions the details of the mentoring program were collaboratively realized. The formation and cultivation of mentoring relationships were also systematically documented and discussed which generated the themes to support the development of the mentoring program for SIEs. Outcomes for SIEs involved increased an awareness of communication in terms of formality, channel, and frequency regarding their interactions with colleagues; increased self-awareness of trust in terms of honesty, reliability in word and deed, and emotional trust; and creating value through developing a mentor relationship which manifested in terms of personal development, professional development, social networking benefits, and emotional value. The impact of this mentoring program on the organization was increased knowledge transfer between departments, a heightened sense of camaraderie, and SIEs working together to better understand mentoring and professional development.

Suggestions for further research

Future considerations for research would involve replicating this study in a different organization and/or country and exploring the mentoring relationships of SIEs in different contexts. The participants were all "Western" in this study and the organization was a Chinese company in China. A comparative study with a different sample in a different country would help to elucidate the generalizability of the findings of this study. While communication and trust are often considered fundamental parts of mentoring relationships, the concept of value might be understood differently in different contexts. "Value" itself also presents an avenue for further inquiry as the identified range of outcomes participants found valuable about peer mentoring relationships (professional development, personal development, networking/socializing, and emotional value) might also be further elaborated. Replicating this study with a larger sample size in which gender is taken into account might also yield insightful results. Another avenue for future research is to extend the duration of the study beyond the 3 months and 3 PAR cycles.

Limitations of the study

The main limitations of the study involving participants result from the transient nature of SIEs which limited the data collection period to three months and the limited sample size. Considering how often people were leaving the organization, purposeful sampling was the only way to have a chance of recruiting participants who could complete the study (even as one participant left the country directly after the final debriefing meeting with the researcher). This also caused the duration of the study to be limited to 3 months and the sample size to be 6 participants. The limited number of SIEs also resulted in all participants being male in this study. Participants were all Western, which meant they shared cultural similarities, but this also reduced the level of different perspectives which might have been involved if the population was less culturally homogeneous. In addition, the lack of clear hierarchical differences between participants limited this study to peer mentoring relationships.

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Appendices

Appendix 1
S1: Today, we were just kind of like...we were...I mean, what did we talk about?
Everything, I mean, so here is the thing.
Right, it's more of a friendly...I think, a mentorship is more like friendly than it is professional in a sense. Because I don't...when I was going to have lunch with [new boss], I wasn't really thinking like...oh...what can I get out of this?
You know like how can I? What can he teach me even though I know that he knows a lot more than me but it's just more like you genuinely enjoy spending time with a person and like you kind of learn through osmosis. That's what I think mentorship is.

Appendix 2
S4: When I dislocated my knee, I was like 'I'm good, don't take me to the hospital'. I mean it hurts a lot but it's better than going to a Chinese hospital. Maybe I'll need a knee replacement at 35, but it's better than going to a Chinese hospital.
S1: We got VIP on our insurance. So you can go to VIP and they will give you a translator. And it's better than regular because it's a little more organized. So, it's not like ideal but better than just going to a hospital.
S4: So, what did you do with your family in the area?
S1: Summer Palace, Great Wall.
S4: Is this their first time?
S1: Forbidden City. We did like all the stuff, except for the Temple of Heaven.

Appendix 3
S5: So...[Subject 6] and I have known each other for years, you know. And, I don't know, like we talk about work quite a bit.
S6: I would say that probably, when we go out, outside of work, I would say, work is more than half the conversation.
S5: Yeah. I think when it tends to get into politics and other things, I tend to steer away from that back to work. But I do think it's something that we talk about because it is a shared experience, right? When you are socializing with people, you talk about common interests and common experiences. I think it's a natural topic to come up when you are talking.
S6: Yeah, I would think the majority of people that I have worked with, when you go out, that's the main topic of conversation. Like, I find for us, it is dominated by work and baseball pretty much. Those are two things that are shared interests.

Appendix 4
S3: So, I got a message from him later because I think maybe I mentioned that he came across my [training] pictures in the photo database.
R: Yeah. Okay.
S3: Yeah. He was making fun of me...for I had some goofy looks on my face.

