Retaining knowledge within organizations

Factors that should be taken into consideration when retaining knowledge from employees leaving for retirement

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Abstract:
As a result of unprecedented demographic realities, whereby the largest cohort of the world’s workforce is going to retire within the coming 20 years, organizations are faced with an inevitable loss of some extremely experienced people. Not only will it be difficult to replace these so-called ‘baby boomers’, but there will be numerous barriers to overcome in terms of how to retain their valuable knowledge base within the organization. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that can affect knowledge retention so that one’s actions are effective in retaining knowledge and avoiding the costs of lost knowledge. Because the field of knowledge retention is quite new, and because the actual effects of the demographic trend are not entirely visible, it is of interest to conduct research on how organizations could tackle the challenges involving knowledge retention activities. In this thesis, a single case organization was studied using Grounded Theory methodology, coupled with a review of existing literature. The main findings in this thesis are firstly that one doesn’t need to be able to define exact pieces of vital knowledge that have to be transferred, but it is important to identify where the vital knowledge resides. Second, it is important to make sure that the conditions are favorable for knowledge transfer to occur when knowledge retention initiatives are begun. Third, there is some degree of lost knowledge which has to be accepted due to the impracticalities and costs of trying to retain a large knowledge base. In addition, some people will not, by their nature, be willing to care for knowledge transfer. And finally, it is important to augment the importance of knowledge retention beyond just being ‘another program’, because its importance is otherwise easily overlooked and forgotten with time.

Keywords: Baby boomers, knowledge retention, factors, lost knowledge.
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1 INTRODUCTION

It is an unavoidable fact, that an increasing number of people belonging to the older cohort of today’s workforce are moving into their retirement age (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:3-18). Many of them have been working within only one or a few organizations throughout their working careers. Because of this, they have built up a huge amount of knowledge pertinent to those organizations’ cultures, networks, technologies, changes, and history etc. (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:35-45) It is of interest to find out the consequences of the biggest segment of the workforce, the so-called baby boomers, moving into retirement. What happens to all their knowledge?

The subsequent generations are substantially smaller; meaning that within a few years there will be an unequivocal shortage of employees in the workforce. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:2) Consequently, corporate leaders are involuntarily faced with numerous challenges. Such a radical change in workforce demographics can have such grave impact on an organization as to put its ability to innovate, compete, and grow at stake. (Liebowitz 2009:6)

When an employee leaves an organization for retirement, there is a risk of his or her wealth of knowledge leaving too unless it has been adequately transferred. This concerns, in particular, the knowledge-intensive sectors of high-technology, health care, aerospace and defense, energy, and other technical and scientific industries. (DeLong & Trautman 2011:xiv, Rothwell 2011:12) However, knowledge transfer is not the only problem; the ability by an organization to retain this knowledge will be considerably lowered in the future as well because the labor pool of available replacements will have shrunk, so more knowledge needs to be assimilated by fewer individuals than is necessarily possible within a certain time frame. (DeLong 2004:17) In addition, even if knowledge has been effectively captured from the retiree, it is nearly impossible to have grasped the full wealth of knowledge possessed by him or her (DeLong 2004:19) due to the spectral properties of knowledge existing on several planes simultaneously. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:46)

Knowledge retention is a process or function within an organization which deals with identifying the important human resources within the organization, that is, the key persons that possess vital knowledge to the organization’s continuity, and formulating a set of actions for what should be done if these people’s employment terminates. (Almgren 2006:2) The problem does not only lie in finding appropriate successors, but
also in appreciating the importance of transferring and keeping the knowledge which
the leaving human resource bestows. (Rothwell 2011:15-20) The organization must also
be able to identify what kind of knowledge that has to be captured and in which way it
can best be transferred to a successor and to the organization as a whole. (Ball & Gotsill
2011:3) However, knowledge transfer is more complicated than just asking the
individual who is leaving the organization to tell what he or she knows about how to do
his or her job.

When attempting to transfer knowledge, in knowledge retention, there are many
factors that need to be taken into account. A classic such is the difficulty of translating
so-called tacit knowledge, that is, knowledge based on experience and which you
cannot explicate with language (also known as know-how), to explicit knowledge, which
easily can be expressed and share (also known as know-what). (Nonaka 1994:16) Other
problems that arise with knowledge transfer are the choice of communication method
and medium, organizational-culture and interpersonal communication barriers
(DeLong 2004:194). Organizations will undeniably come across these types of issues
when it comes down to retaining knowledge and therefore they need to acknowledge
and understand these issues while remaining goal-oriented. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:67)

This thesis will present factors to take into account when initiating knowledge retention
activities. First, the existing theory will be examined in order to find factors that it
suggests. Second, factors grounded in empirical data from a single-case study will be
presented. Some of them are building on the theory, and some of them are entirely
novel. Finally, an overall consolidated view on all indicated factors will be presented, in
order to give a broader understanding of what factors that organizations should take
into consideration when initiating knowledge retention.

1.1. Problem definition

The problem definition can be started off with a question: What does knowledge really
mean in the practical sense for an organization and why should managers care about
potential knowledge loss? Jashapara (2004) describes knowledge as something which
enables decision-making, which in turn triggers actions, which in turn builds
experiences. He calls this “actionable information” (Jashapara 2004:16). This
actionable information gives us, as employees, the ability to make better decisions and
promotes an organizational environment that values communication, sharing, and
creativity. (Jashapara, 2004)
From an organization point of view this ability is clearly important and advantageous. As a result, knowledge and effective knowledge management have progressively come to be understood as being a competitive advantage and value creator for organizations alike. (Brandén, 2003) Therefore, it should be apparent that a loss of knowledge is going to weaken an organization’s ability to compete and create value. Even though this is a huge concern for many, and according to recent studies organizations are well aware of it, they do not necessarily know what factors to take into consideration when attempting to retain this knowledge.

1.2. The research question and aims of this thesis

The research question of this thesis is:

What factors should organizations take into account when meeting the challenges of retaining knowledge as a result of an increasing number of employees leaving for retirement?

The main aim of the thesis is:

To increase understanding and expand existing knowledge on what factors affect retention of knowledge, and thereby to expand on the theory which exists on knowledge retention.

The sub-aims of this thesis are threefold. The first sub-aim is to describe what organizations think about knowledge retention with relation to what needs to be taken into account, through analysis of empirical data. The second sub-aim is to explore and develop a broad number of novel factors and notions (that affect knowledge retention) which are grounded in empirical data. And consecutively, the third sub-aim is to reveal similarities and differences between the theory and the notions that have emerged from the empirical data, in order to build on existing theory.

As a result of having reached these aims, novel ideas on factors that affect knowledge retention will have been presented and existing theories will have been built upon. In addition, new areas will have surfaced for further research interests.

Finally it is called for to explain for whom this paper’s research problem itself is relevant. It is relevant for practically anybody working in any organization, especially for those who are working for companies with a high age-structure. This is because:
1. The demographic changes and their effects are globally spread (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006) and,

2. The demographic changes are beginning to occur now and for another 15 years to come (the youngest bracket of the baby-boomer generation are born in the early 60s, and therefore have approximately 15 years to retirement).

1.3. Limitations

Due to demographic realities, organizations face a practical impossibility of being able to replace all retiring employees. Instead, organizations need to focus on the things that they can control. Basically, there are three logical activities that organizations can engage themselves in:

1. Providing flexible retirement arrangements → Company policies, rewards, and HR activities (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:48)

2. Capturing important knowledge → Knowledge management and retention activities (Jashapara 2004, DeLong 2004)

3. Attracting talent → Talent management (DeLong 2011, Rothwell 2011)

In this thesis, however, I will focus mainly on the second activity which organizations can put themselves in control of. However, in the literature review, one will see links to other two activities because they tend to be interrelated in literature.

The limitations of this thesis are largely linked to the aims mentioned. The literature which will be the base of my theory section will be a compilation and combination of theories from several areas within organizational studies. I will limit myself to not go beyond theories on knowledge management (and knowledge retention), organizational learning, psychology and social psychology, strategy, organizational culture, and intellectual capital. I will also use whatever empirical knowledge retention research that is available, as supported by management literature. I will compile and simultaneously rationalize my choice of theoretical ideas for the sake of creating an existing and relevant theoretical background, to start off, as well as for comparative purposes with the empirical data in the discussion part.

The empirical limitation of my thesis is that this is a single-case study on an organization based in Finland (within a specific base industry) that is knowingly
experiencing an older age distribution, and taking some action on it in terms of knowledge retention. The reason for this kind of sampling is to avoid investigating organizations that don’t regard knowledge management whatsoever or that have extremely sophisticated systems. In the prior case, there would be nothing to research on, and in the latter, there may not reveal any fascinating accounts of development in knowledge retention.

1.4. Definitions

Knowledge
Knowledge is the capacity to act and make decisions effectively within the context for organized activities. (DeLong 2004)

Lost knowledge
Assuming DeLong’s (2004) definition of knowledge, lost knowledge can be seen as a diminished capacity for action and making decisions effectively, within the context of organized activities.

Knowledge management
Knowledge management encompasses effective learning processes that involve doing research, drawing on knowledge, and sharing human knowledge (tacit, implicit, and explicit), through the use of appropriate technology and cultural environments to raise an organization’s intellectual capital and ability to perform. (Jashapara 2004)

Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y
Baby boomers are people categorized as belonging to the generation born between 1946 and 1964 when there was a great increase, a boom, in nativity around the whole world. This presumably is a reflection on the economic growth that began around this time. (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:3-9) The baby boomers are currently the biggest age bracket in the workforce (Ball & Gotsill 2011:2) and are in 2011 going to be between the ages of 47 and 65. They are twice as large as the succeeding generation. Born between 1965 and 1979 (Ball & Gotsill 2011:17), this generation, Generation X, or Gen X, is sometimes referred to as the Baby-bust generation. (Bell et al. 1992:63) Generation Y, or Gen Y, is the following generation, born between 1980 and 1995, also sometimes referred to as the Echo-boomer generation. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:17) Even though the baby boomers did not produce nearly as much infants as their preceding generation, due to the massive size of the Baby Boomer generation, Gen Y is still relatively big. This is why it is referred to as being an ‘echo’ of the baby boomers.
1.5. Thesis structure

The thesis will have consisted of 6 main parts; Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Results and Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusions. In the introduction, the thesis’ problem question and aims were presented. The Literature Review chapter will be a review of some of the relevant existing theory which is finally compiled into a set of theoretical factors that need to be taken into account in knowledge retention. The Method chapter will present the methodology and research design of Grounded Theory to which this thesis largely pertains. The Results and Analysis chapter will consist of a presentation of the empirical data as well as the results of the analysis of it. The Discussion chapter will present theory-building factors as well as novel factors, as derived from the empirical data analysis. Finally, the Conclusions will deal with to what extent the aims and objectives of the thesis have been met, in order to give closure to the paper.

Figure 1: Thesis Structure
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that will be taken into account with regard to knowledge retention comes from a variety of disciplines within the realm of organizational studies. This due to two interrelated reasons:

1. The knowledge interest is definitely not esoteric; knowledge retention does not concern managers or only the select few who have interest in it. (Jashapara 2004:52) This is because,

2. Knowledge retention involves the initiative, input, and involvement of people and functions from many parts of the organization, whether it be HR, management, finance etc. (DeLong 2004:5-7)

The forthcoming sub-chapters will provide an overview of the theoretical framework that surrounds and together integrate to form the notion of knowledge retention as well as the factors that should be taken into account when initiating knowledge retention.

First, the demographic realities will be described. This is to inform the readers of the relevance of this research project. Next, the concept of knowledge will be introduced, unraveled and described in order to set the stage for the discipline of knowledge retention (and where knowledge management fits in). Subsequently, the different origins and inspirations of knowledge retention (and management) will be described, beginning with organizational learning, in order to understand how organizations develop and nurture their knowledge base. After this, a set of factors (based on existing theory) that should be taken into account when initiating knowledge retention will be presented. Within this context, some psychology and social psychology theory will be dealt with, as well as power relations and organizational politics, in order to understand the different inter-personal barriers that may exist to initiating knowledge retention and transfer. Theory on integrating knowledge management and retention into organization strategy will be looked at in order to raise the importance of cross-discipline. Then we will proceed to look at knowledge retention as it is related to organizational culture. Finally, some theory on intellectual capital will be brought in, in order to assert the importance of how knowledge retention initiatives relate to financial measurements and are of financial concern to organizations.
All in all, recognizing all of the mentioned areas for theoretical reference and prior research will serve to form a cross-disciplinary view on what factors to take into account when initiating knowledge retention as an increasing number of employees leave for retirement. A propositional diagram will be constructed to demonstrate the interrelatedness of all these factors, as derived from the theory.

2.1.1. The baby boomer generation retiring and its implications for organizations

The baby boomer generation is the name given to the cohort of people born between the years 1946 and 1964. (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:3) A person born between these years is referred to as a ‘baby boomer’ or, simply, ‘boomer’. This time frame was a time of unprecedented fertility rates, experienced all over the post-Second World War world. This incredible boom in fertility has consequently given birth to the name ‘baby boom’. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:17)

This boom is clearly reflected in the demographics of the world workforce. (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:7). The baby boomers will be reaching ages between 47 and 65 in 2011, or in other words they are reaching (and some have already reached) their eligible retirement age. Together they make up the biggest age sector of the workforce today. So why is this a concern? Looking more closely at fertility rates after the baby boom, we see that fertility rates actually slumped dramatically. The period after the baby boom, between the years 1965 and 1979 (Ball & Gotsill 2011:17) is sometimes referred to as the Baby-bust. (Bell et al. 1992:63) Figure 4 shows a graph of fertility rates in the U.S. between the period of 1940 and 1995.
The Baby-bust generation is also sometimes known as Generation X, or Gen X. Bear in mind that Gen Xers are now the workers who make up the middle age bracket in the workforce. They are around 31 to 46 years old and most have already been working for over 10 years, but they are much smaller than the boomer generation. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:10)

The generation which comes after Gen X, is known as Gen Y, or the Echo-boomer generation, and they were born between 1980 and 1995. Thus, many of these have just entered the workforce, and will be entering it in the years to come. They are known as the Echo-boomers because they are an ‘echo’ of their boomer parents in the sense that they are much bigger in number than their preceding generation (Gen X) but not as big the boomer one. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:17)

Many of the boomers have worked their whole life time within only one or very few organizations. Because of this they have built a huge knowledge base concerning how specific things work (know-what), how you get things done (know-how), and who you can work together with (know-who). These types of experiential related knowledge are very hard to replace or repeat, because they have developed over a long period of time, through unprecedented technological and scientific progress. They are often “inflexible, rule-based, and rooted in historical design decisions that may not be documented” (DeLong 2004:18) The different types of knowledge, know-what, know-how, and know-who, will be presented later.
Even though the baby boomer phenomenon implies an upcoming shortage in labor, the *biggest challenge lies in replacing a large number of very talented employees with people that have insufficient experience.* (DeLong 2004:19) When the natural resignation of the workforce increases and takes with them important knowledge and experience, organizations must take initiative to retain as much as possible of this knowledge capital to minimize the risk of diminishing productivity. Therefore, it is important to understand the different factors to take into account when initiating knowledge retention in an organization in order to make it work as efficiently as possible.

2.1.2. **What is knowledge?**

Jashapara (2004) describes knowledge as the ability to use information and data to draw conclusions and makes decisions, what he calls actionable information. First off it is important to distinguish between 'data' and 'information'.

2.1.2.1. **Data**

Jashapara (2004:14-18) starts off this discussion with the most basic component of knowledge; data. The description of data is dependent on whether it is looked at from the receiver’s or sender’s point of view. As receivers, humans receive data as signals from the external world through our senses. This data stimulates our brain and is shaped through our experiences and ‘saved’ in our minds as ‘facts’. However, these facts can be distorted by our own perceptions. From a sender’s point of view, data is transmitted to other human’s senses. A sender of data can also distort the data to a certain extent so that it is understood wrongly. (A good example that illustrates this point is the ‘Chinese whispers’ game.)

2.1.2.2. **Information**

According to Meadows (2001), information can be referred to as ‘systemically organized data’. In other words it can be thought of as the next step towards knowledge from data, so to speak. The idea of it being ‘systematic’ implies that it is a way of turning data into something that one can make predictions and inferences from. An arbitrary example of a set of systematically organized data would be a set of numbers placed in order of size, from smallest to biggest. If not in a systematized and organized
manner, these numbers may seem simply as random numbers, or in the context of this discussion, mere meaningless data.

2.1.2.3. Knowledge

Knowledge is something which has been given many definitions. DeLong (2004) defines knowledge from a corporate angle. He says that knowledge is the capacity to act and make decisions effectively within the context for organized activities. As mentioned earlier, Jashapara (2004) describes knowledge as the ability to use information and data to draw conclusions and make decisions, what he calls actionable information. Leonard & Swap (2005) take these ideas a step further by more intricately describing the kind of knowledge contextual to the subject of knowledge retention. They bring up the notion of the existence of “deep smarts” (Leonard & Swap 2005), a kind of metaphor to describe the engrained knowledge that exists in employee’s minds, which is built on experiences and social contacts within an organization. Knowledge within an organization can, as such, conclusively be defined as a collection knowing about something, knowing how to do something (Jashapara’s actionable information), and knowing who to contact when in need (Leonard & Swap 2005), accumulated through experience. (ibid) Respectively, these have commonly become known as know-what, know-how, and know-who. (Leonard & Swap 2005, Ryle 1949) I will be using this terminology throughout the coming chapters.

2.1.2.4. Explicit, implicit, and tacit knowledge

“We can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 1966:4)

In order for organizations to be able to successfully capture and transfer knowledge from retiring employees they need to understand the different types of knowledge that exist. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:57)

There are 3 general types of knowledge that can exist. These are explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, and tacit knowledge. (Nonaka 1994:16) These three types are shown in Figure 3. Explicit knowledge is knowledge which can easily be expressed in speech or text form. (Nickols 2000:2) This is because it is objective and rational. (Davenport & Prusak 1998,2000) The biggest portion of know-what could be said to be composed of explicit knowledge. Implicit knowledge is knowledge that can be expressed through the action of doing something, but it is unintentionally or
unconsciously expressed. (NCBI 1990) In other words it is knowledge that an individual has the ability to articulate but hasn’t yet done. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:47) Tacit knowledge is the type of knowledge which you cannot articulate directly, for example the knowledge of how to ride a bike or tie a shoe. In a corporate context, tacit knowledge is often something which its possessor has never tried to make explicit. It is knowledge that is subjective and experiential. (Davenport & Prusak 1998, 2000) It can be argued that know-how is characterized as being made up of knowledge that exists both implicitly and tacitly.

Figure 3: Explicit, Implicit, and Tacit Knowledge (Nickols, 2010)

The above process flow diagram is a good tool for understanding how to categorize knowledge by following the process. The input, or “Start”, is a certain fact, piece of information, or skill that you wish to analyze. Asking yourself whether it has been articulated or not, may lead to you to suspect that it is explicit. If not, you need to ask yourself if it can be articulated or not, which will lead you to believe that it is either tacit or implicit. As simple as it may seem, this diagram is a good starting point in order to understand how people’s knowledge bases should be captured. As we will see later on, different methods are needed with respect to which knowledge type one seeks to capture as well as store. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:42)

Most theory, however, would challenge the above diagram by Nickols (2010) because of its simplicity. Even though it is a helpful tool, it assumes that knowledge only exists within either one of the three levels. However, the generally accepted knowledge theory posits that knowledge exists in a continuum (Polanyi 1967) and on a spectrum (Leonard
& Sensiper 1998), meaning that it can move between levels and that it can exist on multiple levels. Figure 4 illustrates the idea of a knowledge spectrum quite well.

**Figure 4: Tacit and explicit knowledge are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Implicit knowledge exists somewhere in the middle. (Leonard & Sensiper 1998:113)**

All in all, in the context of this thesis, one could conclude that one should aim at an extensive method for capturing all levels.

