



MASTER THESIS

**Mentoring as a tool for attraction and employer branding
- A case study of the Sea of Experience Mentoring program -**

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Declaration of Authorship

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DISCLAIMER: Note on gender-neutral formulation: Throughout this paper, all gender-specific terms are to be considered to refer to both the feminine and the masculine form – except when referring to a particular person.

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"Persistence prevails when all else fails".

Abstract

This master thesis argues that mentoring can be used successfully as a tool for attraction and employer branding, in order to address new trends and demands of the business environment. Those changes are mostly related to the growing competition within the labor market and the shortage of workforce, which imposed the need to search for ways to answer new challenges. For that reason, the interest in the approach to mentoring not only as a tool for personal and professional development, but as a tool for attracting and employer branding is constantly increasing. The research of existing literature, as well as the case study presented in the thesis, showed that mentoring programs, as highly customizable, can contribute significantly to attraction and offer depth to employer branding in different sectors.

The thesis also tried to examine which are the elements of mentoring as a tool for attraction and employer branding and the factors that could affect the successful implementation of the instrument. Based on the findings of the thesis and comparing the literature with the practice, the recommendations for the implementation of mentoring as a tool for attraction and employer branding were provided.

Keywords: mentoring, mentor, mentee, mentoring relationship, attraction, employer branding, marine and maritime sector, labor shortage, skills gap, shortage of seafarers, Sea of Experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of mentoring is ancient and has its origins in Greek mythology. Namely, according to Homer's "Odyssey", when Odysseus left in the war to fight the Trojans, he asked his friend, Mentor, to take responsibility for his son Telemachus's education. "Three thousand years later... Odysseus' friend, Mentor, has been immortalized by the attachment of his name to this widespread form of knowledge-sharing" (Wilson&Elman, 1990, p. 88), which was conceptualized by Kram (1985). In a relatively short time, mentoring has become a well-accepted practice and a valued tool for personal and professional development. Nowadays, it is used to cover a wide range of activities, from providing a mentee with general assistance in helping them overcome or work through a specific problem, to a long term relationship that may involve acting as a guide, role model, teacher and sponsor to junior professionals until they become full members of a particular profession (Johnson, 2002).

The misconception about the mentoring process is very common. For that reason, it would be useful to present Inzer&Crawford's (2005) perspective of four, equally important mentoring components: the mentor, the protégé¹, the relationship, and the organization in which they operate.

The mentor is an advisor, listener and support, driven by a desire to share his knowledge and experience. His role is not to offer a solution, but to lead a mentee to find it on his own, and become as independent as possible. However, the mentors should be careful not to get too comfortable, become friends with their mentee and lose the necessary distance, or adopt a too strict approach and be too authoritative, which is also not useful for the process itself.

The mentee has to be aware of what he wants from this relationship, set the goals and objectives. He must be open to communication, ready to adopt and apply useful experiences he will gain from the mentoring process.

The next component is the relationship between mentor and mentee. Its important features are honesty, openness and trust. Mentoring relationship is unique due to its "inequality" – in the mentoring relationship are included two parties with different levels of expertise, but the relationship is directed to the needs, expectations and goals of the mentee. For this reason, a clear

¹ In the literature, the terms "protégé" and mentee are used interchangeably, while "sponsor" is sometimes defining the mentor.

understanding of the role of both parties has a major impact on the success of the mentoring process, so as not to face discrepancies between the expectations of the mentee and the outcome of the mentoring process. Of the utmost importance is that the mentor and the mentee perceive their relationship as a "partnership in personal and professional growth and development" (Sambunjak, Straus&Marušić, 2006, p. 1003), and not as a relationship between supervisor and subordinate.

The last component refers to an organization that takes place only in formal mentoring. The organization creates and develops the program itself and encourages people to participate. It functions as an observer and coordinator but not as an active participant, provides resources and collects feedback. The informal mentoring process is more unstructured and it usually occurs spontaneously, as "a natural component of relationships that occurs throughout the society, in the workplace, as well as in social, professional, and family activities" (Inzer&Crawford, 2005).

Although being primarily a tool for personal and professional development, mentoring is taking new roles, accordingly to the changes in the business environment. Most of the sectors today face an increasing shortage of experts and workforce in general, due to several factors: the gap between the knowledge provided by educational institutions and skills required in the job market, the aging workforce etc. In an attempt to overcome those obstacles, different sectors try to use mentoring as a tool for employer branding so as to position themselves as competitive, attractive employers in the labor market, and to attract students and young professionals.

To sum up, the goal of mentoring is to create space for thinking, personal development and professional growth of mentees through the exchange of knowledge, perspectives and experiences between mentors and mentees. They should work together to discover and develop the mentee's abilities, talents and skills, recognize his potential limitations and overcome them. A quality mentoring relationship implies that mentors and mentees are committed and engaged in the mentoring process, since it is a reciprocal relationship in which both parties grow together.

With the different changes that occur in the business environment, mentoring is undertaking new roles. Therefore, the goal of the thesis will be to investigate *whether mentoring can be used as an effective tool for employer branding and attraction* of graduates and young professionals to a particular sector, to decrease the workforce shortage. Moreover, through a case study, it will try to present and identify the most important factors, as well as the shortcomings, that could affect the successful implementation of this tool.

1.1. Objectives of the thesis

The main objectives of the thesis can be defined as follows:

1. To review academic literature considering mentoring, the attraction of graduates and young professionals, and employer branding with the emphasis on their interconnection.
2. To present a case study that will point out how mentoring is implemented as an attraction and employer branding tool in a particular sector.
3. To provide recommendations for similar mentoring programs, based on analyses of best practices and successful application of mentoring programs.

1.2. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organized into six chapters:

The first chapter is dedicated to the introduction of mentoring, its main characteristics, and its development from a tool for personal and professional development to a tool for attracting graduates and young professionals. Also, in the introduction are stated the main objectives and the structure of the thesis.

The second chapter begins with the setting of the main research question. Also, it presents an extensive literature review about mentoring in general and non-extensive literature referring the mentoring as an instrument of attraction and employer branding in the marine and maritime sector, with aim to provide a better understanding of the case study presented in the fourth chapter.

The third chapter refers to the methodology used in the thesis.

The fourth chapter involves the case study of the mentoring program in the marine and maritime sector. First, the reasons that led to the need for the implementation of mentoring as a tool for attracting and employer branding in this sector are explained. Further is presented a related case study, as a potential example of good practice.

The fifth chapter addresses the discussion, recommendations on how the particular mentoring program could be improved and become a valuable employer branding and graduates' attraction tool for other sectors in Cyprus, the limitations and implications of the present thesis. It provides suggestions for future research, as well.

The last, sixth chapter includes the final conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research question of the thesis, *whether mentoring can be used as a tool for attraction and employer branding*, was developed from the provided literature review: rich sources related to the main point of the thesis, mentoring and its components, but also to the non-extensive literature about mentoring perceived as a tool of attraction and employer branding that has not been enough research so far by academics. Moreover, the literature review addresses mentoring in the marine and maritime sector as the topic of the case study presented in the thesis and mentoring as a potential tool for attraction and employer branding. A comprehensive literature review of published is divided into subheadings, for better clarification.

2.1. Components of the mentoring process

Traditionally, mentoring has been defined as a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé's career (Kram, 1985). The European Mentoring Centre's official definition of mentoring is "off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking" and it emphasizes mentoring as a means of achieving development and personal growth, which contrasts with much traditional mentoring in North America, focused on career sponsorship (European Mentoring Centre, 1999). Covering both perspectives, in its simplest form "mentoring is about two people coming together with a view to helping one of them progress more easily through work, life or whatever context the mentoring is taking place of" (Beevers, Rea&Hayden, 2020, p. 212). For a better understanding of this topic, it should be mentioned that "mentors provide protégés with both career functions and psycho-social functions. Career functions help the protégé advance in the organization and include providing sponsorship, exposure and visibility... and challenging work assignments to the protégé. Psychosocial functions, on the other hand, serve to increase the competence, effectiveness, and work-role identity of the protégé. Mentors provide psycho-social functions by serving as role models, and by providing counseling, friendship and acceptance to protégés" (Kram, 1985, cited in Forret, 1996, p. 27). Unlike Kram (1985, cited in Forret, et al., 1996), Jacobi (1991) classifies the role model of the mentors, as the distinct, third dimension of mentoring, and not as its psychosocial function.

Scientists did not agree on the mentoring definition, but some of them presented in their papers show a variety of definitions from different scientific fields (Bozeman&Feeney, 2007, p. 723; Jacobi, 1991, p. 507-508; Haggard et al., 2011, p. 285) and the richness of mentoring topics that can be found in the present literature (Haggard et al., 2011, p. 283). Therefore, as Jacobi noted in his research from 1991, there is still a "continued lack of clarity about the antecedents, outcomes, characteristics, and mediators of mentoring relationships despite a growing body of empirical research" (p. 505). Having in mind the plethora of mentoring definitions, for this thesis, the definition that determines mentoring as a relationship between an older, more experienced mentor and a younger, less experienced protégé for the purpose of helping and developing the protégé's career (Kram, 1985) was adopted.

2.1.1. Benefits and negative aspects of mentoring

The positive effect of mentoring is widely recognized in literature, and many different studies prove the benefits both for the mentor and mentee. Positive mentoring outcomes for mentees include, first of all, a better understanding of the chosen topic and consequently, more favorable work and career attitudes, greater learning, increased objective and subjective career success, higher performance, and fewer strain-related reactions (Eby et al. 2013). Also, potential benefits are: "increased confidence, self-awareness and self-management skills, increased motivation from being encouraged and reduced stress as a result of being able to discuss challenges in a non-judgmental context" (Beevers, Rea&Hayden, 2020, p. 212). As a mentor is someone who has different acquaintances and contacts, a mentee could have a great networking opportunity, to gain new contacts that may be important for his further career or development.

