

# *Trust during the Mentoring Process from the Mentor's Perspective*

Sari-Johanna Karhapää and Mirjami Ikonen

## **Abstract**

This study examines how trust evolves in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective by adopting a process approach to trust as a leap of faith resulting from interactions and based on trustworthiness at the initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition stages of the mentoring relationship. Based on ten mentors' interviews, qualitative methods with a narrative approach are applied to analyse textual data in a business student mentoring programme. By acknowledging the process nature of trust the findings show how abilities of listening and hearing, socioemotional communication embodying benevolence, and demonstrating integrity are the drivers for the leap of faith and for trust to evolve during the mentoring relationship. The study contributes to the trust literature on mentoring and to empirical trust research applying qualitative methods with a process view. The findings offer actionable knowledge to practitioners on how to manage mentoring programmes in a higher education context.

## **Keywords:**

trust, mentoring, business students, process view, leap of faith

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## 1. Introduction

‘By not mentoring, we are wasting talent.  
We educate, and train, but don’t nurture.’  
(Wright and Wright, 1987)

Trust is inherent aspect of successful mentoring relationships to foster interaction in which an experienced individual, a mentor, share their knowledge, wisdom, and psychosocial support with a less experienced actor (e.g., Noe, 1988; Kram, 1983; Chao, 1998; Wang et al., 2010). The mentor is usually a senior, experienced individual who serves as a role model and provides direction and feedback to the younger actor regarding career plans and personal development. There is sharing and exchanging of knowledge between a mentor and an actor in a mentoring relationship. The mentor also helps to increase the networks of the actor, and this may influence the actor’s future career opportunities (Noe, 1988; Chao, 1998; D’Abate & Eddy, 2008; Manderstedt et al., 2022).

Mutual trust forms the basis of cooperation in mentoring relationships (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Wilson & Patent, 2011). Both mentors and actors are responsible for creating a trusting relationship (Manderstedt et al., 2022), but particularly, the ability to build trust is one of the key capabilities of the mentor (Dubrin, 2005). Surprisingly, trust has received only a little empirical attention in mentoring research despite its importance for functional interpersonal relationships (Wang et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is a call to devise a process framework for empirical qualitative research on trust in the certain context of the relationship (Lewicki et al., 2006; Möllering, 2013; Karhapää & Savolainen, 2018; Karhapää et al., 2022).

The type of mentoring depends on the context and the phase of the actors’ lives (Donovan, 1990; Putman et al., 1993; Wilson & Patent, 2011). The mentor-actor relationship is particularly important in the pre-career context, when an actor is choosing an initial occupation and forming a professional identity (Thomas, 1990). This research gap is especially visible for mentoring business students in an academic environment (Jacobi, 1991; Schlee 2000; Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Additionally, little information is available on the keys to the success of mentoring programmes or their inner workings, particularly in the pre-career context (McDonald et al., 2007). This study provides actionable knowledge on how to manage mentoring programmes in a higher education context.

Recently, studies on youth mentoring relationships suggest training to foster trust development in mentoring relationships (Williamson et al., 2020). Moreover, the recent research suggests deepening our understanding on both the context and advantages of trust development (Hancock et al., 2023). Recently, studies on youth mentoring relationships suggest training to foster trust development in mentoring relationships (Williamson et al., 2020). Moreover, the recent research suggests deepening our understanding on both the context and advantages of trust development (Hancock et al., 2023). In the current study, the mentors are experienced business professionals and actors are business students who are finalizing their studies. In this case, mentoring enhances the students’ connections to the world of business and offers students ‘a glimpse at life in a business setting’ (Schlee, 2000, p. 332). Mentoring can reduce stress, enhance career success, and increase satisfaction with career choices (Allen et al., 2006). Previous research has commonly focused on the perspective of the actor rather than the mentor (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Wang et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to shed a light to the mentor’s perspective in mentoring process.

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This present study seeks to contribute to the implementation of formal mentoring programmes by business schools and examines trust from the mentor's perspective in the mentoring process. In formal mentoring programmes, relationships are not naturally evolved based on mutual attraction, respect, or interest (Wang et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to examine trust development in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective.

The research questions of this study are:

1. How does trust evolve in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective?
2. How do critical events occur in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective?

## 2. Trust in the mentoring process

Mentoring relationships can be examined via the main characterizing features of the process view, which are temporality (time), dynamics (interaction), and context (Langley et al., 2013). Additionally, for trust, the notion of time is essential since trust may be seen as a process (Karhapää & Savolainen, 2018; Savolainen & Ikonen, 2016; Möllering, 2013). Trust relationships in mentoring are multifaceted, interactive, and contextual. Both the mentors and actors themselves are involved in the forming of these relationships. Wang et al. (2010, 358) define mentoring as "a relational process whereby a more experienced individual, usually more senior, contributes to the professional development of a protégé...". The paper is one of the scarce studies of trust in mentoring.

