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## **Onboarding of managers**

*“Which aspects of onboarding contributes to managers becoming operational faster?”*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to identify how managers could be operational faster. The managers who participated in this study pointed out that they are dependent on a thorough introduction to their role. Whether they were hired as external or internal candidates, they saw the benefits of having an onboarding plan which walked them through key aspects of their position. The study shows how there is a difference between external and internal hires, where those who come from inside the company are given a less formal onboarding. The study also shows how the onboarding of a manager is fairly similar to those who do not have personnel responsibilities, even though managers expressed that they would have wanted more management training as part of their onboarding.

Throughout the eight interviews we conducted with managers in a medium sized, Scandinavian firm, it became evident that knowledge sharing could be a key aspect of a successful onboarding process. The managers expressed that they would be functional faster in their position if they were given more information, training, and introduction to both their role and the relevant IT-systems. By transferring knowledge from the company to the new hires one could remove obstacles in the start-up phase, reducing both the level of frustration among new hires and the time spent on inefficient search for information.

The study concludes that an onboarding is not a copy-paste process, where one size fits all. The managers expressed how there often will be a need for customised processes to make the best fit for the actual candidate. Meaning that managers would like to contribute to planning their own onboarding, so that they can focus on the parts that are most relevant to them.

## Preface

This master's thesis is written as a final paper for our degree in economics and business administration at Oslo Metropolitan University. Both students have chosen strategy, organisation, and leadership as their major.

We would like to thank our supervisor, Erik Døving, for providing advice, constructive feedback, and guiding us through this research process. It has been some eventful months for us, and it would not be possible without the great contributions from our informants, the company where we conducted our research, our families, and our friends. We have had great support from our peers, and we have helped each other out as best as we could.

As this is a final paper, we would also like to say thank you to Oslo Metropolitan University. Even though there are times when term papers and exams have been hanging over our heads, we have still been privileged students who can attend such a study programme. Thank you!

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## 1. Introduction

In this master's thesis we are examining how the knowledge gap that arises when one manager leaves their position and another one comes in, can be minimised through the onboarding process. We will get more into the theoretical background of the term onboarding in the theory chapter, but for now it can be explained as the time from a manager gets the job and until they have been working in the company for six months. Considering that there is a gap in previous research about this topic, we will take an exploratory starting point and conduct a case study with a relatively narrow context. This is so that we can investigate the phenomenon in depth.

### 1.1 Problem statement and research questions

When a new manager is being hired, there arises a question regarding how they can be brought into the new role. From a company's perspective there is a purely economic aspect associated with this process, as they want the new manager to function in their role as fast as possible. As a manager in our context will imply personnel responsibilities, the onboarding of a manager could also affect the other employees. On that basis, this thesis is looking to examine how an onboarding of a manager might include other aspects than an onboarding of other employees does.

By the tentative definition we have provided on onboarding so far, it might seem like a rather wide concept. Various companies might have their own take on what an onboarding entails, and how it should be carried out. This thesis, on the other hand, seeks to investigate the managers' own view on onboarding and what they experience as the most crucial factors on the road to becoming operational as fast as possible. To be able to provide onboarding processes that enhance the likelihood of success, we see it as vital to understand the needs and perspectives of the managers themselves. Our problem statement is therefore:

*“Which aspects of onboarding contributes to managers becoming operational faster?”*

In line with our problem statement, we specify with some research questions. To be able to see how managers can be operational faster, we need their perspectives on key aspects of the onboarding process. Since an onboarding involve some sort of training or learning, we see it as relevant to get the managers' opinions on how onboarding could be connected to knowledge sharing. Lastly, we want to study how barriers could be overcome by providing relevant tools to newly hired managers. These key aspects formed the basis for the following research questions:

1. What do newly hired managers highlight as most important to them in the onboarding process?
2. How is knowledge sharing connected to the onboarding process?
3. Which tools could contribute to making managers operational faster?

## 1.2 Method

To be able to examine the problem statement and to answer the research questions, we carried out our research in a specific firm and used that as our context for our thesis. On that basis, it was not important which firm we chose, or where our informants were employed beyond the point that it was in a medium sized Scandinavian firm. Our main focus was that we wanted to interview managers and learn more about their experiences with onboarding. We conducted eight individual semi-structured interviews with managers from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. In the interviews we were mainly asking about experiences with onboarding, what they expected from the firm and what they thought about possible improvements to enhance efficiency regarding onboarding of managers.

## 1.3 Background

When managers leave their positions, and potentially also the company, there is an imminent risk that a lot of knowledge and experience disappear with them. The labour market today is characterised by employees changing jobs more often than before. At the same time the ever quicker technological development leads to an increased demand for knowledge workers.

Both factors play an important role in the current labour market which leave many companies in desperate need of attracting new employees to their workforce. Therefore, it has become a focus for companies to retain the knowledge that is built up within the company in order for them to gain, or maintain, a competitive advantage. However, both employees and managers might not necessarily wish to share their knowledge with the company or a new manager because they see it as their own personal competitive advantage.

According to a meta-study conducted by KPMG (2000) as many as 61 % of the 423 companies across Europe and USA answered affirmatively when they were asked if they already had implemented or had concrete plans to implement a knowledge sharing system. However, what also emerged in this report, which has also been supported in more recent research (Jami Pour et al., 2020; Kankanhalli et al., 2005), is that the companies have experienced varying degrees of success. Despite companies making an effort towards retaining knowledge and encouraging knowledge sharing among employees, research has shown that time constraints will often lead to employees prioritising doing their job instead of documenting procedures and other knowledge (Trusson et al., 2014). Which means that even though companies seek to enhance knowledge sharing, everyday work life might step in the way sometimes.

Considering that an experienced manager potentially leaves the job before a new manager has been recruited, the opportunity for a direct overlap between the two could be limited. In these situations, a large knowledge gap can arise due to change of managers, whether the new managers are externally recruited or recruited among internal candidates. This could lead to an extended and time-consuming process with lower productivity because it takes time to get the new manager into the role and «up-to-speed». Managerial change can therefore lead to increased costs for the company not only associated with the recruitment process, but also due to lower productivity during the onboarding phase of a new manager.

In prior research there are a lot of studies focusing on onboarding of new employees in general and knowledge sharing between colleagues. However, to our knowledge there is limited research on onboarding of managers and how to minimise the knowledge gap that arise when an experienced manager leaves and a new one takes on the role. From a company's perspective this is important in the sense of getting the manager operational in the role as soon as possible. A good onboarding process has also been shown to decrease the risk of an early exit from a new hire (Bhakta & Medina, 2021; Ross et al., 2014). From a manager's point of view though, how they experience the onboarding process might be different from what the company believe they offer. For instance, a company might be very focused on getting the new manager into the organisational culture and provide information about the business area. However, they might forget or deliver insufficient support when it comes to providing managerial access to systems or training in how to deal with personnel responsibilities.

Our assumption is that companies can streamline the onboarding process so that a new manager settles into the job more quickly, but also make the company stand stronger if a manager should be on long-term sick leave or otherwise unavailable. By investing in this process, companies may cut costs by decreasing the time it takes for a new manager to get fully onboarded, while also providing them with a smoother transition to the role and an experience of a well thought through process which prepares them for the job at hand. This may also reduce the risk of the manager leaving their post early, which could lead to a whole new recruiting process and further costs for the company.

#### 1.4 Thesis outline

In this first chapter, we presented an introduction and the background for our master's thesis. The scientific and practical relevance of the assignment was presented together with the research question. In chapter two we provide an overview of relevant theory and previous research on the topic. This includes management, onboarding, and knowledge sharing. The third chapter consists of a presentation of the methodological considerations. The rationale for choosing a case design, and how the study has been carried out, as well as the process for

data collection and analysis are presented. The study's findings are presented in chapter four, while a discussion of these findings and how it connects to theory and previous research is conducted in chapter five. In chapter six we link the findings to the problem statement and research questions and conclude the thesis.

## 2. Theory and previous research

This chapter will give a brief introduction to some key elements which are relevant to understanding our thesis. It will be based on earlier research done on management, onboarding, and knowledge sharing. This includes the understanding of what it means to be a manager, and what type of manager that has been included in our research. We will also define onboarding, and in which ways companies can choose to conduct such processes in their organisation. Offboarding is also included here as offboarding of the former manager may influence the onboarding of the new manager coming in. As a final subject we will introduce a selection of factors that affect knowledge sharing, and how knowledge can be managed within a company. But before that, we will start off by looking at theory on management.

### 2.1 Management

Yukl et al. (2020, p. 22) describes how terms like leadership, management, and administration act as imprecise terms in organisational theory. He highlights how one could be a leader without having the formal title of a manager, but also how a manager does not necessarily lead. While definitions of leadership emphasise the influence on others in the company, definitions of management emphasise the formalities of being responsible for a part of the organisation. Yukl et al. (2020) goes on to say that one could also be a manager without having any subordinates to lead.

A manager could be in charge of either other managers or more operational employees. Harding et al. (2014) describe a middle manager as someone who has a central position in the organisation, and who is responsible for implementing senior managements plans by ensuring that junior staff fulfil their roles. Middle managers are in other words responsible for other managers. Those managers who are in charge of employees with more operational tasks is often mentioned as first-line or line managers. This type of managers is the basis for our research.

According to (Yukl et al., 2020, p. 27), a manager could be seen as someone who is expected to perform the leadership role, without any assumptions about their actual behaviour or success. However, when someone steps into a manager role, it is often implied that one is given responsibility for organising and directing the workflow, operations, and employees in such a way that the team meets the company's goals. While management focuses on support, guidance and problem solving, leadership focuses on creating visions, giving purpose to the organisation, and help in the development of the company (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2019, pp. 406-407). In this thesis both aspects are highly relevant, but a key specific in this regard when defining a manager is the fact that personnel responsibilities come with the position.

## 2.2 Onboarding as part of the recruitment process

When an organisation is in need of recruiting a new manager, they have the option of bringing in new expertise externally or further developing expertise that already exists in the organisation. Regardless of where a candidate is sourced from, a recruitment process requires a significant investment from a company in terms of time, effort, and money. Some, such as Rollag et al. (2005), describe new employees as “typically a net drain on productivity, drawing a salary, incurring training and orientation expenses, and consuming co-workers' time without providing much in return”. Previous research has found that having an effective onboarding process can be an important contribution to facilitate not only for short- and long-term success, but also increase satisfaction with both the position and the company by the new employee (Bhakta & Medina, 2021; Ross et al., 2014). According to Lynch and Buckner-Hayden (2010) “the benefits of effective onboarding include maximising new employees' full productivity in core functions, thereby recouping the organisation's return on investment, and positioning them for enduring success”.

Onboarding or organisation socialisation are two terms that are often used interchangeably in literature to describe the process of introducing a new employee to a company. On one hand Raub et al. (2021) defines onboarding as “formal and informal processes through which new employees acquire critical information about the job environment in the early stages of their tenure on the job”. Another example is Haave et al. (2020) who describe it as “a way of

facilitating training for newcomers in order to get them socialised and trained for the job in question". The main aim however is to remove obstacles, create a basis for openness and cooperation as well as provide quick introduction to the work in a situation where most things are new and unfamiliar (Mikkelsen & Laudal, 2016). Additionally, this constitutes an important platform for the management to communicate and familiarise new employees with, for example, the organisational culture (Lim & Ok, 2021; O'Neill & Adya, 2007).

Previous studies have indicated that as many as 30 – 40 % of managers fail in their role within the first 18 months of taking over the position (McCool, 2008; Nyman, 2010). In a summary of previous research, Ross et al. (2014) described that some of the most common reasons for management failure and turnover has been connected to poor cultural fit. This has been linked to failing to understand the organisation and "how things are done" in the company, lack of clarity or alignment in terms of performance goals and metrics and lack of a strategic, formal process to assimilate managers into the organisation. Unrealistic expectations being set, conflicting messages on expectations and a mismatch in communication during the recruitment process and what is actually the reality of the job are other factors that play a role (Ross et al., 2014). Connected to this, a study by Lan et al. (2022) showed that employees who had a stronger sense of importance of and affection towards the business principles of the company experienced a higher level of job clarity, satisfaction, commitment and lower levels of turnover intention. Early failure or exit of the new manager is not only costly in terms of money and opportunities, but also in terms of loss of moral and organisational confidence of those stakeholders who are most dependent on the success of the process (Ross et al., 2014). Former research has found that the retention rate has increased by as much as 69 % as a result of a formal onboarding process (Baker & DiPiro, 2019; Lynch & Buckner-Hayden, 2010).

How an onboarding program is structured, what it entails and how long it lasts vary between companies. There are however three terms that are used to describe the phases of an onboarding. These are preboarding, onboarding, and offboarding. We have chosen to divide

the further description of the onboarding process into three different sub-chapters and will describe the terms in more detail there.

### 2.2.1 Preboarding

Preboarding is often used to describe the period from the new employee accepts the job offer to the first day of work. Some however, such as Sagberg (2017), argue that the introduction of the new employee already starts during the recruitment process. The reasoning behind this is that during the recruitment process there is a mutual exchange of expectations between the employer and potential new employees (Sagberg, 2017, p. 19). This is backed by Ross et al. (2014), where they point out that a mismatch in expectations and communication between the new manager and the organisation may lead to higher risk of early exit. Considering the increased mobility and declining loyalty among newcomers (Fang et al., 2011), this makes it even more vital to ensure that employees have a realistic picture of which tasks that awaits them (Sagberg, 2017, p. 28). Clarifying mutual expectations and ensuring open communication about the job throughout the process there is less chance that the new employee encounter unexpected situations and tasks that might have made them choose to not take the job in the first place.