### 2.1.2.5. Knowledge conversions

That knowledge exists along a continuum rather than as distinct entities is something which is acknowledged in knowledge management today. The assumption of knowledge existing on a continuum brings forth the idea that the human brain can make knowledge move from being explicit to tacit (through extensive experience) and vice versa. Nonaka (1994) and Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) are probably the most prominent in bringing this up. They build on Polanyi's (1967) categories of tacit and explicit knowledge, that knowledge can be converted from one form into another, and that different knowledge on different levels can also be shared between humans. A model illustrating these conversions, sometimes known as the SECI model, is shown in Figure 5.
Next, some descriptions of each conversion are given, as interpreted by Jashapara (2004:49), followed by some arbitrary examples in a corporate context. From tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge is known as *socialization*, which can be achieved through shared experience and interaction. For instance, an employee may learn from another employee by working together with him/her. From explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge is the process of *combination*. Here, existing knowledge is reconfigured by sorting, adding, re-categorizing and re-contextualizing it, leading to new explicit knowledge. For instance, a new employee may be asked to convert a database from outdated software to newer software, whereby he/she learns and creates new explicit knowledge. Converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge (which is the most complicated) is known as *externalization*. Here metaphors and figurative language is used to try and explain something which is difficult to explain concretely. For instance, the way an experienced salesperson makes a sale is difficult to describe because it involves so many subjective and even emotional factors. Thus, explaining it figuratively may aid in externalizing it. Finally, the process of converting explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge is known as *internalization*. This is something which happens through repetition and gained experience.

In conclusion, the common understanding is that tacit knowledge exists everywhere on some level, and therefore also within organizational settings. The implication of this, with relation to my research problem, is that there exists knowledge that can be extremely difficult to transfer from a retiree to a successor. While explicit knowledge
can be relatively easily transferred from person to person (Davenport & Prusak 1998, 2000), a possessor of tacit knowledge is often not even fully aware of the tacit knowledge that he/she possesses. Leonard & Swap (2005) believe that the only way for a successor to absorb tacit knowledge is to learn it from the ground up through experience combined with observation, or even to re-learn it entirely on their own.

2.1.2.6. Lost knowledge

If we assume Jashapara’s (2004) earlier given definition of knowledge as being a capacity for action and making decisions effectively, then lost knowledge can be seen as a diminished capacity for action and making decisions effectively, within the context of organized activity. A diminishment of being able to make effective decisions is of course something highly undesirable in any organization.

DeLong (2004) describes lost knowledge through the notion of organizational memory. Organizational memory is characterized by three main activities, which are the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of knowledge. (Walsh & Ungson 1991:57-91) DeLong (2004) encompasses these as part of knowledge retention activities. He says that knowledge retention is, effectively, the act of building organizational memory. In effect then, lost knowledge could be said to diminish organizational memory. (DeLong 2004:24)

The indirect financial cost of losing knowledge is also an important factor here, which links in with two things; the awareness of losing knowledge, and measurements for ‘counting’ knowledge assets. The complexity of knowledge retention programs have proven to be very time consuming and requires a lot of effort from all areas of an organization. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:92) Thus, it should be recognized that knowledge retention is definitely not free.

In behavioral psychology theory, the process of ‘unlearning’ (Hedberg 1981) is brought up, which closely resonates with the notion of lost knowledge, or as a process, losing knowledge. Unlearning actually occurs while learning, in the sense that new knowledge replaces the old. However, Hedberg (1981) also points out that problems often are triggers to unlearning. One of the main triggers to organizational unlearning is people, namely “when key individuals leave the organization, taking with them the experiences of procedures and processes from the organizational memory” (Jashapara 2004:75). Assuming that experience of procedures and processes are an essential part of an
organization’s knowledge base, the retirement of employees who also are possessors of experiential knowledge can have a vast negative ‘unlearning’ impact on an organization. Thus, from a behavioral psychology perspective, organizations losing knowledge is very similar to organizational unlearning.

2.1.3. **Knowledge retention and knowledge management**

The idea of managing knowledge as a competitive asset to a corporation is new to the general workplace. (Davenport & Prusak 1998, 2000) This is where knowledge management as a discipline fits in. Ball & Gotsill (2011:60) summarize knowledge management as being comprised of knowledge capture, knowledge transfer and knowledge retention. Jashapara (2004) describes knowledge management as something interdisciplinary, combining many different dimensions. He defines knowledge management as effective learning processes that have to do with research, use of knowledge, and sharing knowledge (tacit and explicit). Relating to the definition of Ball & Gotsill (2011), Jashapara (2004) says the main purpose of knowledge management is to foster an organization’s intellectual capital and improve performance. He also lists the different disciplines where knowledge management is rooted; strategy, psychology, HRM, philosophy, sociology, economics, anthropology, and some others. He then goes on to categorize these into the content that overlaps in all the discipline roots. These are: strategic management, organizational learning, and knowledge management tools. Within strategic management we find learning organization, culture, intellectual capital, and knowledge management systems. The importance here is not how they are interlinked, but to show the cross-disciplinary properties of knowledge management, and portray how many very different kinds of factors can have an impact on knowledge management (and retention) through these links.

For this research project, however, the emphasis will be within knowledge retention activities. Knowledge retention has a strong relation to knowledge management, and knowledge retention is certainly a core part of knowledge management. However, as pointed out, other functions are needed as well, such as talent and career management, succession planning, cultural management, etc.

Figure 6 below shows how knowledge management and knowledge retention correlate with each other. It also helps in conceptualizing and understanding the structure and iteration of the different parts of the theoretical background to this thesis.
Figure 6: An integrated framework of the disciplines that this thesis encompasses

Drawing on the previous definitions and concepts, knowledge retention infers activities to prevent the problems associated with lost knowledge from occurring, as can be seen in Figure 6 by DeLong (2004). It is essentially comprised of 3 different activities: knowledge acquisition, knowledge storing, and knowledge retrieval.

Figure 7: Knowledge Retention Activities (DeLong, 2004)

One very similar theoretical concept to knowledge management is that of organizational learning. Easterby-Smith (1997) identifies that the disciplines of organizational learning are psychology, management science, sociology, strategy, and
culture anthropology. Even though the study of organizational learning is much younger than knowledge management, it has proven to play an important part in the foundation of the literature on knowledge management. (Jashapara 2004:59) Most research made on organizational learning is of a qualitative nature because of the difficulty to produce effective quantitative measurements. (Jashapara 2004:68)

For the purpose of this thesis, I will be interested in looking at the information-processing perspective of organizational learning as proposed by Huber (1991). This process will be further looked at by considering its relation to knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory (as suggested by Jashapara, 2004). Also, I will look at the impact of politics on learning, an area which is largely overlooked in the field of organizational learning.

If we now take a look at a generally accepted definition of organizational learning we will get a better understanding of what organizational learning means for organizations:

“Organizational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding” (Fiol & Lyles 1985)

Thus, without organizational learning there is no process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding, neither on a collective (group and organization) level, and therefore, nor on the individual level (because the two levels are inseparable as seen earlier).

Huber (1991) presents organizational learning as a framework with a behavioral perspective. His framework can be used to describe how organizations have built up their organizational knowledge base. The framework encompasses four functions: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organizational memory. From a knowledge retention perspective the two most prominent and relevant functions are knowledge acquisition (because it tells where and how an organization’s knowledge base forms), and organizational memory (because this is what suffers when knowledge is lost). “Knowledge acquisition is seen as the process by which knowledge is obtained [and] organizational memory is the means by which knowledge is stored for future use.” (Jashapara 2004:69 derived from Huber 1991) The other two functions, information distribution and interpretation, are
important in knowledge retention from the perspective of organizational culture. This notion with relation to knowledge retention will be brought up in chapter 2.1.6.

2.1.3.1. Knowledge acquisition

Huber (1991) describes knowledge acquisition as the process through which organizations build up their knowledge base. *Identifying the knowledge acquisition processes helps to understand what the core knowledge sources and resources are and how knowledge has been built up.* There are 5 knowledge acquisition constructs; congenital learning, experiential learning, vicarious learning, grafting, and searching and noticing. Congenital learning is inherited knowledge from the founding fathers of an organization. Its influence is not always pronounced, but depending on the organization it may be reflected in the way new knowledge is interpreted. (Jashapara 2004:70)

Experiential learning builds up knowledge through ‘learning by doing’, and thus, from a knowledge base perspective can be reflected in the form of stories, accounts, statistics, reports etc. Vicarious learning is the learning that is done by looking at other organizations or by getting advice from consultants or publications. This may not always be pronounced either, unless it is official, such as a consultancy report. Grafting is a type of learning that happens when people with certain skills or knowledge are employed to fill a shortage of that skill or knowledge. These skills and knowledge are thus resident on a highly individual level. Searching and noticing is a form of intentional learning whereby new knowledge is identified from within. For instance, a manager may seek to document the non-routine, yet relevant, knowledge needed for a particular task. (Jashapara 2004:71 as proposed by Huber 1991)

In conclusion, understanding where an organization’s knowledge base originates from is an important starting point when thinking about knowledge retention activities because it will make it easier to track down where valuable knowledge is contained in the organization and thereby also its possessors.

2.1.3.2. Organizational memory

The other relevant function in Huber’s (1991) framework for organizational learning is organizational memory. In this thesis’ context, it can be considered as the collective knowledge base of an organization. Figuratively, this is what an organization can
remember. It is often scattered, with some people having a larger chunk of organizational memory in their individual minds, and as such they are important possessors of knowledge. If they leave an organization due to retirement, that part of the organizational memory may be forever lost (Jashapara 2004:73). Jashapara (2004) recognizes the importance of Huber’s (1991) ‘organizational memory’ by identifying some circumstances where it can be invaluable to an organization. For example, it may include knowledge of how to diagnose and error in a piece of complex technology, the knowledge of an organization’s skills, experts, and resources, and so on. These ideas resonate closely with the notions of know-how and know-who, or tacit and implicit knowledge, the ‘difficult’ knowledge types that people can possess. Similarly, as pointed out earlier, not only are these knowledge types very difficult to identify, convert, and transfer, but they can be vital to maintaining an organization’s competitiveness.

Organizational memory can also exist collectively. In psychology, two forms of memory, semantic and episodic memory, can be related to this discussion. (Stein & Zwass 1995) Semantic memory is memory (or knowledge) that is built from shared interpretations of events, but is not personally experienced. In organization this type of memory usually exists in the form of manuals or instructional notes. Episodic memory is shared interpretations and collective understandings of events that the collective has personally experienced. These may not necessarily be documented in any way, but the memory of it exists collectively. The implications of this are not as serious as the non-documentation of knowledge that exists on an individual level. However, when an organization downsizes this could of course theoretically deteriorate the collective knowledge base quite drastically.

An important part of an organization’s knowledge base and organizational learning is known as organizational routines. (Jashapara 2004:75) The term defines itself quite well, in the sense that it refers to the “mechanical notions of computer programs” (Jashapara 2004:75 as interpreted from Cyert & March 1963, March & Simon 1958) which are based on routines and subroutines. Levitt & March (1988) talk about organizational routines as being embedded in organizations’ cultures and beliefs and that they often go against the written rules found in manuals or procedural literature. Because it is embedded in the culture, people leaving an organization should theoretically not have an effect on these routines.

Organizational routines have also been analyzed in literature on the psychology of memory, in order to understand how routines can be embedded on the individual level
as well. Cohen & Bacdayan (1994) use the terms procedural and declarative memory instead of knowledge when referring to this. Here, procedural memory is the storage of cognitive and motor skills that are associated with an individual’s skilled actions. This could be considered as an individual’s know-how (Jashapara 2004:76). As we saw earlier, the property of know-how is that it is hard to explicate; it is tacit. Declarative memory, then, is the know-what, the “repository of facts, propositions, and events” (Jashapara 2004:76), or the explicit, easy-to-articulate, knowledge. The theoretical problematization here is that, in relation to organizational routines and ultimately knowledge retention, organizational routines are generally tacit, but occur collectively. It is difficult to tap organizational routines because it would require making something that employees are largely unaware of to be explicated. (Cohen & Bacdayan 1994) The resonance with Nonaka’s (1994) third hypothesized mode of knowledge conversion, ‘externalization’, is impeccable.

At first sight, however, organizational routines may seem like the most stable form of organizational memory due to it being deeply embedded in culture. However, there has been research made on discovering the actual stability of organizational routines, and what can alter them. Feldman & Rafaeli (2002) identify that organizational routines are greatly dependent on the connections between individuals, which in turn facilitate for information transfer that occurs between connected individuals. The outcomes of these connections are social support and knowledge transfer (Jashapara 2004:77). The ties between individuals provide a forum for understanding their organization’s context (what they are collectively doing and why), performance expectations, power relations (e.g. politics and hierarchies), and organizational identity. In other words, the implications of individuals going into retirement can obviously deteriorate on the two outcomes (social support and knowledge transfer). Individuals’ social support and knowledge transfer is narrowed, and their ability to ‘make sense’ out of their work is worsened.

In the following sub-chapters we will present 9 identified factors that should be considered in knowledge retention initiatives, based on literature reviewed. Firstly, the factors that relate to organizational strategy and how knowledge retention should be embedded will be presented. Then, organizational culture factors will be examined, as it has an impact on the effectiveness of implemented knowledge retention. Finally, intellectual capital will be introduced as a factor (and explained) in the context of knowledge retention, where the importance investment calculations is emphasized.
2.2. Factors that affect knowledge retention

Next, several factors will be presented which have been found to affect knowledge retention. They will be easier to understand bearing in mind the previously described and defined notions. In addition, it should be said that they have been numerically assigned because they have been ordered in a logical step-by-step manner. This not only makes it easier to follow, but also more practically useful.

2.2.1. Power relations and politics in organizational learning

Regarding organizational learning as a whole, the power relations and internal politics of an organization can have a very strong influence on the extent to which knowledge is shared. Vince (2001) investigates the psychological effects that politics and power can have on individuals in an organization. According to Vince (2001) learning in organizations on an individual level is determined by anxiety and how individuals relate to one another. Assuming this is the case, this can have a very strong impact on the way that learning occurs and on “the nature of learning spaces in organizations” (Jashapara 2004:81). Positive emotions make people express themselves more in social situations, and as such, anxiety is an inhibitor of this. Anxiety, which is almost always coupled and sometimes confused with fear (Ramaiah 2008 and Kaplan, Harold, Benjamin, Dadock 1994), is a negative emotion, and is likely to cause people to express themselves much less, making knowledge sharing less common. The reality is that politically competitive environments, promoted by strict hierarchical structures, also have the impact on employees’ behavior by making them more anxious. This can prevent effective communication between employees as each individual seeks to act in their own personal interest. (Coopey & Burgoyne 2000) This interest is driven by the political tensions in the organization in what Jashapara (2004:82) calls a “cycle of fear which perpetuates indefinitely as relationships reinforce an individual's emotional make-up”. From the knowledge retention perspective, this means that over time, individuals increasingly develop a power to control what knowledge they share and with whom. As we will see in later, politics in this manner can play a big role in how organizational culture impacts knowledge retention.

2.2.2. Organizational culture

One of the core functions in knowledge retention is the transfer of knowledge from retiring individuals to the organization. The literature identifies several barriers to
knowledge transfer, but one of the recurring ones is organizational culture. In other words, an organization needs to make sure that its culture is supportive of knowledge transfer for knowledge retention to be successful. DeLong (2004) points out that if the organizational culture does not promote knowledge sharing, there is no use in trying to implement knowledge retention.

Organizational culture incorporates values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that are explicated through dynamic interactions. (Jashapara 2004, Brown 1998) Thus, people are seen as members of a social system. In this manner, we can see that the organizational culture stems from a ‘soup’ of aspects in the social environments that collectively occur. The idea behind changing an organization’s culture is that it can be done from either direction. Changing norms or artifacts (which are temporary and subject to physical control) could theoretically influence the values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions of employees. The other approach is to directly try and influence the employees’ values, beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes.

2.2.2.1. Values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions

The values of an organization’s culture exist on four different levels. (Lencioni 2002) According to Jashapara (2004:186) the failure of many knowledge management systems is more often due to cultural factors than any other ones. Thus, it is also important to know the difference between cultural values to avoid any confusion. These are core values, aspirational values, permission-to-play, and accidental values.

The core values are principles which are deeply engrained, and generally act as a guide to the organization’s actions. They are sometimes traceable back to the values of the founders of the organization. Interestingly, it could be correlated with Huber’s (1991) notion of ‘congenital learning’ (see chapter 2.1.5.1). Because of the inherent properties of core values, they will never be compromised, and as such are very difficult to change. Of course, core values can be intentionally modified by managers through the development of value statements, bearing in mind that it is of equal importance that they reflect these values in their rhetoric. If they don’t manifest the values in their own behavior, the effects may be employee mistrust in management and de-motivation to work (Jashapara 2004:192). However, if the values are reflected in their actions, managers can “reinforce individual commitment and willingness to give energy and loyalty to an organization. Individuals may make sacrifices and investments based on corporate values.” (Jashapara 2004:193) In other words, from a knowledge retention
perspective, if an organization’s core values are correctly implemented, employees may be more willing to share knowledge.

Aspirational values are values which an organization wishes to pursue. They are often part of a strategic intent, and as such could be considered something which the organization needs for the future, but currently does not have. (Jashapara 2004:192) It is evident, that for the purposes of this research these are the values which will play an immensely important role when implementing a knowledge retention strategy (as we will see in chapter 2.1.7). In addition, if the core values are correctly implemented, the employees will be more likely to adhere to new aspirational values, such as when creating a knowledge retention strategy.

Permission-to-play values are the minimum required values which any employee must have in order to be accepted by social standards. This could be compared to the notion of cultural knowledge (Ball & Gotsill 2011), which is discussed in sub-chapter 2.1.6.4. Finally, *accidental values are the values which develop on their own with time*. It is a reflection of the commonly accumulated values of the employees. These may be either positive or negative, depending on the aspirational values. In the context of creating a culture that supports knowledge-sharing, for instance, the value of personal achievements, doesn’t promote communication between employees because it enhances competitiveness between them. They do, however, promote innovation which may be desirable in other contexts. Another undesirable value could be that ‘knowledge is power’ (as discussed in sub-chapter 2.1.5.4) which would cause anxiety among employees and as a result cause them to moderate the extent to which they wish to express themselves and share knowledge.

Beliefs, another component of organizational culture, are not the same as values because they are less permanent. Literally, it means what employees think is true. Even though they are hard to distinguish from each other, one way to look at it is to think of values as enduring beliefs. (Rokeach 1973) Attitudes, then, are the manifestations that “connect our beliefs and values with feelings” (Jashapara 2004:193 adapted from Brown 1998). They have an impact on employees’ motivation. Prejudices are an example of attitudes. Assumptions are what employees take for granted, and is closely related to organizational routines (Jashapara 2004:75,193).
2.2.2.2. Developing a knowledge-sharing culture

“Knowledge-sharing cultures are more conducive to knowledge creation and enhanced performance” (Jashapara 2004:199)

Above is one of the primary assumptions in knowledge management literature. The phrase itself is not difficult to comprehend, but understanding how to turn knowledge sharing into a part of organizational culture is problematic.

Nonaka & Konno’s (1998) idea of ‘deploying artifacts’ is built on Nonaka’s (1991) earlier SECI model, illustrated in Figure 5, of four different knowledge conversions. Deploying artifacts assumes that organizational culture can be influenced by changing norms and artifacts (Schein 1985). However, Nonaka & Konno (1998) do not go in-depth into whether the artifacts themselves influence values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions. However, we can see how an organization’s aspirational values, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions theoretically could be changed in order to create a knowledge-sharing culture.

Nonaka & Konno (1998) have built on their SECI model, by simply placing a new term in each box. These terms refer to something they call ‘Ba’, which is a Japanese word for ‘space’ or ‘place’ (Jashapara 2004:200). In socialization, the space is called ‘Originating Ba’. In Externalization, the space is called ‘Interacting Ba’. In Combination, it is called ‘Cyber Ba’, and in Internalization it is called ‘Exercising Ba’. The idea is that different artifacts can be deployed in order to support whichever knowledge conversion or transfer that is desired.

For example, if tacit-to-tacit knowledge is desired, then a space or place where individuals can share feelings, emotions, experiences, and other tacit knowledge should be employed; Originating Ba. Here, a stimulation of aspirational values which support tacit-to-tacit knowledge transfer, such as care and commitment (Jashapara 2004:201), would theoretically occur.

In order to promote tacit-to-explicit knowledge conversion or transfer, a space or place where individuals can have dialogue to share their own understandings is needed; Interacting Ba. This would entail a stimulation of aspirational values such as care and trust.
If one wanted to facilitate for explicit-to-explicit knowledge conversion or transfer, one should create a space or place where documentation, databases, and other IT-tools are in place; Cyber Ba. This would help to promote aspirational values for routinizing knowledge capture, collection, and sharing.

Finally, if one were to want to convert or transfer explicit to tacit knowledge one should create a space or place where individuals can “reflect through learning, training, and mentoring” (Jashapara 2004:201), also known as the Exercising Ba. Here, the aspirational values that would theoretically be promoted would be learning-by-doing, for instance, which would help employees realize the importance for everybody to gain experience.