Here, trust is viewed as socially constructed in the interaction between the mentor, actor, and context. Trust in the other individual means 'to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another and a willingness to be vulnerable' (Rousseau et al., 1998, 395; Mayer et al., 1995, 712). Vulnerability appears in most definitions including cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of trust (McAllister et al., 1995) in the form of not being able to monitor or control the actions of the other party in the relationship (Mayer et al., 1995).

When a mentoring relationship evolves, a 'leap of faith' has been taken. The risk is accepted. There is a process that enables the mentor and actor to cope with uncertainty and vulnerability (Möllering, 2006). Possible doubts are suspended, and the other party is assumed to be trustworthy. Through 'a leap of faith', trust transforms uncertainty into an assessable risk that the trustor is prepared to accept and thus creates opportunities for interaction which might otherwise not exist (Möllering, 2006; Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011). Thus, the leap of faith in trust means adopting a process perspective involving social practices that support positive expectations in the face of vulnerability and uncertainty in a relationship (Nikolova et al., 2015). Straus et al., (2013) found that successful mentoring relationships are characterized by reciprocity,

mutual respect, clear expectations, personal connection, and shared values. On the other hand, according to Straus et al., (2013) failed mentoring relationships are characterized by poor communication, lack of commitment, personal differences, perceived (or real) competition, conflicts of interest, and the mentor's lack of experience.

In this paper, trust is studied at an interpersonal level adopting a relational view of trust development where trust is built between mentors and actors. Trust in relationships has cognitive and affective aspects (McAllister, 1995; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Cognitive-based trust and affective-based trust may be viewed as dimensions of interpersonal trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), where cognitive-based trust reflects aspects of trustworthiness and affective-based trust reflects a concern for the trustee's welfare. In other words, affect-based trust is "trust from heart" promoting social ties whereas cognition-based trust "from the head" fosters professional collaboration (Chua et al., 2008; Eun et al., 2021.)

Trust within the mentoring process is explored based on three dimensions of trustworthiness: ability, integrity, and benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust initiates and develops based on a cognitive evaluation of another individual's (trustee's) trustworthiness. Ability or competence is one of the three dimensions of trustworthiness presented by Mayer et al. (1995). This consists of the skills, competencies, and characteristics of an individual. Competence can be situation-specific or task-based. Integrity, as the second dimension of trust, is the most essential in the early stages of a relationship and includes features of the trustee such as reliability, fairness, justice, and consistency, which the trustor considers to be acceptable (Mayer et al., 1995). Judgements of competence and integrity form quite quickly during the relationship (Mayer et al., 1995; Tomlinson & Langlinais, 2021).

The third dimension of trustworthiness, namely benevolence, includes the notion that the trustee (mentor) wishes to do good to the trustor (actor), rather than acting on opportunistic motives and that the trustee cares for the trustor (Mayer et al., 1995). The benevolence building phase takes more time. The impact of benevolence on trust increases with interaction over time as the relationship develops (Mayer et al., 1995; Tomlinson & Langlinais, 2021). Therefore, communication is essential in the development of a mentoring process. Trust may be built through the narrative as a social process of interaction and conversation (Ikonen, 2013; Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995; Pentland, 1999). Communication is a key to building trust, even if the communication is technology mediated (Savolainen & Ikonen, 2016; Wright & Ehnert, 2010).

The prior literature suggests that mentoring relationships go through four phases, which are initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1983; Chao, 1998). During the initiation phase, the mentoring relationship is started by gathering mentors and actors together in a common meeting. In the current context this means through the mentoring programme in this study. During the cultivation phase (Kram, 1983), the mentor-actor relationship is active, and the range of functions provided expands to the maximum between the mentor and the actor based on their own timetable. In this study, in addition to the initiation meeting, there is another common meeting, where all the mentors and actors gather at the midpoint of the programme. In the final common meeting, in the separation phase of the mentoring relationship, the experiences are summed up. In the separation phase (Kram, 1983) the established nature of the relationship is substantially altered. During the redefinition phase (Kram, 1983), the relationship evolves to a new form that is significantly different from the past, or the relationship ends entirely.

Mentoring as a 'leap of faith' is illustrated in Figure 1.

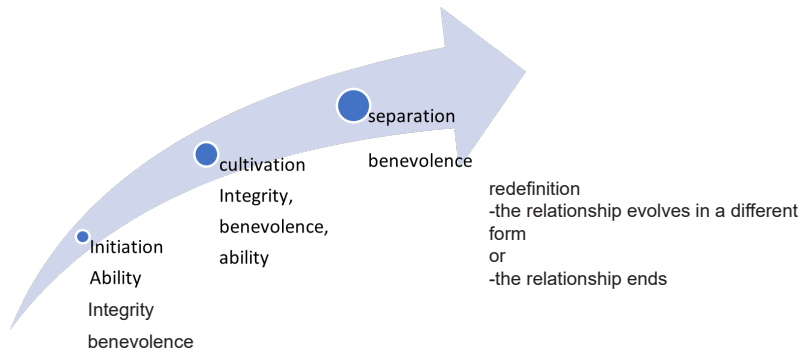


Figure 1: Mentoring as a 'leap of faith'

### 3. Methodology

In this study qualitative research methods (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) are adopted to describe how trust evolves in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective between a mentor and an actor in the pre-career context of business students. More specifically, a narrative approach is considered as an applicable method to identify how critical events occur in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995; Pentland, 1999). We draw on social constructionism with temporality, patterns, and context with constitutive interpersonal communication (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Baxter, 2004).