While benefits for mentees are obvious, the mentor's perspective is more complex, and less extensively examined (Eby et al., 2010). In their research, Janssen, Van Vuuren&De Jong (2014, p. 1) indicated "five broad categories of mentor motives: self-focused motives (based on individual reasons), protégé-focused motives (directed at the protégé), relationship-focused motives (directed at the relationship between the mentor and the protégé), organization-focused motives (benefiting the organization), and unfocused motives (mentoring as the result of unconscious information processing." Some of the self-focused motives are the acquisition of new skills; a better understanding of others' work styles; improvement in their coaching skills (Forret, Turban&Dougherty, 1996). Eby et al. (2006, p. 427) noted four short-term benefits: "improved

job performance through mentoring, recognition by others for one's mentoring efforts, mentoring as a personally rewarding experience, and developing a loyal base of support through mentoring" that could have long-time positive outcomes for mentors, like a feeling of contribution to future generations.

Mentoring can help mentors to build leadership and management skills, expand their professional network, and provide an empowering opportunity to give back to the community. Also, they should perceive the mentoring relationship as a significant opportunity for mutual learning (Clutterbuck, 2005), because a mentee can provide the mentor with a new approach to current topics, so the mentor will have the opportunity for his development.

Mentors may gain a sense of intrinsic satisfaction by passing their knowledge and experiences on to others, and seeing their development (Beevers, Rea&Hayden, 2020). Malota (2017) goes even further by showing that intrinsic motivation is the salient factor in the propensity to mentor.

Negative Aspects. However, for the reasons of impartiality, it is important to stress that most of the literature is assuming that mentoring is efficient and positive, and is neglecting its dysfunctional, negative or "bad" aspects. Although it is clear that "bad" experiences are mostly depending on subjective judgment, they are important to research, since they can have a damaging effect (Jung&Bozeman, 2020) both on of mentor and mentee (e.g. stress) and on their relationship (e.g. cause its premature termination), and they are more intensively experienced than positive experiences. Scandura (1998, p. 453), defined negative mentoring as "dysfunctional" and noted that "dysfunction occurs when the relationship is not working for one or both of the parties. One or both of the parties' needs are not being met in the relationship or one or both of the parties are suffering distress as a result of being in the relationship". In his adaptation of Duck's typology from 1994 (Perlman&Carcedo, 2011), Scandura (1998) discussed four types of dysfunctional mentoring relationships: negative relations (bullies, enemies), sabotage (revenge, silent treatment, career damage), difficulty (conflict, binds), and spoiling (betrayal, regret), also adding submissiveness of a mentee, mentor or protégé deception and harassment. Eby et al. (2000, p. 3) defined the "negative mentoring experiences as specific incidents that occur between mentors and proteges, mentors' characteristic manner of interacting with proteges, or mentors' characteristics that limit their ability to effectively provide guidance to proteges."

The behaviors that could lead to negative mentoring have been studied mostly from the perspective of mentees, since they are in a more vulnerable position than mentors, when entering the

mentorship relationship. In their research, Eby et al. (2000) developed a taxonomy of negative experiences from the perspective of mentees divided into five categories: match within the dyad (compatibility between the mentor's and mentee's in: values, personality, and workstyle), distancing behavior (neglect, mentor self-absorption, intentional exclusion), manipulative behavior (tyranny, sabotage, credit-taking, inappropriate delegation, deception), lack of mentor expertise (interpersonal incompetency, technical incompetency) and general dysfunctionality (bad attitude, personal problems). There are also mentees' behaviors that are perceived by mentors like "failing to meet the mentor's expectations or being perceived as unwilling to learn... breach of trust, relationship exploitation, sabotage, as well as jealousy and competitiveness toward the mentor" (Eby et al. 2010, p. 82). Interestingly, "the bad mentoring experiences reported by mentors tend to be less destructive and damaging than those reported by protégés" (Eby et al. 2010, p. 86). Simon&Eby (2003) noted that negative experiences could be minor (irritation) or serious that "may relate to psychological distress and intentions to leave the relationship" (p. 1101). Further research led to the proposal of making the continuum of severity of mentoring relational problems, which were described as minor relational problems with low severity, taxing relational problems with moderate severity, and serious relational problems with high severity (Eby, 2007, p. 325). However, some scientific views warn "not to equate 'dark' and 'bright' with 'negative' and 'positive.'" (Carr&Heiden, 2011, p. 100) and be positive. One of those aspects is also known by MOMA or mentor-on-mentee-aggression (McClelland, 2009). It is argued that all mentoring relationships are passed at some time through a kind of aggression. For example, "mentoring often requires that the mentor challenge the views and practices of their mentees, and there is likely to be a good deal of argument and counter-argument in their exchanges... mentees in many respects are agreeing to engage in such aggressive encounters when they enter into such relationships" (McClelland, 2009, p. 65).

To conclude, although dysfunctional mentoring is not happening as often as beneficial, it could cause frustration and disappointment, reduce relationship quality or even cause its premature termination. Also, it could provoke "role confusion, interpersonal conflict, the loss of individual power" (Carr&Heiden, 2011, p. 89), lower self-esteem, feeling of achievement and willingness to mentor/to be mentored in the future, so it is important to recognize it when/if happens.

2.1.2. Mentors

The mentor is commonly defined, as a reliable advisor and a guide through the personal and professional development of the mentee, ready to invest time and expertise in his development. One of the common understandings is that a mentor is "a person who gives a younger or less experienced person help and advice over a period of time, especially at work or school" (Cambridge dictionary). Pegg (1999) describes mentoring as a process whose the most important part are mentors, usually older than mentees – because the age brings accountability, who help them to build on their strengths, find solutions, achieve ongoing success, but can be challenging and willing to pass them on their wisdom, as well.

In practice, there are many expectations from mentors: they should be role models, advisors, supporters, leaders, motivators, network enablers, sources of wisdom, experience, and inspiration (Goldberg, 2013). Mentors should provide optimal instructions, suggestions, explanations, instructions and advice; offer stable development support for a certain period; timely considers realistic options for mentee career development; provide new perspectives, propose a different view on the doubts and issues of the mentee (Kreativno mentorstvo, 2014/2015). To achieve that, it is considered that some of the characteristics and skills that are necessary for quality mentoring, regardless of the sector of work include: trust, openness, respect, curiosity, absence of ego and vanity, active listening skills, knowledge of techniques of asking relevant and high-quality questions, patience, techniques of providing helpful and timely feedback (Hieker& Rushby, 2021), good communication skills, networking. In his research Jacobi (1991) provides a table that contains 15 basic functions of mentors. Lewis et al. (2016, p. 277) argue that "one of the most valuable services a mentor can provide to a student... is a different perspective. Having a mentor in a different region, institution, or area of practice encourages a mentee to consider alternative viewpoints and ways to accomplish tasks".

A mentor can be a true role model, since "role modeling occurs through the process of identification with the mentor and leads to the internalization of the mentor's values, behaviors, and attitudes" (Eby & Robertson, 2020, p. 85). Mentors gain respect by giving an honest picture, but also by being able to receive critique supported by good arguments, to point out a mistake or admit it, if necessary (Mali vodič kroz mentorstvo, 2015). However, in addition to these techniques and skills that can be learned and developed, the most important thing of all is the genuine desire and dedication to supporting the mentee in their growth and development.

2.1.3. Mentees

It is widely accepted that mentorship relationships should always be mentee-driven, and a mentee should have a sense of ownership of the process (BBSRC, 2016), take initiative and be proactive (Lewis, 2016). In that sense, mentees should decide on the direction of the mentorship relationship, always with the support of the mentor. Also, mentees should be open to new ways of working and communicating, re-examining and exploring themselves, prepared to confront challenges, be honest, self-aware and committed to the relationship (Nankivell&Shoolbred, 1997). As one of the important mentees' competencies, which he noted in a Framework of mentees' competencies, Clutterbuck (2005, p. 7) wrote that mentees should be ready to dedicate themselves to reflection, to "spend quiet thinking time both before the mentoring session (to prepare what they want to discuss and why) and after (to review what they have learned and extract further lessons from it). Reflection also encompasses a willingness to examine one's own motives, drives, attitudes and behaviour."

It is interesting to mention that, "in terms of comparisons between those with and without mentoring experience, individuals are more likely to be mentees if they possess personality traits associated with positive views of the self, sociability, and achievement orientation" (Eby& Robertson, 2020, p. 76).

2.1.4. Matching a mentor and a mentee – mentoring relationship

The important issue is also how to match a mentor and a mentee. Forret, Turban& Dougherty (1996, p. 28) noticed that "the procedures used to pair a protégé with a mentor can range from a simple random matching process to a more refined process based on the protégé's and mentor's objectives in participating in the program." However, it is reasonable to doubt that the random matching process would be satisfactory. For the topic of the thesis, which is mostly related to instrumental mentoring support, it is important to notice that "mentors who are similar to their protégés in terms of educational background, departmental affiliation, or functional area may be better able to provide appropriate technical guidance, help the protégé engage in networking activities, and recommend the protégé for learning opportunities..." (Eby et al, 2013, p. 460), so it would be a good direction in a matching process. One of the interesting recommendations considering successful matching between mentors and mentees, from the same

research (Eby et al., 2013), is to organize an opportunity to socialize before matching, to estimate later the level of similarity.