Appendix 5

R: I remember specifically, like before this whole thing, we were talking about something…like WeChatting or something and we had a difference of opinion, I think it was like how to communicate something or what to do about something and I remember like you had a really strong opinion about it and I had a really strong different opinion and then we just kept chatting with these long messages, do you remember that?

S6: Oh, hmmm…

R: I don't even remember what it was about. I remember like getting frustrated like 'Ahhh, he doesn't see things my way' and you might have felt the same way.

S6: There's two that could have been, one that was like QA performance templates.

R: Yeah, yeah that's what it was!

S6: Like one of the first things we did together was some sort of email like we were making a template for something and…anyway, you wanted it to be really light-hearted and really light or…and I wanted to convey 'this is serious and something you need to take action on'.

Appendix 6

R: When somebody sends you a message, people tend to read it and interpret it in the most direct way possible, and direct is obviously a little more confrontational.

S6: Yeah.

R: I think it depends on the person and probably their mood. Whenever they read something, and they project themselves into the message and read it however they do, yeah.

S6: Yeah, that's really interesting, because I think there is a lot more. I've learned more stuff about you and I've seen you at work and I've seen the work that you have done and how you have reacted to situations and I kind of understand how you think more. So, I think what I've seen happen since we have interacted more is I've kind of like, I guess you can say, learn to grown to respect you. So now, when you say things, I respect them and I believe them whereas before I didn't know if you were saying this just to say it or if you had a good reason for it or if you are one of those people that just likes to argue. I've met people like that before.

Appendix 7

R: Okay. So, if you think about [Subject 1] and me, as far as communication from the past three months for this project, what would you say is the same or different? How would you compare...
S4: As far as communication?
R: Yeah.
S4: I definitely communicated with you more than I communicated with [Subject 1]. Whether it was related to this project or not, me and [Subject 1] only talked about this project really.
R: Okay.
S4: Or in the confines of this project.
R: Did you [and Subject 1] ever meet up for any like social events or interactions or anything? Did you...
S4: Sorry, no.
R: Did you like, even like small talk or anything, WeChat?
S4: A little bit but it was after the mentoring session.
R: Okay.
S4: It was after one of our meetings.
R: So, what about me? How was, when did we communicate?
S4: Well, I see you like every day, like in Beijing.
R: Yeah, So, every other week for three months.
S4: Yeah, right. And when I don't see you in Beijing, I see your emails that you send out...
R: Oh, Facebook humor.
S4: Oh, that's like the main email I get from you. Right? That and meeting requests that I can't accept.
R: Yeah. With that email, how'd you describe that?
S4: Your emails?
R: Yeah.
S4: Hit and miss! Four-line spam sometimes!
R: No. that's funny. Yeah. So, the...I think it's a little...
S4: It was good, it was good.
R: A little FB humor.
S4: Yeah.
R: Do you ever like laugh or do you ever get offended by it?
S4: I wouldn't...no, not offended, nothing offends me. I think, I don't know if laugh is the right word, but I get a blunt air out of my nostrils every once in a while. Little...
R: Ah, there you go. That's funny. The snicker.

Appendix 8

R: I think the beginning part is the follow-up on the previous meetings. Did you guys already talk about the last mentoring session?
S3: I think we had a brief discussion, sort of about some related things last week, although...
R: Was that on WeChat or...Oh, you were in Beijing.
S3: Yeah, no it was over lunch but our lunch kind of got taken over by other people, so...
R: Who was it?
S3: [Two work colleagues].
R: Ah, okay. Nice, yeah.
S3: Is that it? Yeah, it was [two work colleagues].
S2: Yeah.