2.2.3. Care

Out of the aspirational values mentioned earlier, ‘care’ has been shown to be the best facilitator for fostering knowledge. (von Krough 1998) The characterization of care is “mutual trust, active empathy, access to help, lenience in judgment, and courage” (Jashapara 2004:201). The suggestion is that if employees cared more about each other, the organizational culture would be more supportive and cooperative. There are several ways to cultivate care, and in order to do so organizations should (Jashapara 2004):

1. Have incentives for encouraging caring behavior.

2. Initiate mentoring programs which couple senior employees with inexperienced employees encouraging knowledge transfer.

3. Initiate training programs in caring behavior.

4. Allow time for collective reflection sessions after projects have been finalized.

5. Arrange social gatherings to encourage inter-employee friendships.

Even though it may seem logical that if employees care about each other they will be more cooperative and, hence, share knowledge, it has also been shown that the most effective organizations tend to have employees struggling between being cooperative and competitive. (Jashapara 2003) Basically, if one imagines there being two typologies existent for organizational culture, ‘cooperative’ and ‘competitive’, the most effective organizations find their cultures being somewhere in the middle.
2.2.4. How leaders exhibit their values

Good leaders have a natural power to influence individuals in organizations to act and behave in a certain way. They do this by reflecting the cultural values in their own behavior and actions. (Jashapara 2004:233) Consistently engaging in symbolic actions that reinforce aspirational values such as ‘care’ can facilitate for knowledge sharing cultures to emerge and develop. An example of a symbolic act to reflect ‘care’ is through the way a leader uses their time, for instance when a manager frequently visiting ground level functions and operations to engage in conversation with employees. These kinds of acts demonstrate to the employees what values are important to the manager or leader. (Brown 1998) Other ways to turn employees in a certain cultural direction is to arrange activities, or rites. Also, existing rites can be adapted to new aspirational values, and rites that discourage those values can be removed. However, it is not only leaders who can affect cultural change. Interventions by HR can also be used to demonstrate aspirational values. Brown (1998) provides some examples on HR interventions, such as changing performance appraisal, reward, and recognition norms. In the context of knowledge retention, this would entail rewarding employees who exhibit caring. In other words, an employee who is willing to engage in sharing knowledge is recognized in some way, which in turn motivates him/her to continue displaying that behavior. An accumulation of employees displaying certain behaviors that promote knowledge sharing can help to facilitate cultural change that supports knowledge retention.

2.2.5. Strategy integration

One can safely say that most of the literature that concerns knowledge management (and knowledge retention) puts a lot of emphasis on strategy, strategic intent and implementation (Ball & Gotsill 2011, DeLong 2004, DeLong & Trautman 2011, Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006, Jashapara 2004, Leonard & Swap 2005, Liebowitz 2009, Rothwell 2011) In knowledge management strategy, the two main pillars have been said to be technology and human resource considerations. (Jashapara 2004:157) Nonetheless, an important starting point for aligning knowledge retention with strategy is investigating how knowledge retention can relate to an organization’s business strategy. There are several schools of thought with relation to this. The most prominent one is the institutionalist perspective which involves exploring the notions of resource-based and knowledge-based views of the firm. From this, the idea of a knowledge management strategy has emerged (Jashapara 2004). In exploring how
knowledge retention can be integrated with business strategy, these ideas will be used, and several factors that related to strategy will be presented.

2.2.5.1. The industry

The industry in which an organization acts has an influence on the type of business strategy that is in place, because it is contingent to market conditions and competitiveness. From a knowledge perspective, Eisenhardt & Martin (2000) point out that market conditions also define the type of knowledge that is relied on. In stable and moderately dynamic market conditions managers tend to rely quite heavily on existing tacit knowledge. In rapidly changing and volatile markets, managers rely much less on existing knowledge and as such, knowledge is created ad-hoc and is highly contextual with time. In this sense, organizations that are in stable market conditions tend to have a much larger established knowledge base, and as such they are more susceptible to experiencing lost knowledge as a problem in their everyday business.

2.2.5.2. Core competences

The idea here is that learning shapes strategy, and learning is based on capabilities or competences. (Hamel & Prahalad 1989, Prahalad & Hamel 1990) The core competences (or capabilities) could be seen as the accumulation of organizational learning. In other words, the organization’s knowledge base is the root of its core competences. We can iterate this to Lencioni’s (2002) notion of ‘core values’ being inherent drivers of an organization’s actions, as well as Huber’s (1991) ‘congenital learning’, or the knowledge which is deeply engrained in core values. A turn of an organization’s strategic direction can be achieved through this learning process. In conclusion, the nurturing of core values can help to nurture core competences and as such can create support for a knowledge retention strategy.

2.2.5.3. Formulating intent and objectives

Another concept in the institutionalist perspective of strategy is strategic intent and it provides the drivers for an organization’s employees’ motivation and commitment. In order to create a strategic intent, Hamel and Prahalad (1989) identify several demands from senior management of which two are especially relevant; creating a sense of urgency, and establishing clear milestones and review mechanisms. In the context of boomers and knowledge walking out the door, managers must respond by modifying
or recreating a strategy that takes this into account through making a case for knowledge loss and establishing goals, investment calculations, and measurements. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:91-95) Once this is in place, they must analyze and promote conditions for effective knowledge transfer (Argote 1999,2005:167), while identifying the existing barriers (e.g. culture). Then, the actual strategy can be formulated, beginning with identifying liabilities and responsibilities to sustain the strategy (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:25). Clear objectives must be set so that employees know how to engage themselves as well to ensure that the effectiveness of knowledge retention activities can be measured. The alignment with other investments and budgets is also important in order to evaluate the resources available. (Greve 2003:106-107) Supporting HR activities (e.g. succession planning) need to be in place, and appropriate knowledge transfer methods need to be chosen once the key individuals and the type of knowledge they possess have been identified. (DeLong 2004)

2.2.5.4. Aspirations vs. resources

All in all, there are many factors that need to be considered in a variety of different actions that need to be taken. Being able to face up to all these challenges and completely fulfilling all the requirements is not practically possible. There may be incongruence between an organization’s resources and its aspirations. ‘Resources’ in the context of knowledge retention strategy formulation are time, human capital, and knowledge capital. If an organization has a lot of resources but low aspirations, it is known as a low ‘stretch’ circumstance. However, what organizations likely will encounter is having very high ‘stretch’ aspirations, driven by the high ambition of retaining all knowledge from retirees, but having low resources. (Hamel & Prahalad 1993) Unfortunately, having high aspirations is not enough, and therefore organizations require leverage. This could be done by efficiently accumulating its resources or conserving its resources. In addition, as people are already retiring, an organization’s resources may suffer even more as both human capital and knowledge leaves the organization. Therefore, it is important to leverage the resources that are available.
2.2.6. **Barriers to knowledge transfer**

First, an organization needs to evaluate the existing internal environment. This usually entails assessing whether or not the organizational culture and climate are conducive to knowledge-sharing activities. If not, all the subsequent efforts to create a knowledge retention strategy will have been in vain. Argote (1999, 2005) does claim that further research is required to fully understand the conditions needed for knowledge transfer to occur. However, one efficient way to understand these conditions is to look at the factors that can affect (and barriers that inhibit) knowledge transfer and thereby working around them.

2.2.6.1. **Organizational culture competitiveness**

The organizational culture can be the most problematic and encompassing barrier to knowledge transfer, and thereby knowledge retention. As discussed in earlier chapters, the culture must be made to support ‘care’ and ‘commitment’ as values (Jashapara 2004:201). Argote (1999, 2005) identifies a major cultural barrier to knowledge transfer as being competition between subunits in an organization. The same has also been noted by Messick & Mackie (1989). The notion of competition impeding knowledge transfer comes from the idea that competitiveness causes individuals or groups to not want to share knowledge with other individuals or groups because their knowledge empowers them to act in their own interest. (Cooey & Burgoyne 2000) Unfortunately, there is a dilemma here, because theory also states that organizational settings naturally are conducive to the development of competition between groups. (Kramer 1991) This idea is grounded in social identity theory (Tajfel 1981) which states that when people are categorized into groups it produces competition between them. The implications of this are that there will always be some level of competitiveness, but it is dependent on the structure of the organization. If there are many sub-groups and work teams, there will probably be some level of competition between them. In addition, knowledge sharing may be less existent in organizations that reward employees and teams for innovativeness and performance as the competition between individuals and groups will be fiercer.

2.2.6.2. **Recipient characteristics and personalities**

Another barrier to knowledge transfer is the characteristics of the recipient of the knowledge for two reasons. First off, if the recipient is inexperienced, tacit and implicit
knowledge will be difficult to transfer. (Argote 1999,2005:172) Second, the recipient’s capacity to absorb knowledge may limit the amount of knowledge that can be assimilated in a period of time, whether it be explicit or tacit. The absorptive capacity is partly dependent on the recipient’s prior knowledge of a domain (Cohen & Levinthal 1990) as well as the individual’s memory capacity. An inexperienced employee will probably have a hard time absorbing all the knowledge from an expert who’s had a long tenure within the same organization.

2.2.6.3. Knowledge complexity and observability

The complexity (Galbraith 1990) and observability (Meyer & Goes 1988) of knowledge can have an effect on the effectiveness of knowledge transfer. Galbraith (1990) finds a relationship between attempting to transfer complex knowledge and loss in productivity, as opposed to when transferring relatively simple knowledge. This could be implied as meaning that complex knowledge is much more difficult for the organization to absorb. As a group of people leave for retirement, they carry knowledge of complex processes with them. Thus, it may be very difficult to grasp the whole intricacy of the process whereby causing productivity loss.

Meyer & Goes (1988) find a positive relationship between seeing knowledge in action and assimilation of that knowledge. When the same knowledge was made relatively ‘less’ observable, the assimilation of it was lowered. The implication of this is that if a recipient can see how a piece of knowledge is used in practice, whether it is physically displayed or just explained to them, the likelihood for them to comprehensively absorb that knowledge is increased. If the knowledge is not made observable, the knowledge transfer and learning will be less comprehensive.

2.2.7. Responsibilities, setting objectives and sticking to them

Once the barriers to knowledge transfer have been acknowledged, the actual planning for integrating knowledge retention initiatives can proceed. First off, it is important to distinguish specific persons to take on liabilities and responsibilities. (Rothwell 2011:121) This is because in order to remain goal-oriented and follow up on meeting objectives, certain people need to be handed over responsibilities for following through with their work. In addition, knowledge management activities in general need to be developed collaboratively. It is especially important to include the finance department,
because their consultations will help in determining the costs and performance of a knowledge management initiative. (Jashapara 2004:174)

Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison (2006) go on to identify the CEO and head of HR as key persons in ‘owning’ the challenges of knowledge retention. The CEO is the person responsible for an organization’s “overall performance and sustainability” (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:25). He/she sets the organization’s business goals and direction, while making sure that processes, capital, facilities, technology, and people are all aligned to meet those goals.

The second person, the head of HR, should already by definition be responsible for developing and executing workforce policies and practices. The HR executive needs to make the composition of the workforce in the organization explicit to the CEO. He/she needs to monitor the age makeup, how many are eligible to retire, and the risks that the composition may give rise to. (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006)

It is also important to look at the factors that HR should take into account when looking at organizational culture, and planning for knowledge retention.

There are three things to identify in a culture that supports knowledge retention:

- The employees’ trust in the organization: This is reflected in a collective purpose (distinguished by clear and broad goals and strategic intent, e.g. mission and vision) which should make employees feel engaged on an emotional level and thereby be motivated to share knowledge. Motivation plays a big role in knowledge sharing. (Argote 1999,2005:171)

- Support for individual development: If employees feel that the organization is led is a way that takes into account their own interests this should increase the willingness to share knowledge.  

- High level of unity and cooperation: When employees are embedded in groups and networks there is a greater possibility for knowledge sharing and transfer to occur. (Argote 1999,2005:168)

Employees’ trust, support, and cooperation cannot be achieved without the coordination of the organization’s systems, processes, and activities to support a knowledge retention culture. In a case where employees have high trust in the
organization and are willing to share knowledge, nothing will happen unless there are systems in place to facilitate the transfer and management of knowledge. An arbitrary example of a system to facilitate this could be an online forum. It is also possible that the management of the organization assume that employees don’t want to share knowledge while the actual problem is that there are no spaces/places (Nonaka & Konno 1998), opportunities, or media to do so. (DeLong 2004)

After the liabilities and responsibilities have been clearly pointed explicated, the next step is to set up goals and objectives in order to be able to support the knowledge retention initiatives as well as sustain their implementation.

The obvious overall objective in knowledge retention is to retain knowledge within organizations from employees that go into retirement. The goal is to be able to pursue organizational activities without deteriorating productivity and competitiveness. However, there are two supportive objectives that need to be met for this goal to be achieved.

One of these objectives is to have a supportive organizational culture. Achieving this objective will help to foster knowledge-sharing, especially if the culture is political and knowledge sharing restrained. A supportive culture is one of the main prerequisites for successful knowledge retention to occur. (Jashapara 2004:199) Some goals as to the desired culture need to be set. It is not necessarily so that culture needs to be shaped before implementing knowledge retention activities. Rather, it has also been shown that the implementation of a knowledge retention activity can cause a change in the culture as well. (McDermott & O’Dell 2001:84) However, for this to occur there needs to be diligent adherence to certain values by management in order for other employees to exhibit that kind of behavior as well. McDermott & O’Dell (2001) calls this ‘making invisible values visible’. In addition to behavior, the aspirational values and their relation to strategy need to be made ‘observable’ (Meyer & Goes 1988) so that employees understand the need for and use of those values.

2.2.8. Understanding what valuable knowledge is and how to transfer it

Another important aspect in initiating in knowledge retention is the realization that not all knowledge can, nor should be, captured. Therefore, it is useful to be able to identify what knowledge that actually is valuable to attempt to retain and where it resides. Here it is important to understand the different levels of knowledge that can exist, and also
to understand that a large portion of people’s knowledge has not necessarily been explicated. Understanding these things help to ensure that any valuable knowledge isn’t accidentally overlooked. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:138)

Rothwell (2011) outlines some steps that should be taken when identifying valuable knowledge:

1. Identify key work processes: a work process is defined as “any identifiable list of actions that lead to a result needed by the organization” (Rothwell 2011:121)

2. Pinpoint the employees who possess specialized knowledge: Within each key work process, the experts should be identified.

3. Assess the risk of losing key people: The next step is assessing what happens if an in-house expert leaves the organization. It is good to consider things like the likelihood of them leaving in the near future and what risks the loss of losing their special knowledge will pose.

When the key knowledge has been assessed and priorities have been set, practical ways to capture and transfer this knowledge have to be chosen. (Rothwell 2011:118) There are many practical methods for capturing and transferring knowledge and they should be chosen depending on the knowledge type that needs to be transferred.

2.2.8.1. Methods for capturing and transferring explicit knowledge

**Documentation:** Documenting knowledge is very effective for capturing knowledge needed on how to complete a task. However, it may be difficult to assess how much of a knowledge base has been captured in documentation if it is not questioned after it has been done. Baker (1995) recommends carrying out a so-called ‘bus test’. If a key person were to be run over by a bus tomorrow, would the documentation of their knowledge be sufficient to complete their tasks? Putting this in the realm of boomers leaving for retirement: If a key person were to retire, would their replacement be able to understand their knowledge (in the form of documentation) that they have left behind? One way to avoid risks of the documentation not being sufficient is to set standards and centralize documentation accessibility. (Jashapara 2004:136, DeLong 2004:90) Basically, the documentation has to be formulated in such a way that it is embedded in the actual tasks of the work (e.g. in a logical order).
Interviews: Interviews are a very good way to capture valuable knowledge, especially when there are time constraints such as in the boomer retirement case. Interviews can be planned and executed quickly with low costs. However, the biggest problem with conducting interviews is in translating the raw interview data (e.g. a digital recording) into knowledge which is useful for the people who need it. (DeLong 2004:94) Therefore, a standardized semi-structured interview guide needs to be carefully built for the responses to be categorizable in an easily understood manner; Standardized, so it can be reused, and semi-structured, to allow for adaptability. (Liebowitz 2009:15,17)

Training: Training differs from documentation and interviews because it naturally entails the transfer of knowledge to the specific people who need it instead of just capturing it for the organization. (Rothwell 2011:138) In this sense, documentation and interviews are just techniques for capturing knowledge and therefore are incomplete in the context for knowledge retention.

2.2.8.2. Methods for transferring implicit and tacit knowledge

Storytelling: This is one of the most common ways that knowledge is transferred daily within organizations. Stories are the way in which people generally give meaning to their experiences. They can reveal what employees think of their foremen, colleagues, and customers. If management were to listen to all these stories it would help shape an image of what the organizational culture is like. (Stone 2004) Concerning transferring knowledge from boomers to replacements storytelling can be used as a method by simply having a boomer tell stories about his work experience to the replacement. Stories are an effective in transferring both implicit knowledge of how to get things done and tacit knowledge reflecting values and how those values shape behavior. (Jashapara 2004:191, Rothwell 2011:136)

Mentoring: This is probably the most effective ways of transferring implicit and tacit knowledge between two individuals. (Rothwell 2011:136) Knowledge which is shared through mentoring encompasses everything from detailed technical facts and skills to cultural values. The ideal situation would require the mentor or coach (=the boomer) being motivated to teach and to be skilled at teaching, as well as the protégé (=the novice) being motivated to receive knowledge in a respectful and goal-oriented relation between both parties. (Leonard & Swap 2005:171,178,183)
Mentoring can help to transfer technical, functional, and leadership knowledge. (DeLong 2004:107) It can also help a protégé to learn about who does what in an organization. In the mentoring process, the protégé develops the social contacts that are needed for the particular work tasks, and captures the cultural and political knowledge of organizational values and acceptable behavior. Much of the latter is absorbed through observation of the mentor, as the protégé increasingly comes to see the mentor as their role model or symbol for how things should be done. (DeLong 2004:107) Even though these positive aspects often arise in mentoring, there are also factors that can hinder successful or mentoring in general.

**After Action Reviews – AARs:** After Action Reviews are analyses that are made after a task has been completed in an organization. (Liebowitz 2009:23) Organizations use AARs to generate, retain, and retrieve knowledge that has arisen as a byproduct of organizational activity. (DeLong 2004:112) They tend to revolve around four aspects of a task: What was supposed to happen, what happened in reality, why there were differences in expectations and outcome, and what can be learnt and be done differently next time. (Collison & Parcell 2001) If AARs are well documented and intended for knowledge transfer purposes they can be useful for transferring knowledge to replacements of boomers. (Rothwell 2011:138)

**Communities of Practice – CoPs:** Communities of Practice, or CoPs, can be described as communities or networks that develop naturally within organizations. They contain groups of people who have similar interests, values, or problems, and therefore communication between members is natural. CoPs naturally support the retention of knowledge in organizations, and promoting them is one of the main ways to enhance the sharing of tacit knowledge (Jashapara 2004:299), meaning they should be encouraged. A well organized CoP can help a new employee feel unified with the rest of the organization as they take part in learning from experts’ discussions (DeLong 2004:114).

### 2.2.9. Investing in intellectual capital

One major consideration is the involvement of the financial department in the integration of knowledge retention and strategy. This is to assist in the measurement processes of both assessing the value of, and hence dependence on, the organization’s intellectual capital (i.e. knowledge base), as well as calculating investment costs and returns in initiating a knowledge retention strategy.
First off, it has been noted that market conditions tend to define the type of knowledge relied on. (Eisenhardt & Martin 2000) Basically, the value of certain knowledge is not necessarily the same across time and across organizations acting on different markets. As has been pointed out earlier, organizations that act in stable and moderately dynamic market conditions are much more dependent on their tacit knowledge base, as opposed to if they were in high-velocity and volatile markets. (Jashapara 2004:80) In any case, however, organizations tend to notice the value of knowledge only when it has been lost.

Greve (2003:106-107) gives a good overview of the process of investing in knowledge. In very broad terms, investments can be in either tangible or intangible assets. Investing in knowledge retention is an investment in intangible assets, because knowledge is an intangible asset which can be measured in intellectual capital. (Jashapara 2004:268) Intellectual capital is defined as the difference between market value and net book value of an organization. (Sveiby 1997) Investing in knowledge retention can be extremely costly, but the returns in the long run are guaranteed, if the strategy is implemented correctly, of course. There are no remarkable differences in the investment calculations used for tangible and intangible investments. On the other hand, the latter are usually routinized in a different manner than the prior. Intangible investments are usually financed by budget allowance. The size of this allowance is usually determined by some kind of rules-of-thumb, for instance a defined percentage of the total budget.