There is also a disagreement regarding of mentor's position, which might jeopardize the mentoring relationship. Bozeman&Feeney (2007, p. 726) argue that supervisors can be eligible mentors, because "employees in contemporary organizations often have several bosses and several administrative superiors with whom they have direct, interactive relationships. If all these were disqualified as mentors, the concept would take a different and less useful shape than it has to this point." On the contrary, Hieker and Rushby (2021) emphasize that a mentor should be chosen carefully, not to be, at the same time, responsible for assessing the performance of a mentee (e.g. professor or supervisor), since this potential conflict of interest would compromise the honesty and quality of the mentoring dialogue.

The relevant literature explored also if the "relationship between mentoring and protégé outcomes varied by the type of mentoring relationship (youth, academic, workplace) ... and some differences were also found across the type of mentoring" (Eby et al. 2008, p.1), having in mind that the mentoring process could occur in the various stages of life, and therefore, serve different purposes.

The present research also disagree about the desirable duration of the mentoring relationship and the frequency of mentoring sessions, although the research of Eby et al. (2013, p. 449), argues that "in the absence of frequent interaction, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the mentor to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to the protégé. The length of the relationship is also likely to relate to both types of mentoring support and relationship quality".

2.2. Mentoring as a tool of attraction and employer branding

Employer branding could be defined as "the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors" (Backhaus&Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). Therefore, the messages that are being sent from an organization/sector are crucial for employer branding efforts that aim "to distinguish it from other competitive offerings" (Miles&Mangold, 2004, p. 66), attract and retain employees. Employer branding activities directly contribute to organizational attractiveness because they enhance positive aspects of the employer, "drive employer image, which in turn affects the attractiveness of the organization" (Kalińska-Kula&Staniec, 2021, p. 588). Since the "attraction and retention of talent have become a top priority, branding employment experience to current and prospective employees is imperative" (Biswas&Suar, 2014, p. 58).

The study conducted by Kalińska-Kula and Staniec (2021, p. 598) concluded that "employer image was the predictor that directly impacted employer attractiveness". More narrow, Sousa et al. (2016), indicate the impact that mentoring could have on the informal process of an employer's image improvement. It showed that one of the roles that mentoring has is to increase the sense of belonging of mentees, which is extremely important for the process of employer branding, especially in uncertain economic times and in a marketplace with skill shortages and where organizations/sectors are competing for talents (CIPD, 2021). Mentoring may have a positive effect on protégé attitudes, since it is presumed that protégés will develop positive attitudes toward the activity that they engage in with their mentors, favorable behavioral, attitudinal, health-related, interpersonal, motivational, and career outcomes for mentees (Eby et al. 2008). Therefore, mentoring surely can be a channel for sending positive messages and a tool to create a desirable image of an attractive employer of choice.

Moreover, the research conducted by Spitzmüller et al. (2008), confirmed that the protégé's perceptions of high levels of psychosocial mentoring functions appear to have a stronger effect on organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue employment with the mentors' organization, than the career-related mentoring. Developing a strong mentorship relationship with their mentors, who can be perceived as representative of a specific organization/sector, and receiving all the necessary mentoring support, may also foster the attachment of mentees to the context in which the relationship is developed (like an organization or sector) and become highly attractive for mentees.

2.3. Mentoring in the marine and maritime sector

The main reasons to consider mentoring in a marine and maritime industry do not differ from other sectors, like to serve as a development and learning tool, to retain its internal expertise and experience on shipping related issues for future generations, and to create a workforce that balances the professional and the personal life. Lately, due to the numerous technological changes, it is widely used to help employees to acquire specific skills/competencies (Safety4Sea, 2018). Although it is clear that mentoring should be available to support career development for all positions, both at sea and onshore, there is not much literature that would refer only to mentoring in the maritime sector, and is mostly limited to the mentoring that is happening onboard. Goldberg (2013) writes that "mentoring is particularly applicable to the maritime industry where practices and traditions are deep and varied... It is one of the most effective ways of transferring this knowledge from one generation of the mariner to the next... Despite these values, the availability of mentoring can be limited in the maritime industry."

The reason that mentoring could be limited in the maritime sector, is explained in the research conducted by Pike, Honebon and Harland (2019), who noted that mentoring still happens mostly onboard... and works best within a stable crew environment where mentor and mentee relationships have time to develop and flourish... The research of Pike, Honebon and Harland (2019) also found that mentoring is widely valued, not only as a way of sharing knowledge, but also through the relationships that it engenders. However, contrary to Pike, Honebon and Harland (2019), Goldberg (2013) mentions that onboard mentoring relationships do not have time to develop, since they are "typically short-lived because one of the participants sooner or later ends up on a different vessel or different shift." Of course, with the technical development in communications, the e-mentoring (or distance mentoring) could be implemented both onboard and onshore, as a way to maintain a mentoring relationship. However, barriers to mentoring in the marine and maritime industry, are evidenced as "lack of confidence in leadership, poor communications, time pressures, bureaucracy, and the need for support from the company or sponsor" (Pike, 2020). Finally, the conclusion could be called contradictory: mentoring is a timely and valuable activity in the maritime industry... (Goldberg, 2013), but inconsistencies in its delivery can affect the well-being of individuals and the industry (Pike, Honebon&Harland, 2019).

With regard to the case study presented in the thesis, it should be mentioned that a negative image of the marine and maritime sector prevails (MATES, 2019), due to the sector being perceived as "old", "traditional", and simply, not very attractive (Harris&Sunley, 2021) and negative publicity related to safety (pollution threat, ship disasters), piracy, criminalization of seafarers. This negative image of the marine and maritime sector is one of the numerous reasons (which will be discussed later in the thesis), that causes a lack of initial attraction to the marine and maritime industry (Thai&Latta, 2010), and consequently, shortage of the labor force. In general, this lack of positive image is "largely to blame on the industry as a whole..." because "the sector itself did not recognize the need to manage the reputation" (Thai&Latta, 2010, p. 413). It is important to notice that "word-of-mouth is the most effective method to attract people to the shipping industry" (Thai&Latta, 2010, p. 420), so mentees can become the best brand ambassadors - they can transmit, frequently and consistently (Sousa et al. 2016), relevant and reliable message about the values, the mission of the sector, increase the visibility and awareness of professional opportunities, build its desired image that will help the sector become competitive and establish credibility.

3. METHODOLOGY

The thesis is based on desk research from existing literature (bibliography and webography) from the relevant fields (maritime management, management, human resources, communication, psychology, education, digitalization, ecology). The article search was conducted in academic journals, on database platforms like ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar and Web of Science. Search terms included "mentor" and all derivations of that term ("mentoring", "mentorship", "mentee"/"protégé") in combination with "seafarers", "maritime", "personal development", "shortage" etc. In the thesis are included articles from the relevant websites (e.g. Harvard Business Review) or documents from the recognized organizations (e.g. IMO, EU Commission, CIPD). Unpublished research, conference papers, dissertations and theses etc. were excluded. Therefore, the paper reviews, synthesizes and analyzes systematically a wide range of material.

To provide greater clarity on the topic, the thesis includes structured interviews with open-ended questions, that were conducted with the CEO of CMMI, Zacharias Siokouros and Monica Andreou, coordinator of the Sea of Experience project from CMMI (Cyprus). The first interviews were held online on 11 February 2022. The interview with Zacharias Siokouros lasted 20 minutes, while the interview with Monica Andreou was longer and lasted one hour. On the 2nd March 2022, an interview with Alexandros Rammos, coordinator of the Sea of Experience project from National and Technical University of Athens (Greece), was held, and it lasted 40 minutes. The next day, the 3rd of March 2022, the interview with Despina Davidou from Evalion - SHL company, was conducted and it lasted 30 minutes.

With the oral consent of all the interviewees, all the interviews were recorded on two recording devices, for the purposes of later transcription and further analysis. The questions from the interviews were derived from the literature review, following the main points one mentoring program should cover. They were posed to the interviewees accordingly to their role in the mentoring program (e.g. program coordinator, consultant for psychometrics etc.). In the Appendix, however, it is not marked which question is posed to whom since it was considered that the presentation of one logical, compact interview frame would be more beneficial and easier to follow.

Unfortunately, the mentoring program was delayed and has just started, so it was not possible to interview mentors and mentees, as it was initially planned, and to have their insights.

4. WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN THE MARINE AND MARITIME SECTOR

The marine and maritime sector is marked as conservative and loyal to tradition. The innovations are not well-accepted due to the fear of the unknown and uncertainty regarding the potential risks. In the past, a narrow, well-defined set of skills was successfully used for decades. However, the nature of work in every job is changing, and as a result, there is a pressing need to continuously improve existing skills, while the skills that employers and companies value are transforming, being the subject to continuous change and making these so-called skills gap.

The marine and maritime sector is already facing a lot of changes, both worldwide and in Cyprus, that are affecting it in multiple ways. Most of the literature (Harris&Sunley, 2021; MATES, 2019; Oksavik et al. 2020; Department for Transport, 2019) is anticipating three broad areas, as the main drivers of change in the maritime industry: digitalization and automation/knowledge in the digital domains; green technologies/the drive for greater environmental sustainability; global competition and upgrading into more knowledge-intensive activities. It is noted that "many of the new skills essential for development in these three interlocking domains are cross-sector or transversal" (Harris&Sunley, 2021, p. 4). Transversal skills, according to the UNESCO definition (2013) are "skills that are typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge and that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings (for example, organizational skills)", and Oksavik et al. (2020) consider that they are of vital importance to allow a smooth transition from one to another position in the maritime industry. The more specific shortage of skills is referred to types of engineering and science-based skills including electronics, software, robotics, mechanical engineering, marine and system engineers, environmental scientists, young design engineers/naval architects, cyber security, computing, (Harris&Sunley, 2021), artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data, virtual reality (ECMAR, 2018). Although the literature is emphasizing the role of digitalization and automatization in the maritime sector, I would say that it is important to mention the opinion of Captain Unni expressed in the article *Technology redefines seafarer's role in the future* (2018), when asked about the changes that digital technology will bring to the seafarers' role up to 2030: "The only difference would be the use of more technology that will augment operations onboard a vessel from analog, disjointed systems into smart digital enterprises to aid, rather than to replace the seafarer's knowledge."