It could take some time from the contract is signed until the new manager starts the job. During this time, managers can keep in contact with their new employee in order to answer any questions that they may have or inform them about any courses or comprehensive standardised introductory programs that awaits them after they start the job (Sagberg, 2017, p. 31). In cases where there is a long time between signing contracts and starting the job, companies could invite their new employees to social events as well as formal and informal meetings where the new employees can meet others who are also joining the company and ask questions to experienced employees. Previous research has found that providing information to the new employees in this initial phase is important because it increases their opportunity to interact with co-workers after they start the job (Sagberg, 2017, pp. 32-33), while also increasing their sense of belonging to the organisation and their workgroup (Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016). At the same time, it helps them gain a better understanding of the

working environment they are about to enter into, which may contribute to more clarity around their role, increased job satisfaction and retention (Ashforth et al., 2007; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Saks et al., 2011). A note made by Kowtha (2008) is that engineering disciplines have their own set of professional values and norms. Based on this Dong et al. (2022) argues that “managers’ supportive actions and new employees’ proactive steps may be different in this field” compared to others.

Leading up to the arrival for the new employee companies may use a checklist, often referred to as an onboarding plan, which describes what they need to have in place before the first day and an overview of the onboarding activities that are planned for the employee. This could be access to a workspace, IT-tools, and employee card. In other words, it makes the hiring manager and support staff aware of what information is most essential that the new employee receives from the very start and what is required for them to be able to carry out the job (Sagberg, 2017, p. 33). At the same time, it makes it easier to document which steps have been taken, remind oneself of what needs to be done, as well as being able to return to it later to evaluate the onboarding process. It is well documented that getting training, information and other organisational support from the start is more effective and leads to quicker return than not receiving it (Saks & Gruman, 2012). However, there may be a mismatch between what the company wish to provide when it comes to support and follow up, compared to what an employee actually experiences (Klein et al., 2015).

### 2.2.2 Onboarding after arrival

Onboarding is usually described as the period from the first day of work and lasts until the new employee is established as a full member of the organisation. There is no clear definition of how long this process takes. However, in various literature on the subject, six months, one year, and even up to two years is mentioned. What is agreed on is that the length of the period will strongly depend on the employees themselves and the company in question, as well as the type of work the employee needs to learn and get to know (Filstad, 2017, p. 24).

When a company decides on what onboarding strategy they are going to have for their new employees, they need to decide on the framework they want to base their onboarding process on. For instance, one often divides the onboarding process into formal and informal onboarding. Formal onboarding is when activities are planned, often obligatory and carried out in a structured way. This could be a welcome meeting, training courses and a buddy scheme where the aim is to help the new employee into the organisational culture. A buddy could in this context provide moral support, and help the new hire understand the people and processes that are essential to get things done (Ross et al., 2014). Previous research has shown a higher success rate for this form of onboarding process, and it has therefore been recommended as the strategic approach (Bauer, 2010; Klein et al., 2015). Having a formal onboarding provides a more systematic follow-up of the employees, compared to an informal onboarding, which takes place in the ordinary work situation without a structured plan for how it is going to be done (Sagberg, 2017, p. 67). Activities that could contribute bringing the new employee into the organisational culture in an informal onboarding could be lunches with colleagues, participating in social events outside work hours, and conversations in the hallway.

In the initial phase of the onboarding process, it is also common to provide an introduction to the company's vision, values and principles. Both on a general level and more closely tied to what the company expect their new employee to contribute to in order to realise the goals set out in the strategy (Mikkelsen & Laudal, 2016, p. 168).

Another aspect that is relevant for the onboarding strategy is the question regarding if the new employee is taking on an already established position or whether it is a new role being created. While going into an established position gives the opportunity for the person who have previously held that position to train the new employee and provide clarity and security, it could possibly be a risk of stagnation. Leaving the new employee to create their own role and position opens up for innovation, according to (Sagberg, 2017, p. 68).

Whenever there is an internal recruitment, where an employee has received a promotion to become a manager, there are different needs to an onboarding program as they will be familiar with many aspects of the company already. In such instances the onboarding may be referred to as cross-boarding. Some of the benefits with cross-boarding are that internal recruitment is less risky, more cost-effective, increase employee engagement and increase retention. However, the candidate may experience some difficulties during the transition from being a colleague to being the new manager. For instance, while the general tasks may include a shift from operational to more strategic work within the same field as the managers' academic and practical experience, they will now also have the additional task of managing their team as well. This set of tasks and responsibilities may be completely new to them and would therefore require additional training and onboarding in order to ensure that they abide by the working environment act and internal personnel policies.

When a newly hired manager previously has been a colleague of his coming subordinates, it is likely that they lose some of their previous affiliation in their former community (Evjen, 2011, p. 3). Some of this may be caused by the fact that the power dynamic changes between the former colleagues. Previously they were considered equals, but the positions have now changed to be superior and subordinate (Evjen, 2011, p. 5). With the new role as a manager comes a new set of expectations that sometimes also are conflicting. For instance, as a manager it is expected that one acts objectively and neutrally, and to a lesser extent let their feelings influence the relationship they have with their employees (Evjen, 2011, p. 7). Colleagues and friends can nurture their relationship based on their own benefit from the relationship. A manager, however, must take the employer's point of view and treat their team members based on overall considerations and common rules, not their own opinion. If a manager becomes too personal and fail to maintain neutrality, they can quickly be perceived as biased, frivolous, unclear and untrustworthy (Evjen, 2011, p. 7).

The new employee plays an important role in the onboarding process and settling into the job. Previous research has shown that employees' proactive behaviour during this initial period predicts their workplace outcomes (Ramus & Steger, 2000; Saks & Gruman, 2012).

Such behaviour include that the employee actively seeks information about the job position, the team they are going to work with and the organisation, while they also network and build relations with their colleagues (Sagberg, 2017, p. 18). Adding to the previous examples more recent research has added to this list and included behaviour such as proving their abilities to their co-workers by working hard, actively participating in projects and showing that they are a reliable team member as well as learning company processes while completing tasks (Sagberg, 2017, p. 18). These types of behaviour have been found to have a positive link to employee's having a greater sense of belonging in the organisation (Ashford & Black, 1996; Saks et al., 2011; Tianyan et al., 2018), better integration into their workgroup (Wingerter & Ahn, 2020), better and stronger relationships with their co-workers (Lapalme et al., 2017), higher degree of understanding of their roles and responsibilities in their new position (Ashforth et al., 2007) and greater job satisfaction (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

### 2.2.3. Offboarding

Offboarding or organisational exit are terms that are often used to describe the process when an employee leaves the company. An exit can happen as an either voluntary or involuntary process. Voluntary in the instance where the employee finds a job somewhere else and decides to hand in their notice. Involuntary because the organisation can be undergoing a reorganisation process and are downsizing. The employee and company may also come to an agreement that the working relationship is not working and therefore mutually decide to part ways. An organisational exit may be planned a long time in advance, like e.g., an employee may notify the company that they wish to retire at a certain age. On the other hand, an exit may be nearly immediate if an employee commits a serious enough breach of the code of conduct or values and mission of the company. What is highly relevant for this thesis is that how an employee experiences the onboarding process can also affect how satisfied the employees are, whether they perform to the best of their ability, and how long they stay in the company (Bauer et al., 2007; Sagberg, 2017, p. 102).

According to Sagberg (2017) there are three main reasons to ensure that the offboarding is a good process. Firstly, it is an opportunity for the employer to clarify matters where there

might be disagreements or solve conflicts. That way they can potentially avoid major legal disputes arising that needs external assistance in order to be solved. Secondly, it may uncover areas where the company has room for improvement and what changes could be implemented in order for them to improve in the future. Thirdly, giving an employee a good exit would make it easier for the company to build up and preserve a positive reputation. On one hand it can help mitigate expressed dissatisfaction with an employer in cases where the exit is the result of a conflict. In less dramatic exits it can however contribute to the employee feeling that they are getting a good end to the employment relationship. If the company manages to utilise the information gained in this process, they can gain valuable insights and learn how they can improve in order to become a better place to work in the future.

A tool that could be used in the offboarding process is exit interviews. Used constructively these interviews could provide the company with systemised information about how employees experience being employed by the company and how support functions like management and human resource management work. This also gives an opportunity to evaluate the onboarding program. Learning from the experiences from the termination phase of an employment relationship will not only help to reduce turnover but can also help to ensure that new employees are both good at their job and stay with the company for longer.

### 2.3 Knowledge

Even though the discussion of how to define knowledge has been an ongoing debate since the Classical Greek period, there is still a lack of theoretical consensus for a single, simple definition (Newell, 2009). In an article published by Nonaka and Peltokorpi (2006), they distinguish knowledge from data and information by describing data as raw numbers, images and words, and that information consists of data that is arranged in a meaningful pattern and can be transferred in messages. Knowledge however is about beliefs, commitment, judgment, intentions and actions (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006). An article by Nonaka (1994) concludes that “information is a flow of messages, while knowledge is created and organised by the very flow of information, anchored on the commitment and beliefs of its holder”.

The process of obtaining knowledge implies learning. There is a consensus among scholars that learning occurs through a variety of mechanisms and processes that can be divided into three categories (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 92). Firstly, learning happens through formal training and education. Secondly, the use of interventions in work processes leads to learning. Thirdly, learning is embedded in and emerges from day-to-day work activities. From this description, we can see that knowledge sharing is one of the possible ways of learning. Which means that one can acquire knowledge through completing tasks and learning by doing, and one can acquire knowledge by learning through others.

Two main expressions within theory on knowledge sharing are tacit and explicit knowledge (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 19). One assumption is that most knowledge is difficult to articulate to others because it is grounded in our experiences, actions, and involvements. In other words, it is more or less unconscious to us. Tacit knowledge is gained through experience and completion of tasks, and due to its subjective nature, it is therefore difficult to articulate and explain to others (Nonaka, 1994). Because tacit knowledge resides in our minds and practical skills and actions it is often referred to as “know-how” (Newell, 2009, p. 7). On the other hand, explicit knowledge is knowledge that can be codified in e.g., manuals or knowledge repositories computer systems so that it can easily be shared with others.

Based on vast amount of research there are two fundamental approaches of knowledge management that has developed, which are objectivist and practice-based views (Schultze & Stabell, 2004; Werr & Stjernberg, 2003). With an objectivist view, knowledge is regarded “a (cognitive) entity/commodity that people possess, but which can exist independently of people, in a codifiable form” (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 15). This perspective is built on three key assumptions, where the first one is that knowledge is an “objectifiable transferrable commodity” and through a codification process can be made explicit, and separated from the person who creates, develops or utilises it (Hartmann & Dorée, 2015). This assumption is illustrated in an article by King and Marks (2008) where they discuss people’s individual knowledge being captured in IT-based knowledge management systems. Secondly, there is

an assumption that the nature of knowledge makes it possible to produce objective knowledge that is free from individual subjectivity. This aligns with the “knowledge is truth”-perspective described by McAdam and McCreedy (2000). According to them explicit knowledge is seen as a collection of scientific facts and laws that are consistent regardless of culture or time. The third assumption is that it is possible to produce objective, codified knowledge. For instance, while explicit knowledge is regarded as equivalent to objective knowledge, tacit knowledge is viewed much more embedded within cultural values and regarded as more informal, personalised and individualised (Marabelli & Newell, 2014).

With a practice-based perspective knowledge is believed to be embedded in practice and is therefore not a discrete object or entity that can be codified and separated from people (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 31). Some researchers take it one step further though and argues that one also needs to consider knowledge as embedded in the context which the activity takes place (Tooman et al., 2016). The practice-based view emphasises that a transmitter-receiver model of knowledge sharing could be questioned, since sharing knowledge cannot be seen as a simple transferral of a fixed entity between two people (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 41). It also implies that knowledge sharing could happen through rich social interactions and learning by watching others or interacting. The management’s role would then be to facilitate social interactions between the employees. Instead of gathering all knowledge into repositories, one engages in understanding other employees’ perspectives and learning through their experiences (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 41).

### 2.3.1 Knowledge sharing in organisations

According to Ipe (2003) knowledge sharing can be defined as “the extent to which knowledge can be made available to others in the organisation” and “involves a conscious action from the part of the individual who possesses the knowledge”. Included in this are ideas and suggestions made by employees that can contribute to improvement of processes and creativity among their colleagues (Dong et al., 2017). In other words, it is a resource that can be developed, applied and negotiated through social interaction (Newell, 2009, p. 3).