### 4. Data and data analysis

The empirical data consists of semi-structured thematic interviews with 10 mentors who participated in a business school mentoring programme in Finland. The mentoring programme was facilitated by the Association of Finnish Business School Graduates. Nine of the interviews were conducted by a master's degree student serving as a research assistant in 2018 (Moorrees, 2019) and one interview was conducted by the researcher in 2020. The mentors represent a variety of business contexts or occupations. The age of the mentors varied from 40 to 66. Several mentors were experienced in mentoring. For instance, they had acted multiple times as mentors or as actors during their careers. The mentors mainly formed a single dyadic relationship with the actors. In a few cases there was group mentoring with two actors and one mentor. Nine of the mentors had been mentors in Finland and one in Denmark and Finland. The mentoring focused on counselling business students for the transition to the labour market.

The study follows a qualitative approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The mentoring process followed formal business students' mentor programmes which were nine months in length. Typically, themes in mentoring discussions are based on the actor's wishes, so the mentor does not define nor direct the themes discussed in the meetings. The data is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Data

Pages	Interview: number of words	Gender	Age /Year of acting as a mentor
67 pages transcribed	31,606 words	6 males and 4 females	age 39–66 / 2015–2020

First, the qualitative interview data was transcribed and read meticulously through several times to gain a holistic view of the data corpus and to reflect on the content of the data. Second, the empirical data was analyzed using a thematic content analysis (Riessman, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2006) combined with theory-driven perspectives. Themes related to the mentoring phase, evolvment of trust and critical events were identified. The example of the thematic content analysis focusing on the initiation phase and the evolvment of trust within each dimension (ability, integrity, benevolence) with related critical event is shown in Table 2. Third, the empirical data was organized and interpreted applying a narrative analysis (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995) to describe how trust evolves in the mentoring process and how critical events occur. Narratives (what is being spoken and the way of speaking) were constructed for interpretation and discussion (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

In this study, each narrative is constructed from the interviews into a new narrative, a story interpreted and written by the researchers. Applying a narrative approach, it is analyzed how the mentors themselves interpreted events, and then the researchers interpreted these interpretations. None of the reported narratives were told by a single mentor. Excerpts from the original data are presented to demonstrate the reasoning (why and how, Flick, 2007) and interpretation to the reader. In so doing, the reader can evaluate the interpretations made by the researchers.

**Table 2.** Example of the data analysis focusing on the initiation phase and the evolvement of trust within each dimension (ability, integrity, benevolence) with related critical event

CITATION FROM THE DATA	MENTORING PHASE	EVOLVEMENT OF TRUST	CRITICAL EVENT
	INITIATION	ABILITY	
<p>"I felt that based on my career I can share my work experience and provide a student with somebody to talk to about their future possibilities in their career." 1M1M</p> <p>"To get insights into what the current young generation and graduating business students expect from working life and how they see and think about things." 8M5M</p>	<p>The mentoring relationship is started by gathering the mentors and actors together.</p>	<p>The mentors reflect on their competencies as mentors.</p> <p>The mentors gain abilities from the mentoring process.</p>	<p>The mentors share their wisdom and learn from the actors as well.</p>
CITATION FROM THE DATA	INITIATION	BENEVOLENCE	CRITICAL EVENT
<p>"...I remember myself being in that phase (pre-career), I could have used some support." 8M5M</p> <p>"I have hired young people, and also my own children were young, ...when they entered working life... I also see things through these experiences... that how I would like my young children as employees to be treated and supported." 4M3N, 3M2N, 7M4N</p>	<p>The mentoring relationship is started by gathering mentors and actors together.</p>	<p>Relatedness</p>	<p>The mentors felt related to the students through their own experiences in the pre-career phase of their studies.</p> <p>The mentors felt related to the students through their children.</p>
CITATION FROM THE DATA	INITIATION	INTEGRITY	CRITICAL EVENT
<p>"It demands self-sacrifice to the degree that one is willing to sacrifice few hours of one's life... life is so hectic...it helps when you are genuinely interested..." 9M6M</p>	<p>The mentoring relationship is started by gathering mentors and actors together.</p>	<p>Investing time in the mentoring process.</p>	<p>A mentor shows reliability, fairness, justice, and consistency.</p>

The research ethics has been taken into account as the participants are presented anonymously in this study. Furthermore, the interviewees participated voluntarily in this study. The research participants were also informed of the aims of the research, how the research data would be analyzed, and how the findings would be reported.