New "green" skills are required due to the implementation of the Green Deal, the new green agenda of the European Union (European Commission, n.d.) in the maritime sector as well, specifically, in the domain of carbon and greenhouse gas emission-reducing technologies, fuel efficiency and greener shipping (Harris&Sunley, 2021). They will include professionals for zero gas emission, alternative fuels, renewable resources, weather routing, electrification system, speed optimization.

Soft skills were also highlighted as a skills gap and referred mainly to problem-solving and analysis, self-management and presentation, socio-emotional and communication skills (Harris&Sunley, 2021), teamworking, leadership, resilience, creative thinking and innovation, critical thinking, knowledge management and transfer, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, productivity and accountability etc. (MATES, 2019). In comparison with technical skills, soft skills are easily trained and could be adapted to the specific requirements of the sector.

Although Cyprus has one of the largest registered merchant fleets in the world and the marine and maritime sectors are one of the strongest and most significant factors of the Cypriot economy, Cyprus is facing severe challenges in the maritime sector. Ongoing twin transition (green and digital transition), together with automatization caused a gap mostly in technical skills, i.e. between the skills that are taught in the educational institutions and the skills that are in demand in the labor market. Zacharias Siokouros provided relevant information about the situation in Cyprus related to the skills gaps in the educational system related to the maritime industry: "the academic system, the Universities, is providing very few shipping programs, actually there are two programs, one is called Shipping and finance at the Cyprus University of Technology (mainly finances, customized for shipping), and the other one is Maritime studies at the Frederic University... There are also some hybrid courses on management, MBA, shipping but these are meaningless. Even the courses that are provided within the Universities, do not reflect the needs, especially in Cypriot shipping... The graduates of those two Universities end up doing different things... they do not even end up doing finance because we do not have so many needs in the finance departments of the shipping companies. So, this is the mismatch, we produce a lot of shipping and finance, but we need a lot of engineers, people with technical skills, data scientists who are not produced by Cypriot Universities... That is why we are trying through vocational training or micro-credential programs, as they are called, which are shorter programs of 2-3 weeks, 2 months, to provide specialized skills like how to you make an engineer be also a data scientist. This is something that Universities do not offer, they have their standard bachelors, masters and

PHDs... We need to address the skills that are more specialized, shorter, more adapted to the needs, flexible, that can easily be changed... At Universities, we have a more rigid system, mechanical engineers, electrical engineers, civil engineers, architects. The skills we need are somewhere in between: we get a mathematician and develop him as a data scientist in the two months program which is more vocational, more practical than academic..."

In a way, the lack of attractiveness of the maritime sector relates to the development of digitalization and automatization, since, as much as it contributed to the easier technical ship manning, it created more difficult conditions and had a disruptive effect on living onboard. On the one hand, ships are equipped with communication satellites, tools for optimizing the operational skills, new technologies on the bridges, tools that give information to the office and on the ship about what is the optimum routine for the ship... (Siokouros, 2020). On the other hand, the crews are getting smaller which causes social issues on ships, a lack of communication between crew members who spend a lot of time in their cabins with laptops connecting with their families, instead of exchanging their ideas and passing the experience from older to younger crew members.

Moreover, heavy workload and stressful work environment are intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic, so the task of recruiting and retaining the workforce in the maritime sector, especially in those uncertain times when the seafarers were prohibited from disembarking when the pandemic began, became even harder (Minter, 2021). Traditionally, the retention of talents, knowledge, skills is also ensured by labor mobility in the maritime sector. It mainly involves professionals who move from position onboard to position ashore, transferring the basic professional knowledge, expertise, and work ethics to other nonmaritime specialists and this process. However, nowadays, the horizontal mobility of seafarers is often affected by the lack of information about job availability, as well as lack of recognition of maritime qualifications, and training courses. Research conducted by the University of Southampton (Harris&Sunley, 2021) suggests that engineers and highly skilled workers tend to enter other sectors... having an abundance of choice and being unaware of potential roles in the maritime sector (Siokouros, 2020). Career progression is an important part of the attractiveness of a maritime career, but vertical ladder mobility is difficult because it requires specific upskilling or retraining.

In addition, the shortage of seafarers in Cyprus is related to cultural issues, as well. Z.S. explained that "the Blue Economy, the maritime industry, should be, to some extent, our culture... we have to recognize that the life on the ship is not as easy as the life shoreside. For the

Cypriot, it is a problem, nobody wants to go... On a ship, the personal life of a person is different, because you sleep and you work in the same place. So, the people that you see at work, you see them on your break, and during your lunch, after office hours. You are all the time surrounded by the same people, you cannot escape from them, even if you don't like them... Life on the ship is more difficult than in the army... in the sense that you are away from your family, you are away from your country, you have to manage to live on your own, something that is unusual for a Cypriot. You have to learn to live with other nationalities, eat different food, be in the working environment... something that is not easy to achieve. You have to create a proper culture for years, e.g. there are a lot of cities and islands in Greece where people consider shipping as a very normal thing for somebody to join. For the Cypriots, this is still unusual..."

To conclude, numerous are factors that led to the workforce shortage in the marine and maritime industry, both worldwide and in Cyprus, and different strategies are implemented, accordingly, in an attempt to overcome this problem.

4.1. Case study - Sea of Experience - Mentoring program

4.1.1. About the program

A huge need to invent and implement a comprehensive strategy for attracting young people to the marine and maritime sector, incited the innovative, EU funded project Sea of Experience², coordinated by the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA) and including the Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute (CMMI) as a partnering organization from Cyprus. The project is focusing on ocean literacy and its crucial part involves a mentoring program. It aims to bring young people closer to the sea (since only a minority of young people had any contact with the sea and boats), raise societal awareness, provide guidance and advance knowledge about blue professions.

The Sea of Experience mentoring program is designed to guide, support and inspire students toward career paths in the Blue Economy by relying on the skills and capabilities of mentors to overcome professional barriers and enable students/mentees to succeed. It covers four domains: maritime transport, cruise industry, shipbuilding and port operations. More precisely, within those four domains, the focus will be on ten professions: deck officer, engineering officer and electro/technical officer (maritime transport), cook and steward (cruise industry); welder, marine surveyor, and naval architect (shipbuilding) and harbormaster and stevedores (port operations). The criteria for choosing these ten professions were: their demand; the criticality of the role in the maritime industry; the level of difficulty/complexity when executing the role and the special/difficult conditions that apply in the field and how representative these roles are in their maritime area (Davidou&Polychroniadou, 2020).

The Sea of Experience mentoring program is conducted only online. Alexandros Rammos noted that "from the proposal stage of the project, the concept of the Sea of Experience was to create an online platform for online mentoring and a virtual environment from the videos and other content, so it would be like, to the possible extent, face-to-face. It was made before the COVID pandemic, but the COVID just made more suitable."

² More information about the project: [Sea Of Experience – Establishment of Eastern Mediterranean Regional Network](#)

The implementation of the mentoring program of the Sea of Experience project was postponed due to the COVID situation, and, as planned by the project, it will be finished in October 2022. However, because of the importance of such a program, Z.S. stressed that "the aim is to make this program sustainable... and to consider funding... the sponsorships from companies, training centers..." Both mentors' and mentees' participation in the program will be voluntary, and as a common practice predicts, the mentors will work pro bono. The information about participating in activities in Cyprus will be disseminated through social media channels, the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce Industry and the University of Cyprus.

4.1.2. Mentors

The coordinators of the Sea of Experience mentoring program invited professionals from the marine and maritime industry to apply for mentors. Z.S. explained that the CMMI has close cooperation with the industry "so it is very easy to find relevant experts, and they want to participate because the market has demand due to the lack of relevant personnel in the field. They look forward to getting in touch with us, and participate as mentors..." However, in order to have the opportunity to be a mentor in this program, the Sea of Experience mentoring program focused on very detailed profiling of the mentors. The aim was to define the mentor's profiles in accordance both with the generally defined characteristics and industry needs, but as Monica Andreou, emphasized "apart from the expertise... we were looking for people who are capable of mentoring" and for that reason the Evalion-SHL company was outsourced.³

The criteria were made in two dimensions: the one had to do with technical skills and educational background, and the other, more important, with soft skills. Therefore, it had to be defined what are the soft skills, the critical attributes, in order to be effective in this role (Davidou, 2020). This profile will serve the scope of identifying and nominating mentors during the next phases of the Sea of Experience project.

To identify the most important/critical skills (both technical and soft skills) for mentors, Despina Davidou firstly studied the existing literature for the soft skills/competencies of mentors in general and mentors in the Blue Economy Sector. Later, she gathered information from the CMMI professionals related to the ten professions that were chosen to be a topic of the mentoring

³ More information at: [Evalion-SHL | Αξιολόγηση και ανάπτυξη προσωπικού](#)

program. The next step was to create a new Competency Model for Maritime Mentors by exploiting the Universal Competency Framework (UCF) of SHL⁴, which specifies the requirements for good performance in a given role, and the likelihood of succeeding in certain roles and environments, so it could be said that the skills which are defined for mentors are the combination of the literature review, interviews with people from maritime professions and the SHL Universal Competency Framework:

'Great 8' Leadership Factors



20 Competencies



Picture 1: SHL Universal Competency Framework⁵

For a better understanding of the process, Despina Davidou from Evalion-SHL added that "every competence has 5 or 6 behavioral indicators and the related statements. We extracted ones that we considered important for the mentor profile."