However, for knowledge to be shared, it must also be created. In organisations, learning and knowledge creation is considered a continuous process and involves a dynamic reciprocity between individual, group, and organisational level (Antonacopoulou, 2006; Berends & Lammers, 2010; Crossan et al., 2011). It has however been argued by Ozlati (2015) that “a significant amount of organisational knowledge resides in the minds of individuals”. Because the employee's knowledge often builds on or can be connected to existing knowledge in the organisations such as the products, services, and processes it can be very difficult to replicate and copy (Wang et al., 2009). As a result, which is also supported by extensive analysis of literature, knowledge can be a source of competitive advantage and constitute a major financial asset for companies (Hislop et al., 2018, p. 181). In order for companies to benefit from this latent resource they need to identify tacit knowledge, make it explicit in order to easily transfer it to others, and then convert it back again to tacit knowledge somewhere else in the organisation (Newell, 2009).

There has however been some disagreement about who owns knowledge, which can lead to conflicts of interests between the organisation and the employees. On one hand, the argument is that knowledge that is accessible to employees is considered a general good in the organisation (Hislop et al., 2018). Based on this argument, knowledge is considered the company's resource and asset and they therefore have the power to manage it as they see fit. On the other hand, it can be argued that the knowledge employees gain through their job is to be considered a good that belongs to them personally. It is therefore up to them to decide whether they want to apply and continue to develop their knowledge to achieve the goals set by the company. Because of the potential conflict of interests between an employee and the organisation it may influence the employee's willingness to share knowledge with others.

Previous research has shown that there are a number of factors that may influence an employee's willingness to share their knowledge. For instance, employees' motivation for sharing knowledge may stem from their own personal belief structures as well as organisational structures such as values, norms and accepted practices according to Szulanski

(1996). For some employees they might find it inherently rewarding to contribute with their knowledge. Others however may be more motivated by the potential to achieve material benefits such as bonuses or promotions or gain recognition as an expert among their peers. Others have found that the relation the employee have to their employer may also influence the degree of knowledge sharing in the organisation (Ardichvili et al., 2003; Razmerita et al., 2016).

For instance, in a study conducted by Ardichvili et al. (2003), they found that knowledge flowed freely when it was seen as a public good among employees. Employees' willingness to contribute was motivated by moral obligation and community interest and was justified by the organisational culture that encouraged mutual support between colleagues. Some saw the need to establish themselves as experts by contributing to the community. On the other hand, managers and experts expressed that they had reached a certain stage in their careers where it was time to give something back to the team by sharing their expertise and mentoring new employees. Razmerita et al. (2016) found that other drivers of knowledge sharing to be the employees' enjoyment in helping others, monetary rewards and that the management encourage, motivate and recognise knowledge sharing behaviour.

According to Paroutis and Al Saleh (2009) there are four key factors that influence knowledge sharing: history, expectation of results, perceived organisational and managerial support, and trust. The importance of organisational and managerial support as well as trust, has been backed up by a study conducted by Ozlati (2015). The findings showed that both trust in the organisation and competence-based trust had positive effect on knowledge sharing. In addition, they found that the higher degree of autonomy the employees had in their workplace, the more knowledge sharing they carried out. In some jobs however it is neither practical nor appropriate to have a lot of autonomy, but in these cases one can focus on building organisational and interpersonal trust to counteract the low degree of autonomy (Ozlati, 2015). Whenever a company utilises a knowledge system it has been found that it is important that the employees can trust the information that can be found there (Gray & Durcikova, 2005; Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009).

### 2.3.2 Knowledge hoarding

While some employees might find sharing knowledge as intrinsically rewarding others might be reluctant to do so because they see it as a strategic choice to hold back their knowledge. The most common terms used in literature in this aspect are knowledge hiding, knowledge hoarding and knowledge withholding, however there are some disagreements about their definitions. We will not go into a further discussion about the terminology in this thesis but will refer to the above-mentioned concepts as knowledge hoarding. For the purpose of this thesis, we use the same definition as Evans et al. (2015), who defined knowledge hoarding as “an individual’s deliberate and strategic concealment of information”, while perceived hoarding is “co-worker’s beliefs that an individual is engaged in hoarding” Evans et al. (2015). This behaviour may be seen despite employees specifically being asked to share their knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012).

Previous research has identified a series of factors that may influence employees negatively in this regard. One such factor is that employees may see their knowledge as a source of power and status, and that way want to protect their position in the company (Haas & Park, 2010; Serenko & Bontis, 2016; Steinel et al., 2010). This was the case with credit unions in North America, where lack of job security played a key role (Serenko & Bontis, 2016). Due to the uncertainty regarding them keeping their job, employees hoarded their knowledge in an effort to increase their bargaining power as well as make themselves more irreplaceable.

While knowledge hoarding may benefit the employees themselves a study by Evans et al. (2015) showed that hoarding and perceived hoarding will negatively impact both the team and organisational performance. The reason for this was found to be that it harms work-related interactions and the unit's ability to respond quickly to problems. The positive effect of hoarding on individual performance is mediated by bargaining power, while the negative effect of perceived hoarding on individual performance is mediated by social support (Evans et al., 2015).

Not all factors that affect hoarding are a result of employee self-interest. A study conducted by Ardichvili et al. (2003) showed that employees' fear of criticism and potentially misleading their colleagues was the largest barrier for knowledge sharing. Employees in general were afraid that their contributions may not deserve to be made as they would not be considered important enough, relevant for the ongoing discussion or completely accurate. New employees, however, felt intimidated about contributing to the knowledge system as they did not feel that they had "earned the right" yet. Regardless of the employees having been in the company for a long or short time they feared possible criticism or ridicule of what they might post.

### 2.3.3 Knowledge management

Up until now, we have presented research that highlights factors that influence employees' personal inclination to share knowledge. However, an aspect that is relevant for company executives is that their perception of an employee's reluctance to share knowledge may not only be out of self-interest, but caused by factors that prevent them from sharing even though they wish to. Not all knowledge is easily shared with others. According to Szulanski (1996) this is caused by stickiness, while other researchers have argued that the context of the situation might prevent them from sharing their knowledge (Hansen et al., 2005; Mors, 2010). Stickiness in this context refers to the difficulty of transferring knowledge within the organisation (Szulanski, 1996). In this regard it would according to Steinmueller (2000) be wise for companies to look at "under what circumstances is it possible to reproduce knowledge by exchanging information and under what circumstances is it not possible", as it would be counterproductive for management to push for knowledge to be codified and shared in e.g. knowledge systems if it is practically impossible to do so.

Having a user-friendly knowledge system that makes codified knowledge easily accessible to the employees is another aspect that research suggests that organisations should emphasise in order to increase knowledge sharing. In a situation where an organisation is planning to implement a new knowledge system, Júnior et al. (2020) found that employees' adoption of the new system is dependent on if they receive support and guidance in how to use it. If

employees have prior experience with this kind of system or they receive support, empirical evidence has shown that it not only takes less time for employees to adopt it, but they are also more satisfied in using it (Dennis et al., 2001). However, employees have been found to be less likely to consult a knowledge system and would rather ask their colleagues whenever they are under time pressure (Helms et al., 2011; Trusson et al., 2014).

Whether or not employees trust the quality of knowledge in the knowledge systems is crucial both in terms of employees utilising them, but also if they contribute their own knowledge (Gray & Durcikova, 2005; Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009). Having a fair screening process of contributions would be vital (Fadel & Durcikova, 2014). Kim and Mauborgne (1998) described employees based on their study as “when they felt that their ideas and person were recognised through fair process, they were willing to share their knowledge and give their all”. This statement is emphasised by Huo et al. (2016) who found that when perception of procedural justice is low, workers are more likely to protect their knowledge and therefore hoard it. In a case study of a tech company called Infosys Garud and Kumaraswamy (2005) found that in an attempt to get their employees to start utilising a newly implemented knowledge system they made a detrimental mistake. While their introduction of financial rewards to employees who shared their knowledge led to a tremendous increase of entries to the system the organisation got so overwhelmed by the share volume that they failed to review all the entries. In this incident management decided to approve all entries without prior screening and quality check. This resulted in the knowledge system being cluttered with low-quality and erroneous content, which led the employees to lose their trust in the system and therefore abandoning it.

## 3. Method

In this chapter we want to address the method we have applied in our research. The methodology represents the framework for our work. This chapter starts off with information about our methodological decisions and some theory on the method before we describe our process and the reasoning behind our decisions. We also go into our way of analysing the data before we end the chapter with discussing the quality of the study and the ethical considerations.

### 3.1 Research design

#### 3.1.1 Qualitative methodology

According to Johannessen et al. (2020, p. 51) the preferred choice of method stems from the problem statement at hand. In our case we wanted to describe and understand a phenomenon which involved factors that are not easily measured. Due to a gap in previous research, there is a need for exploration of the problem statement in a group or a population. This pointed us in the direction of conducting qualitative research. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain how this method is used when there is a need for a detailed understanding of the issue. To gain this understanding we were dependent on informants that could elaborate on their own experiences, and we needed to encourage these individuals to share their stories with us. It would not be sufficient with answers in the form of yes/no or numbers. This is also reflected in our problem statement, and our research questions, which emphasise words like “how”, “why” and “in which ways”.

Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 42) use a working definition to explain the characteristics of qualitative research: “Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. They go on to describe how the characteristics have evolved over time, and how they cannot be seen as a definitive set of rules. At the same time, they present some key characteristics of qualitative research. First it is common that qualitative researchers collect their data at the site of interest, where the participants experience the subject being studied. Instead of studying

them in a lab, they gather information in a close-up setting by talking directly to people. Secondly the researcher is a key instrument in the collection of data. This means that they must be observant, act in an appropriate manner when interacting with informants and ask the correct questions at the right moments to gather rich data. The third characteristic of qualitative research is the usage of multiple methods, rather than only using a single data source. Other characteristics that are mentioned are: participants with multiple perspectives and meanings, the fact that the results are context-dependent, a design that is evolving throughout the study, researchers explaining their background to the participants, and a holistic way of thinking about the problem being studied.

### 3.1.2 Within case design

Our master's thesis is looking to understand a phenomenon through people. This resulted in a combination of phenomenology and case design. The reason for using a case design in our thesis was the fact that we were looking for answers to "how" and "why" questions, that we didn't have nor wanted control over the processes we studied, and that we were studying a phenomenon that was in the present not in the past (Yin, 2018, p. 9). A key attribute in case design is that the scientist collects a lot of information from relatively few study objects. The duration of the studies can vary, but the main concept is the detailed and large scope of data collection. According to Yin (2018) it is also beneficial to use multiple methods within a case study to obtain as much information and descriptions as possible. In our research we use a combination of collecting background information from key informants and in-depth interviews. The background information came from employees, who either had a good overview of the onboarding process from the company's side or had been in the company for a long time. The latter helped us in a test interview to quality check our interview guide as they had previous experience as a manager, and currently functioned as manager for HSE and quality of business operations. We collected this information before conducting the interviews in order to get a better understanding of the context we were studying. The case design that we used is called "within case" (Johannessen et al., 2020, p. 212). This means that we were looking at one case in one specific context, but we use eight different built-in units of analysis in the form of eight informants. This gave us the opportunity to obtain rich descriptions and understandings of the phenomenon we were studying.

### 3.1.2 Interviews

We used in-depth interviews to get the full overview of the subject being studied. The interviews we conducted were both factual and phenomenological. The purpose of using factual interviews is that it does not only focus on the informants' own perspectives and opinions, but also to collect valid, objective information (Kvale et al., 2015, p. 180). In our research this meant gathering information about the processes with preboarding, onboarding and offboarding in the firm. We wanted our interviews to provide us with more information on the informants' experiences and views on knowledge sharing in onboarding of new leaders. The subjective experience from the leaders were important when searching for answers to our problem statement. Personal experience and emotions could play a significant role in the onboarding of new leaders, and that is why our interviews also needed to be phenomenological. In our interviews the interviewer could be looked at as a miner who is digging for the true meanings of the informants (Kvale et al., 2015).

One of the pitfalls when conducting phenomenological interviews is that researchers could interpret the information differently. To prevent this from affecting our findings too much we preferably asked follow-up questions in the interview process to make sure that we got the intended meaning from our informants. If we ended up in a situation where we were unsure of what the informants meant, we used the hermeneutic way of analysing the answers (Kvale et al., 2015, p. 236). This means that we saw the answers in line with what the informants had answered in previous questions. The purpose of this method is to fully understand the expressed or intended meaning of the informant. In our interviews we saw it as most relevant to interpret the opinions in the way that the informants expressed them. Our reasoning when concluding on this matter was that we had to believe that no one knows better what the informants mean than the informants themselves. However, since we conducted interviews, we had the opportunity to experience *how* the informants spoke about the different subjects as well. This was used in the analysis to see to which extent those who experienced bad onboarding processes, spoke differently about it than those who had not.

Our interviews were semi-structured. This means that we had an interview guide, which we standardised before the interviews, but that we also could ask follow-up questions based on the answers we got from the informants. We did not necessarily need to ask the questions in the same order as they were presented in the guide. It rather had the function as a guideline for what questions we wanted to ask during the hour we had to our disposal. The interviews were therefore conducted more in the way of a dialogue than in the traditional interview setting, which is typical for case studies. This semi-structured way of interviewing gave the informants flexibility to speak out about the subjects in the way they saw as the best fit. At the same time, we structured the interview guide with simple, factual questions in the beginning and more complex questions in the end. The reason for this is that we wanted our informants to get comfortable in the surroundings and with the situation, and to establish a relationship of trust with the researchers before asking the more difficult questions.