However, not all organizations divide their investments into tangible and intangible. Tangibles and intangibles may also overlap, which is usually the case in more complex investments, such as for knowledge retention initiatives, which, as we have seen, encompass many different aspects of an organization. In this case, an organization may want to categorize investments by objectives (tied to the business strategy), type (e.g. rationalization), scope (e.g. strategic), or organizational level (tied to the political rights to making investment decisions). However, what should be noted when making a case for investing in knowledge retention is that it will not yield profitability in the same way that other investments might. The rationalization of the investment needs to lay in the future losses that will incur if it is not carried out.

Finally, to conclude the literature review, all the 9 factors that affect knowledge retention are mentioned are shown in figure 10 below.
Figure 6: 9 theoretical factors that should be taken into account when initiating knowledge retention based on the literature reviewed.

1. Power relations and politics in organizational learning
2. Organizational culture
3. Care
4. How leaders exhibit their values
5. Strategy integration
6. Barriers to knowledge transfer
7. Responsibilities, setting objectives and sticking to them
8. Understanding what valuable knowledge is and how to transfer it
9. Investing in intellectual capital

KNOWLEDGE RETENTION
3  METHOD

This thesis has been done using a theoretical inductive approach. I have both built and expanded existing theory through describing and explaining one case organization. Epistemologically speaking I have had taken a realist stance.

The empirical primary data was qualitative. It was comprised of interviews with members of one studied organization. I also asked a few questions that demand quantitative responses, relating to employee demographics, employee turnover, and anything else found relevant.

My secondary data, the literature review, was also qualitative and comprised of theories relating to knowledge management and knowledge retention. After the primary data had been collected, the primary data was analyzed on its own, and then compared to the summarized theories reviewed, for an altogether qualitative output.

3.1. Research design and methodology: Grounded Theory

“How to theorize from data rather than from the armchair.” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:14)

In my thesis I have used the Grounded Theory method, a methodology pioneered by Glaser & Strauss (1967). Essentially, Grounded Theory is a method whereby one seeks to generate theory from data. The resultant theory is, as such, grounded in data. When one pursues to discover theory using the Grounded Theory method, conceptual categories or properties of conceptual categories are generated directly from evidence (i.e. data). After this, the evidence which spawned these categories or properties is used to illustrate a new concept. The suggestion is not that the evidence is perfectly accurate but that the new concept is a “relevant theoretical abstraction about what is going on in the area studied.” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:23)

Grounded Theory is a discovering approach which aims to create, rather than prove, theories. It is inductive in the scientific, methodological sense of the word, or at least one could say it is inclined for inductive research. It is also inclined for empirical research and theory building with hermeneutic attributes (i.e. it involves an ongoing intellectual thought and interpretation process). The method primarily sets out to qualitatively describe and predict social processes. (Gustavsson, 1998)
A grounded theory should be easily revisable if new data is accrued and should not be presented as an absolute truth. Rather, one should refer to it as a temporary best-available truth, which has been systematically derived from the phenomenon researched. The purpose of the theory is to help understand and manage a phenomenon better. (Gustavsson, 1998)

Gustavsson (1998) describes two levels on which Grounded Theory can be used. It can be used as a method that seeks to describe a phenomenon, and it can be used as a method for developing a theoretical understanding of an area of interest. However, this doesn’t mean that one needs to choose between one of these levels on which to work on. When working with Grounded Theory, the data collection process and theoretical development are very closely connected. Because of the hermeneutic property of Grounded Theory, one is constantly interpreting the data which one collects. Hence, one may choose to stay merely on the descriptive level of Grounded Theory. However, the problem with simply describing phenomenon is that it easily turns into being too specific and contextual for it to be augmentable to a more predictive theory. On the other hand, when seeking to develop theoretical understanding, that is, the second level on which Grounded Theory can be used, the descriptive level is surely a part of it, but with the difference that one goes beyond mere description on to conceptualization. From the data which is collected, the Grounded Theory researcher usually attempts to find recurring themes, such as the use of the same phrases by different people in various interviews. However, this doesn’t tell you anything new. It merely helps you to put together and describe a social phenomenon. The process of lifting one’s research from the descriptive onto the conceptual (and creational) is characterized by the coding of data.

When moving on to the next level of Grounded Theory, or conceptualization of data, one needs to give names to the phenomena that there are no names for or change an existing name to a more suitable one. In theory building one should try to go beyond just organizing or presenting data, by instead collecting and organizing ideas that derive from the data and by trying to find patterns. (Starrin et al, 1997) The result of such theory-building research should theoretically be able to describe, explain, and predict a phenomenon within an area. (Gustavsson, 1998)

There are certain areas within which one can consider using Grounded Theory. First, and foremost, an area which lacks in theory building for its related phenomena is suitable for Grounded Theory research. Another area could be one where old theories
aren’t relevant anymore, and need to be revised or given new substance. When it comes to knowledge retention and a looming demographic situation which hasn’t been seriously confronted in the modern business world to date, it seems like Grounded Theory would be a good method to use; this area of interest lacks theory building.

3.2. Data collected: Interview data

Business research tends to find itself depending mostly on interview data. (Gustavsson, 1998) In this thesis, the empirical data was collected through the use of interviews. In total, 9 semi structured interviews were made, on 9 different white collar employees. It should be noted that in Grounded Theory it is not the amount of data that determines if the results or conclusions are meaningful or valuable. This is because, as said earlier, one is not seeking to prove relationships but to discover them.

The interviews were conducted using the ‘circle approach’, as proposed by Gustavsson (1998). Using the circle approach entails asking open-ended questions (leading to conversation rather than answers), letting the interviewee speak as much as possible. The idea of the circle approach is to circle around the topic at hand. This entails not being too direct in one’s interview questions. This is to avoid restricting the interviewees to predetermined topics and to let them speak freely. (In the worst case one may unintentionally neglect useful data.) After all, from the Grounded Theory perspective, one cannot know beforehand what the interviewees will be able to reveal.

The interviews were recorded digitally (audio only), and transcribed. Notes were taken briskly throughout the interviews to record any kind of ideas, critical wording, visual observations, as well as emerging links to prior interviews. Immediately after each interview, a pro-memo (see more detail on pro-memos in chapter 3.4) was made. After some time, the interview notes were thoroughly revised and complemented by listening to the interview audio files and jotting down any additional aural observations.

What is interesting in Grounded Theory is that the number of interviews to be done is not something that can be decided beforehand, nor can the interview guide be too well planned out. In Grounded Theory the results of the first set of interviews should act as a guide for whom to interview next and on what. Basically, the interview questions need not necessarily be the same for each interview, as long as they have a proven purpose for the person under study.
3.3. A single-case study

The case organization, for confidentiality reasons, remains entirely anonymous, as do the respondents in the interviews. However, what can be mentioned is that it is a large organization that operates in the base industry in Finland as well as abroad. They have implemented some knowledge management initiatives, and are coping with an aging workforce. Hence, they are and will be experiencing increasing retirement rates in the upcoming years.

Grounded Theory is well suited for single-case studies. (Strauss, 1987 & Gummesson, 1991) Gustavsson (1998) also points out that research done on one single case can be enough to create a theory within an area. However, he does say that when working with only one organization it does restrict the theory to an extent. This is because the quality of a case study done using Grounded Theory is in the possibility of making comparative analyses. Therefore, the more cases one studies, the better are the possibilities of comparing data across organizations for theory development purposes. However, this is not to say that the quality of Grounded Theory is lowered when using data from only one organization. If the organization can act as a representative for other similar organizations then the results are more comparable for the future. The case organization, for example, can be considered a valid representation of a large industrial company. In broader terms, as it is experiencing and acting on knowledge loss due to increased retirements, it is a representative for a much larger set of organizations, namely those that are experiencing and acting on knowledge loss as well. Of course, conducting research on several cases can help to confirm categories discovered in the data of one case, but this is something which can be suggested for further research.

3.4. Data analysis: Coding and constant comparative analysis

Coding is an essential part of a study for it to be considered Grounded Theory. It is the process where the data collected is transformed into concepts and where relationships between these concepts emerge. (Gustavsson, 1998) In other words, coding is a form of expressing the notes that one takes relevant to one’s data. Conceptualization is practically synonymous with coding, as it is the analytical process of shaping terminology and phrasing of concepts derived from these notes.

Coding happens on two levels; the specific and the theoretical. Specific coding is the process of coding when working with primary material, i.e. the interview data.
Theoretical coding is coding of previously done coding, i.e. coding that shows the relationships between concepts. However, the basic coding process of Grounded Theory is known as open coding, whereby one creates categories as well as a core category. In essence, a category is a conceptual element of the theory. What is critical to remember is that categories are derived and indicated by the data; they are not data themselves. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:36)

Even though categories are most desirable to have been derived from the empirical data being studied, they can also be borrowed from existing theory. But focusing on having categories emerging from the data is making sure that they are fitting, rich, and relevant to the empirical being studied. Grounded Theory also tends to put a premium on emergent conceptualizations. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) However, if one wishes to blend in existing literature, which I have done with the use of my literature review in the discussion part of this thesis, this is perfectly acceptable, as long as the analytic core of the categories have emerged from the empirical data. This core can then be compared with the literature to find similarities and convergences, much like I have done when comparing discovered factors with theoretically suggested factors.

Parallel to these components, so-called constant comparative analysis is done, as suggested by Glaser & Strauss (1967). This is basically the activity of comparing the different categories with one another as well as the concrete writing process of theoretical pre-memos (=PM’s), or notes on one’s own ideas (as were done after each interview). Finally, the PM’s and categories are sorted in order to establish the finalized theory’s components and composure.

3.4.1.1. Theoretical saturation

In Grounded Theory one needs to find theoretical saturation through the data which one studies. Saturation means that “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated.” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:61) This saturation is achieved through constant comparative analysis, whereby one continuously compares the contents of new data with previously gathered data. As such, comparative analysis focuses on the contents of the data and not on the form.
3.4.1.2. **Theoretical pro-memos**

When doing Grounded Theory research, exhibiting intellectual freedom is key. One is free to write whichever ideas that may come to mind and in any desired form. The result is a so-called pre-memo, or PM. There shouldn’t be any rules for how PM’s should look, how long they need to be, nor be any criteria on their contents. When writing PM’s one should focus on the ideas and not on their formulation or grammar. Collecting these PM’s results in a set of notes that can be used for later theoretical coding and development of the theory. (Gustavsson, 1998)

3.4.1.3. **Finding the core category**

As mentioned earlier, the core category is a concept which grows out of the open coding process. It has to be able to explain most of the variation in the data, or, in other words, almost all categories need to link to it to give an overall grasp of the theory and illustrate where it is derived from. Gustavsson (1998) recommends that the concept of the core category should be written using a verbal noun. A verbal noun is a word that ends with “-ing”. For example, words like “transferring” or “changing” are verbal nouns. In one of Glaser’s works (from 1961; source derived from Gustavsson, 1998) where Grounded Theory had been used, the core category was ‘seeking recognition’. Gustavsson (1998) says that the core category should be able to explain 95% of the data. As such, it may even be conceivable to use two core categories, but no more. In this thesis there were 2 core categories that emerged. The main core category covered 25 categories, while the other covered 4 categories.

3.4.1.4. **The resultant theory from using Grounded Theory**

By using comparative analysis to create theory that is grounded, one gets a theory in process, as pointed out by Glaser & Strauss (1967). This means that it is not anything absolute, nor is it perfect, nor a product, but rather something which is developing, and should be developed further. Of course, it is momentarily a product of the research project, but in the sociological and scientific realm it is ever-developing. In this thesis, the resultant theory is made up of the factors discovered from analyzing the revealed categories.
The final conceptual theory can either be substantive or formal or a combination of both. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:32-33) A substantive theory is more relevant and specific to a certain empirical case or context, for example organizations in a certain industry. A formal theory is something much more general to an area of interest, which can be assumed to pertain to a grander scale of conceptual cases, such as reward systems or the formal organization. In this thesis, the theory generated (i.e. factors) will exist mostly on a substantive level since only one case has been used. The theory will be relevant for knowledge retention in the large and old international base industry organizations. On the formal scale, one could say the discovered theory is relevant to the general knowledge management and knowledge retention concepts.

### 3.5. Theoretical sampling

“Detailed breakdowns of the timing of research (number of situations to be observed in one group, hours of observation, numbers and positions of people to be interviewed or surveyed, amount of time necessary for respite) are also difficult to give in a research proposal designed for discovering theory, since they depend on the directions the emerging theory takes” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:74)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) clearly point out the dilemma of trying to remain systematic whilst acting on the basis of emergence. The idea is that, when interviewing, new research questions emerge as a result of a first set of interviews, which in turn may cause the researcher to need to go back to certain individuals for subsequent interviews, or turn to another set of individuals. Even though it may seem chaotic, this is what is known as “theoretical sampling” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:47). Thus, since emphasis is on the content of data and not the form, and since the analysis of data acts as a guide to where and what data is needed subsequently, random sampling is not necessary, nor is it conducive for the purposes of Grounded Theory.

In theoretical sampling, the questions to ask oneself are what groups/individuals does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose? Of course, due to time constraints and degree of access, researchers are often faced with the harsh fact that they cannot possibly conduct interviews whenever, with whomever, and not forever. Such is the case in this thesis project, as it had a set time line, a dead line, and, as a student, access to any desired information is not easily granted. Nonetheless, in this project, there hasn’t been any strict preplanned routine for data collection. As such the theoretical purpose and relevance has been achieved through letting the emerging
theory guide the data collection process, i.e. who and what to interview on consecutively. Considering time constraints, this has only been done until theoretical saturation has been experienced. The rest, as suggested by Glaser & Strauss (1967) can be left for future research.

3.6. From interviews to concluding theory

Interviews were digitally recorded, and notes were taken alongside each interview. The group of individuals was determined based on my prior knowledge on knowledge management and retention (and thus I knew who could be useful in the organization), the information the organization gave me (i.e. individuals that they specifically knew were involved in knowledge retention), as well as my own ideas (trying to get a mix of different people). The result was that I had a list of about 20 individuals that had either been physically been involved in knowledge retention programs in the past (for instance as mentors or mentees), been part in administrating them, or planning them. Three interview guides were made according to whether they were meant for mentors, mentees, or part of management. In general, though, they encompassed the same questions and issues. Due to the strict anonymity, I will not reveal any of the identities of the individuals interviewed or what their positions are in the organization. However, it is not important to distinguish between the different respondents because they were all treated equally in the interview process and the same topics were discussed.

In the beginning, a set of 3 individuals were decided to be interviewed. They seemed to be able to provide valuable knowledge on knowledge retention, because they had been involved in mentorship programs in the case organization. An interview guide was created for them. Meanwhile and after these interviews were done, the comparative analysis process was working simultaneously as well, with most time spent on open coding, and creating pro-memos (PMs) for each interview. The categories that emerged from the open coding and PM process led the data collection process forward to the following group of individuals to be interviewed.

Next, two more interviews were set up with two people also prior participants in mentorships, and after they were done individual PM’s were made, and categories identified across all PM’s. Soon after, one more interview was scheduled with a person involved in mentorships, and a PM was made. It is worthy to note that all individuals interviewed so far were from varying departments in the organization. Next, 2 extensive interviews, with 2 people involved in management of knowledge, lasting 1.5 hours each
(as opposed to the earlier 1 hour interviews) were set up, and PM’s made for each. They also had a modified interview guide. And finally, a bit later, another 1 hour interview was set up with someone involved in mentorships, and a PM made for that as well. All the ones interviewed were different individuals, so no individual was interviewed twice. All in all, 9 individuals had been interviewed and 10 PM’s had been made at this point.

Figure 7: Theoretical sampling, amount of, and time spent on, interviews

Figure 8: Amount of PM’s made alongside interviews

There were extensive comparative analyses made across these PM’s, in order to reveal the strongest categories as well as to reveal the core category.

Next, the interviews were transcribed, with smaller analytical PM’s being made alongside listening to them, bearing the categories in mind. Then, the categories were finally outlined as themes, and supporting quotes were connected to each theme. After this, the analysis continued on a descriptive level. After this had been done, the more in-depth analysis of these themes as referring to factors that actually can affect knowledge retention was done. Several factor-like statements were formulated, and they were then compared to earlier established theoretical factors in order to find similarities and differences between them to either build on existing theory or declare novel notions. Finally, there were conclusions drawn as to how the aims of the thesis were reached.

In the following chapter, the empirical results will be presented, coupled with analysis. In essence, the 29 categories that were found will have been formulated for easy understanding. As such they could be considered categorical themes. They are
supported by quotes from respondents in the interview data. Following the analysis and results, the discussion part will take over, where the analyzed categories (or categorical themes) will have been compiled into meta-categories, or factors, to show the theory discovered; the final product of having used Grounded Theory as methodology. The diagram below illustrates this entire progression, beginning from data, through categories, and finally on to the concluding factors.

**Figure 9: From data to categories to factors**

![Diagram showing data to categories to factors process]

**KEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview data</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Discovered novel factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Core category</td>
<td>Discovered theory-building factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Meta-category</td>
<td>Theory, and theoretical factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter summarizes the results from the interview data, and presents how the data was analyzed in order to produce an arrangement of meaningful information from which a relevant discussion could be had in terms of what the conclusions are. First off, it is worthy to remind the reader that a total of 9 interviews were made, totaling in 10 hours of data. In addition, 10 PM’s had been made, and copious amounts of notes had been taken. All of these combined formed the base of data which would be analyzed using Grounded Theory methodology.

4.1 Results

The interview data that had been collected was transcribed, coded, categorized, and analyzed as proposed in Grounded Theory methodology. The analyzed results are presented below in terms of the categories that were found. There were all in all 29 common categories which came up as interesting for the purpose of this research. Some of the categories do overlap somewhat, but they all have their own significant meaning and are worthy of attention in this study.

There were two core categories that arose from the 29 categories:

1. **Increasing understanding.** This core category encompasses 25 of the categories named in the results. This means that the categories under it all had something to do with how an organization as a whole needs to increase their understanding on knowledge retention initiatives, possible barriers to knowledge sharing, and knowledge management in general in order for knowledge retention to be efficient. This goes for both management and the employees.

2. **Heightening importance.** This core category encompasses the remaining 4 categories. It implies that categories under it all had something to do with how raising the level of importance of an initiative can have a huge impact on its success. Figures 10 and 11 below shows the two core categories with the respective categories that compose them.
I found the purpose of the core categories to be an easy way to understand what the categories were collectively conveying in general terms, and as such they do not provide any detailed meaning. Basically, one could say that the results of the empirical material shows that, in general, the issue of 'increasing understanding' is one of the most important when it comes to initiating knowledge retention. Organizations need to make sure that the interest exists at all levels and that employees understand why they are taking part in knowledge retention initiatives, why the organization is doing it and for what greater purpose. Secondly, the issue of 'heightening importance' is something
which also needs to be taken into account, because otherwise knowledge retention will not necessarily be something high up on the agenda. This is especially important when the need for retaining knowledge is urgent, i.e. when there is a threat of employees leaving the organization and taking their knowledge with them.

Next, all the 29 categories will be presented in a table. Each category is supported by one or a few relevant quotations taken directly from the interview transcripts. This was done in order to show from where the analysis derives in the interview data. Following this table is a compiled analysis of the raw data wherefrom the categories spawned.

