

# Student-President Reverse Mentoring at Universities: Maltepe University Case

## Üniversitelerde öğrenci-rektör ters mentörlüğü: Maltepe Üniversitesi örneği

Şafak Gündüz<sup>1</sup>, Belma Akşit<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Maltepe University, Istanbul, Turkey

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Maltepe University, Istanbul, Turkey

### Özet

İşletmelerde uzun zamandır sıklıkla ve yaygın olarak kullanılan mentörlük, akademik camiada da genellikle bir öğrencinin bir diğerine ya da bir akademisyenin meslektaşına yardımcı olması şeklinde gözlemlenmektedir. Mentörlükte yeni bir anlayış olan ters mentörlük de yine aynı şekilde yükseköğretimdeki uygulamalar arasında yerini almıştır. Akademisyenlerin donanım kattığı öğrencilerini ters mentörleri olarak görevlendirmeleri artık mit olmaktan çıkmıştır. Peki, ya bir rektörün öğrencileri ters mentör olarak görevlendirmesi? Bu çalışmanın amacı Maltepe Üniversitesi Rektörü'nün öğrencileri ters mentörü olarak ne şekilde görevlendirdiği üzerine bir olgu çalışması sunmaktır. Elde edilen bulgular bu tip ters mentörlükten tüm yükseköğretim kurumlarının fayda sağlayabileceğini ortaya koyar niteliktedir. Bu olgu çalışmasının bulguları ters mentörlüğün akademiye olumsuz basmakalıp yaklaşımı ortadan kaldıracak niteliktedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Lider-üye etkileşim teorisi, mentörlük, rektör, ters mentörlük, üniversite öğrencisi, yükseköğretim.

### Abstract

Mentoring is a de *rigueur* concept, which has been widely practiced in organizations for a long time, and has also been observed in academic milieus in the form of one student helping another and an academician giving a hand to a colleague. Reverse mentoring, a new twist on this familiar concept, also has a long history and has been used in higher education as well. Academicians' empowering students as their reverse mentors is no longer a myth. How does a university president's benefiting from students as her/his reverse mentors sound? This paper aims to present a case study by exploring Maltepe University's experiences, whose president has delegated some students as his reverse mentors. The conceptualization through the findings has revealed the significance of such a mentoring system from which all higher education institutions can benefit. The findings of this case study demonstrate how reverse mentoring can clear up negative stereotyping in academia.

**Keywords:** Higher education, LMX theory, mentoring, reverse mentoring, university president, university student.

*"Wisdom does not come with age."*

A proverb

**T**oday's multigenerational workforce has a new nature for communicating and knowledge sharing. Generation X's traditional learning interventions cannot be enough to close skill gaps in today's fast-changing and demanding business environment (Emelo, 2012). Generational studies, having been a part of social sciences for

a long time (Srinivasan, 2012), also focus on changing working principles of these different generations.

Due to the business characteristics of millennial professionals, there is a gradual shift towards reverse mentoring from traditional mentoring system (Chen, 2014). Murphy (2012) states that in spite of the fact that reverse mentoring has many prac-

#### İletişim / Correspondence:

Asst. Prof. Şafak Gündüz  
Faculty of Business and  
Management Sciences, Maltepe  
University, Istanbul, Turkey  
e-mail: safakgunduz@maltepe.edu.tr

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tical applications, there has been little academic interest and almost no empirical evidence on reverse mentoring in business management and higher education studies. This paper attempts to fill this gap by providing a theoretical framework for the conceptualization of reverse mentoring by stating the differences and similarities between traditional mentoring and reverse mentoring within a case study.

The present paper reports a case study demonstrating reverse mentoring practices carried out at Maltepe University. Implementing reverse mentoring in student-president format for the first time in academia is of utmost importance. Although this paper presents a local case, it may give glimpses of how this type of reverse mentoring is applicable across all academic institutions. It should be underlined here that the relationship between students and deans should not be confused with reverse mentoring. Although reverse mentoring is highly popular, it is weakly conceptualized. The aim of this paper is to clarify how this concept can be applied to higher education institutions in the form of student-president reverse mentoring. We used the article on lecturer-student reverse mentoring project started at the University of Hertfordshire as a source of inspiration (Evans, Goossens, & Jefferie, 2009).