### 3.2 Data collection

Our collection of data started with establishing contact with the selected company. One of the researchers had a part-time job in the company, which made it possible for us to get in touch with the CEO to discuss the research project. The CEO gave their approval to conduct the study, and to reach out to potential informants. For the company to benefit from participating, we agreed to carry out a presentation of the study's findings. This way we would ensure that the firm, and hereunder the employees, would be motivated to contribute throughout the period.

Since our informants could be picked out from the employees in the whole Nordic-Baltic area, we were dependent on having a degree of flexibility when it came to gathering the data. We agreed with the CEO, that our main location for data collection would be on the first floor of their building in Oslo. Their offices were located on the fifth floor in the same building, but we wanted to conduct the interviews in safe surroundings where the informants could be totally anonymous without fear of being exposed as informants in our research. At the same time, we wanted our informants to have the opportunity to choose another location for the interviews if that suited them better. This decision was based on our mission to create an

environment where the informants felt as if they could share all the relevant information with us.

### 3.2.1 Selection and recruiting

Within our case study we used a combination of criteria-based selection and the maximalisation of variation from key characteristics (Johannessen et al., 2020, p. 219). The first criterion was met by interviewing managers who had personnel responsibility and who were not in charge of other managers in the company. We distinguished between those who were middle managers and those who were line managers. A middle manager in this context was seen as a manager who had personnel responsibilities over other managers, while a line manager had personnel responsibilities over more operational staff. We decided to interview line managers in our study. Because the company in Norway only consists of roughly 100 employees, we saw it as a bit problematic to exclusively interview Norwegian managers. This is because it would be very difficult to maintain their anonymity when the selection of managers is so small. Because the company is organised in a Nordic-Baltic zone, which includes the countries Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and based on the background information from the company we saw it as a stable context for our study. This assessment was also made based on models for national and business cultures such as Hofstede, who classifies the Nordic countries to have relatively similar characteristics (Clegg et al., 2019). In the selection of the informants, it was assumed that they should have a varied demographic background to ensure that we got a broad, rich data collection given our time limit for the study.

The size of the sample is, as stated by Creswell and Poth (2018), an equally important decision in the data collection as the choice of sampling strategy. They point out that a general guideline for the sample in qualitative research is not only to study a few individuals, but also to focus on gaining extensive detail about everyone studied. In our study we recruited from two categories; first line managers with experience in the position (longer than two years) and first line managers who had recently got the position (within the last two years). To get enough data we started off by finding eight relevant informants, four from both categories.

Given our time limit we saw this as a reasonable number of informants. At the same time, we kept the door open for having more informants if we still got a lot of new information from each new interview. Early on we established contact with the HR manager in the Nordic-Baltic area of the company to get information about potential informants.

### 3.2.2 Conducting interviews

Out of the eight informants, four were interviewed digitally while the other four were interviewed in person at the company's facilities. To make the transcribing process easier we did the teams interviews in English, since these specific informants had another Scandinavian language as their mother tongue. All the interviews had a duration of approximately 45-60 minutes, where one researcher asked most of the questions every time. This was done to ensure that the questions were not affected by the fact that the other researcher worked in the company at the time. All the informants agreed to the usage of audio recordings. After conducting eight interviews, we had reached a saturation point, and could therefore move on to analysing the data.

### 3.2.3 Context specific background information

In addition to the interviews we conducted, we also collected some background information from some key employees. We used two different sources for this information, one personal assistant (PA) that had worked closely with the top management of the firm, and one manager who had worked in the company for several decades. The purpose of this gathering of information was to prepare ourselves for the interviews, and to give ourselves a better understanding of the case we were studying. With the personal assistant we had a conversation where we wanted them to describe the preboarding, onboarding and offboarding processes in the company as well as they could. This information was necessary if we wanted to ask our informants relevant questions. The meeting with the manager, on the other hand, was conducted as a test interview. We wanted to experience how our interview guide was working out in an interview setting and prepare ourselves for the situation we would be working in with our informants. This experience was helpful in terms of teaching us

how to communicate with the informants, how to ask our questions properly, and how much time we would use going through our interview guide.

### 3.3 Data analysis

After conducting the interviews with our eight informants, we structured and analysed our data. Since all our informants agreed to the use of audio recordings, we did a complete transcription of them to get a better overview of our data. With almost 100 written pages of transcripts, we divided the data into categories. The categories were formed based on both the interview guide and the answers received from informants. Our categories were then used as boxes, where we put relevant answers in the respective box; for example, were answers from all eight informants regarding experienced onboarding were gathered in the same category. Johannessen et al. (2020) describe this as a cross-sectional way of analysing data, which is common for analysing qualitative interviews. However, since we conducted in-depth interviews, part of the analysis started already during the first interview. In this way, one could say that the analysis was a continuous process, but more structured after having transcribed the material. A combination of written text, notes from each interview, and the way the informants spoke and argued on the subjects made the total basis for our analysis.

### 3.4 Quality and limitations of the study

#### 3.4.1 Reliability

In terms of describing our research's quality and limitations we get into the terms reliability and validity. Yin (2018) states that the purpose of reliability is to make sure that if another researcher follows the same procedures as described by an earlier researcher, the other researcher will conclude with the same findings and results. With the kind of research design we used, reliability will mean that the same case would be studied repeatedly. However, as Johannessen et al. (2020) points out, reliability in the historical sense is not as relevant in qualitative research as in quantitative. The reasons are that one does not use the same structural data collection as in quantitative research, and the researcher in qualitative research functions as an instrument who affects the data collection. At the same time, Yin (2018) describes how the focus on reliability in qualitative research has evolved. Even though

the studies might be impossible to replicate one hundred percent, it is possible to document the whole process, making it easier to study the case in the same way. This would at least make it possible to redo your own research, which is another way of looking at reliability.

We started off making a thorough interview guide, which made the basis of our entire data collection process. To make sure that our study is credible, we acted as neutral as possible throughout the research period. Specifically in the interview settings this meant not asking leading questions that could be affected by our personal opinions and prejudices. Since one of the researchers also worked in the company, we decided early on that the other researcher would oversee all the interviews. If an informant had too close a work connection to the researcher, we saw it best that said researcher did not join the interview at all. However, this never became an issue in this thesis. When it comes to neutrality, there is also an issue regarding interview effects (Ringdal, 2018, p. 215). Interview effects are the way our informants could be affected by what they think about the researcher's background and personal opinions. These effects were overcome in accordance with theory, by acting and dressing in the way that was the common norm in the firm.

### 3.4.2 Validity

One can distinguish between two forms of validity, internal and external (Johannessen et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Internal validity has close relations to what we addressed in the last part of the reliability chapter. Internal validity addresses whether we are measuring what we think we are measuring or not. When it comes to qualitative research the questions are mostly regarding whether our method examines what it should do or not. This means that the scientists' procedures and findings should in a correct manner reflect the purpose of the study and represent the real situation in the case being studied. External validity on the other hand addresses to which extent the results can be generalised. According to Johannessen et al. (2020), all research is seeking to draw conclusions beyond the immediate information that has been gathered. In a qualitative study like we conducted it is not possible to do a statistical generalisation. However, we can do an analytical generalisation, which means that we could

use the information from the interviews to discuss whether we can expect to find similar results in other cases that look like ours.

To discuss the validity of our research we need to assess whether we can trust that the informants are giving us truthful information. Based on the framework we have described earlier we should be able to expect them to share their true experiences. The strategic way of picking out the informants also ensures that we interview managers who have experience with the issues we are studying. We recruited managers who had different backgrounds and different tenure in the company to get a holistic view of the situation of the case. In addition to this we used both background information from key employees and information validation to triangulate. Information validation means that we were asking each informant about what they think others in the same position were thinking about the issue at hand.

### 3.4.3 Ethical considerations

One of the aspects that separates qualitative research from quantitative is the degree of human interactions. In our research we met all our informants either on site or at teams. Either way we experienced close-up meetings with informants who had a lot to say on matters that were important to them. One of the main criteria for conducting studies like ours, is that the purpose should be a development of the field and for the betterment of those who are participating. That is why we as researchers in this study needed to have a dynamic way of working regarding ethics, instead of having a set of fixed rules. At the same time there were four key aspects to ethics which we saw as relevant to our study: informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the researchers position in the study. This was highlighted by Kvale et al. (2015, p. 102).

Both the company and the employees were informed about the research purpose before we started. We decided that both company and informants were to be held anonymous. Every informant was informed about their rights, and how they could back out of participating at any time in the process without giving reason. Our goal was to ensure that potential

consequences by participating in the study was kept at a bare minimum. In this study that meant making sure that the informants knew that we were only interested in the phenomenon, not judging them for their opinions or their experiences. We made sure to ask all questions in a way that didn't make the informants feel stupid or egocentric regarding their demands for an onboarding for example.

As researchers in this study, we are dependent on our own integrity, meaning that we are obliged to present our findings in a complete and honest manner. Although the findings should be presented in an exact way, it was also important for us not to analyse the informants' answers as something more than they really were. That is why again it was crucial to ask an adequate amount of follow-up questions in the interviews, to make sure that we got the intended meanings from the informants if we were unsure.

This master's thesis is not sponsored or in other ways influenced by parties that could affect our integrity or independence. But we feel obliged to mention once again that one of the researchers at the time of the study was working in the company. To prevent this from creating a bias, we took necessary precautions so that this researcher couldn't affect the data collection or analysis in a way that would be inappropriate.

## 4. Analysis

In this chapter, we will present the findings of our empirical analysis. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how companies can minimise the knowledge gap, which comes from one manager leaving their position and a new one taking over the role. To shed light on this topic the collected dataset consists of individual interviews with eight managers. The findings that are most relevant to the scope of this thesis will be emphasised and elaborated here. To provide a clear presentation of the findings, we have divided them into five themes, which are: 1) leader ambitions and motivation, 2) recruitment process, 3) expected and experienced onboarding, 4) transitioning to the manager role, and 5) future improvements.

### 4.1 Leader ambitions and motivation

#### **Dreaming of becoming a leader, or a coincidence?**

During the interviews, the informants were asked about their motivation for becoming a manager and whether being given managerial and personnel responsibility was something they had envisioned since they were young. Among the informants who had been given personnel responsibilities within the last two years, it became evident that becoming a manager was not necessarily a specific goal. The main features of the job they highlighted were the fact that they enjoyed the responsibilities in a previous job or that they had a natural talent for it and therefore tended to end up in charge regardless of whether they wanted it or not. As one of the informants said it: *“I always wanted to see what opportunities came along”*. When the informants received the question about motivation it seemed like the majority had not given it a lot of thought. However, there was one informant who said straight forward that becoming a manager was a goal they had for their career.

When the informants who had been managers in the company for more than two years were asked the same question, there was more variation in their answers. The reflections they had focused on how personnel responsibilities could come with time, how being a manager just felt natural from the beginning, and their thoughts about having a manager title. Even though each informant had their own personal thoughts about the motivation of becoming a manager, it was clear that it was no coincidence that they ended up there. For some that

meant expressing their interest in becoming a manager during the internal people management program that the company ran yearly. For others it was never an option to not become a manager. One perspective that stood out was the concern regarding taking on a management position without having enough time to follow up each team member individually. The focus here was not on the title itself, but more on how one could use one's own knowledge to influence people in the company. The informant's words were: *"it weighs more heavily that I want to be heard more, I have more to say and can influence more"*. Which meant that even if the informant was reluctant to take on the management position, the opportunity to influence more people was the basis for the decision.

### **A purposeful job, but some problems along the way**

All together our informants described how they enjoyed working with people, how they could help build up their employees, and how they could help develop them so that they thrive and succeed. Another aspect which was brought up was that joining the management group gave the opportunity to influence more, and participate in a more long-term perspective, instead of just solving operational tasks here and now. At the same time, it was pointed out that being a line manager involves the complexity of working with people who are on either end of the experience scale in terms of all the technicalities of the job.

What our informants found most rewarding with the job in general and being a manager was that they were working with products with a higher purpose. During the interviews, informants expressed that they *"do not regret taking the challenge"*, *"great company, great team"* and *"I love it"*. One informant pointed out that it takes time to get to know and settle into a complex matrix organisation. While they might work in one country, they had the headquarters located in another. The headquarters also initiated and made plans for the local teams. *"It means that there's always tasks coming in that I don't necessarily plan myself, but that keeps the job new and fresh"*. Another informant expressed that they found it rewarding to see that the input they collected from their team was accepted by top management after they had presented it and convinced them about it. This way they felt that they were contributing to shape the company. This kind of input, but also feedback on them as

managers, which was collected anonymously through an IT-system, was something that several informants expressed that they found important.

Even though working as a manager was seen as a purposeful job, it became evident in the interviews that it also comes with its negative sides. Several informants expressed in their own ways that the job had its ups and downs. Some went as far as saying that they sometimes didn't enjoy their job as a result. In one case this was particularly connected to the fact that important information that was crucial to perform the tasks in their role was not provided. This meant that the informant had to ask for information they did not even know existed or was available. When the same informant also experienced difficulties in their team, it goes without saying that the onboarding process and the time after was difficult, even though the informant said they learned how to manage it.