⁴ More information at: [Universal Competency Framework | SHL](#)

⁵ Davidou, D., Polychroniadou, A. (2020). Identification of teachers' / mentors' profile. Sea of Experience project, p. 18

For example, the mentor's competency *Inspiring others* includes the following behaviour indicators, derived from the particular SHL Universal Competency Framework competencies:

Indicators from Leading and Supervising: D⁶

Leading and Supervising

- A. Provides others with a clear direction
- B. Sets appropriate standards of behaviour
- C. Delegates work appropriately and fairly
- D. Motivates and empowers others
- E. Provides staff with development opportunities and coaching
- F. Recruits staff of a high calibre

2 of 2 **LEADING AND DECIDING** 1.2

Indicators from Persuading and Influencing: A⁷

Persuading and Influencing

- A. Makes a strong personal impression on others
- B. Gains clear agreement and commitment from others by persuading, convincing and negotiating
- C. Promotes ideas on behalf of self or others
- D. Makes effective use of political processes to influence and persuade others

2 of 3 **INTERACTING AND PRESENTING** 3.2

Indicators from Achieving Personal Work Goals and Objectives: A, C⁸

Achieving Personal Work Goals and Objectives

- A. Accepts and tackles demanding goals with enthusiasm
- B. Works hard and puts in longer hours when it is necessary
- C. Identifies development strategies needed to achieve career goals and makes use of developmental or training opportunities
- D. Seeks progression to roles of increased responsibility and influence

1 of 2 **ENTERPRISING AND PERFORMING** 8.1

⁶ SHL Universal Competency 1.2, D behavioral indicator extracted.

⁷ SHL Universal Competency 3.2, A behavioral indicator extracted.

⁸ SHL Universal Competency 8.1, A and C behavioral indicators extracted.

The competencies recognized as critical for a mentor, as the following:

1. Demonstrating active listening

Active listening is one of the core communication skills, the highest, most effective level of listening, a great strategy for having effective communication, and one of the most important tools used in the mentoring process. It implies a conscious intention not only to hear the words spoken by the mentee, but also to understand the message he is trying to convey to the mentor. Active listening also means effort, adjustment, focus and empathy towards the mentee.

It is based on complete, undivided attention to what a mentee is saying. A mentor should listen carefully, show interest verbally and timely pose open-ended questions to encourage the mentee to provide more information. He should give attention to the feelings of the mentee. Being an active listener means that different factors should be considered, such as non-verbal communication, meaning appropriate body movement and posture showing involvement, facial expressions, eye contact, nodding, attentive silence, reflecting feelings... (Robertson, 2005). By being an active listener, the mentor demonstrates to his mentees that his concerns have been heard and understood. As a result, mentees feel accepted by mentors and trust is being built (Phillips-Jones, 2003). On the contrary, if the mentor shows selective listening, it will damage and limit the communication because the mentee will censor what he tells.

2. Providing constructive feedback

Feedback is defined "as the extent to which a person receives clear information about performance effectiveness from the work itself" (Noe et al., 2009, p. 177) and traditionally, it was viewed as the primary means for managing employee performance. It is a useful tool for mentors to indicate, whether things are going in the right direction or to redirect problem performance. By providing valuable feedback, a mentor shows a mentee that he is attentive to him and his performance, appreciates a well-done job, has the capacity to redirect undesirable behavior. According to its content, feedback can be positive or negative and it relates to the estimation of the particular aspects of the mentee's performance. According to its effects, feedback can be constructive or destructive. Although the content and the effects often equalize, negative criticism/feedback can be constructive if it gives precious information on how to increase competencies and if it is based on trust and respect. On the other hand, positive criticism/feedback can be destructive, when the estimation is affirmative but not in the realistic frame, so it does not encourage development but stagnation (Mandić&Ristić, 2014). It could be said that feedback is essential for improvement, it

should be focused on the behavior and not the personality, and provided during and after each session with the mentor.

3. Building "Together"

Taking into account that mentoring could act as a support mechanism that can help new seafarers feel less isolated at the early stages of their careers, mentors should know how to be tactful in their conversations, be emotionally intelligent and have "emotional presence" to be able to deal with personal and sometimes emotional issues. A mentor should analyze mentees' profiles in order to provide effective support and consultation, and build a wide and effective network of contacts that mentees could make use of it (Davidou&Polychroniadou, 2020). One way to "build together" is a recently developed trend called "reversed mentor programs" that allows the (senior) mentor to connect to the younger generation not in the mentor role, but as a mentee. The idea is to let the younger, less-experienced person provide different viewpoints to his mentor (Beevers, Rea& Hayden, 2020), so the learning process could go in two, but again reciprocal, ways. One of the mentor's benefits will be, for sure, some knowledge acquired and some new resources revealed from the younger generation.

4. Building trust

Identifying and responding to the needs of the mentee and engaging in closeness-building behaviors are among the most critical tasks for mentors (Eby&Robertson, 2020). Bilateral trust develops over time, comes from respect and consistency, and is critical in order to have a mutual commitment to a mentoring relationship. It is shaped by the mentor's perceptions of the protégé's ability, benevolence and integrity, as well as the perception of the risk inherent to mentoring (Leck&Orser, 2013). The mentee must feel respected, valued, welcomed, recognized, so as to open up to a mentor who should create a safe and trusting environment for mentees, by being honest and approachable (Davidou, 2020). Both mentor and mentee can contribute to trust-building by not disclosing confidential personal and professional information revealed during a mentoring session to anyone else. Also, in order to build trust, they should spend appropriate time together; keep promises; admit errors and take responsibility for correcting them etc. (Phillips-Jones, 2003). Most research show that trust between mentor and mentee is essential for a fruitful mentor relationship (Chopra, 2017; Tjan, 2017; Johnson&Smith, 2018). When trust between mentor and mentee cannot be established and/or the mentors do not have the skill-set,

time, interest or motivation to add value to their mentees' development, the risk of failure of the mentoring program is really big.

5. Inspiring others

Successful mentors should be able to inspire their mentees to come out of their comfort zone, think critically and creatively, and make a step ahead. By setting an example and sharing his experience, a mentor can help a mentee in his future paths that excite and motivate them, even beyond his original dreams or expectations (Philips-Jones, 2003). Common methods to inspire mentees include storytelling, metaphors, powerful phrases. A good mentor is not afraid or ashamed to share his past challenges and lessons learned to inspire mentees on continuous self-learning (Davidou & Polychroniadou, 2020).

6. Cultivating a positive & growth mindset

A growth mindset is directed to attain one's full potential. Some of the characteristics of the Growth mindset are embracing challenges, overcoming obstacles, learning from criticism and finding inspiration (Oregon State University, n.d.). Mentors should recognize core mentees' motivator factors and encourage them to use their skills and knowledge most effectively, develop and improve them to their full potential, sometimes stepping outside of their comfort zone. A successful mentor is capable of identifying mentee's comfort zone and developing steps and activities that will force them to become comfortable outside of their zone (Davidou & Polychroniadou, 2020), and most of all, to find that step inspirational.

7. Applying expertise & technology

Good mentors will be excited to share their knowledge with mentees and willing to explore and keep up with new trends and developments in their field. They should be considered an expert in their field and have the skill and willingness to transfer this knowledge and expertise to mentees. They should, also, be considered "learning brokers" as they assist mentees in finding resources such as people, books, software, websites and other informational sources (Phillips-Jones, 2003). Of course, in today's digital world, mentors should be able to use technology and other resources during their mentoring sessions. Of course, due to the advanced technology and the mentoring platform that was created for the Sea of Experience mentoring program, e-mentoring could be an effective, acceptable solution, since mentors and mentees do not need to meet physically.

To validate if the potential mentors have critical soft skills, evaluation interviews were conducted. The interviewees were experienced professionals (6-25 years of experience), and the emphasis in these interviews was given on the (critical or desirable) soft skills for a successful mentor in each of the 10 aforementioned professions (Davidou&Polychroniadou, 2020). It is interesting to mention some of the interviewees' insights, since they recognized potential benefits and shortfalls: "they emphasized the fact that mentors should be experts in their field, but at the same time to have the means and desire to transfer their knowledge and experiences. They recognized that mentoring is not easy to be applied on a systematic basis on board due to lack of time and difficult conditions. Additionally, the problem is that opportunities to interact face-to-face with a maritime mentor are rare due to the isolation of being on board and, in some cases, the limited number of crew personnel. When mentoring in the maritime industry does happen, it often occurs between people serving on the same vessel, and is typically short-lived because one of the participants sooner or later ends up on a different vessel or different shift..." (Davidou& Polychroniadou, 2020).

Apart from the typical qualifications, they should have experience, recommendations and specific competencies. D.D. thought that those competencies should be measured based on the behavioral questionnaire: "Therefore, we developed a questionnaire with statements that can evaluate these aforementioned competencies. Mentors who want to participate in the program should complete this questionnaire... and the aim was to see if we have a strong mentor profile. Optionally, we developed another methodology to evaluate. We have also designed an interview guide with specific questions, in order to assess again the mentors. We ask for specific examples based on the experience of the mentor, and it is a competency-based interview approach. We have a pool of specific questions, for each competency. These two methodologies are designed to evaluate the possible mentors of the program" so the coordinator could be more confident when choosing somebody for the mentor. Following the aforementioned steps, a full profile (both technical and soft skills) of maritime mentors can be derived.