## 5. Findings

It is argued that trust is an inherent aspect in successful mentoring relationships which fosters interaction. Specifically, an essential ability of the mentor is to build trust (Dubrin, 2005). Next, it is explored how trust evolves in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective. The findings are discussed through three narratives of trustworthiness: the narrative of ability, the narrative of benevolence, and the narrative of integrity. Within each narrative it is shown how critical events occurred in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective.

### 5.1. The mentor's narrative of ability in the mentoring process

The mentor's narrative of sharing and gaining abilities evolves from the outset of the mentoring process. The formal mentoring relationship between the mentor and actor (that is: business student) is initiated when the mentor and actor meet in the first common meeting organized by the mentoring program. Trust in the mentoring relationship is based on the mentor's knowledge and skills. A mentor shares one's abilities and competence based on the seniority and expertise in business: *"...to share my life experience and management expertise."* 5M2M, *"... based on my career I can share my work experience and provide a student with somebody to talk to about their future possibilities in their career,"* 1M1M.

The mentor gains knowledge and learns from the actor. The mentor gets insights about the views and values of the younger generation who are entering to labour market. The mentor's narrative of ability is constructed through communication of gaining knowledge: *"...I wanted to get an opportunity to understand current students' views and perspectives..."* 3M2N, *"To get insights into what the current young generation and graduating business students expect from working life and how they see and think about things."* 8M5M. The mentors had gained insights from the young actors' current ideas and values, which seemed to be less harsh, *"...I gained more knowledge about my ideas of what there is (in the air or in the minds of the young people) at the moment,"* 8M5M, *"I have gained insights into today's students' values, which seem to be less harsh compared the values during my studies,"* 10M7M.

The narrative highlights that the socioemotional communication abilities of the mentor are active in the cultivation phase of the mentoring process. The mentor raises the actors' awareness of career possibilities during the cultivation phase when the mentoring relationship was active, and the range of functions provided expanded to the maximum between the mentor and the actor. The mentors perceived the actors' communicating their insights and novel ways of thinking as a critical event: *"The best moments were those when (the actor said that) 'I have not thought about it that way (before)'...Like when you realize that one plus one is not two, it is an entity, it is not even a number,"* 1M1M, *"The key moment is when the actor seemed to become aware that this (career prospect) interests him..."* 9M6M.

The mentor's socioemotional communication abilities also support the actor's self-esteem: *"I mentioned many times how good they were...that they noticed it, ..like, did you see how you just said that? And it shows that you are good at this and this, and that they would be themselves and believe that it is enough,"* 4M3N. Key moments in the cultivation phase occurred when the mentors perceived the actors' self-esteem and courage: *"(when applying for a new job): trust...self-confidence. When you go there, you can go in with bright eyes and say, I can do this, I know how, and I want to do this. It is important to catch that level,"* 1M1M. In order for trust to develop between the mentor and actor in the cultivation phase of the mentoring process a critical factor seems to be match-



ing chemistry: *"...there should be matching chemistry...that is needed for trust to develop,"* 3M2N, and commitment to the mentoring between both parties: *"(to develop trust)...often the three first glances will tell whether the other party is involved and what kind of person is in question,"* 8M5M.

Additionally, the mentor's interaction skills are crucial since interaction builds trust: *"We met so many times, so there was trust,"* 3M2N, and open communication builds trust: *"It is like catching a ball that is thrown by the student. You catch a ball and pass it around,"* 5M2M. In order to trust someone, there is 'a leap of faith' needed, as the mentors put it: *"You have to build trust, if it is not there, you may not know how to proceed and what to say next and have interaction, or dialogue...you should throw yourself in (and take a leap of faith),"* 4M3N, 6M3M

In the separation phase of the process the mentors reflected on the abilities they had gained from the mentoring process. The mentor gains knowledge from the mentoring and learns new abilities: *"...for me (mentor) it was also about learning about guidance, how to lead things forward in this small group,"* 1M1M. Some mentors noted that they had gained courage during the mentoring to reflect on own career prospects and opportunities: *"During the mentoring programme significant things tend to happen to people, and it did happen, my work changed after the mentoring programme."* 3M2N, *"It happened to me...so now I have implemented a change. So..., during the mentoring process, I set major wheels in motion concerning my career. And I made a change. Now, I live my dream in my working life, and it is great."* 9M6M

One important impact of mentoring is to bring visibility to business skills and competencies that are found in the local area because of the business education. Mentoring enabled some mentors to gain abilities and business competence in the local area: *"...often, people complain that you cannot find a job in this area, while the business world here complains from their side that you cannot find employees..."* 8M5M. Mentoring made the career opportunities for business students more visible in the local area: *"...to be able to widen the perspective to find employees, and to find jobs. The aim should be that not everybody (students) needs to complete 'circumbendibus' far away (abroad) but it is important to find (good) jobs here in this area,"* 8M5M.