## 4.2 Recruitment process

### **Internally or externally recruited?**

When it came to discussing the recruitment process, we found that six of our informants were recruited from within the company. Despite this not being a selection criterion, it gave us yet another perspective to consider when looking at recruiting and later also the actual onboarding. The differences between these two groups already became apparent when we talked about the actual recruitment process. The externally hired managers experienced a rather normal process that included applying through the recruitment system and participating in some interviews. Even though one of them was quite unhappy with some misleading information about what the job entailed, it was still the best recruitment process they had experienced in years.

Among the internally hired candidates there were several aspects that were highlighted. Some experienced being asked to apply for the position or were given the role as a part of a reorganisation, while others had more of a trial period in the position before formally taking over. Whilst the internally hired managers had not necessarily given it too much thought before participating in this study, the process was described as more ad-hoc and less formalised than for the externally hired. At the same time some informants experienced the

process to be very rough. This was explained by there being a lot of back and forth in the decision process in terms of giving them the role or not. Another aspect brought up was dissatisfaction related to challenges with contract agreements, communication problems, and formal errors. Those who experienced these types of issues had more to say about the recruitment processes, while those who thought it was okay had not given it a lot of thought. This was reflected both in the level and number of arguments given by those who were unhappy, but also in the way they spoke about it. Those who were unhappy spoke with more enthusiasm and made it clear that they had been thinking a lot about the subject.

### **Different entrances to becoming a manager**

Those candidates who experienced a more traditional recruitment process, got a good overview of the responsibilities in the job from the job posting, and what was not covered there was elaborated on in the interview process. The overall experience was that having interviews conducted by different parts of the organisation gave a better understanding of the expectations from both a local and a global perspective. However, there was also an instance where an informant experienced that the job was misrepresented in the information they got beforehand, which changed the scope of the position and what forums they would be involved in. What we saw here was that those who had traditional recruitment processes pointed out if there were times where the formalities were not held up.

For those who were recruited from within the company, however, the focus was more on to what degree there were some formalities at all. They all knew the company from before, and some also knew a lot about the position they would be taking on. The reasons could be that they had been working closely with the former manager earlier, or that they had been involved in the operational tasks of said manager. What was unknown for them before was having personnel responsibilities and utilising unfamiliar tools to deal with such matters. One of them stated that: *“Although they tried to tell me what the position was about, it was difficult, because there is so much latent information and things going on between the lines”*. Those who did not know much about the position from before expressed that they got their position as part of reconstruction or transitioned from a different department.

Since the internally hired had different entrances to the manager positions, they described the recruitment process in different ways. Some of them wanted, and had the opportunity, to discuss the role with the previous manager while they were considering applying for it. Some of them wanted to get an overview of what was working and what was not before taking over, and some wanted to be familiar with the team. One informant expressed that *“If there are things that work, then you continue with that regardless of there being a change in management”*.

At the same time, many of the internal candidates had similar application processes as the external ones had. Some of them applied for positions where only internal candidates were considered, and some were given the positions without applying. However, there was especially one informant who pointed out how different an internal recruitment process could turn out in contrast with an external one. This informant was given the position as a trial-period first, and then given the role formally a year later. Within this period the candidate was not fully compensated for the position they functioned in, which they explicitly said that they did not think would happen with an external candidate. Even though not all the internal candidates had similar experiences, they showed how an internal hire could differentiate from an external one in terms of formalities.

#### 4.3 Expected and experienced onboarding

##### **Flowers and phones, but too much implicit information**

As onboarding is a key subject to this thesis, it was reflected in the time spent talking about it in our interviews. What we saw was that informants who had been in the position for a longer period of time did not necessarily remember every little detail about their onboarding. Some informants also distinguished between their organisational onboarding that they got when joining the company from the onboarding when they took over the management position. Those who had more recently gone through the onboarding process had more to say about it. As with recruiting, those who had experienced problems in their onboarding had also given it more thought and had more arguments on how it should have been done. However, what we found was that there were significant differences between those who had been hired externally versus those who came from within the company.

Those who were hired as external candidates described a thorough onboarding process. The process included them receiving flowers either before starting in the position or on their first day, and they received an onboarding passport when they started. This onboarding passport is described as a PDF file where there were tasks that were going to be done for the first 3 – 6 months. Some of the tasks were up to the company to fulfill, while others were the responsibility of the newly hired manager. There were also some introductory meetings set up with relevant colleagues, and both the personal assistant to the country manager and HR were very involved in the onboarding process. One of the informants put it like this:

*“A very thorough description of all the things that I could expect when I joined. A lot of information about the company which at the time, I remember I thought, this is a professional process where it seemed that some thought had gone into how we want people to perceive the company also before they join, not just once that they are there. And you can tell that it seems well thought through”.*

The focus of the externally hired managers was how everything was in place on their first day. They got assigned to their own cupboard, where they found their phone, their computer, and other IT equipment they would need. This led to one of the informants feeling like this: “this might be the best hiring process I have been involved in, in a long time. I have to say. Very professionally done. Except for that little thing I mentioned, everything went smoothly. Absolutely”. The exception referred to here was some misleading information that was given in the recruiting process.

Even though these managers experienced good onboarding processes, they emphasised that there was a lot of information that was so incorporated in the organisation that newly hired employees were struggling to figure things out. Pursuing these thoughts, they described how there were attitudes like: “why should I explain this, everyone knows this”. The result was an overall feeling that the company values employees who have been there for a long time, way more than newly hired personnel. Some informants said that this information was also

validated through the experiences of other external hires, who did not participate in this study, but who had spoken to them about similar experiences. One of our informants had also participated in a presentation of a colleague's first three months in the job, where it had been stated that they saw too much information being considered implicit.

The implicit information was also brought up as an obstacle regarding IT access. While those who came from the outside were given flowers, merch, and a plan for their first months, there were still obstacles to overcome. One of them described how they were given their laptop, got shown to their desk, was told that this was their spot, and then were left to figure out the rest on their own. As they pointed out: "I opened my laptop, and it says you need to key in a code... Which code are we talking about?". The informant got told by a colleague that they just needed to decide on an eight-digit code. However, they were not told that this was a code that was going to be highly relevant for them in the next three years. After figuring out this code, they stumbled on to the next problem, which was that they did not know that they had to insert their employee card into the computer to be able to access pages and systems such as intranet, personnel handbook etc. The informant summarised it like this *"Very basic things, but if nobody tells you and you haven't tried it before, potentially you don't find half of what you're supposed to be finding"*.

### **No formalities when being recruited from within the company**

Moving on to the internally hired managers, the focus was more on how they did not experience a formal onboarding. No matter the reason for them getting the role, they described a more ad-hoc way of being introduced to the role. Some of the informants laughed a little when they were asked about their formal onboarding. As one of them put it: *"The onboarding was non-existent"*.

The informants went on to say that there was not much changing from one day to the other, when they changed position. The focus was more on them being granted the correct access rights and that was about it. At the same time, they felt that they could ask both the previous

manager and other colleagues if they had any questions. It was stated by several informants that if they wanted to be operational as fast as possible, they had to be proactive in asking questions like: “How do I do this?”, “Where do I find this?”, and “How do I handle this?”. Since many of them had no previous management experience, it was difficult to know how to handle the personnel responsibilities, even though they might have known both company and team before.

We then get into the separation between an organisational onboarding and onboarding more in terms of handling the tasks as a manager. Because the trend among these informants was that they did not feel that they needed onboarding in terms of getting to know the company structure, setting up the computer, and all of that. But what several of them pointed out was how there were both tasks they were unfamiliar with, people they did not know from before, and responsibilities they were new to. They emphasised that they did not think a traditional onboarding, going through the whole onboarding passport, would be necessary. Although, they thought it would be nice to have a talk with someone about which aspects of the onboarding passport that were relevant for them. The informants explained how they could have had a talk with HR about the type of support they would need when entering the new position. That could be management training programs, courses in how to use the systems, and meetings with other managers that were relevant.

Even though most of the internally hired managers agreed that the processes could have been more formal, there was especially one informant who thought the status quo was sufficient. This informant also experienced an informal onboarding and had no management experience from before. It was pointed out that becoming a manager only meant more work, and more responsibilities, but that there were no big changes other than that. However, this manager also stated that they were unsure of where to find information, and how to best lead the team. Their thoughts on onboarding were:

*“It is not possible to know everything from the beginning. You have to find ways, learn where to look. So, as I said there is nothing coming for free. You must look for it yourself. It is not going to be thrown to you”.*

### **Someone to turn to?**

When asked if they had an assigned buddy, seven out of eight informants said that they did not. One informant described that *“the buddy system is great, but you only get that when you are new to the company, at least from what I have seen”*. In this case the previous manager was still in the company and could provide support when needed. However, there were also someone who took matters into their own hands and got themselves a buddy either within the company or somewhere else. One way of doing this was to use the management team as a form of buddy. One of the informants who found their own buddy said: *“I think it’s kind of important to have someone you could reflect with”*.

The managers spoke about how they thought a buddy was only something the company provided to personnel who were not in management. Except for one of the externally hired informants who was assigned a buddy from the beginning. The other external one also mentioned that they thought they were meant to have a buddy, but that they never experienced having one. Most of those who did not have a buddy pointed out that they would have benefited from having one, and that they did not see why managers are not assigned one. The one who had a buddy also stated that it would be nice to have one both at a local level and one at a zone level.

### **4.4 Transitioning to the manager role**

In an evaluation of their prior competence coming into the role, the consensus among the informants was that they felt competent in their functional role. However, some expressed that this was not the case, since it was the first time they had been given personnel responsibility in their careers. The biggest challenge for all the informants though was to get an overview of which systems and tools that they needed to use in their new role and could

use to support them in the tasks that they needed to get done. This applied to both those who were recruited externally and those who had previously worked in other roles in the company. Although the internally recruited managers had some familiarity with some of the tools as employees, they expressed that they had no knowledge or overview of what information or what opportunities these systems had for managers. This was expressed, for example, in an interview with one of the internally recruited first-time managers who at the time asked themselves *“What do I need to use the intranet, and system X etc for as a manager?”*. They also mentioned that *“there are guaranteed tools I don't know about today too, right, that I might be able to use”*.

### **Receiving a new position in the same firm**

For the internally recruited managers, there were some common features in how they went about transitioning from being an employee to becoming a manager of the team. Most of these informants entered management positions that were pre-existent. As one informant points out *“entering into a team that's been pre-existent you enter a culture and pre-existent dynamics and relationships”*. For them it was therefore important to talk with the previous manager to get an overview of these three things:

- 1) If there was someone that was exceeding in their role.*
- 2) If there was someone there were issues with that needed to be dealt with.*
- 3) If everyone was getting along or if one or two people maybe were not too happy about one another.*

While several informants sought this type of information from the previous manager, they were clear that they did not want the previous manager to tell them what to do or how they should conduct the tasks in the new role. The main aim was to gain background information about the team so that they knew more about what they got themselves into. Several of the informants, however, reflected a little on the advantages and disadvantages of knowing a lot

or a little about the team in advance. For instance, some informants expressed that it might have been easier to start off with a clean slate and to know as little as possible about the team itself. This was on the grounds that it would give them the opportunity to form their own opinions without being influenced by the previous manager's thoughts. Additionally, one informant argued that this was important because they did not know the reasons for the manager leaving or the relation the previous manager had with the employees. Going into the role without too much information about the team would therefore allow them to form a picture of the team without the previous manager's bias.

A challenging aspect that was brought up, was that having worked in the team one ended up managing, meant that the team members' view of them did not change straight away even though they had a new title or role. For instance, one informant's experience was that even though they had started in their new role as a manager they still performed a lot of the functional tasks that they had before. The informant had worked in the team for many years prior to becoming the manager and this could in their words be described as a blessing in disguise. The reason behind this was that the team would continue to ask the informant to solve certain problems. He put it like this: "They know that I am better at certain things... Even though it is not my job anymore". So, the manager ended up in a dilemma where they had to choose between making the customer happy fast or allowing the employee to develop. The pattern that became evident in this matter, was that there could be difficulties with role clarification when being hired internally, especially when there are few formal changes from one role to the other.

A way of handling said challenge was brought up by another informant, who came from a junior role to the manager role. With the risk of being seen as too inexperienced in the role, especially in a team where many had worked in the company for a double-digit number of years, the informant found it important to be humble. The way the informant addressed this was that they gathered everyone for a team meeting to talk about and try to align the expectations that the team had to their new manager and what the informant expected of the team. From the informant's point of view, it was important to address that the team

members were the experts in their roles and that the manager's role was to facilitate and support them. This perspective overcomes and stands in contrast to those who struggled with differentiating being a part of the team and managing the team.

### **From outsider to manager**

When the externally recruited managers were asked about how they handled coming in as a new manager, they emphasised the importance of getting to know the team. One informant expressed that *"as a manager you need to move with the time"*; regardless of whether it is a virtual or physical presence, different tools, or tasks.

*"That is kind of part of the development that both as a manager you are responsible for, but also working with people, because people change all the time so you cannot just say: "oh now it needs to be in one way or another".*

One of the challenges that this informant pointed out when starting in the company as a manager, was that because their teams are spread around in different countries, they suddenly had to deal with an in-country manager as well. According to the informant, this is due to the matrix structure of the company, which means that employees whose manager is in a different country than themselves have both a line manager (the informant) and an in-country manager that they report to. The difference in the roles of these two managers was that the in-country manager was the day-to-day person to go to and who approved e.g., working hours, holidays, and followed-up sick leave. The line manager on the other hand was the manager within the same department that the employee worked with but who did not work in the same country.