## Reverse Mentoring

The word “mentor” comes from Homer’s *Odyssey*. Odysseus, King of Ithaca, while fighting in the Trojan War, entrusts the care of his household to Mentor, who is the teacher and overseer of his son called Telemachus (Emory University, 2016; Colley, 2000). As understood from his function and profession, a mentor acts as a teacher.

Reverse mentoring, known as protégée-to-mentor learning (Swap, Leonard, & Anrams, 2001), is an upward mentoring (de Vries, 2011) and different from mentoring or coaching, to some extent. Reverse mentoring, due to its nature of being reciprocal, has become highly popular, especially in the last decade with the increasing number of millennial employees participating the new workforce. Jones and Brown (2011), in their classification of mentoring, find traditional and reciprocal mentoring similar. However, reverse mentoring is a different and emergent model, which turns demographics of traditional mentoring on end. Despite the similar structural characteristics and the content exchanged in the relationship, reverse mentoring is distinguished from peer mentoring, coaching, alternative mentoring and peer coaching (Augustiene & Ciuciulkiene, 2013; Jones & Brown, 2011). Due to its nature, reverse mentoring that occurs between two different generations is also called reverse intergenerational learning (Baily, 2009).

Interestingly, Alson (2014) states that he does not prefer using the term reverse mentoring as all mentoring types are mutualistic in nature and “role reversals” is observed in mentoring relationships due to various contextual effects of mentoring. Using the term “reverse mentoring” can only be a patriarchal definition of mentoring wherein the mentor and the mentee are in top-down positions. According to Social Exchange Theory, individuals are willing to engage in helping behaviors based on feelings of reciprocity in order to maximize the outcomes (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976; Gouldner, 1960). Social Exchange Theory is associated with mentoring in terms of knowledge sharing and transfer (Mairos, 2013). Higher education is criticized for its perceived failure to be transformational towards the changing demands of people. A shift away from a traditional leader perspective to Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) (an outcome of Social Exchange Theory), which focuses on the dyadic relationship between the leader and his/her followers to maximize reciprocation (Lunenburg, 2010; Truckenbrodt, 2000) as Homans emphasized seems a must in higher education context (Cook & Rice, 2006; Power, 2013), and it can be achieved by reverse mentoring.

Reverse mentoring has come into scene as a result of the Millennials’ expectations. Meister and Willyer (2010) surveyed with 2,200 professionals among various industries to find out their expectations from their employees. The Millennials – or generation Y – provided feedback that they were in a hurry for success but interestingly turned out not to have outsized expectations. Working on their CV’s since their childhood, Millennials have set high standards and as they are used to being high achievers in the academic world, and they prefer being engaged to overachieve (Chaudruhi & Ghosh, 2012). Having grown up in an online world where downloading and sharing knowledge is quite normal, they start working with a moniker of “digital geeks” (Buahene & Kovary, 2009), who navigate the digital world at ease (Anderson, Baur, Baur, Griffith, & Buckley, 2017). Managing Millennials (millennovators) (Moon, 2014) is possible not only by benefiting from their unique skills but also by making them contributors (Behrens, 2009). Matching a millennial with an executive to teach him social media or to help him cope with technological illiteracy is an effective way to empower the junior, and this is exactly what reverse mentoring is. Reversing the roles enables younger people to know about the organization and the business when their mentee retires. Burson-Marsteller, a PR and communication organization with offices in 85 countries, for instance, implemented a reverse mentoring program bridging experiential divides both between millennial mentors and their older mentees. Mentors had the opportunity to understand how the



leader thought and offered insights with which young mentors could accelerate their career track. (Harvey, McIntyne, Heames, & Moeller, 2009; Racz, 2013; Zanni, 2009).

Reverse mentoring is an innovative method which facilitates cross-generational relationship involving the pairing of a junior employee acting as a mentor to transfer his expertise to the mentee, a senior colleague. Bringing a generation with classical learning habits together with younger ones equipped with new age's demands is different from traditional mentoring in which knowledge transfer is mostly one way from the older to the younger. Thus, reverse mentoring turns this formula on its head (Murphy, 2012). However, it is not only technology that all reverse mentoring projects start for. It has a wide perspective such as overcoming difficulties in diversity, gender differences or biotechnology. For instance, young female employees are seen as reverse mentors to their senior executives coaching on sexism (Biss & DuFrene, 2006; Goldhill, 2016) to break the glass ceiling syndrome.