Additionally, mentoring enabled the mentors to "pay something back" to society: *"...when you have gained an expensive education, it is beneficial to go to work and pay society back (reclaim),"* 9M6M.

## 5.2. The mentor's narrative of benevolence in the mentoring process

The mentor's narrative of benevolence cross-sections all phases of the mentoring process. The narrative of benevolence highlighted empathy and relatedness. Additionally, the narrative of benevolence stressed reciprocity. The mentor's willingness to do good, help students, and 'give something of oneself' during the initiation phase was narrated: *"...if I can smooth (the route), and share information about possible options,"* 7M4N. From the mentor's perspective, the notion of benevolence was reciprocal as they got energy from the actors: *"When I spent one afternoon with the actor, it gave me such energy as well,"* 4M3N.

The mentor's narrative of benevolence reflects relatedness to the student' situation. From the mentor's perspective, it seems that they could have benefited from mentoring in the pre-career context of their studies. Thus, the mentors felt related to the actors through their own experiences: *"I would have needed (mentoring),...about the needs of different firms and competence [...] When I graduated, I would have liked to toss concrete ideas around with experienced business professionals and have a conversation about future options,"* 9M6M. The mentors also felt related to the actors through their own children's experiences: *"I mirrored the (mentoring) discussions*

through my own children's experiences," 3M2N, 7M4N. The mentors positioned themselves as a parent who would like their own children to be treated with respect in work life: "I also see things through these experiences...in terms of how I would like my own children as employees to be treated and supported," 4M3N.

The mentors felt that this relatedness gave them the ability to communicate with the actors better: "It helped me to guide the students and relate to their situation, listen to them open-mindedly, then ask (the student) if they you thought about it in this way," 3M2N, 7M4N. Furthermore, the mentors felt related to the actors through their experiences of hiring young people: "I have hired young people, and also my own children were young, ...when they entered working life... I also see things through these experiences... how I would like my young children as employees to be treated and supported," 4M3N. So, mentoring was seen as an opportunity to make work life better in that sense.

Critical events were related to building a good atmosphere, positivity and consequently, open discussions. In the cultivation phase of the mentoring, building a good atmosphere in the mentoring relationship is critical. The senses of empathy and positivity were essential: "The sense of empathy was very high, but I had to adopt a very relaxed feeling, so it created a similar feeling for the actor as well," M3N, "Positivity, because it gives energy, not cynicism," 9M6M.

Benevolence in the mentoring relationship enhances open communication and trust: "The most important thing is to get the other party to talk. Of course, at first trust must be built, in the sense that next we are going to discuss these issues," 4M3N "The key moments have been...when (the actor) has started to talk...openly, about their own dreams and plans...so the actor trusts in me," 4M3N.

During the separation phase of the mentoring process benevolence was shown as the mentors narrated about what they gained from and shared in the mentoring process. The mentors' faith in future employees had grown: "...faith in these young people...we have good employees for our future working life.... Also, I mirrored myself, what there is for me ahead, say in ten years, what I want or what my motives are," 1M1M.

Additionally, the mentors wished to leave something good for the young actors: "...the older you get the more you would like to leave something good behind...like, this is what I have learned, and I would like to share it," 6M3M.

The mentors wanted to help the actors and act as the mentor had wished someone would have acted when they were in the pre-career context themselves; "The willingness to help is built into me (mentor)...so why not use it in this way (mentoring)," 6M3M "...what I (mentor) have needed sometimes when I studied was someone 'to kick ideas around with'," 9M6M.

The mentors perceived mentoring as rewarding: "Personal and professional development and the joy of sharing feel meaningful, when by making quite a small effort you are able to give ideas and something to think about to someone who is making important choices. ... This is a meaningful activity," 10M7M.

In the redefinition phase of the mentoring process, the mentoring relationship evolved a new form that was significantly different from the past, or the relationship ends entirely. Most of the mentor-actor relationships ended since the relationships are somewhat forced. Here, a mentor narrates: "Some actor-mentor -relationships may almost become friendships, but I had the feeling from the beginning that this would not happen...this is a sort of forced relationship, even though it's voluntary. Still, I was wondering whether I should commit myself even more (take a leap of faith), openly...or is it just when the right chemistry is better," 2M1N.

Additionally, in this case the mentor-actor relationship did not become a friendship since there were no personal life connections, or desires to socialize: "We (mentor and actor) were in

just such different phases of our lives, that it (friendship) did not happen..." 2M1N, "We were not such people who would go out and have a beer...as I heard might have happened in some other mentor relationship," 2M1N.