### **Learning through knowledge sharing, or learning by doing?**

The informants were also asked about the actual courses and trainings that were performed as part of the onboarding process. The overall feedback in this regard was that there had been

a general lack of activities in this area. However, three of the experienced managers who had been with the company for more than two years informed that they had attended courses called something like “*New manager in company X*” and “*Aspire to lead*”. One informant expressed that they had received the offer to attend such a course but had not had the time to do so. It took at least a year after starting the role before they got this offer. Another informant had asked for such a management training course on their own accord, and been granted participation in the course, but had yet to conduct it. Overall, one got the impression that management training is not done in a structured way, but that it was seen as an asset for them in developing as managers. Several informants pointed out that if management training was done in a more structured manner, it could have helped them to be a better manager for their team in the long run.

Across the interviews, a total of 11 different systems and tools were mentioned. Based on the informants’ descriptions of these systems, we will present an overview of those which are relevant to knowledge sharing, knowledge management and/or the onboarding processes.

1. *General information about the company, policies, and HR information (Intranet and personnel handbook).*
2. *Handling of personnel information, salary increase etc.*
3. *Travel expenses and reimbursements.*
4. *Personnel development (one system for obligatory courses, and one system for personal development and voluntary courses).*
5. *Grant access to other systems.*

In this regard several managers expressed that the systems and tools they should use as a manager were only mentioned by name in the onboarding process. Apart from what they knew about these systems and learned by using them as an employee, they did not receive any information or training in how they could or should utilise these as a manager. For all the informants there had been a lot of trial and error, and getting hold of someone who could

help them when they could not figure out what to do or how to access the information that they needed. For instance, one informant said that whenever they got an email to approve travel expenses for a team member, they had to go and ask someone “*what is this?*”. They described the same situation for figuring out approval of holidays for the team or whenever the manager needed to make some changes in some of the IT-systems. Another informant initially expressed that they received training in how to use one of the key IT-systems, however, there had been a few glitches regarding hiring new employees and several employees feeling that the trainings had been insufficient. When thinking more about this matter, the informant expressed that they would have wanted the training in how to use the system to have been more extensive.

When asking the informants specifically about the systems, they said that they found the information relevant and that the tools could be useful in developing as managers. However, we discovered that some informants decided not to use the systems in full, because of the lack of training in them. Some managers pointed out that they used some of the IT-systems every day at the office, but that they did not know how they could fully utilise it in their position. One perspective that came up in most interviews was that the managers would have wanted more training in how to use the systems, but also more information on how and to what degree management expected them to use them. One informant specifically said they had severe trouble with finding relevant budgets and other information that was necessary to know in their position. And the informant went on to describing how more guidance in terms of relevant information would make them operational as managers faster.

There was one informant that expressed in the interviews that they did not see the need to use systems that could enhance the skills they had. The informant pointed out that the information in these systems was not relevant to their position. At the same time the informant was not able to specify what kind of information that could be found in the system, and they said that they had not really given it a lot of thought. This information could be seen in context with the experiences of those who said lack of training and courses in the systems could affect how much time one spent using them.

## 4.5 Future improvements

When the informants got the task of designing their own onboarding process, there were certain aspects that were mentioned in many interviews. At the same time each informant focused on the specific part of the process that was most relevant to them. We will in this chapter present the aspects that are most relevant to our thesis.

### **One size fits all?**

One informant mentioned that there is not one solution that fits everyone, and that the onboarding process should therefore be customised to the needs of the new manager taking over the role. An example that is mentioned often is how the needs of an internally recruited manager would be different to the needs of an externally recruited one. One thing that both internally and externally hired managers expressed however, was that they would want the feeling that the organisation is prepared for them to start in the position. That would include, among other things, that all equipment such as computer, phone, access card and other equipment is ready on the first working day. Internally recruited managers would already have access to most of this, so for them the focus would be more on being granted access to systems and getting acquainted with the team.

The managers that were interviewed focused on how the first period in the position should involve meeting their team, meeting other managers at similar level in the company, and meeting people that they would be working closely with. One of the managers also specified how meeting relevant international colleagues in addition to local ones could enhance their ability to function in the position. At the same time, it was also brought up that those who already knew the team would not need formalised meetings with those co-workers. The main outcome of this subject was how familiarising yourself with other employees should be done in a way that emphasises the needs of the manager, instead of doing the same for everyone no matter their background.

One subject where the managers seemed to be aligned in their reflections, were their thoughts of having an assigned buddy. Both informants who were hired internally, and those who came from outside the company, reflect on how having a buddy would make it easier to ask questions in the beginning. They also emphasised how having someone to discuss with would be beneficial. While externally hired candidates wanted to have the opportunity to discuss both the organisation and the job itself, internally hired ones wanted the opportunity to discuss their new function in the organisation and the transition process. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that the managers would benefit from a buddy in the same way that other employees would.

### **Clarification of expectations and some management training**

Some informants expressed that it was important to have a clarification of expectations and a thorough role description of the role if this had not already been done in the recruitment or preboarding phase. This would both include who the new manager should report to, but also an explanation of the reporting lines within the company. For instance, in the company where we conducted the interviews, they had a matrix organisation structure. Because of this, employees often had one line-manger in one country and an in-country manager in the country where they worked. Based on the experience of one informant they say that “the zone and the local offices are not working well enough together”, as they felt that the different roles were unclear.

In the transition from being an employee without personnel responsibilities to becoming a manager, an informant expressed the importance of a new manager getting to know “*What you should be aware of when you are suddenly seen differently by all the others who work here*”. They did not specifically express how this could be done from the organisation’s side, but it was a clear desire that it should be incorporated as part of the onboarding. Regardless of the new manager being internally or externally recruited they wanted a thorough introduction to what it entails to go into a management position in general, but also managerial policies that are specific to the company. For instance, first-time managers would need an introduction to what the responsibilities are as a manager. This included, e.g., how

to follow up an employee in their daily work and their development, routines regarding approving hours, holiday and sick leave. One informant wished that they had received more of an introduction on how to conduct one-to-one meetings, and that this and other company specific policies could be included in a management training program. The informants expressed that all new managers should get the offer to participate in a course like this, and preferably quite soon after starting their new job. Their argument was that new managers get a good introduction to their personnel responsibilities, get more familiar with company specific policies, while also building a network of other new managers which may face similar challenges.

Regarding the management training, one informant spoke about an HR course they had taken about personalities and how to manage a team with different personalities. It involved how a manager should proceed in different situations, how to read people, and how one should talk to each other. The informant found it useful and meant that a course like this should be offered to all managers. In addition to the course itself, it would enable managers to meet and discuss how they approach different scenarios of the job. Courses like this, but also other management training programs were, according to the informants, something that could be presented in an overview to the managers. When presented with these opportunities, managers could choose for themselves what they felt was most relevant. It was also pointed out that it might be more relevant to an internally hired employee to participate in making their own onboarding plan and decide what courses were needed.

### **Training, coursing, and information**

After, or parallel, with receiving a clarification of what the organisation expected of them as new managers and what the leadership role entails, the informants wanted new managers to receive training in the systems that enabled them to carry out the job they had been recruited for. Throughout this thesis, this might have been the point where the informants gave us the most unison answer. The general feedback on this topic was that a good onboarding should include getting to know the different tools available and go through the ones that are used in the day-to-day operations. Several informants expressed that they would want someone from

HR, or someone else in the organisation, to set up appointments for them to get familiar with the systems.

Several managers in the company had employees in their team who mainly worked remotely, according to one of our informants. In some cases, this meant not seeing an employee physically in the office for months on end, and these managers would therefore need to know how to motivate and manage them remotely and virtually. After experiencing that society was put on lockdown during the corona-pandemic, employees ended up having more flexibility regarding working remotely. According to some informants it is therefore vital to include training in this way of working, in the onboarding of new managers.

Some of the informants expressed explicitly that it takes time to adjust to the role and to learn the environment. Because “not everyone is as quick or learn at the same pace or in the same way” it is therefore important to allow the new managers some time to get into their role. Some might prefer to sit down and read up on policies and procedures, while others learn more from talking with colleagues and managers. One informant believed that it takes a lot longer if one assigns a new manager to a desk and give them tons to read by themselves.

*“If you are structured and have good follow up from your manager, and even the manager above that again or from another manager on the same level, one can learn more based on other’s experiences”.*

A couple of informants also pointed out the importance of senior management or the company to emphasise that it is okay for new managers to allow themselves to just sit and absorb for a while in the beginning – that it was not a requirement that you must be 100 % operational from day one, but making it clear that it is perfectly fine for one to go and chat with colleagues to get to know them or look up and read information on the intranet etc.

#### 4.6 Summary of analysis

To summarise what has emerged in the analysis, we see that there is a difference in whether a new manager being internally or externally recruited. What the informants expressed, however, is that while the need for onboarding will depend on their previous experience and how they enter the organisation, they also distinguished between what we can refer to as organisational and managerial onboarding. Organisational onboarding focuses more on getting the new manager acquainted with the organisation and the business culture, while managerial onboarding focuses on providing training in their role as manager and clarify expectations.

In order to be able to identify the new managers needs for onboarding, the informants expressed a desire to be involved in setting up their own onboarding plan. This is so that they could get an overview of which onboarding activities the company offers, which of them that are relevant for them, and which of them that are not necessary. Associated with this, the employees wanted as much information as possible about how the former manager had operated in the role, information about the team and other information that may be relevant to the role they would be stepping into. At the same time, it was clearly expressed that they wanted to shape their own role, and that they did not want to be told how they should conduct the job.

To help settle into the job, we found that the informants wanted to have a buddy scheme similarly to the one that new employees otherwise received. For both externally and internally recruited managers the buddy would act as a first point of contact for questions. While externally recruited managers expressed that they could more easily discuss the organisation and the job itself, internally recruited managers said that they would have the opportunity to both discuss their new role as well as the transition process from an employee to a manager.

Another topic that was emphasised by the informants was the importance of access to and training in IT systems they were expected to use. The informants experienced major challenges in finding and obtaining information about which systems were available to them and their purpose. There was a lot of trial and error as they were left to their own devices to try and figure things out and no training was provided. The informants expressed that some of this information was as simple as being told that one had to insert the employee card into the computer in order to log on and gain access to systems. In addition, informants expressed that there was a need to receive more in-depth training in the respective systems, as well as more information about what the systems could be used for and what expectations there are from the organisation in relation to their use.

## 5. Discussion

In this study, we seek to identify how companies can minimise the knowledge gap between one manager leaving their position and a new manager coming in through the onboarding process. The overall purpose is to explore which aspects of onboarding contribute to managers becoming operational faster. Based on the research questions, we will in this chapter compare our findings to previous theory. In addition, we will present how our findings contribute to the research, what limitations the study has, as well as suggestions for future research in the field.

### 5.1 What is most important in the onboarding process?

#### **Hiring externally vs. internally**

Previous research describes onboarding as the formal and informal process that is conducted in order to get new employees introduced to the company and familiarise them with the organisational culture and work environment (Haave et al., 2020; Lim & Ok, 2021; O'Neill & Adya, 2007; Raub et al., 2021). While our study supports this prior research, we did however find differences in the way new managers were onboarded depending on them being internally or externally recruited. One key finding was that externally recruited managers received a more formally planned onboarding process, which is supported by prior research as the preferred strategic approach due to its higher success rate (Bauer, 2010; Klein et al., 2015). The reasoning behind this is likely to be that those who hired them are aware they are not familiar with the company from before and therefore need more support.

While we found that externally recruited managers had a formal onboarding process, this was not the case for the internally hired managers. According to them there was no onboarding at all, which contradicts the theory that onboarding is used as a way of removing obstacles in the new position (Mikkelsen & Laudal, 2016). One may argue that the reason for this is that it is believed that internally recruited employees do not have obstacles in the same way as externally recruited managers do. However, our findings show that also internally hired managers experience such obstacles. An explanation for this could be that the needs of the

internally recruited managers, in the transition to a new role, are less obvious compared to those who are generally unfamiliar with the organisation. Another explanation could be that their needs have not been mapped out well enough during the recruitment process.

An additional finding in terms of differences between the onboarding of the internally and externally recruited managers, was that the perception of what the opposite group received as part of their onboarding. From the internally recruited managers view they experienced that externally recruited managers received a much more comprehensive onboarding and closer follow-up. On the other hand, the externally recruited managers felt that they got a lot less support in the onboarding process as a lot of tacit knowledge was taken for granted that "everyone" know. The fact that new managers experience such differences in the support they receive can be a source of dissatisfaction and a feeling of being taken for granted. Receiving adequate information and support has been associated with an increased sense of belonging (Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016), clarity about the role, increased job satisfaction and retention (Ashforth et al., 2007; Saks & Gruman, 2014; Saks et al., 2011). Although these findings apply to the individual manager's onboarding, one could argue that the perceived disparity between the onboarding process, between different groups, can affect the individual managers in a negative sense. As a result, the company could therefore run a greater risk of an early exit from a manager (Ross et al., 2014).