Appendix 9

R: Ah, cool. Yeah, it does sound like fun. Let me see. Yeah, okay so over the past two weeks, how many times did you communicate with [Subject 5]?
S2: Over the past two weeks? (Subject 6)
S1: Yeah. (Researcher)
S2: If you just mean like any sort of communication, then probably every day. (Subject 6)
S1: Yeah. (Researcher)
S2: Aaah, if it's like having an extended conversation, probably at least 5 days out of a week. (Subject 6)
S1: Wow! (Researcher)
S2: Yeah. (Subject 6)
S1: Okay. And then you meet at the weekends for brunch? (Researcher)
S2: Yeah. (Subject 6)

Appendix 10

R: Okay. So, kind of just to clarify this idea. To be open to being mentored, and in your opinion, trust is a very important part of that?
S3: Yeah.
R: Okay. Cool. So, how do people build trust?
S3: Hahahahahah. Build trust.
Ummm, yeah, I think....[LONG PAUSE]....well, presenting these sorts of mentoring instances in a way that it's like...in terms of, not so much like it's not their job necessarily. To me, it's not a requirement that it would almost be informal.
Like, trust is created I think because I get the impression that that person actually cares about me as a person and isn't necessarily doing this because they've been instructed to or because it is one of the KPIs or something.

Appendix 11

R: How would you describe your attitude on that day?
S4: Nervous.
R: Really?
S4: A little nervous. Probably because I was worried about what his reaction to my presentation was going to be. I wasn't even worried about what I was going to say during the presentation, really, I was only worried about me, me, me.
R: Would you describe that as like self-confidence?
S4: Lacking self-confidence, maybe.
R: I don't know.
S4: Actually, once I had, once I had that matrix down, I knew I would have enough to talk about, I was just worried about him. How he would receive it and how much we could talk about with his work. He had plenty of time so, it was all good.

Appendix 12

S1: But there is definitely a difference between a mentor and a friendship, right? If you are friends, you can just vent with, it's just like you are talking whatever...like...but like, if you have a mentor...it's like the mentor should be like the lighthouse, he should be like the guiding light.

S5: I think, here we are trying to discuss how we get to build trust, honesty between, we are not talking actually about mentoring, right? So then venting is probably a way to build trust right, like...

S1: You need trust in both relationships, you need it in a friendship and...

S5: If the other person is honest and you feel they are honest and they are telling you what they actually think, you are easier to trust them right? And then you can move on to mentoring them, right? I think they are two different...

R: Here, when [Subject 5] said that, it really resonated with me because I was thinking specifically of [a former director].

S1: Oh no.

R: And I was thinking you trust...you trust him immediately because he tells you things that you'd think the only way he would say so many bad things was only if they were true, and then over time you see, 'Oh, everything he says is bad!' So initially, I felt like I really trust this guy, he is going to tell me the truth even if it's something really bad, but then as time went on, I realized he is not telling me the truth; he is only telling me the bad stuff. So, then it kind of eroded like my trust in that perspective...

S1: I find that the other risk about that is that a lot of the time you do get that first impression when somebody is like brutally negative, you think this person doesn't candy-coat things when you get the truth from him, but after a while, you start like you start wondering like all the things that they have said are bad, right? Are they saying these sort of like, these sort of brutally negative things about me when I'm not around? So, it can start to erode that trust a little bit because you wonder, right?

S2: It's about finding a balance.

S6: Of course, you need a balance; we are not here just to unload all the negative things that you like, "Please listen to me, I have a lot of bad things to share with you, so..."

Appendix 13

S1: I am really stressed out. I'm just really...

R: This week specifically or just today?

S1: Hmmm. The past couple of weeks. This week is more intense because [my boss] came back so like people are like joining...and people are finally leaving this week. Who like gave notice because it's the end of the month.

R: Ohhh...okay.

S1: So, yeah. I have been like having a hard time you know, like sleeping and then you wake up and I go like God you know...

R: Because of work?

S1: Yeah. It's really hard right now.

R: When people leave, do you have to do their jobs?

S1: More or less, they are like trying to like keep it going and it's like, they are like, there hasn't been a shift...yeah.

R: So, they expect production to stay the same as the number of people decreases?

S1: Yeah, there is that and then there is also the fact that you have to like re-train people on things and like people are kind of confused and everyone, like some people are working really hard and like other people are like 'I don't know what they do' and so just...

R: Yeah. It sounds disorganized right now.

S1: Yeah, exactly.