However, some mentoring relationships seemed to evolve into a form of friendship. This was enhanced by the fact that the mentor was interested in the future career development of the actors, as one of the participants narrates: "Our connection will continue after mentor programme. I shall hear from them (the actors) and find out about their future careers," 3M2N. Furthermore, a friendship relationship is could also be possible because it had a positive impact on mentor: "I felt wistful, how things are built up, all that happens in life...it gave me a good feeling." 3M2N.

### 5.3. The mentor's narrative of integrity in the mentoring process

The mentor's narrative of integrity highlighted reliability and presence. At the initiation of the mentoring process, the narrative of integrity evolved as the mentors demonstrated reliability by investing time in the mentoring: "It demands self-sacrifice ...that is to be willing to sacrifice a few hours of one's life, ...although life is so hectic, ...it helps when you are genuinely interested," 9M6M. Our findings also indicated that mentors should stay focused and present in the mentoring discussions. This entailed the mentor committing to and genuinely liking mentoring for the mentoring process to be successful, as narrated by the mentor: "It is important that you really like to do mentoring, not just fill in the mentoring meetings in your busy calendar, ...and that you are mindful in the meetings, being present 100 percent and forgetting everything else," 3M2N, while another stated: "You have to genuinely get into mentoring or otherwise not participate in the process..." 8M5M.

During the cultivation phase of the mentoring, the mentor's narrative of integrity circulates between authenticity, presence, and confidentiality. One mentor emphasized the importance of honesty and humbleness: "Authenticity is the number one thing, no matter what you do it applies, ...to building a career as well, you cannot build it on fake role, it will fall apart and you cannot manage it if you cannot be yourself, and another this is humbleness," M3N. The mentor's narrative of integrity related strongly about how to listen to an actor: "There are just two people talking to one another without any kind of power relation, nor 'know-it-all' -actions..." 1M1M. "A listener, that is what I tried to be. But when you get excited yourself, you easily forget to be a listener, and you are so eager to share your own thoughts as well." 4M3N. "It entails that you are with it, and in its' best, let it (conversation) flow forward..." 3M2N, 9M6M. Additionally, it is important to find a balance between listening and sharing. When mentors share things about themselves, it builds trust and helps the discussion to unfold: "(trust develops) when you open up about yourself, share things...so the other party also opens up and shares things. This is interaction, it is how trust is developed," 6M3M, "...there should be trust, and then you have courage to ask, tell, say, and maybe question," 6M3M, "(mentoring relationship) is an interactive, where through the constructive discussion an actor's strengths are brought up. It gives an actor courage to follow one's own way..." 1M1M, 8M5M.

Additionally, the mentor's narratives on actually hearing the actor reflects trustworthiness: "A mentor is like a sounding ear or a wall, where an actor throughs balls against it,...the mentor should be able to respond to the needs of the actor.," 2M1N, or "The role of a mentor is sparring, to give a space to the other party,..., it is not for me to show off," 2M1N, or "You have to know how to listen, and it means that you are not talking yourself all the time and focussing on yourself and underpinning your own career," M3N. So, to act as a mentor seems to entail maturity of character: "...a mentor has to

be mature enough to share one's experiences and to participate in mentoring," 8M5M.

Confidentiality builds trust and is emphasized in the mentor's narrative: "...the conversations stay here, you have to agree to these rules," 6M3M, and, "...at first, you keep yourself hidden until there is trust...the actor notices that they can share things with you. It (conversation) does not open right away," 5M2M. One key moment was perceived by one mentor when an actor asked the mentor's view on a topic. The mentor explained this by saying: "I perceived trust when the actor did not ask for help, but rather asked what I thought of the matter," 4M3N.

Additionally, when talking about working life, one mentor highlighted hard work and presence in supervisor-employee relationships: "To appreciate (hard) work...it is my (mentor's) key asset in working life. Also, in working life employees are not necessarily relaxed with their supervisors, ...you just have to break it, ...and the best way to do it is to do nothing. Just be present," M3N.

Both mentor and actor should invest in the mentoring relationship for trust to develop. A critical event that hinders trust and fosters distrust is a lack of commitment in the mentoring relationship: "If the prerequisites are not applicable it creates challenges. Logistics, finding common time slots, changes in life, unexpected situations (like covid). These create trust breaks and lack of commitment (in mentoring)," 9M6M.

There were challenges in the group mentoring process. The challenges related to the phases of the studies of the actors: "The actors were in different phases in their studies, so the discussions did not benefit both, thus one actor faded away from the mentoring process..." 2M1N. Another problem involved the different personalities of the actors which raised challenges, as one of the mentors narrates: "The other actor was 'strong' and took up the whole discussion environment. So, I (mentor) had to direct the conversation in order to allow the voice of the other actor..." 3M2N. Thus, in the mentoring process it seems that it is all about finding a balance: "You have to keep the balance between respect and justice," 5M2M.