While this study has been conducted in a medium-sized technology company, these findings do not deviate to a large extent from what we would expect to find in similar sized companies, especially when it comes to the externally recruited managers. However, one could ask if an extensive onboarding for internally hired managers would feel a bit over the top and too formal for some employees. What we would expect, though, is that in case of smaller companies, who have less resources and fewer people, the onboarding process would be less formalised for both internally and externally recruited managers than what we have seen in this study. In comparison, for a larger company one would expect that the internally recruited managers would also receive a formalised onboarding process. The reasoning behind this is that the larger a company is, the lesser of a difference there is between an internal and

external hire, due to the number of people in the organisation. This could be reflected in the transition from one department to another, where one might not know anyone from before.

### **Organisational onboarding vs. Management onboarding**

Having identified that internally and externally hired managers do not experience similar processes, we investigated more closely how their needs differ from each other. What we found was that the need for onboarding is twofold. On the one hand, which is most relevant for those recruited externally, there is a need to get familiarised with the company, the business culture and environment. This is in accordance with what previous research refers to as onboarding (Haave et al., 2020; Lim & Ok, 2021; O'Neill & Adya, 2007; Raub et al., 2021), while in this study we will further refer to it as organisational onboarding. On the other hand, we have also identified a need for management onboarding, which focuses more on being introduced to the role as manager and what that role entails.

The need for managerial onboarding is perhaps most obvious in cases where there is a first-time manager. However, what this study has discovered is that there is a need for managerial onboarding regardless of whether the new manager has prior managerial experience, or if they are internally or externally recruited. For instance, while one could expect that an externally recruited manager would have a good overview of what a manager role entails, they would still be new to the company and unfamiliar with personnel policies and procedures that are specific to the company. At the same time, internally recruited managers would be familiar with the company in general as an employee, but not necessarily from a manager's point of view. They might therefore not need a full organisational onboarding similarly to externally recruited managers, however that does not mean that they avoid encountering obstacles when stepping into their new management role.

Considering that this study was carried out in a knowledge-intensive company, we consider it likely that similar results will be found in comparable companies. In this regard knowledge-intensive firms could be defined as "companies where most work can be said to be of an

intellectual nature and where well qualified employees form the major part of the workforce” (Alvesson, 2000). In this case, the context is a company with a relatively flat hierarchical organisation, where the managers work closely with their team members. However, if one conducts a similar study in a company with much larger distances between each hierarchical level, then we would expect that the findings made in this study would become even clearer. Another possibility is that an internally recruited manager, in a larger firm, might come from a completely different department. In such instances organisational onboarding may become more relevant again as the business culture and environment may be different and should therefore be given greater emphasis in the total onboarding process.

## 5.2 Obstacles in knowledge sharing

### **Learning through interaction or learning by reading?**

As one of the informants points out, we all have different preferences for how we learn. While some may prefer to sit down and read up on manuals, others prefer learning through interactions with other people. At the same time informants expressed that not all aspects of the job are possible to be taught through a system, like getting to know the team you will be leading. This supports the theory that says that not all tacit knowledge is quantifiable and can be put into knowledge repositories (Newell, 2009; Nonaka, 1994). However, making as much knowledge explicit as possible will make the knowledge more accessible across the organisation. At the same time the company could avoid a situation where only a few key employees possess very valuable knowledge, that could leave the company in a very difficult situation if they decide to quit or become unavailable for longer periods of time.

With these previous points in mind, companies must consider how to set up knowledge sharing in such a way that it works for as many people as possible. This involves, among other things, assessing whether the company should put more emphasis on an objectivist or practice-based view in their knowledge sharing policy (Hislop et al., 2018; Newell, 2009). This choice is not only influenced by the role in which training is to be provided, but also the context, as this will affect how easily it is to transfer knowledge (Hansen et al., 2005; Mors, 2010; Steinmueller, 2000). Although developing such a knowledge sharing policy and an

onboarding plan is an investment for the company, it will ensure a more effective onboarding that again may lead to the new manager reaching their full productivity and recouping the organisation's return on investment quicker (Lynch & Buckner-Hayden, 2010).

However, the managers pointed out how some barriers made it difficult for them to contribute to knowledge sharing. For instance, one key finding in this study is how the lack of knowledge sharing taking place during the onboarding process acted as an obstacle. This is because there was a lack of proper introduction and guidance in how to use the knowledge sharing systems. While our informants tried to read up on prior knowledge themselves, they were not able to access it due to insufficient training. This finding is supported by the study conducted by Júnior et al. (2020) who found that a key factor for employees to start using a system is if they got training in how to use it. If those who are responsible for the onboarding process do not provide this guidance, there might be an unfulfilled potential for knowledge sharing.

Whenever a company has made an investment in implementing a system that facilitates knowledge sharing, often described as knowledge repositories, it is done with the intention that it will be used by their employees. On that basis one could ask why necessary measures, such as training and support, are not carried out to facilitate newly hired managers learning how to use them. In this instance, it may be caused by the expectations technology companies have of their managers when it comes to competence and the ability to familiarise themselves with technical systems on their own. Such a mismatch between expectation and reality can be the result of insufficient clarification during the recruitment process. On the other hand, it is possible that the company thinks that having knowledge sharing systems in itself is enough of a commitment to these processes. However, other studies we have presented contradict this, in the sense that employees will not use knowledge sharing systems if they are unsure of the quality of what exists there (Gray & Durcikova, 2005; Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009). Our study therefore shows that one must facilitate the usage of knowledge sharing systems in order for managers to adopt utilising it.

Our research shows how managers in a medium-sized technology firm prefers guidance over learning on their own when it comes to using knowledge sharing systems. This could somewhat be influenced by the fact that they could not access the knowledge systems and therefore found it difficult to search for information themselves. At the same time this finding could predict that medium-sized firms in some ways end up being more formalised than smaller firms, whilst less formalised than the larger ones. In the larger firms it might be normal to send all new hires through a management training programme as part of the preboarding or onboarding, while in smaller firms they might not have resources to invest in knowledge sharing systems at all. In that sense it is possible that other medium-sized firms also have systems that facilitates knowledge sharing, while they do not necessarily have specific courses that teach managers how to use them.

#### **Practise-based view in order to use an objectivist perspective**

Detecting that lack of sufficient training and guidance in how to use knowledge systems also revealed that it had a negative effect on knowledge sharing. Through the interviews, the informants expressed that they were aware of having access to some systems that could enhance their own knowledge. However, due to lack of training and full overview of what systems were available they did not feel confident that they had a clear picture of what they could access.

A different point of view is that since they did not know how to use it or what knowledge was stored in the systems, they could neither utilise nor contribute to the knowledge there. The key finding here is that to be able to retrieve crucial information or to use knowledge sharing systems, the informants had to tap into the tacit knowledge and “know-how” that their colleagues possessed. This meant that every time one of our informants did not understand how to utilise the systems, they would ask a colleague for support instead of trying to figure it out by themselves. This becomes particularly prominent, whenever employees are under time pressure and have limited experience with the system, as previous research has showed that they then are more likely to confer with a colleague than utilising the knowledge system (Helms et al., 2011; Trusson et al., 2014). In other words, for informants to utilise the

knowledge in the knowledge systems, as per an objectivist perspective for knowledge sharing, they had to work with a more practice-based view to get there.

Being proactive in their new role and search for information themselves has been found to predict their workplace outcomes for new managers (Ramus & Steger, 2000; Saks & Gruman, 2012). However, it is challenging to take this approach according to our informants in situations when there is unclarity around their role and they are unsure of what is expected of them. This becomes especially prominent when information is strongly tacit knowledge within the company, to the extent that a new manager has little to no opportunity to find any information about it unless they already have some knowledge in advance. Examples of this from this particular study is that external managers did not know that they had to insert their employee card in the computer to log on, or got any information about a computer system unless they had already been sent the direct link, as it was not available through e.g. the intranet. In such instances new managers need to know what they are lacking in order to know what to ask for. While proactive behaviour has been found to create better integration in the workgroup (Wingerter & Ahn, 2020), stronger relations with their team (Lapalme et al., 2017) and greater sense of belonging in the organisation (Ashford & Black, 1996; Saks et al., 2011; Tianyan et al., 2018), one may argue that the opposite effect may occur if the manager ends up feeling frustrated in the constant search for information on their own.

According to theory, being assigned a buddy is common as a part of a formal onboarding process. The managers we interviewed pointed out that they did not have an assigned buddy, so they asked others for help when needed. This backs up the fact that the managers had to learn ad hoc through other employees, while they wanted the knowledge sharing to be done through a more formal onboarding process. The effect of not having a buddy led to an increase in time consumption, since the managers had to interrupt other employees in their work to both check whether they could and would help. There is also a risk that by finding their own buddy somewhere else, like some managers did, they might use buddies who are not suitable in terms of not knowing the company or department, or what it entails being a manager in their specific firm. If the managers had a suitable buddy in these situations, the

buddy would function as a knowledge sharing partner. This aligns with theory showing that the onboarding process should be done in a way that removes obstacles (Mikkelsen & Laudal, 2016). But it also contributes to theory in showing that knowledge sharing can be a key element in an onboarding in order for new hires to join in on effective knowledge sharing.

While our earlier analytical generalisation has been focused on firm size, this finding is more neutral in that sense. For those companies who have systems for knowledge sharing, it seems likely that managers with insufficient support would ask colleagues for help. However, in complex organisations, which matrix organisations can be, it could be difficult to figure out who the correct person to ask is. In addition, there may be ambiguities about who is responsible for providing training for the new managers, something that can lead to the task of training the new employee falling between two stools. For companies that have small HR departments, it can also be difficult to overlook that all parts of the onboarding, in cases where a policy has been implemented by the company, are carried out. However, some of these challenges may be overcome if the company makes sure they provide the new managers with a buddy, as they would know the organisation well and function as a first point of contact. Saying that though, there might be some exemptions to these arguments in certain industries or companies where managers would not ask for help if they could not figure it out on their own. This could be a result of there being a lower amount of knowledge workers in the industry who do not necessarily see the importance of contributing their knowledge. Although it could also be a result of the business cultures where asking questions may be seen as losing face in front of colleagues (MacKenzie, 2010, p. 27).

### 5.3 Tools

When it comes to tools, we have already discussed that the managers in this case had a large number of IT-systems available, but not necessarily the training or knowledge about how to use them, or how to maximise their utilisation. Another aspect of this, is that the new managers must see the relevance of the system. One example from the interviews is where an informant expressed that they had heard that a knowledge system was available, but that they did not see that it had any useful knowledge that could be relevant to them. Even though

the same person expressed that they neither had an overview of what the system was nor what type of knowledge was stored there. By the looks of it, a company risk “losing” their employees as a user of the system already before they have adopted using it if they fail to convey why it is useful. One should be careful about drawing conclusions based on only one informant, but in this case, it could be an example of what Kowtha (2008) and (Dong et al., 2022) referred to as a set of values and norms among engineers that differ from the rest, as the informant was the one who had the clearest professional and practical engineering background. The basis for this argument could be that in their view it would be much more valuable to be out in the field and do the practical work with an expert, than sourcing information from a system where they do not know the origin of the knowledge.

In relation to the point above, and earlier discussion around practice based versus objectivist-based views on knowledge sharing, which tools that are relevant for knowledge sharing would depend on the nature of the knowledge. In cases where standardised procedures are needed, it is natural to think that storing explicit knowledge in a knowledge system (McAdam & McCreedy, 2000). However, when teaching an engineer how to change a part in a machine one could argue that would be done best through social interactions and absorbing knowledge through watching others (Hislop et al., 2018). Yet, it should be mentioned though that digitalisation has reached a point where practical learning can be partly done through, e.g., VR glasses and similar solutions via a repository which creates a whole new set of opportunities for knowledge transfer.

The informants explained during the interviews how it could be useful to have an overview of which IT-systems, and other tools that were available to them. This was based on the informants expressing that they do not feel sure that they actually have an overview of all systems that they are expected to use. In connection with this overview, it would be useful if it was also stated why they should use it and what opportunities were available in the respective IT systems. One example of such an overview could be a handbook for managers that both mentions this, but also gives them an overview of personnel policies and routines for managers. This differs from a personnel handbook as a manager's handbook would be

specifically aimed at managers. In that way, they would have a "one-stop-shop" from which they could seek advice when they have questions.

IT-systems are a central tool for knowledge sharing; however, they are not the only tools that companies can utilise in an onboarding process. In a broader context, a formal onboarding process could in itself function as a tool in making managers operational faster. As we have earlier discussed in this chapter, the informants expressed a need for a more formalised process for both organisational and managerial onboarding. Similarly, we would argue that a buddy could have the purpose of being a knowledge sharing partner, and therefore could also be considered a useful tool. This aligns with previous research that express that a formal onboarding plan would lead to a more structured follow-up (Sagberg, 2017) and would therefore increase the success rate for the onboarding process (Bauer et al., 2007; Klein et al., 2015).

In order to meet the various needs of new managers, the informants in the study expressed the need for customised onboarding and a desire to be involved in the planning of their own onboarding process. Considering that every newly hired manager enters the position with their own background and previous experience it is not necessarily time efficient and cost-effective to give them the same onboarding process. For instance, a study conducted by Dennis (2002) showed that adoption of systems goes faster for those who have prior experience and for those who receive support. Meaning that those who are hired and have prior experience with some parts of the job or some of the systems, do not necessarily need the same tools and training as those who have not.