The mentor's competencies that were listed for the Sea of Experience Mentoring program, are much in line with one of a few existing academic research on mentors' competencies, conducted by Clutterbuck (2005) in which he analyzes macro and micro mentor competencies for every phase of the mentoring relationship (as he understands them), in detail, since each phase requires modification of a mentor's behavior. Phillips-Jones (2003, p. 3) indicates that "the most

valued mentoring skill is giving encouragement. This includes giving... recognition and sincere positive verbal feedback", which is also in accordance with the mentor's competencies that are considered important within the Sea of Experience mentoring program. Apart from the Mentoring skill model that consists of mentor and mentee specific skills, Phillips-Jones (2003, p. 2) argues that both a mentor and mentee should have the following core skills: "Active listening, building trust, Encouraging and identifying goals & current reality, in order a relationship to be successful".

For the moment, 28⁹ mentors were chosen for the program. A.R. said that the coordinators "are more focused on engineering professions and this is something we are still building on. We have more marine engineers and technical officers than other professions that we are focusing on, so this is an imbalance, and we are still missing mentors for some of the professions."

DOMAINS	Mentors / Male	Mentors / Female	Age (from-to)
Maritime transport	10	3	30-60
Cruise industry	6	0	40-60
Shipbuilding	6	0	30-50
Port operations	5	0	40-50

Table 1¹⁰

There will be no external mentor supervision. A.R. shared that "we deliberately did not want to have such supervision. The mentors have ways to report if something is wrong but we thought that the mentoring relationship is more personal, so external supervision is not needed, at least from our point of view, except for things that could be easily reported since it is an online format."

⁹ The table refers to 30 mentors, as some (male) mentors are relevant for more than one domain.

¹⁰ The data about the number of mentors were collected on 18.3.2022. and provided by Alexandros Rammos.

4.1.3. Mentees

As A.R. described, the Sea of Experience mentoring program, "is open to anybody, we do not have constraints on the mentees, regarding who can express his or her interests... We do not have any specific criteria for the mentees... we have only some limitations. One of these is, since we have to do the matching, we have to be able to find a relevant mentor for the mentee." Moreover, what is suggested by Evalion-SHL is that mentees complete a kind of psychometric tools before the first session, so the mentor could have the results and use them through these sessions. D.D. emphasized that it "is a career guidance tools test battery in order to assess the ability, skills and personality of the mentee... The point is to complete it before the first mentoring session, so the mentor could have the results and use it also as a tool during the mentoring sessions...". These tools will be delivered to mentees as online questionnaires, through the Sharing-pooling platform. It "contains multiple variables and differentiated algorithms that are used to calculate points (scores) based on combinations of given answers. When a psychometric tool is completed and submitted, the system will produce a personalized report for each mentee" (Voulkas, 2020a).

It should be mentioned also that, likewise there are no mentors for some professions, A.R. noted that "nobody from mentees expressed an interest in the profession of a cook, for example, but we want somehow to facilitate this." Moreover, he hopes that this gap could be overcome since the CMMI and Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry have contact with Vocational Education and Training Institutes¹¹, and they will try to attract from there both mentees and mentors. If it happens to have more applicants for mentees than it is planned, it is again left to the mentors to decide how many mentees they can take. However, up to this moment, it is another way around, there are more mentors than mentees.

¹¹ Μεταλυκειακά Ινστιτούτα Επαγγελματικής Εκπαίδευσης και Κατάρτισης (MIEEK) in Cyprus.

4.1.4. Matching mentors and mentees – mentoring relationship

The Sharing-pooling platform will be primarily used for the matching of the mentees and mentors: "all registered mentors will be stored in a registry within the system... The mentors' registry will include all the descriptive fields (and their respective data) that are included in a mentor's profile" (Voulkas, 2020a). Matching can be done based on different selective criteria (e.g. Mentor Fields of Specialty). Coordinators of the program will be able to search within the Mentors' Registry using combined criteria and mark the desired mentor. This mentor will then be associated with one or more mentees. Also, it is planned that one mentee could be matched with more mentors, so as to cover a mentee's different needs for mentoring in varying topics. Therefore, matchings are done both based on the mentees' interests and the available mentors. Most of the mentees, if not all of them, are students, and, as A.R. said "there are also regional matches. We actually have a student from Greece and a mentor from Cyprus."

The research Eby and Robertson conducted (2020, p. 94) about the impact of the relationship science theories¹² on organizational mentoring, suggests "that the behaviors that occur once the mentoring relationship has been established are just as important, and are likely more predictive of outcomes, than pre-entry characteristics, program features, and matching." Since the official training about building the mentoring relationship is not provided, it is left to the mentors and mentees to find the most efficient way to establish it.

In the case of mismatching, A.R. points out that they are open to collect feedback, both in a formal way through evaluations, and an informal one, which is, of course, a faster way: "We had one mentee who did not like his mentor. He reported it to us and we are still trying to find him another mentor. That is the only thing that we do about mismatching" but also if a mentor cannot cover the mentee's need.

¹² Attachment theory, interdependence theory, self-expansion theory, Rhodes' model of formal youth mentoring, and the working alliance.

4.1.5. Structure of the program

The Sea of Experience program does not have any specific structure. The training for mentors or mentees before the program starts is not provided, but A.R. explained that "both mentors and mentees receive one-pager with brief instructions and guidelines about the mentoring process."

The mentors and mentees will have three sessions and every session will last one hour. A.R stresses that it is "just a recommendation for now... Three sessions are a compromise, because of the availability of mentors, they are all experts, it is three hours of their time. The first session will be used so the mentor and mentee get to know each other, the second one to build on the mentoring work and the third one will be an evaluation, in the case that something was missing from the two previous sessions." However, this is only the proposed frame for the sessions, since it is more up to the mentors how they will go through those 3 sessions.

4.1.6. Sharing-pooling platform

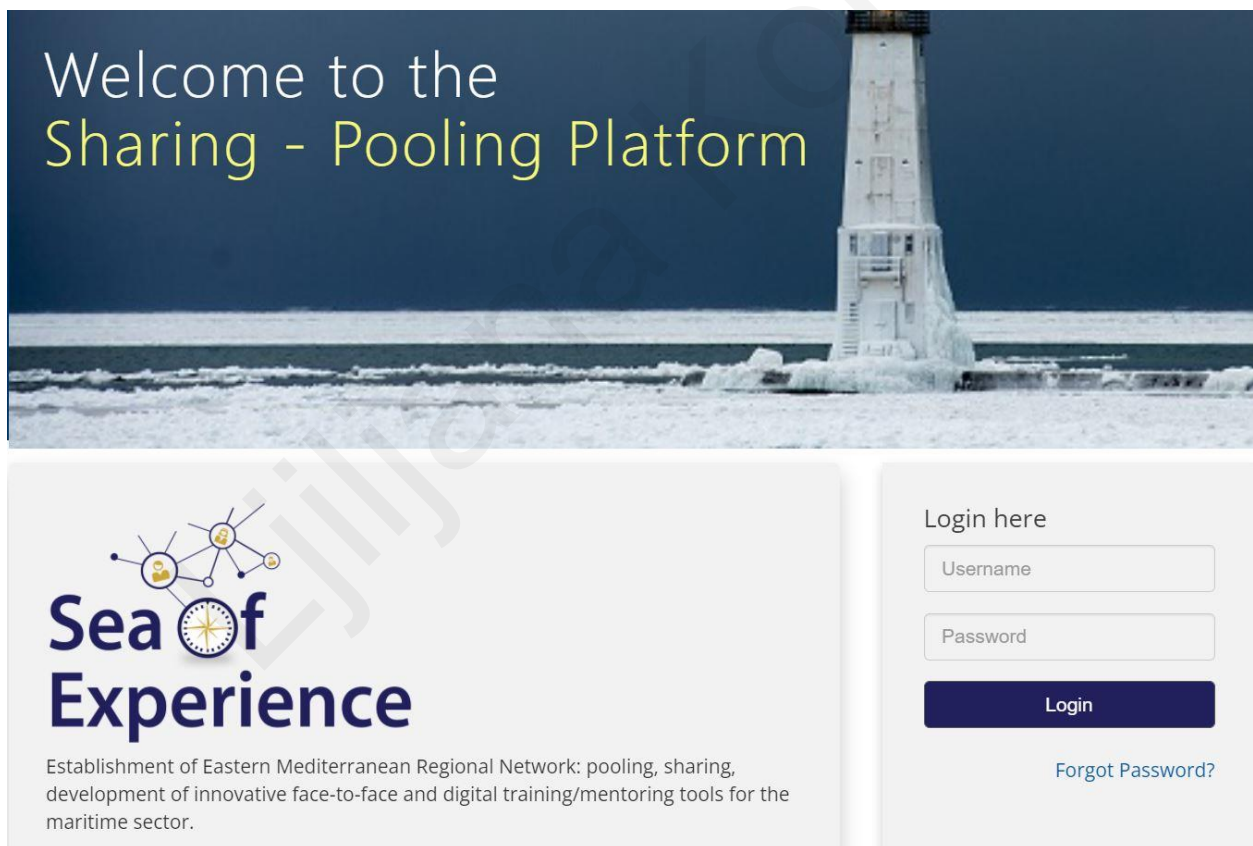
The most important tool for the Sea of Experience mentoring program is the Sharing-pooling platform. It will be the main tool for matching mentors and mentees, it offers numerous functionalities and workflows regarding the creation, overview and management of various mentoring activities (Voulkas, 2020a). It was developed specifically for the needs of the program by the company Apopsi,¹³ and started to run at the end of 2021. The platform will be online for at least 5 years, so within this time frame it will be possible to accept mentors and match them with mentees.