Appendix 14

S4: I'll go first.
R: Okay. Go ahead.
S4: Alright, so we're talking about stress. Managing your stress levels, handling the stress effectively. So, first couple of questions, do you often feel stressed?
S1: Totally yeah, absolutely.
S4: Do you really?
S1: Absolutely, yeah.
S4: About what? Like what kind of things stress you out?
S1: Lately, I think what happened, we talked about this a little bit like two days ago, but I think in my new position, there is just a lot of stuff that I don't know about and I don't understand so there is this word that was used actually by [supervisor] the other day; it was called 'cognitive overload' and it's when you just get too much information.
S4: Yeah.

Appendix 15

S1: As part of this project, like I had to say some things that I don't normally tell people, so whenever I tell someone something like that, it's like you know they are seeing the side of me that I don't present so that's one thing and then, yeah, I feel like I can ask you like you have given me a bunch of good advice too. So...
R: Like what?
S1: Like with [a subordinate]. It's just you know, I was having a really bad time with him and I still, you know even today, even today, like 'you read my message because I asked where are those files I sent you a day and a half ago' and then he tries to like do this f***ing like voodoo like psychology where it's like I'm a bad guy for asking him where the files are. So, he still continues to do it like I don't know. But anyways, he is leaving at the end of the week...
R: Forever?
S1: Yeah, yeah.

Appendix 16

R: Interesting. Yeah, what we did before was we kind of categorized mentoring relationships into a lot of these different things. Some of the key ones that we talked that most of the people talk about are communication. So, have you noticed that you have communicated with [Subject 6] in a different way over the past three months?

S5: We already talked about work in a lot of ways. I think actually, yeah because what I was given for him was sort of socializing, right?

R: Yeah.

S5: As my topic and I don't think that's an area that he feels comfortable talking about. Hearing him talk yesterday and about loosening up a little bit kind of thing, like that was really interesting, that's really different from the [Subject 6] I know.

R: Yeah, yeah, I was really surprised by that too. I kept thinking like is it just because he came back from vacation or...

S5: No, I have seen him post-vacation before.

R: Okay.

S5: He doesn't, it's not, he is always kind of goal oriented and I think it's cool to see him...it's funny, I don't...the stuff he was talking about yesterday and the way he's grown and loosening up and not being so task oriented and goal oriented for anybody else that will be like, 'oh sh**, oh sh**, oh sh**, you know but for [Subject 6]...right because you do want to be goal oriented like, a lot of people you do want to set smart goals and everything and timelines and all that stuff but for [Subject 6], in particular, I think that is something he needs us to step away from that a little bit and over to the human side of interactions.

R: Yeah, before you mentioned, you went to brunch with [Subject 6] and did like lots of social, outside of work things with him...

S5: Hmmm.

R: Umm, yeah, so do you think he was already on that trajectory, to kind of like loosen up or something, maybe less rigid.

S5: Umm, maybe in a way...I don't know if you...I don't know if he is...I think he became more aware that he is kind of rigid through this process... Umm which is a good thing.

Appendix 17

S2: I mean like I think, I think Chinese people are better at networking their relationships, I mean compared to foreigners. I feel like I have a lot to learn from my Chinese colleagues when it comes to building a personal...a strong personal network, because they are better at one thing - at keeping relationships alive you know, so, there are some points that I observed, and I would like to share with you. I'm not necessarily doing these things but I think they, I think they work. And I do recommend you give them a try.

And one, would be that never let a relationship die. I mean no matter how little you know a person, it's always good to bump into them. Say, 'hi' from time to time, send a 'Happy New Year message', you know, just find a reason, any reason to keep in touch with the people around. No matter if you feel like they are important to you at a certain point but it's good to keep the thing work. Never let it, you know get cold.

Two, would be actually, this is more of a foreign thing, actually I like it. I took it, I borrowed it from my American colleges, always say 'hi' to people. No matter if you know them, no matter if you don't. if you bump into people, always say 'hi'. I mean like I had a habit before that I kind of ignored people and then later, I realized like sometimes, you just happen to need somebody one day and you have been seeing that person on so many occasions like you never say anything and it's so awkward and weird that you suddenly just pop out next to them and be like 'Hey, we got to deal with this thing'.

So, now, I often say hi to people like if they make eye contact, I usually say hi. And it's so much easier to go to this person later and begin talking about something. And it does help a lot.