Our findings in this study contribute to substantiate what previous studies have shown in terms of the importance of the organisation having made choices about the onboarding process for newly appointed managers. On one hand a tailor-made onboarding process may seem a bit extensive and an unnecessary strain and investment for the company. However, when previous research has shown that as many as 30 – 40 % fail in their role within the first 18 months (McCool, 2008; Nyman, 2010) one may argue that it would still be worthwhile to

make the investment. Especially since increased mobility and a declining loyalty among employees has become more prominent (Fang et al., 2011) and may lead to a quicker exit if they do not find their place in the organisation.

The last topic that we will cover in this discussion is the use of offboarding as a tool. In connection with the transition from a former manager to the new manager, a company could try to extract as much knowledge as possible before they disappear from the organisation or transfer to a new role in the company. In cases where the former manager leaves the company, this can be done through conducting exit interviews in order for the company to gain feedback on, e.g., their onboarding process as that could have had an influence on how long they stayed in the company (Sagberg, 2017). In addition, they could also identify any other aspects that the company could have improved on in order to keep the employee with them. The informants in this thesis did not necessarily point out exit interviews as a useful tool, but they expressed how obtaining relevant information from their predecessor could be crucial. This supports our assumption that the success rate of an offboarding could affect the onboarding process.

Previous studies have shown that the employee's relationship to the company (Ardichvili et al., 2003; Razmerita et al., 2016), but also one's own perception of who owns the knowledge they have acquired (Hislop et al., 2018), and personal belief structures (Szulanski, 1996) will affect the willingness to share knowledge with others. Considering that the majority of former managers in this study transferred to a new role in the company one could argue that they had a good relation since they chose to stay. Based on the feedback from our informants, the former managers made themselves available to answer questions that the informants had, but that it was primarily on the basis that the new managers were proactive and asked questions. At the same time, the informants expressed a desire for as much information as possible without being told exactly how to do the job. If one links this to previous studies, which pointed out that a more formal process gave greater success and made the managers more operative (Bauer et al., 2007; Klein et al., 2015; Sagberg, 2017), one could potentially achieve both an effective offboarding and onboarding in the same process.

This finding, which emphasise individualisation of the onboarding process, is not only relevant for medium sized firms. As we have discussed earlier some firms may see an onboarding as a very formal process that does not necessarily fit their company culture. However, this finding suggests that people will have their own personal opinions on what an onboarding process should contain. It seems likely that in most companies where one would have conducted this study, there would have been different views on how an onboarding process should be carried out and how they experienced their own process. At the same time, one cannot rule out that in some companies there would be a consensus regarding that processes should be carried out the same way for everyone. The Scandinavian business culture might emphasise individualisation in a different way than other business cultures do.

#### 5.4 Limitations and future research

In a master's thesis like this, there will always be a time constraint. During the approximately five months we had to our disposal, we were able to gather and analyse an extensive amount of data. Despite reaching a saturation point, conducting more interviews could have provided us with even more useful information. Strategically selecting informants was made easier by the fact that one of the researchers worked in the company during the study. We recruited informants with various backgrounds, who were able to share their perspectives. However, it is possible that our selection was done in a way that excluded those who did not necessarily have strong opinions on the subject. The researcher's position in the firm could also have been an incentive for employees to contribute to the study. At the same time, it may also have been harder for the informants to say no when we asked.

One of our selection criteria was to have informants who had worked for both a long and short time in their positions. During the process we understood that if some time had gone by since the onboarding process, it was harder for the informant to remember exactly how it was done and what they felt about it. Considering that a key finding in this thesis was connected to the fact that there is a difference between internal and external hires, one could have used that as a selection criterion instead. However, the combination of seniority and a

variety of recruitment backgrounds, may also have helped to explore the different aspects of onboarding.

Since we conducted this research as a master's thesis, there is an opportunity to do more extensive research on the same subject. For instance, one could conduct a qualitative study with more informants, in various contexts, or one could do a statistical generalisation through a quantitative study. We also experienced how there seems to be a difference between an onboarding of external candidates versus internal ones. It would therefore be interesting to look more specifically at the differences between these two groups in other companies, both in terms of firm size and type of industry. Additionally, we would like to see more studies specifically done on the onboarding of managers, to see to which extent this is different from onboarding of other employees. This could also be done as a comparative case study where one could see how the onboarding of managers are done in smaller versus larger firms, or across different business cultures. Lastly, we suggest conducting research that explore differences in onboarding programmes between knowledge-intensive firms and those who are not.

### 5.5 Practical implications

The findings in this study show how companies can benefit from having onboarding programs that are relevant to their newly hired managers, which include the necessary training and guidance. If companies manage to structure the onboarding in a way that makes managers operational faster, it would be both less time-consuming and more cost-effective. The newly hired managers would spend less time being idle in their role due to lack of information and would faster become a useful resource for their subordinates. To a larger extent it would also ensure that new hires stay in the company and become part of the organisational culture, meaning lower costs connected to recruitment processes.

Another outcome from this thesis is that it shows how knowledge sharing processes could be a key aspect in the onboarding of managers. Instead of leaving them to figure out things on

their own, they could get operational faster through the usage of knowledge sharing, structured through buddy schemes and knowledge repositories. Companies could save resources by having structured knowledge sharing systems that helps managers overcome barriers in the onboarding phase. This could be beneficial beyond the purely economic aspect; it could also contribute to building a good working culture and reduce the level of frustration among managers.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to investigate how companies through onboarding can reduce the knowledge gap that arises when a manager resigns from his position and a new manager takes over. In order to shed light on this, we have identified what newly hired managers consider most important to them, which tools contribute to making managers operational faster and how knowledge sharing is linked to the onboarding process.

Based on our findings it became apparent that managers in the same way as other personnel value a thorough onboarding that provides support and guidance. The managers would like to have a buddy in the same way others have, and they want sufficient training in how to handle their role. It was also pointed out that managers could need management training as part of their onboarding, in addition to the organisational onboarding that is also offered those who do not have personnel responsibilities.

This thesis shows that knowledge sharing is closely linked to the onboarding process, in the managers' point of view. Not only can the onboarding process affect their ability to contribute to knowledge sharing processes, but lack of knowledge sharing itself can function as an obstacle in the onboarding process. The managers also point out that the lack of knowledge sharing during the onboarding force them to seek help from colleagues instead of knowledge repositories. This thesis emphasises how companies could benefit from having a holistic view on knowledge sharing, by combining relevant training and introduction to knowledge sharing systems and company expectations.

As regards which tools can make managers operational faster, the managers expressed that onboarding in itself functions as a tool. But providing them with relevant information, having a clarification of expectations, and giving them proper training and guidance could shorten the timespan from newly hired to fully functional in the position. Additionally, having time to discuss the onboarding process with the recruitment team could be a useful tool to secure that the onboarding is conducted in a relevant manner.

Our problem statement was looking to identify how newly hired managers could be operational faster. This thesis shows how having a well thought-through onboarding process that is customised to suit the needs of managers is crucial in that sense. It also shows how knowledge sharing between a company and their new hires can influence the effectiveness of onboarding. A part of this knowledge sharing is to provide relevant information and training, in order to remove obstacles in the transfer from one manager to another.

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## Appendix:

### Appendix 1: Interview guide

#### Interview guide

At the start of the interview:

The interviewer will start by informing the informant about their rights as well as giving some brief information about the project. We will also ask the informants if it is okay to make an audio recording of the interview and inform them that they can refuse. We would also inform about how we define onboarding: "From the interview process until they have worked in the position for 6 months.

1. How long have you worked for the company?
2. What kind of formal education do you have?
3. How long have you been in the workforce?
4. Do you have previous management experience? If yes, please describe briefly.
5. Can you briefly describe your current position in the company?
6. How did you find out about the position?
7. What did you learn about the position before you were hired?
8. What motivated you to become a leader?
9. How did you experience the hiring process when you became manager?
10. How do you enjoy your job?

When you took the position:

11. How did the formal transition from the previous manager to your work?
12. How much information did you get from the previous manager about his experience and ways of solving the tasks?
13. What is important to you in a role as a newly hired manager?
14. How did you experience your competence in relation to what is required of you in the position?
  - a. Can you tell us a bit about what prior knowledge you had about personnel management before you took up your current position as manager?

15. What special initiatives in the company were part of your startup program/onboarding?
- b. What areas of personnel management did you receive training on in connection with the onboarding?
  - c. Are there any personnel manager tasks that you would have liked to have had more training on when you took over as manager?
  - d. Is there a form of tool that could have made the process easier to familiarize yourself with personnel management tasks?
  - e. Are there any tools that you have access to today that you think have been particularly useful to you as a personnel manager?
16. Did you experience any challenges when you took up the position?
17. How could the onboarding of new managers in the company be done in the most ideal possible way, as you see it?
- f. Do you see an unmet need that could/should be covered in the tools you have access to today? If so, what needs are these?

**Closing questions:**

Is there something you feel you haven't been able to tell, or do you have something you'd like to add?

## **Participation in research project**

### *“Onboarding of Managers”*

This is an invitation for you to participate in a research project in connection with a master’s thesis in Economics and Administration (30 credits). In this document, we provide you with information about the aim of the project, and what any participation will mean for you. Participation is voluntary, and whether or not you participate will have no impact on your working relationship with the company.

#### **Theme:**

The topic of this master’s thesis is the onboarding and offboarding of managers.

#### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

The Business School at Oslo Metropolitan University.

#### **Why do we want you to participate?**

The selection of informants in this project shall consist of representatives from the following employee categories:

- Have been middle managers in the company for at least 2 years.
- Have been middle managers in the company for less than 2 years.
- Managers/employees who have been responsible for or participated in organising the onboarding process in the company.

Based on these criteria, we will invite 8 – 15 people to participate in the project.

#### **What does participating mean for you?**

If you choose to participate in the project, it means that you participate in an interview with us. The interview is scheduled to take place between February and March 2023, and will last up to one hour. The time and place for the interview will be agreed upon after further agreement with you as a participant. Regardless of location, the anonymity of the participants will be safeguarded. For those based in Oslo, the interview will take place physically, while for those based in other cities in the Nordic-Baltic countries, the interviews will take place digitally.

During the interview, we want to make an audio recording in order to be able to process the material as best as possible afterwards, and to ensure that we get all the necessary information in the most correct way possible. As a participant, you have the option to refrain from this without having to give a reason.

With regard to good research ethics, the interviews will mainly be conducted by Student Y, as Student X works in the company and can therefore in some cases have too close a working relation with some of the informants. This assessment is made individually for each individual informant. Among employees, only Student X will have insight into who is participating in the project.

The questions you will face in the interviews will deal with what experiences you have gained as a manager in the company, as well as the onboarding process you had in connection with taking up the position.

### **Voluntary participation**

Participation in the project is voluntary. All information about you will be anonymised. You can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason. All material from you as an informant will then be deleted. There will be no negative consequences for you if you do not want to participate or choose to withdraw at a later date.

### **Privacy – storage and use of your personal data**

Your personal information, as well as the information that emerges in the interviews, will only be used for the purposes we have described in this document. The information is treated confidentially and in accordance with the privacy regulations. Only the project group and supervisor will have access to the information. It will not be shared with other employees of the company.

The student group consists of Stian Grastveit and Kjerstin Østenseth. Supervisor on the project is Erik Døving. Your name and contact details will be replaced with a code that is stored on a separate name list separate from other data and stored on separate devices. Informants will not be recognized in the final publication of the master's thesis. During the interviews we will use the app "Diktafon", which ensures safe storage of personal data during the work. The audio recordings will be deleted by May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

### **What happens to your information when we end the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end at the end of May 2023. As previously mentioned, personal data will be anonymised in the publication and audio recordings will be deleted. The company will receive a copy of the thesis when it has been completed. Informants who wish to can receive a copy of the thesis after it has been submitted in spring 2023. The thesis will also be presented to the company after it has been submitted.

### **Your rights**

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to:

- Insight into which of your personal data is used.
- Change or correct information you have contributed.
- Have personal data about you deleted.
- Get a copy of the transcript of the interview.

### **What gives us the right to process personal data about you?**

We process information about you based on your consent.

On behalf of OsloMet, SIKT – the knowledge sector’s service provider has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have any questions about the study, or wish to make use of your rights, please contact:

- OsloMet, Erik Døving (Supervisor/Project Manager), E-mail: [erik.doving@oslomet.no](mailto:erik.doving@oslomet.no)
- Stian Grastveit: E-mail: [s235830@oslomet.no](mailto:s235830@oslomet.no)
- Kjerstin Østenseth, E-mail: [everyhat@oslomet.no](mailto:everyhat@oslomet.no)
- OsloMet Data Protection Officer: Ingrid Jacobsen, E-mail: [Ingrid.jacobsen@oslomet.no](mailto:Ingrid.jacobsen@oslomet.no)
- SIKT – The knowledge sector’s service provider, by E-mail: [postmottak@sikt.no](mailto:postmottak@sikt.no) or phone: 73 98 40 40

Yours sincerely,

Stian Grastveit og Kjerstin Østenseth

## Declaration of consent

I hereby confirm that I have received information about Stian Grastveit and Kjerstin Østenseth's master's project "Onboarding of managers" and hereby wish to participate in an interview.

Name:

Phone number:

Email:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_