The platform is user-friendly, it is working on any operating system and any popular browser, it is accessible from any device (tablet, phone...). Mentors and mentees will be networked and communicating through the platform (Voulkas, 2020b). The platform is able to digitize different mentoring actions, and it aims to help the mentoring process to be highly standardized and personalized, at the same time (Voulkas, 2020b). It is used also for scheduling a mentoring session (live or distance...), chatting, sharing different types of files, using a larger library with his mentees. Online meetings can occur in the already implemented user-friendly web conferencing environment, so there is no need to go to another application or online. There is also a chatting

¹³ [Homepage - ΑΠΟΨΗ \(apopsi.gr\)](http://apopsi.gr)

application, in which is very easy to upload and send a file via chat (Voulkas, 2020b). The system holds the whole chatting history, and there is no need to rely on any other external application: mail, chatting system etc.

The most important feature of the platform is that it is equipped with sources that could help in the mentoring process. It is continuously enriched by different valuable tools, like an e-library incorporated into the system consisting of 360° videos, Virtual Reality videos, pictures, documents, useful links, so the mentor could use this during the mentoring session. 360° videos deliver a more immersive experience, so the watchers can be easily familiarized with the working environment (Ramos, 2020). A.R. gives an example: "if the mentee is interested in becoming an engineering officer at the ship, we have captured in 360° video the engine room of 2-3 different ships, so this could be a reference to the mentor."



Picture 2 – The interface of the Sharing-pooling platform¹⁴

¹⁴ Screenshot from: Voulkas, G. (2020b). Sea of Experience, establishment of Eastern Mediterranean Regional Network: pooling, sharing, development of innovative face to face and digital training/mentoring tools for the maritime sector. Presentation at the Sea of Experience 2nd Annual Workshop

At the end of a mentoring relationship it is very important to do evaluations, to determine the effectiveness of the process, and to identify improvements that can be made. Evaluation of the program, both by mentors and mentees, is also embedded in the platform. A.R. described that after the end of the mentoring sessions "when we will have more feedback, both from mentors and mentees will fill a questionnaire, evaluation on the platform, if three sessions are too many, too few or maybe a more flexible schedule is better. The platform has some limitations and some advantages. Maybe somebody does not feel reluctant to report something through the platform, but only in real life... if a mentee wants an additional session, or to give us feedback that his mentor does not know something... the feedback we expect is not only I like the session or not, but also: I was covered, my mentor was friendly or not." Overall, the idea is to be approachable in a more personal way, and for different kinds of feedback. Finally, it is important to emphasize that the whole mentoring program and its features, like the Sharing-pooling platform, are under verification and validation. In this stage, it is important to locate the setback and problems, address them until the end of the project, and create a sustainable mentoring program that would be able to fulfill its aim.

5. DISCUSSION

With regard to the research question, a literature review related to the topic indicated that not enough attention is being dedicated to the interconnections of mentoring, employer branding and attraction, because mentoring is still dominantly seen as a personal and professional development tool. Nevertheless, the existing literature showed that mentoring programs, due to the changes in the business environment, nowadays are seen as a strategic approach for attraction and employer branding in different sectors.

To illustrate the literature review, as a practical example, a case study from the marine and maritime sector is presented, as well as the main reasons for using mentoring as a tool for attracting and employer branding in the particular sector, both in general and in Cyprus. Mentoring in the marine and maritime industry serves mostly as a development and learning tool, like in other sectors. However, in the last decade, due to the various changes, it is used also to help employees to gain specific skills/competencies. Namely, the skills gap in the marine and maritime sector is one of the most important factors for labor shortage in the sector, and mentoring programs are considered a tool to overcome them. In addition to that, the marine and maritime sector does not have a very good public image, and mentoring programs are seen as a good, practical tool for the improvement of the public image, and consequently, its branding as a desirable employer. It is considered that after the mentees go through the mentoring process and get a deeper understanding of the sector, the sector could be more attractive to the mentees, mostly students. Therefore, mentoring could contribute not only as a learning tool that would close a skill gap but also as a powerful employer branding tool, that could improve the image of the sector, attract students in the sector, and help them decide about their career path.

The literature about mentoring shows that mentors and mentees should have particular skills or competencies, for the mentorship relation to be successful. The biggest emphasis in the Sea of Experience mentoring program is given to the mentors' competencies and selection. To be selected, mentors have to pass several custom-designed interviews and tests. Moreover, the characteristics of the mentors are analyzed and presented in detail.

It can be noticed that there is a big gender gap in the case of mentors: of 28 mentors, only 3 of them are women. This trend, however, is in line with the global trends since women still represent only 1.2% of the percent of the global seafarer workforce (IMO, 2021). According to Long (1994) there are numerous reasons that mentoring is including more male than female mentors, which

could be undoubtedly implemented nowadays, as well. However, although in the particular case study could be observed a big difference in the number of male and female mentors, it could be argued that it is more a matter of the difficult industry/sector that is traditionally turned to males. In Cyprus, this gap is, in addition, attributed to cultural issues, and it could be decreased in the future, since, as Z.S. notes "half of the students in Maritime Academies are women."

It could be expected that age could also influence the willingness to become a mentor. On the one hand, younger professionals could be more eager to undertake more obligations and establish themselves in different fields, but they cannot have as much expertise as the older professionals have. From the range of age of the mentors included in the sea of Experience program, no connection can be made between the sectors and the age of the mentors, except that age range of mentors in the Port operations sector is smaller than in other sectors. So, in this particular case, no connection between the age of a person and his willingness to become a mentor, as Ragins and Cotton (1993) argued in their research, could be confirmed, since the age range is significantly big.

The Sharing-pooling Platform that was developed for the needs of the Sea of Experience program, could be defined as a very good idea to connect mentors and mentees in an online environment, where also different resources for mentoring will be placed. However, it should be questioned if all the rich educational material provided will draw attention from the mentoring relationship, especially having in mind that there are only three mentoring sessions and that the program is conducted online, which might set different challenges while trying to build a mentoring relationship. Although online or e-mentoring has its advantages, like cost and time-efficacy, flexible scheduling or overcoming geographical barriers, in general, virtual communication is limiting, due to the absence of body language and it can slow down relationship building. In addition, since the mentors and mentees are not able to interact in person, they might not establish the so-called chemistry in the mentorship, which, in turn, can be a problem for engagement in the relationship and influence the outcomes of the program. Finally, technology problems, e.g. bad Internet connection, could cause misunderstandings and be very frustrating for building a relationship. Technical issues cannot be predicted before setting the meeting, but they could prevent the effective conduction of a session and slow the relationship building. Therefore, it might be said that maintaining virtual mentoring relationships might be the biggest challenge in the program.

It is not clear if the mentoring program has taken a formal or informal direction. In the maritime sector, there is a plethora of cultural and general knowledge that can only be learned through informal means. Based on many estimates, as much as 70% of professional knowledge comes from various forms of informal learning (Davidou&Polychroniadou, 2020). Although more mentoring support is found in relationships that develop informally compared to those that are part of a formal program (Eby et al. 2013), it could be said that the Sea of Experience mentoring program is established as a formal program since it is established through an institution/organization. However, as it was concluded from the interviews and program description, a lot of decisions within the program are left to mentors and mentees, so it could be said also that it is characterized by a high level of informality.

5.1. Recommendations

1. One of the issues of the mentoring program was that mentors were more than mentees. It is recommended to consider more effective ways to disseminate the information about the program. One of the most effective ways to attract new mentees, students, is to organize some entertaining event like "Mentoring breakfast" or "Mentoring coffee" in a relaxed environment, e.g. popular cafeteria. The event information should be disseminated through communications channels, but the mentoring program should be presented in person and, in the end, dedicate some time to their questions. It should be useful that some of the ex-mentees and mentors could share their experiences with the students during the presentation, and be open also to questions. The idea is to give the program more human touch, having in mind that everything related to the program is online. An official program presented in an informal way, especially in a small environment like Cyprus, may cause bigger interest, be transferred by word of mouth as something new and interesting to other students and attract new potential mentees.

2. The mentoring program should follow a particular methodology. Different methodologies could be applied in the mentoring process and one of the most used and applicable is the 5c mentoring methodology or the OSCAR model, which are simple tools that provide a kind of "journey map" for facilitating a structured approach to the mentoring session.

3. The mentoring Sea of Experience program is not having any specific structure, as well, which could contribute to a less efficient collaboration between mentor and mentee. The literature is offering different perspectives on the potential structure of a mentoring program (Clutterbuck,

2005; Mentoring guide - A Guide for Mentors, 2003: Beevers, Rea&Hayden 2020), so it would be recommendable to choose one.

4. The program should include the pre-session or the kick-off session, when both mentors and mentees would receive training on the topic of the mentoring process, their role, behaviors and activities that could contribute to the development of a quality mentoring relationship, trust-building, conflict management. The practice has shown that lack of mentoring training is one of the most common reasons for the failure of the mentoring process, and that is necessary for both parties to go through training to be able to participate in a quality relationship and manage the mentoring process (Vodič za mentora i mentorisanog – mentorstvo, n.d., p. 11). It is highly recommended that the training also includes the provision of guidance books (with the most important bullets from the training and frequently asked questions).

5. The basis of a successful mentoring process is to have a clear picture of the desired outcomes, so the emphasis of the training should be on setting the goals of the mentoring process (that could be modified over time) and how the mentor and mentee plan to achieve them together. If it is not clear to a mentor what is expected of him, or mentees have unrealistic expectations that exceed the mentoring relationship, the mentoring process can be unproductive.