Systemized reverse mentoring schemes may help alleviate difficulties in managing two different generations coming to the forefront in the workforce (Chen, 2013). The mentor has less expertise within the organization but has more technological familiarity (Swanson, 2011) compared to the mentee, a more experienced and tenured counterpart (Rosa & Hastings, 2016; Shupe & Pung, 2011). Reverse mentoring is classified under power mentoring with the other types of mentoring such as boss mentoring, e-mentoring, group mentoring, barrier-busting mentoring, peer mentoring, situational mentoring, alumni mentoring, activity mentoring, co-mentoring and panels and circles of mentoring (Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Hamilton & Scandura, 2003; Oxford Learning Institute, 2016). There are also some alternatives to mentoring such as buddying, informal mentoring, networking and championing (Oxford Learning Institute, 2016).

According to Pershing (2006), the advantages of reverse mentoring in which the senior manager can get a direct input from the "shop floor" are:

- learning more about the organization,
- stroking the mentor's ego,
- giving protégé self-esteem.

The functions of reverse mentoring offered as a strategy to develop human capital (Green & Roberts, 2012) are task-assistance, career and psychological support, and role modeling. Additionally, some of its sub-functions are skill development, support, affirmation, networking, and new perspectives (Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Murphy, 2012), which will help bridge the multigenerational gap and transform 21st Century

managers into successful ones for the future (Harvey & Buckley, 2002; Wilson, 2014).

Reverse mentoring works given that the matching of the mentoring pairs is carefully done, the project structure is sufficient and the expectations of both sides are established (Biss & DuFrene, 2006).

A good mentor should (Oxford Learning Institute, 2016):

- listen actively with interest, holding the focus on the mentee's agenda
- encourage the mentee to take responsibility for the content of mentoring sessions
- take appropriate approaches such as robustly challenging a mentee who is not sufficiently focused, or sympathizing with the mentee in the event of bad experiences while encouraging him/her to take ownership and respond appropriately
- help the mentee to see the bigger and longer-term picture if he or she is concerned only about the present and the short-term future
- help a mentee to reframe how he or she sees something, or to consider a different perspective; for example a tutor who may need to consider a student's perspective; an author of a paper who may need help with understanding of an editor's viewpoint
- take an interest in the mentee's progress

Within a developmental mentoring relationship, a mentee is expected to be (Oxford Learning Institute, 2016):

- in control of the agenda, taking responsibility for his or her development, rather than expecting 'quick fixes' from a mentor
- committed, for example, attending planned sessions, taking the actions planned with the mentor
- prepared to be challenged when the mentor feels that this, rather than perhaps sympathy, will be of benefit
- be professional in the relationship with the mentor, for example, being punctual, respecting agreed ground rules, and talking openly and honestly with the mentor.

Pershing (2006) states the questionable aspects of reverse mentoring as:

- Employees at lower-level people would not 'rat on' their managers.
- Both parties could be accused of favoritism.
- Expectations tend to be thwarted.
- The mentor cannot prefer violating policies or bypassing standard procedures for promotions or plum tasks.
- The protégé can be the target of jealousy by peers.
- The protégé will not point out the areas of needed growth, which prevents growth.
- Outcomes are usually not measured.



The main problem behind the failure of a reverse mentoring project can be often down to the pairing of the mentor and the mentee. Unsuccessful pairing is always a problem which needs to be explored in reverse mentoring (Piasecki, 2011; Van Rosmalen et al., 2008).

### Reverse Mentoring Implications

Reverse mentoring is not a new concept in business world. Does reverse mentoring really work? There are many examples to prove it (Pijpers, Bemelmans, Heemstra, & Montford, 2001). General-Motors is one of the examples with its virtual reverse mentoring program to which even Tom Gottshalk, the senior vice-president attended to get updated on technology and ended up overcoming his fear of computers (Kirk & Olinger, 2003). Such type of mentoring is also called e-mentoring in the literature (Ensher & Murphy, 2007).