In the table, for the sake of anonymity, the interviewees who were quoted have been identified by a letter, A through I, rather than by their names. Again, there is no significance as to who said what, because the same general interview guide was used for all interviewees.
Figure 12: The revealed categories as from the empirical interview data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FROM EMPIRICAL DATA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A C1</td>
<td>‘Hidden information’ and other terminology used by interviewee</td>
<td>&quot;[…] hidden information, trying to get in touch with, and to be distributed to the following generation.&quot; (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C2</td>
<td>Identifying valuable knowledge and networks</td>
<td>&quot;I know quite a lot of people, and I have a big network in the organization; if I say so, I know also a lot of people quite well, not just saying hello in the corridor but really have the experience of working together with people.&quot; (D)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A C3</td>
<td>The acceptable scope of knowledge transfer and lost knowledge</td>
<td>&quot;Even if you know that this ‘star’ or person with a lot of knowledge will retire in 2 years, it’s very difficult to document everything and interview him on every detail in the process.&quot; (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C4</td>
<td>Key persons: Measuring the value of knowledge</td>
<td>&quot;This knowledge that’s walking out the door, it’s not so tangible, it’s not so concrete. It’s these things that come up maybe later.&quot; (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C5</td>
<td>Everybody-is-replaceable mentality</td>
<td>&quot;We can replace each and everybody, that’s a fact. But it may take a shorter or longer time to do it.&quot; (G)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A C6</td>
<td>Valuable knowledge at all levels</td>
<td>&quot;Yes, yes […] in every level. […] I think everyone has something to give. But of course there can be some people that have more knowledge.&quot; (G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C7</td>
<td>Dilemma between getting rid of old, embracing the new</td>
<td>&quot;Every time someone leaves there is something going with him. Sometimes it’s even good because there might be some old attitudes or something.&quot; (H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C8</td>
<td>Two types of knowledge non-givers</td>
<td>&quot;You always find some people who think that knowledge is power and they try to block their own competence area from others.&quot; (G)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>&quot;I think it’s also these guys that are coming after, they should also be active and ask. Because maybe there are things that the person who is leaving is not…thinking ‘aah, everyone knows this’.&quot; (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C9</td>
<td>Documentation and archiving</td>
<td>&quot;That’s [documents] an easy way to have information, which is the old knowledge in that case. […] It’s very good help if you have documented what has happened in some project, because that is very good learning from these documents.&quot; (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C10</td>
<td>Taking on responsibilities in knowledge transfer</td>
<td>&quot;I always answer to that that it’s in my own responsibilities to take care of those issues. I can’t blame anybody, I have to take my own responsibility, and try to make my own work atmosphere and try to affect my colleagues in a way that we as a team are a good team.&quot; (D)</td>
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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td><strong>C20</strong></td>
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<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td><strong>C23</strong></td>
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<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td><strong>C24</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td><strong>C25</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td><strong>C26</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td><strong>C27</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
<td><strong>C28</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>C</strong></td>
<td><strong>C29</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4.2. Analysis

The analysis of the interview data was done coupled with the comparative analysis (=PM’s) and compilations of notes that had been done alongside the data collection. In this sense, the categories are derived from a wealth of data and information. In order to turn the data and information into something useful for the purpose of this thesis, I will present a combined analysis of all the data, which will also indicate at the various categories that were revealed. This will be done in accordance with the two core categories under which the categories belong. In addition, the categories under each core category were assembled into a few meta-categories (as can also be seen in figure 13 above, indicated in letters A, B, C, D); eliminating the need to go through each category separately. The meta-categories also bring coherency into the analysis, because they go beyond the mere statements which are the categories, into something more analytical.

Throughout the analysis I will make references to the various categories that appear in the table in figure 13, in order to explicate where the categories derive from.

4.2.1. Core category 1: Increasing understanding

4.2.1.1. Identifying vital knowledge and its possessors

When the interviewees were referring to knowledge they spoke interchangeably of ‘information’ or ‘data’ rather than ‘knowledge’. However, some of them who had a hands-on part in actually integrating knowledge management into the organization spoke specifically about knowledge as ‘knowledge’. But generally, the interviewees were not directly talking about knowledge or knowledge management, or managing knowledge in any way. It seemed that when most of the interviewees talked about tacit knowledge they used phrases like ‘hidden information’. (Refers to category C1) Consequently, there were mixed understandings of the issues that were being spoken about.

All interviewees were confronted with the question of how the previously regarded ‘hidden information’ or important knowledge can be identified in their organization, and in any organization in general. This seemed a natural follow-up question to that all interviewees agreed that there is some form of important knowledge residing within
their organization and that it is important to figure out where (and in some cases what) it is. All responded, with a sense of thoughtfulness, that it is a very hard question.

One other aspect of appreciating who the possessors of vital knowledge are is through the network that they have. Persons that are very well networked, mostly through job rotation and having been in the organization a long time, will be considered very valuable. Simultaneously, it was acknowledged that this kind of knowledge is very hard to pin-point in detail, and much of it is only realized after a person with such ‘know-who’ has left the organization.

The network that a person has is not only the contacts that he/she needs to do their own work, but it may also stretch the other way. Other employees have reached out to this person, almost having been reliable on their knowledge. In this respect, these people who have connected to him/her may suffer as well; it is not only the successor who suffers from lack of knowledge. One interviewee brought this up in an example where a person had retired and there were many people who were in need for their knowledge, but the wealth of it was realized only after they left. (C2)

There was a general agreement by all interviewees that you cannot transfer all the knowledge that retirees possess. It is practically nearly impossible, too costly, and also not all knowledge a person possesses is known. However, there was a level of acceptance, shown by the fact that it didn’t really worry people. Many said that it should just be accepted that not all knowledge can be transferred, and the possible consequences of that will just have to be dealt with. However, one strong point brought up with relation to this is that you need to understand and focus on what you need to transfer so that you can at least minimize the costs induced by losing it. (C3)

One thing which was brought up in most interviews was the fact that people have a kind of 6th sense when it comes to who possesses important knowledge. A lot of interviewees said that they had a ‘feeling’ of who the possessors are of vital knowledge. It was very difficult for interviewees to describe a ‘key person’ or a person who is ‘very knowledgeable’ or who a person that one is dependent on in some sense (because of what they know and their skills), even though it was widely acknowledged that these persons do exist. It was more often a feeling inside the interviewees that made them feel that some people are more knowledgeable, coupled with a feeling that those people are ‘key’ persons in the company.
One interesting aspect concerning measuring lost knowledge was that it is very hard to appreciate the effects that it can have because the effects are usually experienced later on after the knowledge has been lost. Measuring the effect of an initiative like mentoring was also agreed to be very difficult, not only because it’s hard to measure the value of knowledge, but also because the effects of mentoring are usually felt in the way that there is business continuity; no increased returns. (C4) In effect, increasing understanding of how to measure lost knowledge and initiatives would be beneficial.

Each interviewee also believed in the idea that everybody is replaceable. This was not in an undermining sense to the value of the employees but it was a mentality; everybody should be replaceable. Otherwise there would be a problem. (C5) Simultaneously, all interviewees said that there definitely exists important knowledge at all levels of the organization. One interviewee, when asked if they believed the important knowledge to be spread out across their organization, said that they think everybody in the organization has something to give in terms of knowledge. However, the general understanding was that some people have a richer or broader knowledge base than others (C6), but that doesn’t stop them from being replaceable.

A very interesting issue brought up was that there may be cases when an organization wants to get rid of some knowledge because the knowledge may represent an old way of thinking. This is also combined with new young employees wanting to bring in state-of-the-art methods they have learnt in schools. There is a dilemma between letting go of old ways and embracing a new generation. In this sense, you can look at knowledge retention in a different light. There was also another interesting positive aspect of lots of people retiring brought up by some interviewees regarding that it opens up career opportunities for the younger generation. (C7) In other words, one has to understand that old knowledge may be redundant and that embracing new knowledge can be rewarding for both the organization and the new employee.

Another interesting aspect that was brought up by many interviewees was that one needs to have understanding of that there are certain people who naturally don’t, and probably won’t, care for transferring knowledge. However, there was another interesting point brought up with reference to the people who don’t give their knowledge away, in terms of the possessors of knowledge themselves. Most interviewees gave the response that some people are aware of some fragments of the knowledge they possess but they are not aware of all that exist. When asked if they themselves knew what kind of knowledge they possessed, or if they possessed vital
knowledge, one interviewee replied that they certainly have something, but you can’t
know it before having left. This is a good example of how people don’t share their
knowledge simply because they don’t even know themselves that they possess it. It may
very well be that there are many individuals who don’t know that they have any
important knowledge at all meaning that they are not able to share it with anyone
either.

Another type of ‘non-giver’ of knowledge is one who hides it for political reasons. One
interviewee described it as a simple case of accepting that there will always be these
kinds of political individuals in large organizations who think that knowledge is power.
Another interviewee expressed this kind of political non-giver as someone who does not
share knowledge because they feel that they want to express their power through the
knowledge they have. For instance, there may be a problem that has come up,
something this person knows the answer to from the beginning, but they deliberately
wait for the right moment to get as much credit for their solution as possible. A final
type of non-giver of knowledge is the kind of person who thinks that their knowledge is
so obvious that they don’t see the point in sharing it with anybody. In these cases one
interviewee pointed out the importance of asking ‘stupid questions’, in order to attain
their knowledge base. (C8)

Most interviewees brought up documentation at least once, through saying that there is
a lot of knowledge, or information, which is not documented in any way and that
routines of documenting and archiving are not in place in all areas. Some departments
seem to do it regularly, and some are even built on documentation, in the sense that
whenever something new is discovered or tried out it is marked down daily (e.g. the
R&D department). That is not to say that these departments are dependent on the
documentation but that the documentation exists in case there is a need for reference.
In this way, the earlier mentioned ‘time costs’ are eliminated almost entirely, because
you don’t need to reinvent the wheel when someone leaves, e.g. an innovative engineer.
In addition, in R&D they work in teams, and so the knowledge of where and from when
the documentation can be found is spread out as well. Archiving should also be part of
the routines, according to some of the interviewees. Things like important agreements
should be paid more attention to, especially in the day and age of computers where files
tend to be scattered and people don’t tend to systematically rearrange or file them.
(C9) In other words, the understanding of why documentation and archiving is useful
later on should be increased.
There was emphasis by interviewees put on that it should be part of the employee's own responsibility to make sure that appropriate knowledge is absorbed, as well as in that things are restored to a normal state even after the knowledge has been lost. With regard to knowledge being documented, one interviewee pointed out that even if you take on the responsibility of transferring knowledge, or trying to absorb knowledge passed on to you, such as in documented form, it may be that it still won't be very useful because what you really need is time & communication. On the other hand, having documentation is better than nothing. It's just that it takes time to go through all those documents. (C10) In essence, having increased understanding of one's own responsibilities in terms of knowledge retention was emphasized as important.

Two vivid accounts of how tacit knowledge has disappeared from the case organization were given in the interviews. One of them regarded the loss of knowledge on how to handle increasing amounts of snow which melts during spring time in one of the organization's sites. Many years ago there had been a lot more snow, but following them had been many winters in a row with almost no snow at all. Therefore the need for such knowledge had not been there during the 'no-snow' winters. However, when the snowy winters came back, it was realized that the already retired employees would have known how to handle the snowy situation. The other case regarded a serious accident which had occurred as a result of lost knowledge of how to scrape out rocks in the outdoors in order to ensure a safe working environment. There was also another very important explanation given on how it is important to know when certain knowledge will be needed, especially regarding maintenance of old machinery. Interestingly, the maintenance itself was not documented, but the time when the machinery is scheduled to be maintained was. As such, it was not an issue in the organization, but it is important to understand that once a scheduled maintenance occurs, there has to be someone who is capable of maintaining it. Therefore, if that someone is going to leave before the next scheduled maintenance, there has to also be someone else who shadows that someone and asks them questions about how to maintain the machinery in order to retain this knowledge.

However, there was the interesting point brought up by some interviewees that they don't think it is that important to understand exactly what knowledge has been transferred, as long as a good and appropriate program is in place for whoever's knowledge that is desired to be retained. Basically, they said that it is enough for management to know that the participants are doing something for retaining
knowledge, because it is assumed that there will be some transfer of knowledge anyway, e.g. in any mentoring relationship. (C11)

Some interviewees talked about ‘soft skills’ leaving the organization, and how those skills are irreplaceable. What is definitely irreplaceable is the nature and characteristics of people; so key people are not always about skills, because someone who can create an enjoyable work environment can have a big impact on the way a team works, how well they perform together, personal efficiency, and people’s mood and overall happiness and satisfaction. However, interviewees identified no general approach for how to handle these soft skills in terms of knowledge retention. The only thing you can preemptively do, it seemed, is to first off identify the skills and include them in the job profile when recruiting for a replacement, as well as make the replacement aware of the soft skills that the predecessor had, in the hopes of them pushing themselves to pursue those skills. (C12) All in all, an increased understanding of soft skills is needed.

4.2.1.2. Purpose and motivation

To many of the interviewees, the challenge of stimulating people seemed to be a big problem. The issue is how to make a program like mentoring, or any other initiative for that matter, interesting. Clearly, the program needs to be interesting to the point that people are motivated to take part in it and care about it. The question is then how you can make people motivated for taking part in such a program. What was implied here was that if you understand the program itself, what the purpose of it is, rather than making it a mere work task, it will becoming stimulating. Secondly, it needs to be stimulating to the effect that the people involved are themselves actively seeking to fulfill the purpose of it. (C13)

Another major issue which came up is that setting up initiatives can be very difficult because of the nature of people; you can only manipulate peoples’ level of interest to a certain point. One interviewee very clearly pointed out that in any environment or situation there will be people who naturally care and people who don’t care about things in general. In an organizational setting there will also be people who naturally care about the future of the organization, and others who don’t. (C14)

There is also a need for understanding the element of internal competition which can inhibit knowledge sharing. One interviewee expressed this very directly, saying that if you are competing towards the same career goals, it leads you to not want to share your
knowledge because it can remove your personal competitive edge in gaining that position. Another employee expressed the point of internal competition inhibiting knowledge sharing through saying that the division of business units causes some competition between the different units. The interviewee speculated that this may have some kind of impact on knowledge sharing. (C15)

What may affect how well a retiree’s knowledge is retained is the motivation that the retiree has to share his knowledge when they are closing in on retirement. There were three main arguments pointed out here. First off, it may be that the retiree sees no internal competition anymore when they are about to retire, because they have reached their last milestone, so to speak. Therefore, they should be very willing to share the knowledge that they possess without feeling like they are losing an edge. Second, the issue of some people simply not caring can play a big role in whether or not retirees will want to engage in sharing their knowledge. If they don’t care about the future of the company, why should they care about transferring all their knowledge to someone else?

Third, the overall fatigue of the retiree may have a big impact on the transferring of knowledge. If the retiree is exhausted from their normal work, they will not have the motivation to spend more energy on a new task like knowledge transfer. However, one interviewee said that the mere fact of making the retirees’ knowledge and the job that they do explicitly appreciated can be an extremely strong motivator. Fourth, there is emphasis put on that in order for any individual, not just a retiree, to practically be able to transfer their knowledge, there must be time allocated for it as well, so that it is part of their daily work tasks. It cannot be an add-on to their normal work, because it might become too heavy of a work load. In essence, knowledge transfer needs to be made a part of retirees’ work routines. (C16)

Another thing which some interviewees had found as a result of the retention initiatives in the organization is that it had raised awareness and understanding among employees for the issues relating to knowledge management and also the need for retaining knowledge from retiring employees. One interviewee said that every now and then some things come up in the internal information distribution (e.g. intranet), acting as a kind of activator in peoples’ minds that the issues of knowledge management and transfer are still on the management agenda. However, even though there is no follow-up as of if people are really reading up on these issues, the interviewee was confident that as long as somebody reads it and is aware of it, it is worth the effort of mentioning it in said publications.
Some interviewees pointed out that it is also important that management creates awareness through appreciation of the employees’ knowledge and embedding the faith in that it, in fact, can be transferred. They idea brought up was that if management can spread this awareness, understanding, and feeling of importance among all employees, it would promote a friendlier atmosphere, which could entail more knowledge sharing as well. Another interviewee pointed up that they believed that the mentoring program in the organization had triggered people to think that it is desirable to learn from everybody and share experiences and that since the program there has been a more positive environment for sharing knowledge. (C17)

One common factor which comes up when interviewees speak about how to motivate people who are involved in mentoring is that the will to learn is the strongest motivator. Some interviewees also pointed out that if there is a possibility for both parties to learn something, the motivation may be even stronger. Again, also the individuality question is brought up; whether or not anybody could be a mentor or mentee. The most common answer to that is that if they want to be part of a mentorship program, they should want to learn something. For a mentee, the understanding and will to really absorb everything, and not only the things that are interesting to them, is enhanced by telling them that it will have some value for them in the future. One interviewee pointed out that the mere chance to talk about something else other than just daily work can be a motivator for either mentor or mentee. The same interviewee said that for a mentor to be motivated they must be a people-person, so to speak; that they inherently want to meet new people. This kind of motivation may also be emphasized through matching mentors and mentees from different countries.

Another important point brought up by many has to do with the structuring of the mentoring program itself. Most interviewees are unison in that the people should not be appointed to a mentorship program; they should not be told to take part in the program as any other task. They did say, however, that some people should be strictly appointed as mentors to such a program if they possess very important knowledge. But in these cases it is important to inform them of why they should be taking part in it, as well as motivating them for it.

For mentors, the fact that they are made aware of the fact that they possess knowledge may be a good motivator as well, because it makes them feel good about themselves. One interviewee expressed their vast know-who as a great motivator for feeling good about their job. However, it is also emphasized that too much knowledge of one’s own
knowledge base can be inhibiting to sharing it with others. This is of course depending on what level the mentor is on in the organization. If they are very close to retirement it may be that they don’t experience any internal competition and so will be very willing to share. But if there are still milestones ahead of them, in terms of career advancements in the organizational hierarchy, this type of political interest may arise. (C18)

4.2.1.3. **Structure**

When speaking of structured initiatives, and more specifically regarding mentoring, this entails that partners are chosen by management beforehand, all meetings are prescribed (in terms of knowledge that needs to be transferred and amount of meetings to be held), and that clear goals or milestones are set for the relationship as a whole. Unstructured mentoring would entail that people taking part are voluntary, they can choose their partners freely, they can meet and talk about whatever they want to discuss, and that the goals of the relationships are very broad. In the interviews there were a lot of comments regarding whether or not mentoring, as a knowledge retention initiative, should be strictly structured or not. An issue was whether or not it should be completely guided from top management or if middle-management should take part in guiding mentorships. In general there were different views on this, but there was a fair unanimity in that there needs to be some kind of middle ground found between the unstructured and structured.

Making the program more personalized was for some people an important point. One way to do this would be to tailor the program for individual needs. However, this would easily become too costly. Another way to do this would be to either let the partners decide quite freely on the topics to discuss, or that a middle manager closer to the mentorship partners monitors what knowledge that needs to be transferred.

In the beginning of the mentoring program at the case organization, there was first a pilot made. It came out of the realization that the age structure of the organization was very unbalanced with a high amount of employees being close to retirement. There were a group of people identified as key people, who were going to leave, whose knowledge would urgently need to be retained through transferring it to another employee. Because of this rush, and because the interests of the pilot were very specific, regarding certain pieces of knowledge from certain people to be transferred to specified individuals, the program had to be very structured (in order to serve those purposes).
After this pilot, the mentoring programs became more ‘traditional’ in the sense that they were not as structured because the matter was not as urgent anymore. This would entail that the purposes and urgency of a mentoring program will affect the way it is initiated and controlled. (C19)

There were also discussions on whether or not it is good for the mentors and mentees to know each other before they engage in a mentoring relationship. These ideas can be transferable to any initiative where there is a person sharing their knowledge, and another person absorbing it. Quite often views were mixed here as well. Some people said that it is good if they know each other, but only to a certain extent. In many cases, it was agreed that if they don’t know each other, the knowledge sharer also has a lot to learn, which can make the relationship even more engaging. This was especially noted when a mentor and their respective mentee were located in different business units in different countries. However, it was also pointed out that business units existing across borders could in fact inhibit knowledge sharing; people may feel that what they know in their own business unit belongs to them and does not need to be shared with anyone else. One interviewee pointed out, from their own experience, that if the mentor and mentee already have close relations, such as belonging to the same team, the results of the relationship may be better because then the direct effect of it is understood; the more knowledge the mentee gets, the better it is for the team. However, one interviewee explained, also from their own experience, that when you know the person too well, it is not productive for the purposes of mentoring. Another interviewee explained that one important thing to understand is the general respect that the mentor and mentee have for each other. In other words, even know they may know each other, they may not respect each other, and thus mentoring will not succeed. (C20)

There is another major point brought up by nearly all interviewees when it comes to choosing mentors and mentees and pairing them up. What it boils down to in the end is the question of whether or not the personalities match one another. That is to say that someone can be a good mentor for certain mentees but not for others. There needs to be a kind of personal chemistry between the two individuals. (C21)

There was also a point brought up about the importance of close communication when transferring knowledge that is hard to express or that is difficult to identify. One interviewee described how knowledge is transferred through close communication. The interviewee speaks of issues just ‘popping’ up. This is a very good example of implicit knowledge which appears without preplanning it. So in this sense, just the fact that
close communication occurs can be a good way to catalyze or even enable the transfer of implicit knowledge. (C22)

4.2.1.4. The nature of the industry

Interviewees frequently pointed out that the nature of the industry in which the case organization is active is a big contributor to how knowledge, and what kind of knowledge, is built up and shared among employees. They said that the industry doesn’t change very rapidly, and that people have been doing things in the same way for a very long time. Also, it is a very traditional industry regarding how careers are built from the ground up, meaning that people who are higher up in the organization are often old-timers with lots of experience. The simple realization of this is something which you have to take into account when studying any organization from the point of view of knowledge management. In essence, the nature of the industry, its long history, and traditional ways of doing things, can actually be an inhibitor to knowledge sharing. This is because of a kind of vertical thinking style, where you are constantly looking upwards and competing against others at the same level in order to reach the top of the hierarchy. However, having a vertical, divisional, traditional organizational structure doesn’t mean that knowledge sharing doesn’t occur at all, but it means that it occurs mostly vertically. The problem pointed out is that it needs to occur horizontally as well. The way this can be achieved is by job rotation (talked about more later), as pointed out by some interviewees. (C23)

Perhaps one of the most central recurring themes that comes up in each interview is the idea that important knowledge within the case organization (or any organization in a base production industry) is not just made up of individual pieces of experiential (or tacit) and functional (or practical, explicit) knowledge, but a much greater whole, so to say. It is more about a ‘way of thinking’ regarding one’s work tasks, and being able to see the ‘whole picture’. Regarding this is the importance of understanding the horizontal organization, as opposed to just seeing the vertical. Through understanding how various parts of the organization are chained together (horizontally) one will absorb a wider knowledge base. It was frequently pointed out that these types of people are the vital people in the organization because they tend to have multi-disciplinary experience from different organizational areas. (C24)

A final aspect brought up regarding this was that knowledge transfer may be inhibited by naivety, and this is something which needs to be understood and addressed. For
example, it was noted that people who have only been working in one position their whole careers will look at things through a narrow or channeled view, and this would mean that they are not receptive of broad knowledge. If many employees are like this, it can affect the organizational culture in such a way that it inhibits knowledge transfer on a broad scale. (C25)

4.2.2. Core category 2: Heightening importance

4.2.2.1. Management transparency

There seemed to also be a kind of ‘behind-the-curtains’ approach to how knowledge was being managed, especially with reference to how aware the interviewees (not the ones involved in managing the retention initiatives) were of initiatives being taken for retaining knowledge, or how explicitly knowledge management was portrayed to them. However, many of the interviewees who had been part of the mentoring program (set up earlier in the case organization) felt that it may have been due to them not being actively part in the program anymore that caused them to be unfamiliar with the organization’s ongoing initiatives.