The separation phase of the mentoring process was reflected upon by the mentors. Although the mentoring programme followed a formal pattern with a common initiation meeting, a midpoint meeting and a final meeting during nine months period, a more structured process was called for. According to the mentors, the themes in the mentoring meetings could have been specified by the mentoring programme: "It would help to realize and emphasize the themes which are relevant for the mentoring process," 1M1M. Additionally, the evolvement of trust in the mentoring relationship could be facilitated: "For example, after the first meeting, the facilitator (formal mentoring organiser) should have a brief discussion about how the mentor-actor relationship has been started and how it feels..." 8M5M. Additionally, the mentors could have been introduced to one another more properly: "I recognized some colleague mentors from the publicity material but I did not know them earlier," 7M4N.

Even though there had been some challenges in the group mentoring, one of the mentors felt that that one of the actors who dropped out may have gained insights anyway. This mentor noted: "...an actor said something that I (secretly) smiled at myself and thought 'the actor got it': the actor seemed to learn that people might think so differently from my own thinking," 2M1N. All in all, mentoring was seen as beneficial for the students: "I think all students should have possibility to participate in mentoring," 1M1M.

The summary of the main findings is shown in Table 3. In Table 3 it is shown how ability, benevolence, and integrity are the drivers for trust in the mentoring process.

**Table 3.** Summary of the findings: ability, benevolence, and integrity as drivers for trust in the mentoring process

<b>Evolution of trust</b>	<b>Ability</b> Skills, competencies, and characteristics of a mentor	<b>Benevolence</b> Good will, empathy, attachment of a mentor towards an actor	<b>Integrity</b> Reliability, fairness, justice, and consistency of a mentor	<b>Distrust</b> Factors hindering trust in the mentoring relationship
<b>Mentoring phase</b>				
<b>Initiation</b> The mentoring relationship is started by gathering the mentors and actors together	1. Share expertise in business 2. Gain insights from the young generation	1. To do good, help 2. Reciprocal: energy from actors 3. Relatedness: remembering own experiences as a student	1. Reliability	
<b>Critical event</b>	Reciprocal: sharing knowledge and learning	Reciprocal: sharing good and getting good energy. Relatedness: empathy	1. Reliability: -investing time in the mentoring process -presence in the encounters -commitment	
<b>Cultivation</b> The mentoring relationship is active, and the range of functions provided expands to the maximum between the mentor and actor	1.socioemotional communication 2.supporting self-esteem of an actor 3.interaction Mentors raising the actors' awareness of career possibilities, self-esteem, and courage	1. Empathy, positivity 2. Open communication and trust	1. Authenticity 2. Presence: no power-relations 3. Honesty and humbleness: the mentor did not 'show off' (with their own achievements) 4. Listening and sharing things: without 'know-it-all' actions 5. Hearing the actor; actor learning about different ways of thinking 6. Confidentiality	Integrity: The mentors' and actors' lack of investment and commitment in mentoring relationship  Challenges in group mentoring: -different phases of the studies of the actors - overly different personalities of the actors
Critical event	Mentors perceive the actors' novel way of thinking, self-esteem, and courage. The mentor's and actor's matching chemistry and commitment enact interaction and communication, which build trust	Relaxed atmosphere building trust in mentoring relationship	Listening and hearing; gives courage to actor to follow the own way. -'At first you keep yourself hidden until there is trust' -mentor share things about oneself in order trust to develop	Relating to group mentoring: Finding a balance between respect and justice  Relating to mentoring program: More structured procedure; appointed themes during mentoring discussions, facilitating the initiation of mentoring relationship, introducing mentors to each other more properly

<p><b>Separation</b> The established nature of the mentoring relationship is substantially altered as the mentoring programme ends</p>	<p>1.The mentors developed guidance and leadership abilities 2. The mentors gained courage to make their own career changes 3. The mentors gained insights from young actors' ideas and values 4. Impact in the local area</p>	<p>1. Faith in the future employees 2. To leave good behind 3. Meaningful activity</p>	<p>1. Commitment 2. Liking 3. Finetuning the mentoring process</p>	
<p><b>Critical event</b></p>	<p>The mentors gain insights and make career changes  Visibility for business skills and competencies in the local area</p>			
<p><b>Redefinition</b> The mentoring relationship evolves into a new form that is significantly different from the past, or the relationship ends entirely</p>		<p>1. The relationship ends if there are no personal life connections, or desires to socialize 2. The relationship continues if there is interest in the future career development of the actors</p>		
<p><b>Critical event</b></p>		<p>The mentoring relationship ends: -natural social interaction was not involved in the mentoring relationship -The mentoring relationship evolves into a new form: friendship</p>		

## 6. Conclusions & Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine how trust evolves from the mentor's perspective in the mentoring process. The findings indicate that mentors' competences of listening and hearing, socioemotional communication skills with benevolence, and actions demonstrating integrity are the drivers for the leap of faith. Consequently, there is a basis for trust to evolve during the mentoring relationship. Moreover, it seems that trust in mentoring relationships is based on affection-based trust rather than cognition-based trust (McAllister, 1995; Lewis & Weigert, 1985), since the mentors are concerned for the actors' welfare and future success in their careers and lives. Affective-based trust is manifested in the mentor's narrative of benevolence which cross-sections all phases of the mentoring process.