Mentees need to clearly define their goals in order to identify/need support during the mentoring process. For that purpose, the SMART model could be used, with other words, the goals should be Specific, Measurable (measurable – it should be possible to define if the goal has been achieved), Attainable (achievable), Realistic and Timely (with clearly defined deadlines for realization). Goals may change with circumstances or as they are achieved and replaced with new ones.

6. It should be considered that mentees' perceptions of mentoring relationship quality are also related to more frequent interaction with the mentor (e.g., more hours worked per week, Eby et al. 2013), so it would be strongly suggested to have more than three mentoring sessions.

7. Although the mentoring relationships sometimes can be dysfunctional, problematic, or just the mentoring pairs could be mismatched, the coordinators of the program did not plan to search deeper into the reasons for dissatisfaction, but just to change the mentor.

The relationship between mentor and mentee could be unsatisfying for many reasons, and some of them can be objective like the sudden busyness of the mentor or mentee. However, some could be highly subjective: lack of commitment, not taking the time to prepare for meetings, both from

mentors and mentees. It happens also that the mentees fully transfer the responsibility for the process to the mentor and do not invest enough time and resources for preparation, as well as for the later implementation of agreed activities, so there is dissatisfaction on both sides because the desired effects are not achieved.

Therefore, it is suggested that a coordinator of the program, has a detailed conversation with the mentor/mentee about their dissatisfaction, so as to understand correctly its roots and prevent future disappointments, with a new mentor.

Also, due to the "dark mentoring" and its potential consequences, it would be very useful to train both mentors and mentees to understand the mentorship relation boundaries and to recognize potential dysfunctionalities, in order to prevent or report them timely.

8. According to the Spitzmüller et al. research (2008), individuals with face-to-face contact with their mentors rated their mentors as more useful for their career and psychosocial function, than the mentors who they were contacting with only virtually. Some of the disadvantages of virtual mentoring are obvious, and one of the most important is that through virtual relationships it is difficult to build a rapport. There are also views that if participating in an online mentoring program, both mentors and mentees should have at least three webinars to prepare for the mentoring relationships. That would allow them to connect with others in the program and provide closure once the program and/or mentoring relationship is completed (Virtual mentoring, n.d). The least that can be done if involved in an online mentoring program, to overcome some of the communication challenges is to open cameras during the sessions, which, at least, would add to the program formalization.

9. Although the literature did not examine how the quality mentoring relationship should end, even in the case of e-mentoring, it is recommended to organize a closing event of the mentoring program with all the participants, to celebrate successes and say an "official goodbye".

5.2. Limitations of the thesis

The biggest limitation of the thesis is the lack of surveys and interviews with mentors and mentees of the Sea of Experience mentoring program, that were planned but were not conducted due to the delay of the program. The thesis would surely be more insightful and could offer a better understanding of the mentors' and mentees' motives for applying to the program, which is also an important factor for the mentoring program's success. Moreover, the evaluations from the mentors and mentees would be also available and contribute to the presentation of the overall program's effectiveness and different perspectives.

Although there are approaches that online interviewing is a growing opportunity for researchers to overcome distance and time barriers (Mann, 2016, p. 87) and has numerous advantages such as reduced discomfort and pressure that some respondents feel in face-to-face and greater cost and time efficiency, my personal experience is that they cannot be compared with face-to-face interviews. I would agree with Brinkmann (2013, p. 28) who argues that “in face-to-face interviews, people are present not only as conversing minds, but as flesh and blood creatures that may laugh, cry, smile, tremble, and otherwise give away much information in terms of gestures, body language, and facial expressions... but the challenge concerns how to use it productively.” Therefore, although the interviews had to be done online, due to the geographic distance, I would define them as the thesis' limitation.

5.3. Future research

There are several possibilities for future research on the topic, since it is clear that the thesis only scratches the surface of needed research in different directions. First of all, not having a unique mentoring definition, surely suggest the need to continue to research mentoring, its components and its effects.

Additionally, more comprehensive research on the role of mentoring, especially the online mentoring that was implemented mostly in the last 2 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in attracting students and young professionals and employer branding could be conducted. One of the interesting topics for future research related to mentoring is the effects of online mentoring on the overall mentoring process and its advantages/shortcomings compared to face-to-face mentoring, since the literature related to that topic is limited.

Concerning the case study presented in the thesis, I hope that in the future the effects of the Sea of Experience mentoring program in Cyprus will be investigated once when evaluations are available. In addition, the thesis could be complemented with surveys and interviews with mentors and mentees about their motives and experiences within the program, when the first cycle of the program finishes.

The labor shortage in the marine and maritime sector and the case study of the mentoring program are presented in the thesis within the frame of specific local conditions in Cyprus. Bearing in mind that the Sea of Experience mentoring program is being conducted in parallel in Greece and Cyprus, the effects of the program could be compared between those two countries, regarding their cultural differences and other factors that could affect the mentoring process, or with similar programs in other countries.

5.4. Implications

Since it is expected that mentoring will have a positive impact on employer's image and attractiveness, its use as a tool for employer branding and attractiveness is justified and strongly recommended. Employers wishing to improve their brand and attract graduates and young professionals should focus on mentoring programs, which, as highly flexible, could be tailored for specific sectors.

The case study from the marine and maritime sector in Cyprus, as a potential example of good practice, could be an encouragement for professionals to undertake a mentor role in similar programs, and be aware that a strong psychosocial mentoring component is likely to be effective in enhancing perceptions of organizational attractiveness and intentions to pursue employment.

With the same logic, the thesis could be an incentive for mentees to apply for mentoring programs so as to gain a deeper knowledge of the employer and potential career paths.

The recommendations for the improvement of the presented case study that are included in the thesis, could be the starting point for similar mentoring programs and serve as their "checklist".

6. CONCLUSION

Hundreds of studies have been published related to mentoring, due to the great interest in the topic. Its definition proved challenging, therefore the scientists did not come to a unique definition. However, in an effort to provide clarity to the topic, the literature review in the thesis presented some of the most important mentoring definitions and components, as well as narrower functions of mentoring, like attraction and employer branding, and their interconnection.

Mentoring is widely known as a tool for personal and professional development. Due to today's increased shortage of workforce and the need to promote organization/sector as a competitive one, it is used as a proactive tool for building a competitive advantage and winning in attraction - "war for talents". Through mentoring, employer branding may take time, but once built, the image of a strong, respected employer/sector, will easily attract young talents, highly skilled professionals from other sectors and retain professionals who may think to change the sector.

The desk research indicated the successful use of mentoring as a tool for attraction and employer branding. To get more insight into the thesis topic and make it more specific, the case study from the marine and maritime sector in Cyprus was chosen to present the implementation of mentoring as a tool for attraction and employer branding, as the workforce shortage is especially visible in the marine and maritime sector in Cyprus. The crucial reasons are the skills gap between what education offers and what the labor market needs, and the lack of attractiveness of the marine and maritime sector professions. Through the mentoring program, the skills gap should be overcome and at the same time, the marine and the maritime sector should be promoted and branded as an appealing employer, in order to increase the number of young people who would choose to pursue a career in the maritime sector. The case presented in the thesis is significant, since it indicates proactive thinking, acknowledging the need for improving the sector's image and the fact that strong employer branding could have a great effect when it comes to attracting people.

Finally, in the discussion are provided observations about desk research and the case study, as well as the limitations and implications of the thesis, and suggestions for future research.

To conclude, despite its limitations, the thesis presented a holistic view of mentoring that can be perceived as a tool for attraction and employer branding, and hopefully, together with the case study from the marine and maritime sector in Cyprus, will contribute to the further research of this interesting topic.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW 1 (Zacharias Siokouros)

1. What has been done so far in terms of digital and green transformation, concerning the maritime industry in Cyprus?
2. What do you think, do marine and maritime educational institutions in CY have the capacity to offer to their students training for key technologies where various combinations of (interdisciplinary) modules and courses are needed?
3. Do you know any particular effort to attract young women in the maritime industry, since we know that it is mostly masculine?

INTERVIEW 2

(about the mentoring program: Monica Andreou, Alexandros Rammos, Despina Davidou)

1. How do you approach mentors?
2. How do you disseminate the info about the program?
3. How do mentees apply?
4. Is there a limited number of mentees per program?
5. How do you choose mentees? Based on what criteria?
6. Are mentors only from the academic environment?
7. Do the mentors receive clear instructions, guidelines, hints, tips about their roles and responsibilities? If yes, how, training, workshop, mentoring toolkit with suggested strategies, manual?
8. Do mentees receive some training or orientation material regarding goal setting?
9. Is there a kick/off - initial meeting?
10. Does the program have a specific duration (6 months, 1 year...)? From when until when is it lasting?
11. Does the program follow some specific methodology?
12. How do you match mentors and mentees?
13. What if a mentor and a mentee find their matching unsatisfactory?
14. Is there external mentor supervision, to ensure the support of mentors, if needed?

15. Is there any monitoring (survey/evaluation/questionnaires) process concerning mentor and mentee progress? If yes, how often? Do you get it both from mentors and mentees?
16. How long do the session last (are there any limits) and is there any recommended length of meetings?
17. Is there a limited or recommended number of sessions (or the recommended one)?
18. How will the mentorship relationship end? Closing event?
19. Until now, do you think that mentoring program could cover the needs of the mentee?
20. Can one mentee have more than one mentor? If yes, do you suggest it or...?
21. Is there a limit to how many mentees can one mentor take?

Ljiljana Korica