General Electric, Proctor & Gamble, Philip Morris, Siemens, and BP (Dalton, 2005; Evans, et al., 2009) are some other examples of reverse mentoring. Total Oil started a three-month reverse mentoring project to build bridges between X and Y generations for mutual knowledge sharing and transferring in Turkey. In that voluntary mentorship, 16 top-management executives as mentees including the general manager were taught all social media and new trends by 16 young mentor employees (HRdergi, 2016). Another example of reverse mentoring program for digital knowledge sharing is Danone (Yörükhan, 2015).

Akbank, a Turkish bank, which hires 1500–2000 people most of which are new graduates, has started the implementation of a reverse mentoring program called “Switch”, expressive enough to define what reverse mentoring is. Akbank staff can share innovative ideas and suggestions on a platform called “1001 Ideas” which was awarded the Global Mobile Award (Hürriyet, 2014). Garanti Bank, Bosh, and Eczacıbaşı are some other examples of reverse mentoring (Ekonomist, 2016).

Peer mentoring is a well-known practice in higher education and seen as a determinant of success in academic careers (Balen, Arensbergen, Weijden & Besselaar, 2012; Harnish & Wild, 1993; Meyer & Evans, 2005), whereas reverse mentoring is not. One of the first examples of reverse mentoring in academic setting was younger students’ helping out university students via GenYes Project (Christie et al., 2004). Doğuş University Library (Çelik, 2011), Wake Forest University Library (Keener, Johnson, & Collins, 2012), College London, Royal Free, University College Medical School and Centre for Health Informatics (Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Evans et al., 2009;) were also other successful reverse mentoring applica-

tions in academia, in which mentees were led to fill in their knowledge gap by using some computer-based applications such as e-mailing and using Microsoft applications.

University of Delaware paired 28 students with dietetics professionals, who were Internet novices, in a reverse mentoring program consisting of 10-minute “meet and greet” session, 20-minute formal lecture and two-hour-guided practice spent surfing the net resulting in great satisfaction (Cotugna, Vickery, & Fada, 1998). University of Adelaide also used a mentoring circle program in 2006. Mentoring circles in this program involved one mentor with a group of mentees or some groups of people mentoring each other (Darwin & Palmer, 2007).

What makes reverse mentoring hard to apply in Turkish academia is the fact that Turkish culture has a high power distance (highly correlated with collectivism) as described by Hofstede. In academic settings, high power distance manifests itself as students refraining even from asking questions to the lecturers in classrooms since it may be understood as a rebellion to authority (Goodman, 1994). This submissive attitude may lead to delay in innovation as it deters upward communication. Reverse mentoring, as a collectivist method, seems to be a good alternative to overcome “power myopia” seen frequently in Turkish academic settings.

### Student-president Reverse Mentoring at Maltepe University

Maltepe University, founded in 1997, is one of the 181 universities in Turkey providing higher education with its nine faculties, three graduate schools, two schools and a vocational school. The EUA, TASSA, IMHE memberships and ERASMUS exchange program co-operations with 75 universities are the indicators of internationalization of Maltepe University.

Prof. Dr. Şahin Karasar, the President of Maltepe University initiated a reverse mentoring project at Maltepe University in 2015 under the name of “social media student support group” (SMSSG), and no other university could be found in the literature using reverse mentoring program among Turkish Universities. His aim was to increase the recognition and publicity of the University and to carry out collaborative projects with other universities in this sense. He chose five students from the Faculties of Communications and Business and Management Sciences. Freshmen and sophomores were given preference considering the sustainability of their delegation.

The students would basically help the President and the University with basic social media applications and manage Maltepe University’s and the President’s social media accounts. The students as the mentors and the President as the mentee came together to determine the demands of the



mentees and the capacity and limits of the mentors in order to create a win-win process. Barbour, Thomas, and Ritter (2006) stated that the universities are spending a great amount of money on technology, but not on staff development to catch up with these technologies per se. Exposure to fast-changing technologies brings organizations a new vision like reverse mentoring (Fruchter & Lewis, 2000).