This study contributes to the previous literature (Jacobi, 1991; Schlee 2000; Higgins &

Kram, 2001; McDonald et al., 2007; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Wang et al., 2010) by revealing how trust evolves in the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective, and how critical events occur when mentoring business students in an academic environment. The findings reveal that at the initiation of the mentoring process trust evolves based on the mentor's seniority and expertise, so the findings are in line with the previous literature (e.g., Noe, 1988; Kram, 1983; Chao, 1998; Wang et al., 2010).

The findings contribute to mentoring literature (e.g., Manderstedt et al., 2022) about knowledge exchange in mentoring relationship by emphasizing that in addition to sharing knowledge the mentors' gained insights from the current young generations' ideas and their expectations of working life. Besides this, the findings indicate how mentor developed trust during the mentoring process to make a leap of faith for oneself and make one's own career changes.

The study contributes to the trust literature on mentoring and to empirical trust research applying qualitative methods with a process view on several ways. First, by acknowledging the process nature of trust, the findings show how the ability to listen and hear are the drivers for a leap of faith and for trust to evolve during the mentoring relationship. Even though the relationships are to a degree somewhat forced in the formal mentoring programme, the mentors felt a sense of relatedness to the actors in two ways: through their own experiences in the pre-career phase, and through their own children. From the mentors' perspective, mentoring was seen as an opportunity to make work life better in that sense. Additionally, the mentors perceived that this relatedness gave them the ability to communicate with the actors better. Based on the findings it seems that for trust to develop it is critical that the mentor is committed and willing to sacrifice their time in their encounters with an actor. The findings show how doing good, engaging in self-reflection and relatedness are the drivers for trust to develop at the initiation the mentoring process from the mentor's perspective.

Second, findings indicate that socioemotional communication embodying benevolence is one of the drivers for trust to evolve during the mentoring relationship. The socioemotional communication skills of the mentor come into play for 'a leap of faith' and engaging in proper conversation with the actor who could perceive a safe space in which to open up. Based on the findings in this study, the senses of empathy and positivity are critical in order to build a good atmosphere in the mentoring relationship to enhance open communication. Additionally, the mentors should engage with the actors using their listening and hearing skills without any power relations or "know-it-all" actions. Findings indicate that the mentoring relationship becomes deeper through presence, empathy, authenticity, and confidentiality.

Straus et al., (2013) argue that failed mentoring relationships are characterized by poor communication, lack of commitment, personal differences, perceived (or real) competition, conflicts of interest, and the mentor's lack of experience. Based on our findings in this study, it seems that mainly a lack of commitment and mismatched chemistry characterized the failed mentoring relationships. To evolve into a friendship, the mentoring relationship was enhanced if the mentor was interested in the future career development of the actor.

Thirdly, the findings reveal that that by not mentoring, we are wasting talent and expertise, especially concerning the local area business needs. Mentoring enhances the opportunities for the students to be employed in the local area because of the university and the business education. The findings contribute to previous literature (e.g., Wright and Wright, 1987; Schlee, 2000) by emphasizing impact of the mentoring to the local business area.

### 6.1. Managerial implications

This present study contributes to the implementation of formal mentoring programmes by business schools. The findings offer actionable knowledge to practitioners on how to manage mentoring programmes in higher education contexts. This study brings insights to youth mentoring about how to develop training in the mentoring programme to foster trust development in mentoring relationships. The findings are in line with Williamson et al., (2020) suggesting training to foster trust development in mentoring relationships. Based on the findings of the current study, the evolvement of trust could have been better facilitated in the mentoring programme through feedback discussions after the first meetings. Additionally, facilitating the interaction between mentors could have benefited the mentoring and better enabled the sharing of experiences and good ideas.

Concerning group mentoring, challenges arose if the actors were in different phases of their studies. Thus, group mentoring could benefit if the students are in the similar phase in their studies. Also, the mentoring programme could have facilitated better interaction by appointing certain themes to be discussed during the mentoring. All in all, based on the findings, the critical factors for trust to develop seem to be a matching chemistry and commitment to the mentoring between both parties.

### 6.2. Limitations and future research

The research data in this study includes mentoring relationships which have been mainly successful. Therefore, trust deterioration, trust breaches and distrust as such are scarcely described in the data, even though factors for successful mentoring relationships were discussed. Future research could comprise also the actor's perspectives, for example a study conducted with business students' perspectives included in the mentoring process. Moreover, it would be interesting and probably revealing to explore cultural aspects of the mentoring process and to compare Western and non-Western cultures, e.g., patterns of communication, and collaboration. Nevertheless, further research is required on trust development processes in order to better manage mentoring process.



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