What comes to mind from these kinds of comments is that it may not be desirable from a management point of view to make things too explicit either. It may even be harmful to the program itself if, for instance, people are too well informed about what the agenda for (knowledge) management is. However, if people are not informed about the agenda and retention initiatives, the effect may be that they don’t see them as important anymore and thus they don’t talk about knowledge transfer issues, and don’t keep themselves up to date either. (C26)

Some interviewees emphasized that knowledge transfer, and the amount of knowledge that can be transferred from an employee about to retire has a lot to do with the time that the successor spends together with the retiree. In practical terms, what is being said is that the longer the time spent together, the more knowledge can be transferred. However, it was also argued that the time when knowledge transfer should occur is not in the final years before retirement but much earlier than that. This is not only because you need a lot of time to capture the knowledge base, but also in order to avoid them becoming too ‘tired’ to take on the tasks of transferring their knowledge. One interviewee also said that at around the age of 40, most people have reached some kind of milestone in their careers, whereby they may need some kind of encouragement to
continue in their jobs. One way could be to show them appreciation of their accumulated knowledge base. (C27) The importance of knowledge retention initiatives should already have been in effect at around this age. The point is that it is not sufficient to make the initiatives transparent right before retirement occurs, because it may be far too late.

4.2.2.2. Implications of lost knowledge

In many cases it seemed that interviewees were realizing the cost of losing experience from older employees leaving for retirement, but they were not saying that it was a monetary issue, because it was regarded as too difficult to measure. However, what they did point out was that it could cause ‘time’ issues where someone would halt in a procedure, wondering how it had been done by their predecessor, and spending a lot of time figuring it out. There were many examples of people leaving leading to situations where people had thought to themselves that ‘the older people would have known how to do this’. (C28) Another way that lost knowledge had been realized as a cost in terms of time was that you may be doing something which has already been tried in the past and not worked out. Basically, if the persons knowledge of what has not worked in the past can be retained, costs induced by time spent on re-inventing the wheel, so to speak, can be avoided.

4.2.2.3. Informal does not mean unimportant

Interviewees also spoke of retention initiatives not having to be so official. There were several accounts of mentoring occurring without any official monitoring or initiation. Some interviewees even said that mentoring relationships can exist without them being referred to as ‘mentoring’, and that they occur naturally between members of the organization. One interviewee said that it may be good to stimulate these kinds of informal mentorships as well. Another interviewee said that if you allow people to form their mentoring partners more freely, it may stimulate more people for more knowledge sharing. Spin-offs had also occurred as a result of the mentoring initiative done at the case organization. For example, one interviewee initiated an informal mentoring-type relationship as a mentor to a younger employee, as a result of having been influenced by the official program. (C29) All in all, just because an initiative is not formal, doesn’t mean that it is important for knowledge retention, because its positive
effects can be even more emphasized. Therefore, it should be noted to also heighten and acknowledge the importance of informal initiatives.

Before delving into the discussion part, it may be useful to get a reminding overview of how we have arrived to the discussion in the thesis. First, data was collected and compiled, and through analysis, applying Grounded Theory methodology, some categories were found. These categories were found to belong to 2 core categories. By looking at the categories through their respective core categories, further analysis was made, in order to create 7 meta-categories which were rationalized thoroughly. At this point, the discussion kicks in, and it is put together in conjunction with the gathered theoretical material from the earlier literature review. Through this, we will see how some concluding factors (that affect knowledge retention) will have been found; some which build on the existing theory, and some which are entirely novel.
5 DISCUSSION

After the analysis and presentation of the resulting categories derived from the empirical data, the discussion part of this research paper will now take over. The discussion will embrace the whole analysis chapter, without specifically referring to any quotes from the interviews, in conjunction with theory gathered from the literature review. The purpose of the discussion chapter is to organize the revealed categories in such a way that they give meaning to the empirical data, closure to the categories themselves, as well as to compare, contrast, and build on the existing theory with the empirical results and generate novel ideas for the field of knowledge management. Finally, the discussion should also serve a purpose of triggering analytical thoughts in the reader, as well as carving lacunae for possible further research. As such, the discussion is by no means definite, and, staying true to Grounded Theory methodology, it is not finite either.

In order to remain on track with the purposes of this thesis, one should consider each of the subsequent sub-headings as ‘factors’ that deal with notions and inclusive elements that should be considered and can affect knowledge retention in organizations. The factors are all main findings of this thesis, but should nonetheless be differentiated into two sections.

First and foremost, 7 concluding factors that build on existing theory will be presented. Thus, there will be links made to the literature review and the theories that they build on. The significance they have is that they enable the reader to further understand what other features that may be coupled to these factors.

Secondly, 7 concluding factors that turned out to be entirely novel will be presented. Even though there may be some light references to the literature review, they bear no direct reference to the existing theory.

The following table shows the two factor sections (theory-building and novel) and the respective factors that make up the sections.
Figure 13: Tables of concluding theory-building and novel factors that should be taken into account when initiating knowledge retention, as discovered in this research

### DISCOVERED FACTORS THAT BUILD ON EXISTING THEORY

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<td>B1</td>
<td>Dilemma of telling people that they will be a successor</td>
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<td>B2</td>
<td>Spreading responsibility</td>
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<td>B3</td>
<td>Know-who and networks are extremely difficult to identify and transfer because they are shared knowledge bases</td>
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<td>B4</td>
<td>Relying on just one knowledge transfer tool is not reliable nor sustainable</td>
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<td>B5</td>
<td>Accepting a level of acceptance</td>
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<td>B6</td>
<td>Augmenting knowledge retention initiatives</td>
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<td>B7</td>
<td>Structuring initiatives is contingent to the purpose it’s supposed to serve</td>
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### DISCOVERED NOVEL FACTORS

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<td>N1</td>
<td>Defining mentoring and creating meaning through wording</td>
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<td>N2</td>
<td>Contagiousness of initiatives</td>
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<td>N3</td>
<td>The positive side of a large number of retirements</td>
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<td>N4</td>
<td>Horizontal learning: Knowing how to get the multi-disciplinary knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N5</td>
<td>Knowledge not just lost, but also missed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>N6</td>
<td>Setting the stage, and is it necessary to explicate tacit knowledge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N7</td>
<td>Measuring the cost of lost knowledge</td>
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This chapter will be followed by a conclusive chapter, where the conclusions on to what extent the aims of this thesis were accomplished will be presented.
5.1. Concluding factors that build on existing theory

5.1.1. Dilemma of telling people that they will be a successor

The idea of how potential successors may react when informed that they are potential candidates is something not brought up in the existing literature that was reviewed. However, there are some notions which are comparable and which can be used to support this suggested dilemma, or factor, to take into account when managing succession planning for knowledge retention purposes.

In a competence mapping and succession planning endeavor, pointing out successors can be a very delicate procedure. If the potential successors are told too early on about that they may be succeeding a retiring employee, it may trigger some undesired effects, in the same sense that the existing literature speaks of ‘accidental values’ (Jashapara 2004). In other words, the accidental value of competitiveness for career advancements and thereby discouragement of knowledge transfer may arise. Of course it is good to tell an employee if they will be succeeding someone so that they can prepare themselves for that position and absorb any appropriate knowledge. But since the knowledge may be very multi-disciplined, there may be a group of potential candidates available, and it may take many years for them to come up to the same level of experience as the one leaving. In this sense, informing them early on about their potential to succeed the upcoming retiree is desirable, but it may also be inhibiting knowledge sharing for several reasons.

First off, if there are several candidates present and they are told that they are all candidates for an opening retiree’s position, there may be some internal competition created between them. The fight for knowledge may induce political confrontations between candidates, much like the theory indicates as well (Argote 1999, 2005, Coopey & Burgoyne 2000, Jashapara 1993, Messick & Mackie 1989, Tajfel 1981). Secondly, when the final succession decision is made, a feeling of unfairness may emerge from the ones not chosen from the group of potentials. This may leave them in despair for any other upcoming opportunities. It may have been better for them to not know about it in the first place.

Thirdly, the ones who weren’t initially chosen as potentials for the position may feel a sense of pointlessness in their job because an opportunity to climb up in the
organization is lost. This could demotivate them in their work and as such also demotivate them to share knowledge, and care about the organization’s future.

And finally, if there is just one potential identified, and they are not chosen in the end, they may feel extremely disappointed, because they have put a lot of effort into getting that position. As above, it can demotivate them for their own work and deter on their openness and concern for the future of the organization.

In this sense it may be desirable to keep the list of potential successors confidential, so that the successors or the ‘not-chosen’ ones are unaware of them being potentials, and thus the possible undesired effects won’t transpire. It may also be desirable to just have one candidate for each succession. However, this may easily create an environment of jealousy and feeling of unfairness and lack of opportunity, as pointed out by one of the interviewees.

5.1.2. **Spreading responsibility**

The empirical research indicates a clear need for establishing responsibilities when it comes down to knowledge retention activities, especially when there is a sense of urgency and rush, in order to maintain guidelines, set milestones, and give management a sense of overall monitoring. The existing theory also indicated that in order for retention initiatives to work, liabilities and responsibilities need to be established (Rothwell 2011, Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006, Jashapara 2004). However, there were some aspects brought up in the empirical which do not come up in the existing literature (i.e. they go beyond just HR and executive levels). There are three main groups of people that need to assume responsibilities:

1. **HR management** – Much like the existing theory dictates HR should assume the responsibility of making sure that they how to implement KR initiatives and which initiatives should be implemented on whom, as well as distributing the instructions clearly to the people taking part in them (Rothwell 2011, DeLong 2004). One thing which was especially denoted in the empirical research which is not covered in the existing theory is that HR should not only assume the responsibility for starting, monitoring and following-up, but also *ending* the program. Coupled with this, feedback needs to be provided to the participants so that they also understand the effect it had, as well as how they can do better for the
future. (Part of their motivation taking part in the program has to be linked to them understanding why they are part of it and what the meaning of it is).

2. Middle-management – Unlike the theory suggested, where it was implied that only higher management of an organization should identify and monitor knowledge possessors (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006), the notions from the empirical suggest that an increased involvement of middle-managers would be more conducive and efficient. They should assume the responsibility of keeping up to date with the current knowledge base of their subordinates, establishing who the key persons and key potentials are, as well as monitoring the age structure in order to project retirements and plan successions. They should also assume the responsibility of overseeing which areas of knowledge need to be retained and who needs to transfer what knowledge to whom. In addition, they should be supportive in explaining to their subordinates the reasoning behind knowledge retention initiatives as well as making them understand the ‘why’ in order to boost motivation to participate in it.

3. Participants – This is a very important factor in knowledge retention indicated in the empirical analysis, which was not mentioned in the existing literature: No matter on what level in the organization, the individual participants of a knowledge retention initiative need to assume a basic and diligent personal responsibility, in the same way as when being part of any project in the organization. Individual employees need to see to it that they follow through from beginning to end, and that they communicate to the administrators if they feel like they don’t understand or feel capable for the initiative at hand.

However, it should also be pointed out that passionate responsibility can’t merely be expected from everybody. Of course a superior may bluntly tell their subordinates to do something but then they will feel no inherent responsibility to do it. The key is that people can learn to emotionally take on responsibility by understanding why they are doing it. This is also key for strategic thinking because you need to understand how your daily tasks relate to the wider long-term view. As such, employees need to understand the ‘why’ and also the long-term purpose (of something that doesn’t seem to have an immediate benefit) when taking part in knowledge retention initiatives.
5.1.3. **Know-who and networks are extremely difficult to identify and transfer because they are shared knowledge bases**

As was indicated by the results from the interviews, and which can be identified as one of the important types of knowledge that exists, know-who is something which is very difficult to understand. It usually exists on explicit, implicit, and tacit levels. In addition, the network that one has is both internal (within the organization), and external (to external stakeholders). These networks compile into a massive knowledge base of know-who, which is both internally and externally crystallized over a long period of time.

In addition, what makes networks extremely difficult to transfer is that people may be dependent on a certain person for assistance, for example. When that person leaves, many people may be in trouble because they don’t have the knowledge support anymore. This may also exist externally, in the sense that an external person is dependent on the person who leaves the organization. When a successor takes over, the fact that the person has changed in the network can cause some conflicts with reference to inexperience, as well as the successor not possessing permission-to-play values, as suggested by Ball & Gotsill (2011); the most fundamental and necessary values needed to be considered a part of the social environment among the organization’s stakeholders.

The existing theory says that mentoring can help to transfer know-who because it helps to transfer the social contacts that are needed to perform certain tasks. The empirical also pointed at that mentoring makes the employees involved in the mentoring relationship ask each other questions which leads to implicit knowledge ‘popping up’, such as know-how.

In conclusion, however, *it can be argued that an employee's network and know-who knowledge base could be the most difficult one to replace because it does not only reside in one persons mind, but it is, in a sense, shared.* In addition, since it often exists on the implicit and tacit levels, and since one is never fully aware of the knowledge one possesses (Davenport & Prusak 1998, 2000, Leonard & Swap 2005), it makes it even more complicated.
5.1.4. *Relying on just one knowledge transfer tool is not reliable nor sustainable*

The point here is that not only can you not rely on one single tool, but you also need to know which tools you can use at which levels of the organization. And as if this isn’t enough, none of the tools used will be efficient if you don’t have a knowledge-sharing culture in place (Jashapara 2004).

Thus, having a knowledge-sharing culture is a set demand for any tool to work. In addition, if the culture promotes knowledge sharing already, such as that people are very open and share their experiences, then, chances are that knowledge retention initiatives will not be so urgent.

The first and most prominent tool that has been identified in the case organization is mentoring, or mentorships. As the existing theory denotes, mentoring is probably the best tool for transferring implicit and tacit knowledge. (Rothwell 2011) In a similar vein, the interview data indicates that mentoring is more suitable for transferring the knowledge of white collars than for blue collars. Mentoring can be very important and have a lot of potential for transferring knowledge if it works, that is, if the prerequisites are there; the right match-up of pairs, sufficient time, a balance between structured and non-structured, attitudes and motivation, management support, and common understanding for why it’s being done and what the effects will be.

White collar work tends to be a lot more conceptual. As such, the knowledge here is much broader and diffused across many different areas. Some of it is functional, a lot of it is networks, and some parts can be just plain hunches; pure experiential tacit knowledge. Because the people who work in these types of jobs tend to be quite conceptual ‘thinkers’, they may also be more apt for having discussions, and therefore mentoring can be a very suitable tool for transferring their knowledge.

Blue collar work tends to be more functional, and as such the knowledge required is more explicit. For these types of jobs, the knowledge can best be transferred through documentation. Documentation can be said to be the second tool.

Because blue collar work is less conceptual than white collar work, the knowledge may also be more concretely expressed, such as through steered discussions, which brings us to the third tool, namely, Communities of Practice (CoP’s). Here, larger teams of people can come together and discuss more technical things and share their knowledge
that way. However, CoP’s don’t only provide a forum for a group to share technical expertise, but it has also shown to be a mediator for sharing tacit knowledge and know-who. (Jashapara 2004, DeLong 2004, Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002) This was also noticed in the case organization; when groups of blue collars were put together, there was evident knowledge sharing of more implicit knowledge types occurring.

A big difference between the three tools mentioned is in how they should be timed. Documentation is something which happens over a longer period of time, and it should also be something routinized for the sustainability of knowledge in the long-run, such as it was in the R&D function in the case organization. Of course, it may be that when an employee is about to retire, they are asked to write down what they know, but this will scarcely be very productive as a lot of things can easily slip the mind, and a lot of knowledge verges on the implicit, existing on a continuum and spectrum (Polanyi 1967, Leonard & Sensiper 1998). As such, it has to be triggered somehow, usually through the use of it. Therefore, when trying to urgently communicate blue collar knowledge it may actually be best to have a successor shadowing the person leaving, because they see the knowledge in action, and through that they can ask questions regarding what they are doing and document it for their own purposes. This was seen in how the knowledge of machinery maintenance was transferred in the case organization.

CoP’s are also a more preemptive way to avoid urgent challenges of knowledge loss as employees retire. It’s a way for a group of people with the same interests, or same types of work, to come together and share their experiences. In the case organization, this was seen as an effective way to sustain the knowledge level and spread the knowledge across several people instead of having it centralized. Similarly, this knowledge could be documented in these CoP’s by someone writing memos. The CoP’s could also be steered to the extent that there is a third party who asks questions about work, and the participants answer to the third party. In essence, however, just merely setting up CoP’s is a good way to make sure that knowledge is transferred across the organization and is decentralized.

Another good way to evaluate the knowledge base that exists within an organization is to arrange some kind of competence mapping, whereby key employees, as identified by middle-managers, are interviewed for a thorough job description, the network that they use, and possible successors to them. This kind of competence mapping can be a very useful tool when deciding on who should be taking part in knowledge retention
initiatives, such as mentoring, as well as determining when they should take part in them.

5.1.5. Accepting a level of acceptance

The empirical data supports the theory in that there will always be barriers to knowledge transfer and therefore knowledge retention (refer to: Argote 1999, 2005, Coopey & Burgoyne 2000, Eisenhardt & Martin 2000, DeLong 2004). However, the empirical suggests that there needs to be some acceptable level of acceptance when it comes to retaining knowledge. First of all, it is too costly and time consuming to attempt to retain all knowledge from all retirees. Secondly, realistically speaking it may not even be possible to retain all knowledge. Third, there will probably always be some knowledge which you only later find out you have lost. Fourth, there is most probably knowledge being lost as we speak without us even knowing about it, and as such some knowledge is always being rediscovered. And fifth, the priorities of an organization may not allow for knowledge management initiatives to be invested in, especially in times of economic downturns where other more acute issues need to be addressed. The problem here is that even though an issue like retaining knowledge from retirees can be, for some organizations, a very important thing to address, it may not be taken seriously. This could be because,

1. **It is not easily measureable** (type and value of individual knowledge base),

2. **the effects of it are not easily visible** because it is really only the effect of not doing them which is visible (through the consequences),

3. **it is relatively new and none of the competitors are doing it** (so why risk it?), and because

4. **it may not be embedded in the organization’s strategy** so its importance is denied.

However, this acceptable level of acceptance is not easily calculated. But at least there has to be some realization that A: not all knowledge will nor can be retained and B: it will be hard to make a case for why knowledge retention is important to think about, especially during economically bad times.
Finally, one has to accept that there are certain kinds of people who simply will not care for transferring knowledge, whether it is on management level (within the people who should be managing knowledge) or the people who should be transferring it. In the theory discussed on how it is important to create ‘care’ and ‘commitment’ (Jashapara 2004:201) there is a sense of that if the organizational culture is made to support these kinds of values, all employees can theoretically become knowledge sharers. However, the empirical evidence seems to point at a much more blunt reality, which is that some people just simply do not care, full stop. This may be embedded in their natural behavior. Perhaps they separate their personal life from their work life so strongly that they just work for the sake of working and earning money, but do not have any kind of commitment or concern for the company as a whole. It may also be that they are so tired in their profession that they do not want to put any more effort into it, perhaps due to old age or exhaustion. These kinds of lack of care and commitment will be nearly impossible to deal with, and as such, there needs to be an understanding and acceptance for these types of cases.