## Methodology

In this study, the case study method with in-depth interview technique is preferred due to the limited number of mentors and mentees to be used as a source of data in order to analyze various aspects and characteristics of Student-President Reverse Mentoring. Case-study research is an in-depth examination of an extensive amount of information about a few units or cases for one period or across multiple periods of time (Neuman, 2013). The qualitative case study research method is useful for collecting data that reveal the values, perspectives, experiences and world views of the population under study, and it provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Although case study as being widely used in social sciences for a long time is found invaluable in practice-oriented fields such as education, management, public administration, and social work, it has received little attention among the various methodologies (Starman, 2013).

Since case study is a sort of narrow field, according to Shuttleworth (2008), it is not possible to extrapolate the results to stand entire question due to its limited capability of showing only one narrow example. However, it should be noted that a case study can provide more realistic responses than a purely statistical survey. The truth lies between the combination of both and it is probably best to try and synergize the two approaches.

Case study is used to explore an individual, group or phenomenon (Sturman, 1997), and it provides an in-depth and comprehensive description and analysis of an individual from multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009; Starman, 2003). Some researchers state that a case study is not a methodological choice. It is rather a choice of what is to be studied. Using a case study in research is not the question of choosing a method. It concentrates on the case itself and uses analytical eclecticism (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011).

Another important point about case study is its flexibility. A case study may introduce new and unexpected results when proving or disproving a hypothesis (Shuttleworth, 2008). It should be noted here that the study does not have a claim to generalizability; however, it indicates important cues about the topic analyzed.

In this study, four male participants (3 students as mentors and a president as a mentee) were interviewed through semi-structured frameworks. One of the researchers was the interviewer and the other one was the observer. After each interview, researchers transcribed the tape and developed a text by combining observation notes, and each text was analyzed thoroughly once more to obtain overall results.

## Findings and Discussion

### Profile of the Key Informants

The profile of the key informants in the semi-structured in-depth interviews can be described as follows: Three students are aged 22–23 and one is 26, all male. The informants shared some broad similarities in terms of their age, except one of them, who gave distinctive and distinguishing answers. One of the informants has been in charge of Social Media Group for three years, two for two years and the last one for one and a half years. Two of them were students at the Department of Journalism, one at the Department of Public Relations and Publicity, and one at the Department of International Relations and European Union.

Karasar, the mentee, 51, male, is a Professor with a background in Communication Sciences. He has been working for Maltepe University for 12 years (on and off) and been the President of the University since 2014 with experience in private sector.

All informants (mentors) listed the tasks they carry out as members of Social Media Group as the following:

- Social media account management (content creation, design and activity sharing)
- Taking an active role in Maltepe University promotional activities
- Periscope broadcasting
- Publishing the University newspaper
- Content/page creation for different units at the University

### Parameters that Make a Good Student Reverse Mentor

To determine the parameters of a mentor, first, the mentor informants were asked what they understood from the term “mentor” and what way it could work. One of the most interesting finding was that only the elder informant with a part-time job could define a little bit what mentor meant. “*Mentor is someone who teaches how to reach knowledge. That is the difference between a mentor and a teacher.*” Other mentors said that they had heard of the term “mentor”, but did not know much about it.



The President described mentorship as “a senior’s informing, briefing, advising and leading a junior inside an organization. So, a sophomore can help a freshman, or a junior can be a mentor to a sophomore.”

He added that it was something different from ‘coaching’. A coach is an outsider evaluating someone’s competencies. He underlined that what he was trying to implement is ‘reverse mentoring’ system at the university. He initiated it by being a great example of being ego-free in such an ego-driven culture of academia.

*“This reverse mentoring system will help us know and understand them better. I believe mentoring does not necessarily need any title at all... Your experience and ‘repertoire’ is what make you wise.”*

It is quite important to share the observations when the mentor informants realized that they were to become the mentors of the President, whereas the President said that he kicked off and structured this mentorship system deliberately as he deemed it necessary. The mentor students were so unaware of this fact that they had difficulty finding words to express how happy and proud they felt. *“I am giving some advice to my friend in the group. Is this mentoring?”*

Another mentor informant uttered: *“I taught how to use Twitter to our Vice President, is this mentorship?”* One said:

*“Yeah, I feel so proud of realizing that I have mentored and it has nothing to do with age or status. I love sharing and if this is mentoring and if I am doing this unconsciously and teaching something I know to someone at a higher position and status, this is what I love the most. I feel that I have found meaning in what I am doing.”*

The mentor informants said that a good mentor should not have any ego problem. Ego ruins a mentoring system. *“What makes a mentor good is his soft tone and the way he uses his body language. He should be reliable, patient and frank.”*

Another mentor says:

*“...must be organized and dedicated to work; ready to share even at night for a smooth work flow... being smiling and sincere and open to criticism and suggestions. That is what a good mentor needs actually.”*

Karasar, the mentee, reported similarly that one of the respective roles of the mentors he needed was having some sort of experience, or background in the social media.