And, three would be that, this is another Chinese, the...how to give a person the Chinese 'No'. You know, in a big company like this, often people need you to, I mean look for you and ask you to do certain things for them - some are urgent, and some are not. Some you feel you should do, most you feel like you shouldn't, right. It's not part of your job description. And then, it's very important not to say 'no', to a person's face. Especially, I think, especially in China. When you give like a straight cold 'no' to someone's face, you are really kind of hurting him and it makes it very difficult to cooperate with them in the future. So, even if you feel like you cannot deal with that thing, it's good to, well, it's good to find a good excuse, give some positive feedback, try to offer some solutions like maybe, recommend another person that could help them or suggest a better time when they come and they could come and look for you. Something that could also work for them or maybe put them on hold a little bit and tell them 'Hey, I'm not able to help you right now, could you come back maybe tomorrow, I have to deal with something urgent' and you know, try to figure something out but based on what I observed - a straight 'no' or 'Hey, no, I cannot do this right now' , or 'no, it's not really my job' would affect you know and usually, people talk, you know. They kind of, especially you know for us, for foreigners, you kind of get labelled easier and you are more under the spotlight than let's say, a Chinese employee. So that will be the third point.

Appendix 18

R: Yeah. so, during the last three months, I've met with you regularly, yeah so how has your relationship with me changed?

S5: I think, I think we have been in meetings and stuff before, I think we socialized before and everything...

R: Yeah.

S5: ...we have talked a lot more deeply about stuff in the last three months than we ever had before...

R: Yeah, I think we have done more stuff together partially because I come to Beijing more often. Yeah, lots of quiz nights, lots of going away parties...

S5: Yeah. And I think but also like...I don't know I look at the conversations we've had and I think those add a lot of value to them, you know?

R: Yeah, definitely.

S5: We are not just...we're not just pussyfooting around!

R: Yeah, I think we talk about really interesting stuff that we are both interested in.

Appendix 19

S5: I think it's... that's one of the cool things as my career progresses that just seeing, you know moving companies and your friends move to new companies and all that stuff and like just seeing your network just become enormous...

R: Definitely.

S5: ...and like, just this, I mean I'm thinking soon at the top of ESL [English as a Second Language] in China, it's going to be all my friends like...like, it's pretty cool to think about you know? (Subject 5)

R: Yeah. That's crazy. Then the other part which I thought about a lot kind of working, in the Middle East especially, is just you know there are lots of ESL jobs out there, just connecting the right person with the right opportunity...

S5: Yeah.

Appendix 20

S1: Taking the train from China on a normal day.

R: That was funny. It's nice to sleep in. Usually, I get up at 5 to get the train.

S1: Right.

S4: From Beijing West or from South?

R: South.

S4: I hate Beijing West.

R: I have never been there before.

S1: Oh yeah, that place sucks.

S4: Yeah, it sucks. It's really, it's hard core.

R: What's so bad about it?

S1: Like... It's all right.

S4: West is just like, it's really old and so poorly, it's kind of, yeah. South is like super modern. If you go to West, you're just like 'what is this'.

R: They've got Dunkin Donuts in there too. It's not too bad.

S4: If you go to...I took a train to Wuhan one time and I went to West. And it was a nightmare. I was so close to miss my train. Because to get the tickets, you have to like go into the atrium and like yeah, get in the line and everyone's cutting each other and there is one English speaking line but it's like...should I even bother with English, like it matters.

R: It's not worth it.

S4: And you know...

S1: West is the one you walk in and there's a big hallway and there's rooms on the side of each one.

S4: Yeah.

R: The search rooms...

S1: And South is the one with the huge lobby.

R: Yeah.

S4: Yeah, like the South is the one they have kind of built in every city I feel. Like I don't know.

S1: Yeah, okay. I don't take the trains much.

R: It's so awesome to go upstairs in there and take a picture down because like literally, thousands of people there.

S4: South. I don't like South either. I don't like train stations.

R: Shanghai Hongqiao is like the same thing – a big open space and you can go upstairs.

S1: That place, the only time I was there, it was just packed.

R: Yeah, yeah for sure. It's really busy.