5.1.6. Augmenting knowledge retention initiatives

One major conclusion from the empirical analysis is that in order to make knowledge retention a part of the everyday agenda, and in order to prioritize it, it needs to be augmented to a higher level, beyond just being ‘another program’ and perhaps embedded on a strategic level along with general knowledge management. This is one of the most emphasized ideas in knowledge retention, and knowledge management literature in general. (Jashapara 2004, DeLong 2004, Ball & Gotsill 2011) However, if the organization is not seeing knowledge loss as a problem then why should an organization prioritize it?

There is an evident dilemma between management trying to tell about knowledge retention initiatives and employees not caring because it is presented as a ‘program’. In addition, the continuity of knowledge retention (because it is not a one-time thing) makes it seem as if there is no beginning, nor end. As many people pointed out in the interviews, they had no idea of whether or not there were mentorships still going on, and if they were being followed-up in any way. Some said that they thought the mentorships were an ongoing process, and as such was difficult to measure and understand as a whole. In a nutshell, employees are not able to conceptualize what knowledge retention initiatives, like mentorship programs, actually are or what the
benefit of them will be. If people don’t realize this, why should they take responsibility for following it up?

Another issue is that the nature of the organization under study was in an industry which is very process oriented, and as such, things are often described in numbers, and visualized as having a beginning and an end. Because of the problem of not being able to measure knowledge retention initiatives effectively (and definitely not in numbers) coupled with a difficulty of visualizing the process adequately (like a production process chain of events from input to output), people will not necessarily understand what it is and what the meaning of it is. This indicates that the industry in which an organization is should determine how management needs to approach their employees when talking about knowledge retention.

However, knowledge actually being lost will be the most effective in making people realize that knowledge is important, because then the linkages are made between why that knowledge is important and has an effect on operations; it’s not just skills. This is not to say that you should just let knowledge be lost. Rather, in cases where knowledge has not been identified before it was lost, after it actually has been lost it is important to identify it for the future. That could be one way to really gain appreciation or acknowledgment for implicit or tacit knowledge or even just knowledge in general, and, through that, gain support for knowledge retention initiatives.

5.1.7. Structuring an initiative is contingent to the purpose it’s supposed to serve

The idea of alignment in terms of strategy formation is something which frequently comes up in the existing literature when talking about integration of strategy and knowledge retention. However, making knowledge retention initiatives aligned with the purpose they are supposed to serve is not made that explicit. Rather, different initiatives or tools are discussed merely with reference to the type of knowledge that can be transferred by using them. The empirical analysis, however, takes this a step further, by saying that structure of a retention initiative, such as mentoring, is contingent to the purpose of the initiative itself. In other words, different knowledge transfer tools or initiatives will serve different purposes and only work for certain parts of an organization.
The idea here is that *the organization must know what purpose and needs to be served and at what part of the organization:*

1. **What purpose/needs?** – directly related to type of knowledge, urgency, and scope of initiative.

2. **At what part of the organization?** – directly related to the kinds of jobs and people that work there and the type of knowledge they possess.

For instance, an organization may find that they have implicit knowledge possessed by employees who are about to retire. If they are retiring within the next year, there is urgency, and therefore the structure of the initiative taken to retain that knowledge has to be well established and outlined. This is because the needs and purpose for an initiative are very clear; to retain a certain knowledge type from a certain amount of people. In this sense, it must be monitored that these needs are met before they retire. There is no time to waste, so the meetings may be outlined beforehand and at close intervals. In addition, if there are many people retiring soon, the emphasis on structured in strengthened because there needs to be systematization present. It is simply not productive, nor realistic to tailor an initiative for each and every retiree. On the one hand, if there are just a few retiring, tailor-made solutions may be more apt. On the other hand, a strict structure must be maintained in order to monitor that all pieces of knowledge are retained.

Another thing that has to be taken into account is at what part of the organization a potential loss of knowledge is taking place. For example, if the loss of knowledge seems to occur by people leaving from a production line, it may be wiser to have somebody shadowing the one leaving. If it is on higher management level, mentoring may be more suitable. If it is a person who is part of a team, it may be wise to host CoP type sessions.

In conclusion to all the theory-building factors presented, the following diagram illustrates all these factors, which have been presented in this sub-chapter:
5.2. Novel concluding factors

5.2.1. Defining mentoring and creating meaning through wording

Because mentoring was one of the most prominent topics discussed in all interviews, what often came to mind was the definition of the word itself. In addition, does the word ‘mentoring’ really need to be defined in any way? The use of the word mentoring in an organizational setting can have an effect on people’s attitudes and conceptions. This is due to the connotations associated with the word mentoring. In the interviews, many people were puzzled over the term ‘mentor’, because they always pictured it as someone older than themselves sporting a white beard, or something of that nature. The implication of this may be that people do not feel as if they are adequate mentors, and may turn down an offer of becoming one. However, as it turned out, the people who had been mentors had realized that it worked out just fine even though they were not old and grey-haired, and, in turn, they questioned the use of the term, and suggested that perhaps it should be called something else.
Another important point brought up by one interviewee was that the word ‘mentoring’ may mean something completely different for different generations. It may also be that the younger generation, which is constantly bombarded with information and which is daily using social media tools to communicate and transfer information may not even need mentoring in the future because they are so well connected already. The way of communication of older people and old companies may be so old fashioned, and younger people may be connected in such a way, that mentoring and older forms of communication are rendered useless.

In essence, one factor that organizations should take into consideration is the sensitivity that people may have to the use of wording, especially if they are not pre-defined. The theory did not bring up this factor at all, and as such, it could be considered one of the main findings and conclusions in this thesis.

5.2.2. Contagiousness of initiatives

The setup of any initiative can trigger other spin-off activities which are not officially initiated or monitored. For example, a mentoring program can trigger people to start up unofficial mentoring relationships. In this sense, official knowledge retention initiatives can encourage a more knowledge-sharing culture. In other words, it seems as if it is contagious.

Like one of the interviewees also mentioned, there were Communities of Practice type groups set up as a result of being influenced by the ideologies implied by the mentoring program in the case organization (=sharing knowledge is good). This is a good testament to how an initiative and the ideologies it represents can influence the thinking of a whole organization, even for the ones not having taken part in the initiative.

In the same way, certain very strong people, who are respected through hierarchies and have a charismatic personality, may also have a contagious influence on the employees of an organization. Even though the existing theory doesn’t bring about the notion of ‘contagiousness’ or how initiatives can influence others in the organization to pursue the values of those initiatives, what is mentioned is that higher managers and HR can deliberately have an influence on the organizational culture by staying true to and demonstrating aspirational values. (Brown 1998)
5.2.3. The positive side of a large number of retirements

Old vs. new knowledge
As mentioned in the results part, there was a completely different take on knowledge retention brought up by some interviewees, namely, that some knowledge can be considered to be redundant and as such should not necessarily be retained, and that new knowledge also needs to be embraced to replace the kind of thinking the old knowledge represented.

It could be argued that if your organization projects no problems for replacing people (i.e. that you are an attractive and successful employer), you are well prepared, and you have outlined key potentials and outlined your current core competences then you can look at a huge turnover of employees as an opportunity to get a new and fresh competitive edge.

The literature does bring about the notion of ‘unlearning’ (Hedberg 1981) whereby an organization constantly ‘loses’ some knowledge due to the fact that new things replace the old. The literature discusses this as being a normal part of the overall psychological learning process. But what was brought up in the empirical analysis was that there is a sense of some people desiring for older people to retire because they can then replace the old knowledge with new knowledge. The novelty in this is that in some cases it can actually be a good thing to have a large amount of employees retiring because it can attract young talent, boost innovative thinking, and give a competitive edge.

Opportunities for the young
Looking at new aspects of a large number of people retiring, there is one major positive one which may boost an entire organization. In the case organization there were about 25% white collars eligible to retire within the upcoming 5 years. This would mean a lot of job openings and possibilities for younger people to advance in their careers. If you have the knowledge retention activities in place and at work, there may be lots of great opportunities for the younger people to advance and boost commitment to the organization. As well, the organization is made more attractive on the job market because of many job openings for younger people.

5.2.4. Horizontal learning: Knowing how to get the multi-disciplinary knowledge

In base industries, the career paths are often well-defined, and your way up in the organizational hierarchy is very traditional; there is a sense of vertical thinking. If the
organization is not very big, and if resources are restricted, there will not be much job rotation and a tendency for a mentality of just looking upwards instead of sideways, as not everybody can have the privilege of moving across jobs. Knowledge may not be so well-spread across the organization due to this traditional ladder-style career path. Hence, both the career-path structure and the size of the organization can influence how much job rotation there is and thereby affect how spread out the knowledge is.

As such, having a traditional organization which has strict divisions between career paths is not a genuine problem, especially if people are happy with the system and if demographics are well accounted for. However, if the knowledge was more spread out there would be less work if the need for retaining knowledge came up. This need may arise from high personnel turnover or if there are looming demographic threats that have not been prepared for. In addition, it should be said that just because an organization’s career paths are structured vertically, it doesn’t mean that there is no knowledge sharing. It just means that the knowledge sharing will mostly occur vertically, between people in the same division. It also has to be accounted for that old employees may be stuck in their jobs and may not have motivation to share their knowledge or care about the company’s future. Job rotation can be an important tool to prevent people getting stuck in their jobs.

What is significant here is to teach people not specific knowledge, but the knowledge of how to get a more multi-disciplinary, ‘horizontal’ knowledge base. Often the people who are considered key persons are people who possess this kind of multi-disciplined cross-dimensional knowledge. They also happen to be people who have moved around in the organization throughout their careers, and, therefore, their experience is so vast that no single knowledge transfer initiative could possibly cover everything they have experienced. After all, their whole knowledge base will have crystallized into one seamless form which contains various combinations of various kinds of knowledge from different areas of the organization. Therefore, HR also needs to realize that key persons’ knowledge will often be very multi-disciplined, and will not only pertain to the current area of work they are in. What is more is that through job rotation a wider network is accumulated, which is not only very valuable per se, but also extremely hard to replicate.
5.2.5. Knowledge not just lost, but also missed.

One interesting discussion that should be had is the effect of when people feel that what people take with them when they leave the organization is not important knowledge per se, but something more emotionally concerning, such as a sense of humor, a good attitude, or an ability to spread team spirit. These are all things which are not easily replicable.

The interesting thing is that even though there may be a feeling of something leaving together with a person leaving an organization, it doesn’t have to be something directly related to a job task. On the other hand, even though it is not directly related, it can be traceable to something which can have an equally upsetting effect. For example, say there is an employee who has a great sense of humor which causes the whole work environment of the team that they are part of to be very positive. If they were to retire, the work morale of the rest of the team would decrease a lot. This, in turn, could cause the whole team to become less productive and not feel as happy about their job, because they miss the missing person’s sense of humor. It would take some time to regain that morale. In this sense, the social skill or knowledge of creating a good work environment left with the retiree leaving. Their knowledge was not just lost, but also missed, which had a negative effect on productivity and work morale.

In addition, if this retiree had a well-established external network, the work for the people on the other side of that network might also be affected by the retiree’s absence. That, as such, has no direct effect on the internal environment of the organization to which the retiree belonged, but the replacement employee may be responded to with disappointment from that network which they need to inherit. In some sense, this can be related to the idea of organizational routines, and how employees’ dependency on each other can be lost when someone leaves (Feldman & Rafaeli 2002, Jashapara 2004) but those theories don’t take into account how remaining employees feel when someone’s personality leaves. This idea was something directly brought up by many interviewees as something which can have a great impact on work efficiency and morale. This is something which managers should take into account when employees leave the organization.
5.2.6. Setting the stage, and is it necessary to explicate tacit knowledge?

The final novel discussion is a very important one because it could mean the slashing of unnecessary hours spent on trying to figure out what tacit knowledge exists within an organization. Time after time, the accounts (of tacit knowledge having been lost) point at that you cannot know that tacit knowledge has been lost before it actually is lost. Not only is this a problem because you don’t know what the knowledge is, but imagine trying to identify every single piece of tacit knowledge that exists. It would just be too tremendous of a venture. Here a thought arises; why spend time on thinking about something that is inevitably not worth the time and effort? Instead, organizations should be focusing on how they can set the stage for fruitful knowledge transfer.

A great example which supports this discussion is on the maintenance of certain machinery equipment; an example taken from the case organization. The interval between each maintenance occurring is known, and who that knows how to maintain it is also known. There is monitoring of whether or not this knowledgeable person will be retiring. Hence, if the time comes when the machinery needs to be maintained, and the following scheduled maintenance will be needed only after they have retired, another employee has to step in to shadow this old knowledgeable employee, in order to retain their knowledge. As such, in this example, it has been identified that there is no need to try and document this knowledge because it is very experiential and implicit and because it has been shown that it can effectively be transferred in the manner described. So far they have not had any issues concerning loss of knowledge of how to maintain the machinery, which shows that it is an exemplary way of managing a sustainable knowledge base as well as retaining it according to projected retirements.

In essence, this example shows that it is not necessarily required to transform a piece of tacit, experiential knowledge into something more tangible, but it is good to know that certain initiatives can help to transfer that knowledge regardless of what that knowledge explicitly is. The point is that there is continuity in the job and that there is no sense of lost knowledge occurring.

In this light, what organizations should focus on is where this knowledge is located (=in what activities/tasks, and in whose heads), how they can make sure that the attitudes of the people are aligned with what is prescribed for effective knowledge transfer to occur (=favorable culture, personal will to teach/learn, personal care for the future, low mental fatigue, sufficient time allocation etc.), and setting up appropriate
initiatives that suit the kind of person and knowledge that is concerned. The conclusion is that if these three can be done successfully, then the knowledge will almost transfer on its own, because the stage is set for this to occur. If the business remains continuous and productivity stays the same, and there is no experience of lost knowledge relating to the tasks concerned, then the initiative can be said to have been successful. The cost of not doing it would have been the consequences of worsened business continuity, worsened productivity levels, and a feeling of having lost knowledge.

5.2.7. Measuring the cost of lost knowledge

A major theme that comes up again and again in the interview data is the fact that there is no consensus, nor is there any idea, of how you can measure the cost of lost knowledge. The existing literature does not put emphasis on why it should be measured either, as it doesn’t provide any concrete measurement tools. So why is it important to know how to measure it? If you can measure the cost of lost knowledge, you can:

1. Make a valid case for investing in knowledge retention.

2. Make a case for why employees should be interested in taking part in knowledge retention activities.

3. Make higher management understand how it can have an impact on the overall business continuity, and as such the importance of it will be augmented; perhaps even embedded in a strategic context.

The next question is: How can the cost of lost knowledge be measured? The problem lies in that it is very difficult to measure knowledge in the first place. Also, as the literature indicates, as for any investment in intangible assets (Greve 2003), the effects of it cannot be seen immediately, but usually much later (when the knowledge is needed). And much too often, its value is only recognized when it is too late, resulting in the knowledge having to be reconstructed. In the worst case, the cost may manifest itself in the loss of people’s lives (e.g. through a fatal accident due to lack of knowledge). The existing literature does not provide any concrete suggestions for how to measure the cost of lost knowledge. Next, I will present some ideas on how this could be done.

Lost knowledge could be measured in terms of time spent on reconstruction of knowledge. However, this is a very vague measure, and is more an indicator of that “it’s ok” to lose knowledge, and since time is only usually really measurable in money terms
through budgeted hours for specific tasks, this may be very difficult, since you do not know how much time will be needed for individual pieces of knowledge. To make the matter even worse, you don’t even know what knowledge is going to need time to be reconstructed. Therefore, a philosophy needs to be established for how to measure the cost of lost knowledge.

The cost of lost knowledge could be measured in terms of trying to estimate what the costs would be of not having a function working as it should (as a result of people leaving). This could be expressed in time, for example, through people needing to work longer hours on a specific task. It could be done through measuring how long certain tasks should take, and then measuring how long they take after someone important has left the company. The cost of lost knowledge could also be expressed through the decrease in productivity that may occur. For instance, linking retirements with productivity numbers could be a way to do this. Naturally, the causality of retirements leading to less productivity is something which will need to be looked at with scrutiny.

The two suggestions described above are retrospective ways of measuring the cost of lost knowledge, and would require the actual loss of knowledge to occur for it to be measurable. However, it would at least help to understand the value of the lost knowledge.

Naturally, the question is: Is there any way of measuring the cost of lost knowledge before it occurs? Estimates could be made with regard to what kinds of investments would need to be made in order to restore continuity, such as reconstructing certain knowledge. The areas where vital knowledge exists would need to be identified, then certain tasks within that area would have to be evaluated through the sense of how much time it would take to train someone for that new job, and as such re-inventing or reconstructing that knowledge.

One flaw exists in all of these, and that is with regard to network knowledge, or know-who. This is something which is very hard to evaluate, if not arguably impossible. Therefore, one can only speculate on the cost of losing know-who knowledge.

The following is a diagram illustrating all the 7 novel factors that were discovered, grounded in the empirical data:
Finally, the following diagram, figure 17, illustrates both the theory-building and novel factors in one consolidated diagram. It also shows the theoretical factors (from the end of the literature review) in order to illustrate that the theory-building factors are related to the theoretical factors. In essence, this diagram summarizes the results of this thesis; all the factors found to be taken into consideration when engaging in knowledge retention.
Figure 16: Conclusive diagram of the factors and notions that affect initiation in knowledge retention (KR)

Theory-building factors

- B1: Dilemma of telling people that they will be a successor
- B2: Spreading responsibility
- B3: Know-who and networks are extremely difficult to identify and transfer because they are shared knowledge bases
- B4: Relying on just one knowledge transfer tool is not reliable nor sustainable
- B5: Accepting a level of acceptance
- B6: Augmenting knowledge retention initiatives
- B7: Structuring an initiative is contingent to the purpose it's supposed to serve

Novel factors

- N1: Defining mentoring and creating meaning through wording
- N2: Contagiousness of initiatives
- N3: The positive side of a large number of retirements
- N4: Horizontal learning: Knowing how to get the multi-disciplinary knowledge
- N5: Knowledge not just lost, but also missed
- N6: Setting the stage, and is it necessary to explicate such knowledge?
- N7: Measuring the cost of lost knowledge

Theoretical factors

- Theoretical factors related to knowledge retention
6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the conclusions of the thesis will be presented and implications for practice and future research will be discussed.

6.1 Meeting the aims and objectives of the thesis

The main aim of this thesis was:

*To increase understanding and expand existing knowledge on what factors affect retention of knowledge, and thereby to expand on the theory which exists on knowledge retention.*

The first sub-aim of this thesis was to describe what organizations think about knowledge retention with relation to what needs to be taken into account, through analysis of empirical data. The second sub-aim was to explore and develop a broad number of novel factors and notions (that affect knowledge retention) which are grounded in empirical data. And consecutively, the third sub-aim was to reveal similarities and differences between the theory and the notions that have emerged from the empirical data, in order to build on existing theory.

I believe that the objectives of this thesis were reached, because the factors that affect knowledge retention were examined thoroughly in the case organization through interviews with a number of different people in the organization (to give a broad view), while adhering to the methodology of Grounded Theory. Because of the exhaustive research done on the case organization, both novel notions were discovered from analyzing the data and some existing theoretical notions were supported and also extended. In this sense, similarities were found between the empirical and the existing theory. However, one could not say that there were any major differences found between the theory and the empirical data; there were no real conflicting notions between the two.

The research question of this thesis was:

*What factors should organizations take into account when meeting the challenges of retaining knowledge as a result of an increasing number of employees leaving for retirement?*
There were several new factors discovered that are worth taking into account when meeting the challenges of retaining knowledge, which were derived from categories in the empirical comparative analysis. They could be considered novel, in the sense that they were ideas that did were not revealed in the extensive literature that has been reviewed. This is not to say that they are generalizable, because the research was only done on one case, but they are nonetheless grounded in the data, staying true to the method of Grounded Theory. One can also say that these novel factors which were discovered pertain more to substantive theory, thus, would require further research in order to be appreciated as formal theory. This is not to undermine the factors that were discovered, but more to remain modest and help the reader bear in mind that the conclusive theoretical inductions are quite substantive. The research itself was exhaustive, and I feel that there was a level of theoretical saturation reached, and, as such, this paper should bring about new notions on the factors that can affect knowledge retention within organizations operating in the base industry. As well, many of the factors that affect knowledge retention that were presented in the existing literature were reinforced by this paper’s empirical research and in many cases the existing theoretical factors were furthered and built upon.