*“...I wanted them (the mentors) to reflect the vision I am trying to attain and they achieved it to some extent... should have some sort capacity and enthusiasm at the same time, being well-organized and proactive.”*

Karasar added that in addition to their positive manner, the happiness and pride they feel when they show and teach him something was obvious.

*“...A good mentor should be a good listener to sort out what is being expected so that he can share and convey the right points.”*

## Parameters that Make a Good ‘President Reverse Mentee’

The mentors said:

*“When I saw that my project proposal was approved, I felt great. There is no censorship on our shares. We are all entrusted. Many universities work with big social media agencies for the task we are carrying out whereas our University appreciates us. Today, social media acts as a call centre, which is important for an organization. People prefer to write a comment on Facebook which they think is faster than even the University’s official website.”*

It can be inferred that the mentors perceive themselves to be involved in by the reach and power of their own contributions. Thus, it can be said that a good mentee should trust them according to their opinions. There should be no issue of trust.

This sentence by one of the mentors *“A mentee should appreciate learning from an inferior and I should be proud of being a mentor to such a mentee”* indicates that the mentors are proud of gaining such a role of mentoring someone reputable. They also believe that a good mentee should be patient, and listen carefully without any prejudice.

The mentors also added that a mentee must be inquisitive, eager to learn, and be open to ideas. Impatience is something that cannot be tolerated. As it can be inferred from what one of them mentioned below, a good mentee should be a good representative of the anonymous idiom ‘You are never too old to learn.’ The mentors emphasized that they admire a mentee who is so open to ideas and suggestions.

The President reported similar views to the mentor informants’ responses.

*“A mentee must be able to express himself and what he expects clearly. He should use whatever transferred to him in relation with his needs in real life. He must know how to use what he has gained in daily life. I assume that someone who is willing to be a mentee is free from some personal defects such as underestimating or disdaining. It is hard to find a mentee candidate in academia where high ego is prevalent.”*

## Gains from reverse mentoring

Reverse mentoring offers gains for three parties: The President, the students (delegated as mentors), and the University.

### Gains from Reverse Mentoring for the President

One of the main advantages for the President is that he can catch up with all the technology. He does not have to waste his precious time to sort out all the changes in technology. It can also be noted that the President may learn many skills that belong to Y and Z generations, thus he will not fall behind the



advances in field. It also helps to cope with age difference. One of the mentor students reported the following to support this:

*“We make the president’s unique image visible on social media. He is a kind of president who is so personable and friendly known by every student at the university and being such a role model should be demonstrated on the social media in my opinion.”*

The mentors also reported that the discrepancy between generations is felt less strongly.

*“Our President has a wonderful sense of humour and we want that all prospective students should know this via periscope broadcasting. Young generations prefer a close, personable, modest and considerate President. As our President is also a Professor at the Faculty of Communication, it could be so ironic that he did not even have a social media account.”*

Karasar has the same belief with the mentors that he benefitted from this mentoring in terms of increasing his reputation. He emphasized that he deliberately started this reverse mentoring program, and stated that he felt it worked well judging by the feedback he received from many people at different hierarchical levels. One of the posts on social media labeling his table tennis tournament with students as “best-practice” is a glimpse of “reaping the harvest”. His expectations at the beginning seem quite parallel to the outcomes.

Karasar also reported that he felt that this program worked well, as he was able to learn new generation’s habits and expectations directly, straight from the horse’s mouth. He added that his daughter as a university student also plays a kind of reverse mentor role in his life, feeling proud of teaching something to his father.

The mentee, the President, reported that what he expected from this group was not clear in his mind at the very beginning. He asked the mentors to follow how other presidents appeared on social media and what they were sharing. He noticed that the concept of “success” in Y generation’s mind was quite different than his, and is just based on the number of likes and followers. Just doing something means success in their mind.

### Gains from Reverse Mentoring for the Students Delegated as Reverse Mentors

It is not only the positive feelings the students gain from the project but also learning a lot from the President. They have the opportunity to add to their existing skills. They may benefit from the vast experience of the president. In an atmosphere with both-sided consultancy, it is sure be a win-win experience.

The students can also develop their time-management skills. The overall consensus is that being a team member in this project will be a great asset for their business career.

Finally, it can be said that many of the skills students have gained are transferrable. The mentors report that they can pursue careers as mentors, as this experience is something that can be distinctive in their résumés. They state “*Working with so many high-profile people here is an invaluable experience*”.

Pershing (2006) states that mentoring gives the protégé self-esteem. The following words uttered by one mentor support this statement:

*“Working here helps me build self-confidence. Social media has the power to improve or destroy brand reputation. As my University trusts me in this, I feel that I really have important responsibilities.”*

Another interesting benefit mentors gained is to learn interpersonal skills including mutual respect. They have learnt how to behave in a working environment, which they will benefit from a lot in their future business career. It can be said that their involvement increased their motivation and gave them the feeling of organizational citizenship. Being known by many people in the university is prestigious for them as well. They also think that they are seen as an intermediary representative between the President and the students, like the voice of all students. They also feel proud of being asked for this position. One mentor stated that he gained many insights in terms of establishing relationships, which also helped him overcome his shyness, as he stated:

*“I feel so proud that the President respects me... he makes everything to make me feel as a mentor. Mentor-mentee relationship has never changed because of his higher authority, which boosts my confidence.”*

Karasar states that he motivates them with this reciprocal relationship. The mentor students experience social learning, which emphasizes the role of observing and modelling behaviours, emotions and reactions of other people.

All mentor informants reported similarly that they benefitted from being part of a teamwork whereas Karasar pointed out that his teamwork expectation for co-production of social media content, however, turned out to be more individualistic with some slight ego fights.

### Gains from Reverse Mentoring for the University

Murphy (2012) presents organizational outcomes of reverse mentoring as the following:

- talent management or succession planning
- recruiting and retention
- social equity and diversity
- bridging technology gaps
- understanding trends and customers
- driving innovation
- organizational learning



The implications of power distance in Turkish higher education context are: being lecturer centered; lecturers are expected to initiate communication and outline paths; lecturers are never subject to be contradiction or criticism, and learning quality is lecturer excellence-oriented. Reverse mentoring may help to overcome this power distance construct as in Maltepe University case by making students feel that they are involved in determining the in teaching objectives; they are free to initiate communication; they can find their own paths; they could criticize, and their learning depends on the amount of two-way communication (Wursten & Jacobs, 2013).

The students (mentors) feel that they are respected at Maltepe University. This is a source to increase their motivation, and motivated students are a great gain for the university both in the short- and long-term.

Having help from the students is also a way of cost-cutting at the University. It is also believed that this project may play an important role in students' preference of this University.

The University's visibility via social media increased the placement rate to 95.2%, which helped the institutionalization process of the University. With the help of Social Media Group, there is a considerable increase in the number of social media followers of the University (from 3,000 to nearly 35,000 including Instagram, Facebook and Twitter). The number of followers is considered as one of the precise measures that shows increasing brand value and reputation. The University has gained momentum which builds trust as well. It should be noted that consumers (students in this context) have strong expectations from how brands use social channels (Bevan, 2016). The informants believe that their University is a pioneer in social media platforms for other universities in Turkey.

Karasar stated word-of-mouth mechanism by social media is quite effective in building up his reputation. He gets feedback on being an unusual president model by being considerate, helpful and friendly. This is the fruit of his open-door policy and individualized consideration he follows.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

It is demonstrated that this win-win project for all parties (student-president-university) with comfortable equilibrium in terms of knowledge sharing and transfer has proved to be very successful, cost-effective, and time-saving. Due to mutual sharing between the mentors and the mentee, it can even be called a reciprocal mentoring and that sort of mentoring can be a good approach to attain the 21st Century competencies. The mentor students have had the opportunity to prepare themselves for business life. Reverse mentoring is also a way of keep-

ing the millennials occupied. The project helped them to improve their communication and time-management skills. The President, on the other hand, has had the chance to receive some fresh ideas from his mentors, which naturally make those mentors student representatives as well. Their suggestions about the university are invaluable for the President to take into account and take the necessary measures. By improving his new social media jargon, and enabling mentors to learn business terminology, the President has found a way to come closer to the new generation and helped create "Us vs. Them" mentality. The mutual trust between him and his mentors helped him to move out of his comfort zone.

This case at Maltepe University as being the first example may shed light on reverse mentoring for all higher education institutions. A President with no fear or concern of being taught by students also gives a glimpse into how to change the highly hierarchical structure of Turkish universities. This project is a challenge for the Turkish culture with a high power distance as described by Hofstede. Reverse mentoring is a well-known concept in the business settings, but not in universities. This study tries to show how a reverse mentoring intervention is significant at universities, which are the first places to meet new generations just before their work experience. As opposed to informal reverse mentoring relations that develop naturally in any work or academic environment, formal reverse mentoring is related to organizational goals with measurable results, which is beneficial for the mentors and the mentees in different ways. The organization benefits by an enhanced image as well (Piasecki, 2011).

Due to complimenting parenting, Millennials are today called "the entitled generation" (Zavarnick, 2016) too many times. They do not look for jobs only to pay their bills. What the President of Maltepe University has done is giving them the opportunity to do a job they like and to carry president-student relationship to a more professional platform.

It is obvious that anyone can be a mentor regardless of his/her age and stature. Young people can be experts in some areas and teach elder people as stated in the Turkish proverb mentioned above.

Further emic studies can be carried out on mentoring to see whether the 'American import' theme works in other cultures. The projection of this mentoring program in the business lives of the mentors can also be the subject of further research.

According to the mentor students, new equipment supplement and sponsorships are needed to support and strengthen this reverse mentoring program. More people should be involved to benefit from reverse mentoring. What is more, ego should be out of question for this scheme to work.



“Our teachers can be mentors, not teachers. They should prepare us for real life. Education must go beyond the limits of a classroom. Just a few teachers are acting like mentors. Their number should increase.”

On strengthening this program, the President of the University, Karasar, added:

“What we should do as the top management is to encourage all our staff to strive for personal development. We should make investment on Human Resources Management. Everyone has competencies that can be developed. Personal growth will bring organizational growth.”

He shared the same feeling as students saying that all academic staff must gain some sort of experience in the sector. He emphasized the importance of preparing curricula in accordance with the sectoral needs. For him, universities should stop acting on ancient Greek romanticism a little bit and work hand in hand with the industry. He said: “I got a course named ‘Film Making Techniques’ from a teacher who had never done this. This is how academia works, I know, but we should lessen that.”

With the pace at which technological and digital advances are likely to continue developing, it is an undeniable fact that students should be seen as potential reverse mentors for the ones who are willing to keep abreast of these young and fresh information sources. The practicality of a reverse mentoring scheme can help other higher education institutions vis-à-vis a new leadership model for higher education (Burke, 2008).

For a better reverse mentoring system, it is important that the mentee should make a direct contact with the mentors, and the mentors should feel free to turn down requests which are unsuitable for any reason. A more detailed written guide should be prepared in order to provide reference, which would typically cover a statement of aims and expectations, any ground rules including confidentiality, the period, record keeping, etc.

As the number of informants is not adequate, the generalizability of this study is low whereas the transferability is quite high. Flyvbjerg (2004) put forward some implications on the misunderstandings, myths and oversimplifications about the nature of case study research inspired by Campell and Stanley’s (1966) works. Misunderstanding about case studies arises from the problems of presenting too practical knowledge rather than theoretical, lack of generating hypothesis, generalizability, bias towards verification, and finally, difficulty in developing propositions and theories. He underlines, on the other hand, context-dependent knowledge gathered in case studies is so important that it develops people “from rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts”. Saying so, especially in studies of human affairs, context-dependent knowledge is what is actually needed, he presents quite radical views against the conventional view of the case study.

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