The main findings in this thesis, as said in the discussion chapter, are 7 theory-building factors and 7 novel factors discovered as being important factors to take into account when retaining knowledge in organizations. To summarize, the main findings can be divided into four major themes:

1. **You don’t need to be able to define exact pieces of vital knowledge** that have to be transferred, but it is important to identify where the knowledge resides.

2. **It is important to make sure that the conditions are favorable** for knowledge transfer to occur when knowledge transfer initiatives are begun.

3. **There is some degree of lost knowledge which has to be accepted** due to the impracticalities and costs of trying to retain a large knowledge base. In addition, some people will not, by their nature, be willing to care for knowledge transfer.
4. **It is important to augment the importance of knowledge retention**

   beyond just being a program, because its importance is otherwise easily overlooked and forgotten with time.

In conclusion, the research question was answered sufficiently, as several new and theory-building factors were brought to light. As such, the reader should now be more aware of the factors that need to be taken into account when facing the challenges of retaining knowledge in organizations as employees retire.

**6.2. Suggestions for further research**

There are three main suggestions for research that are worth mentioning. First of all, the discussion on *how to measure lost knowledge* is something which should be looked into in greater detail. In this discussion there were several ideas suggested for how this could be done. However, there needs to be more investigation, beyond the qualitative level, on how lost knowledge could be measured in practice. Being able to create some kind of measurement tool for measuring this would be a great way to make a case for setting up knowledge retention initiatives, because managers and employees alike would be able to, in figures, see what the benefits of them would be.

Secondly, a *more longitudinal research* on how the effects of initiatives are felt in the long-term should be conducted. This is because of the field of knowledge retention being so young, and because the real effects of knowledge leaving organizations have probably not been felt yet. This is partially due to that not all the people expected to retire have retired, coupled with the fact that the effects are usually only felt much later when a certain kind of experiential knowledge is needed and when it probably cannot be retrieved any longer.

Finally, research on *how the entire generation shift will impact on how knowledge is shared in organizations* would be of interest. This is closely aligned with the concept of ‘unlearning’ or replacing the old with the new. It would be of interest to see how the younger generation will have changed the way that organizations communicate internally and how knowledge is managed. As brought up in the analysis, there is a feeling of younger people communicating more openly than the older ones and are better networked thanks to social media and globalization. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if organizations would also become more open and knowledge-sharing as the younger generation steps in.
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

**Introduktion**

Det är ett oundvikligt faktum att en ökande del av människor som tillhör den äldre årsgruppen av världens arbetskraft närmar sig pensionsåldern (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:3–18). Många av dem har arbetat inom endast en eller några organisationer under sina karriärer. På grund av detta har de byggt upp en stor mängd kunskap som relaterar till dessa organisationers kulturer, nätverk, teknologier, förändringar och historier. (Dychtwald, Erickson & Morison 2006:35–45) Det är av intresse att ta reda på konsekvenserna av att det största segmentet av arbetskraften i den moderna världen, de s.k. baby boomers, går i pension. Vad händer med all deras kunskap?

De följande generationerna är betydligt mindre, något som betyder att inom några år kommer det att uppstå en brist på arbetstagare på arbetsmarknaden. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:2) På grund av detta ställs företagsledare inför många utmaningar. En sådan radikal förändring i arbetskraftsdemografin kan ha en allvarlig inverkan på organisationer såtillvida att deras förmåga att vara innovativa, att konkurrera och att växa ställs på spel. (Liebowitz 2009:6)


(Rothwell 2011:15–20) Organisationer måste också kunna identifiera hurdan typs kunskap som måste behållas och på vilka sätt den kan överföras till efterträdare och till organisationen i sin helhet. (Ball & Gotsill 2011:3)


I denna sammanfattning kommer jag att presentera faktorer som måste tas i beaktande när organisationer tar itu med kunskapsbehållning. Först redogör jag för den existerande teorin på området för att hitta faktorer som redan föreslagits. Efter det presenteras en fallstudie. Genom analys av intervjuer som gjorts i fallstudien presenteras faktorer som är grundade i empirisk data. Till sist ges en överblick där alla indikerade faktorer uppvisas för att ge en bred förståelse för de olika faktorer som organisationer måste ta i beaktande när de påbörjar kunskapsbehållning.
Motivering av studien och syftesformulering

Problemställningen i detta arbete baserar sig på följande frågor: Vad betyder kunskap för en organisation i praktiken, och varför borde företagsledare bry sig om potentiell förlorad kunskap? Jashapara (2004) beskriver kunskap som någonting som gör det möjligt för någon att fatta beslut, som i sin tur utlöser handling, som i sin tur bygger erfarenhet. Ur en organisations synvinkel är denna förmåga någonting mycket viktigt och fördelaktigt. På grund av detta har kunskap och effektiv kunskapsledning allt mer betonats som faktorer som kan medföra konkurrenskraft och värdeskapande för organisationer. (Brandén 2003) Därmed borde det vara självlklart att förlorad kunskap kan försvaga en organisationers förmåga att vara konkurrenskraftig och skapa värde. Även om förlorad kunskap oroar många i företagsvärlden, så vet de inte vilka faktorer som bör tas i beaktande när de inleder behållning av denna kunskap. Forskningsfrågan är därmed:

Vilka faktorer bör företag ta i beaktande när de påbörjar kunskapsbehållning i och med att en ökande mängd anställda går i pension?

Huvudsyftet är:

Att öka förståelse och bygga på existerande kunskap om de faktorer som påverkar kunskapsbehållning och därmed att bygga på kunskapsbehållningsteori.

Det finns tre bisyften: Det första är att förklara vad organisationer anser om kunskapsbehållning i samband med vad som bör tas i beaktande, genom analys av empiriskt data. Det andra bisyftet är att utforska och utveckla en stor mängd nya faktorer (som påverkar kunskapsbehållning) som är grundade i empiriskt data. Följaktligen är det tredje bisyftet att hitta likheter och skillnader mellan teorin och de faktorer som uppkommit från empiriskt data, i syfte att bygga på existerande teori.
Presentation av tidigare forskning, forskningsmetod och material

Faktorer som påverkar kunskapsbehållning

I detta delkapitel kommer jag att presentera de faktorer som påverkar kunskapsbehållning enligt den tidigare forskning som gjorts på området. Faktorerna har organiserats i numerisk ordning för att man skall förstå att läsa dem som om de vore steg, som också gör dem lättare att följa.

Maktförhållanden och politiskt intresse


Organisationskultur

Omtänsamhet


Hur företagsledare uppvisar sina värden


Strategisk integration


Barriärer för kunskapsöverföring

Ansvar och målsättning


Förståelse av värdefull kunskap

En annan viktig del av kunskapsbehållning är förståelsen av att all kunskap varken kan eller behöver behållas. I och med detta är det nyttigt att kunna identifiera vilken kunskap som egentligen är värdefull att försöka behålla, och var den finns i organisationen. Rothwell (2011) ger 3 steg för hur man kan identifiera värdefull kunskap:

1. Identifiera nyckelprocesser.
2. Utpeka anställda som innehar specialkunskap, dvs. experter.
3. Bedöm risken ifall dessa personer lämnar organisationen.


Att investera i intellektuellt kapital

En mycket viktig faktor att ta i beaktande är hur organisationer skall investera i intellektuellt kapital, dvs. i kunskap. (Jashapara 2004:268) Man måste också förstå att

**Forskningsmetod: Grundad Teori**


Redogörelse för genomförandet av undersökningen

Genomförandet av undersökningen kan bäst beskrivas med hjälp av en bild. Denna bild visar hur jag, genom grundad teori (metoden som beskrevs ovan), kommit från data till kategorier, och vidare till konkluderade faktorer som påverkar kunskapsbehållning.

**Från data till kategorier till faktorer**

**DATA**

**KATEGORIER**

**FAKTORER**

Grundad Teori metodologi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervju data</th>
<th>Kategori</th>
<th>Upptäckta nya faktorer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Kännetecken</td>
<td>Upptäckta teori byggande faktorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anteckningar</td>
<td>Meta kategori</td>
<td>Teori, och teoretiska faktorer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resultatredovisning

Då jag analyserat all data och skapat kategorier under analysarbetet är resultatet upptäckten av 7 stycken nya faktorer och 7 stycken teoribyggningsfaktorer som bör tas i beaktande inför initiativ i kunskapsbehållning (KB). Med nya faktorer menas faktorer som inte framkommit i litteraturgenomgången. Nedan visas en bild av de faktorer som upptäcktes, samt hur de teoretiska faktorerna byggdes på:

- **Teoribyggningsfaktorer**
  - B1: Dilemma att berätta att anställda att de kommer att bli befordrade
  - B2: Spridning av ansvar
  - B3: Natverk är extremt svåra att identifiera och överföra fersomde existerar e mellan människor
  - B4: Att vara beroende av endast en kunskapsöverföringsmetod är oerakneligt
  - B5: Att acceptera en nivå av acceptera
  - B6: Upphöjning av kunskapsbehandlingssinitiativ
  - B7: Strukturering av initiativ är beroende av dess mål

- **Nya faktorer**
  - N1: Definitionen av mentor och att skapa mening genom ordanvändning
  - N2: Smittsamhet
  - N3: Den positiva sidan av pensioneringar
  - N4: Horisontell inlärning
  - N5: Kunskap är inte bara förlorad utan också saknad
  - N6: Förberedelser
  - N7: Att mäta kostnaden av förlopad kunskap

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**Teoretiska faktorer**
Härefter presenteras kort alla faktorer som upptäckts. Jag presenterar först de nya och sedan de som bygger på existerande teori.

**Upptäckta teoribyggnade faktorer**

*Dilemmat med att berätta för anställda att de kommer att bli befördrade*

Detta relaterar till matkamper som diskuterades i teoridelen. Ett dilemma uppståttes genom att många intervjuade antydde att man inte kan berätta till anställda för tidigt om att de kommer att ersätta någon som går i pension. I många fall så finns det många kandidater, och om de får reda på att de potentiellt kommer att väljas som efterträdare kan detta främja oönskade värden som t.ex. intern konkurrens.

**Spridning av ansvar**

Detta relaterar till förklaringen om hur ansvar är viktigt när man tar initiativ till kunskapsbehållning. Det nya som upptäcktes var att det också måste finnas en personlig ansvarsnivå bland de anställda. Denna ansvarsnivå kan antas om den anställda verkligen själv förstår *varför* han eller hon borde ta del i initiativet.

**Nätverk är extremt svåra att identifiera och överföra eftersom de existerar emellan människor**

Detta relaterar till svårigheten av att förstå viktig kunskap. Det som blev synligt i empirisk data empiriska data var att nätverk möjligvis är den svåraste typen av kunskap att identifiera och överföra eftersom de existerar emellan människor.

**Att vara beroende av en stå en kunskapsöverföringsmetod är Oberäkneligt**

I teorin aktualiserades flera olika kunskapsöverföringsmetoder och de presenterades ur den synvinkeln att olika metoder är anpassade för olika ändamål. Av de empiriska data framgick att man inte kan använda sig av en endast en metod, utan att man antagligen blir tvungen att använda sig av flera. T.ex. ansågs det att man samtidigt kunde ha mentorskap på ledningsnivån och Communities of Practice på lägre teamnivåer.

**Att acceptera en nivå av acceptans**

Av teorin kom det fram att vissa typer av kunskap är mycket svåra att identifiera och ibland inte kan identifieras förrän de förlorats. Detta betyder dock inte att man kallt skall låta den gå förlorad. I samband med att man investerar i kunskapsbehållning måste man samtidigt förstå att acceptera att en viss grad av kunskap kommer att gå förlorad oberoende av hur mycket man satsar på att behålla den.
**Upphöjning av kunskapsbehållningsinitiativ**


**Strukturerings av initiativ är beroende av dess mål**

Till sist upptäcktes en faktor som behandlade hur väl initiativ bör vara strukturerade för att de skall fungera. Teorin antar att det är bra att strukturera initiativ enligt målsättningar och mått. I det empiriska materialet upptäcktes det dock att initiativ kan vara bra att struktureras i vissa fall och i vissa fall inte. T.ex. om det är bråttom eller om det är en stor mängd människor som skall ta del av initiativet så borde det struktureras för att det skall kunna hanteras överhuvudtaget. Å andra sidan, om det är få människor som deltar och om kunskapen som bör behållas inte är definierad så kan det vara mera gynnsamt med ett ostrukturerat initiativ.

**Nya upptäckta faktorer**

**Definitionen av mentorskap och att skapa mening genom ordanvändning**

Människors uppfattning av initiativ som t.ex. mentorskap varierar beroende på hur de själva förstår betydelsen av ordet. Många sade att deras bild av en mentor är en gammal man med grått hår och skägg. Vissa kände sig inte förberedda att bli mentor på grund av att de inte tyckte att de uppfyllde de kriterier de föreställt sig.

**Smittsamhet**

Det visade sig också att efter att olika kunskapsbehållningsinitiativ hade tagits i organisationen så hade andra inofficiella initiativ tagits av anställda för att överföra kunskap. Detta betyder att bara genom att ge uppmärksamhet till kunskapsbehållning så kan det smitta av sig på hela organisationen i positiv bemärkelse.

**Den positiva sidan av pensioneringar**

Det ansågs också i vissa fall att det ibland är bra om anställda går i pension. Detta var för att man tyckte att det kunde vara nytigg att bli av med gamla tankesätt och få in nya innovativa unga människor.
**Horisontell inlärning**

Detta syftar på tanken som togs upp av många gällande att kunna veta hur man kan bygga upp en vid kunskapsbas: en sådan som många äldre har i fallorganisationen. Man måste tänka horisontellt, skapa kontakter i andra enheter, och proaktivt jobba med olika arbetsuppgifter.

**Kunskap är inte bara förlorad utan också saknad**

Kunskap som hade förlorats på grund av pensioneringar i fallorganisationen ansågs oftast som någonting som de *saknade*. I samband med att äldre och erfarna går i pension så tar de också med sig sin personlighet och historier om företaget; sådana saker som kanske skapat stark gemenskap och god arbetsanda.

**Förberedelser**

Organisationer borde använda tid på att förbereda sig så mycket de kan inför kunskapsbehållning genom att skapa en organisationskultur som gynnar kunskapsbehållning och är mottaglig för initiativ, och använder uträkningar och mått för att mäta om kunskapsbehållningen lyckas, bygga anpassande initiativ, samt skapa uträkningar och mått för att kunna mäta dess framgång. Företagsledare borde kanske inte tänka så mycket på exakt *vad* som måste behållas. Idén är att om allt är förberett så kommer denna kunskap att behållas oberoende av vad den är.

**Att mäta kostnaden av förlorad kunskap**

Detta relaterar starkt till någonting som man borde forska vidare i, dvs. hur man egentligen kan mäta kostnaden av förlorad kunskap. Vad som främst rekommenderas på basis av den empiriska forskningen är att mäta förlorad kunskap i termer av förlorad tid, dvs. den extra tid som behövs för att göra någonting utan en viss kunskapsbas.
Konkluderande avslutning

Undersökningen visade att det finns flera faktorer som måste tas i beaktande när man skall ta itu med kunskapsbehållning. De faktorer som kallades ”nya” kan anses som nya för att de bygger på idéer som inte framkom i litteraturgenomgången. Detta betyder inte att de kan anses vara generaliserbara, men de är i varje fall grundade i data i enlighet med metodologin grundad teori (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Forskningen i sig var uttömmande och en nivå av teoretisk mättnad uppnåddes. På grund av detta borde de faktorer som upptäckts anses vara väsentliga. Många av de faktorer som presenterades i litteraturgenomgången förstärktes också genom de empiriska resultaten av denna studie, och i många fall utökades existerande teori.

Nedan förtecknas de fyra viktigaste resultaten:

1. **Man behöver inte definiera exakta delar av viktig kunskap** som måste överföras, men det är viktigt att identifiera **var** den viktiga kunskapen finns.

2. **Det är viktigt att se till att förhållandena är gynnsamma** för att kunskap skall kunna överföras när kunskapsbehållningsinitiativ inleds.

3. **Det finns en grad av förlorad kunskap som måste accepteras** i och med att det är opraktiskt och kostsamt att försöka behålla en väldigt stor mängd kunskap.

4. **Det är viktigt att betona vikten av kunskapsbehållning** som något mer än bara ”ett program” i organisationen, eftersom vikten annars lätt förbises och glöms med tiden.

Sammanfattningsvis kan man säga att forskningsfrågan besvarades väl i och med att flera nya och teoribyggande faktorer upptäcktes.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Interview guide for interviewees involved as mentors

Knowledge Management at The Case Organization

- Is knowledge management or managing knowledge something made explicit in The Case Organization?
- So how do you feel that knowledge management or managing knowledge is approached at The Case Organization?
  - Formally, only among management? If so why do you think so?
  - Is it of interest to all employees? Should it be? If so why?
  - Is it acknowledged by all employees? Do all employees understand what it means?
  - If not, do you think they need to? Why?
- Do you think that there are certain persons at The Case Organization that possess vital knowledge, or is the important knowledge spread out among everyone?
  - Do you feel a need for initiatives being taken for managing knowledge at The Case Organization?
- Do you feel that some people’s jobs at The Case Organization are more dependent on the knowledge that they possess than others?
  - Do you think the necessary knowledge for a job is easily accessible for, say, a newcomer?
  - If not, do you have an example of this occurring or?
- Do you feel as if knowledge is actively shared among employees (e.g. either formally encouraged or initiated, or day-to-day over lunch/coffee breaks, when working in teams etc.)? If so, how?

People retiring

- I am interested in hearing about what happens when people go into retirement and what happens to their knowledge.
  - Do you have any experience or an example from people’s knowledge leaving with them (not just for retirement)? If so, how did you come to realize it?
    - What happened as a result of that?
      - Were you the only one who suffered?
      - Did you report it somehow, or is it a recognized problem?
    - What about after you have left a position, have you noticed this happening, after someone has taken over your job?
      - Why do you think this happens?
      - Do you think something could be done to keep (retain) this knowledge?
- Do you see this happening still (knowledge leaving)? Do you see this happening in the future? If so, is it a concern for you? Do you believe it is a concern for your company and companies as a whole?
- How do you think it can be prevented in a long-term kind of way?
  - What about after people retire? Why? Do they come back ever?
  - Have you ever documented you own knowledge in any way? What about the others, do they document their knowledge?

**Mentoring**

- How have you taken part in mentoring at The Case Organization?
  - Why do you think they wanted you?
    - Did they make it explicit?
  - How were partners chosen?
    - Did you have an influence?
  - Were you motivated to take part in it? Why?
    - What about the others taking part?
- Tell me about how the mentoring programs were initiated?
  - Why do you think they were initiated?
    - What was the reasoning?
    - Did it make sense to you?
  - What were the goals?
    - Were they achievable?
- Tell me about your experiences of having been part or being part in mentoring.
  - How did they work in practice?
    - Did mentors and mentees know each other beforehand?
      - Does it affect how a mentorship goes?
        - Is it better to have someone you know?
    - How many meetings? Were they prescribed?
    - Were meetings pre-outlined for you?
      - Why?
        - Is it better when they are structured?
    - Could you outline a typical meeting?
    - How was vital knowledge assessed/How did you know what need to be passed on?
    - How many meetings did people generally have?
      - Why?
  - Do you think the amount of meetings is important?
  - Do you think it takes a certain kind of person to be a mentor or mentee?
  - What did you get out of it?
    - Do you think the others involved feel the same?
      - Why/Why not?
    - Do you think the *official* goals were reached?
      - Why/Why not?
      - Is it the HRD’s responsibility to make sure that mentor relationships work, or is it something you can’t predict?
o In your opinion, was your mentoring relationship a success? How was it successful/unsuccesful?
  - Why do you think so?
  - Could you give an example of why it was successful/unsuccesful?
  - Would you do it again? Why?
    • Could you have done it differently?
    • (Did you learn to be a better mentor?)

o Do you think the whole program itself was successful and why?
  - How do you think they could be improved or could have been done better?

o Are employees in general satisfied with the mentoring programs?
  - Why do you think so?

o What were other employees’ (mentors, mentees, those not involved) opinion on initiating in mentoring?
  - Do you think there is an overall acceptance or motivation for these kinds of initiatives? Why?

  • (Any anecdotes or memorable moments from your mentoring experience?)
  o (What about from others’ mentoring experiences you have heard about?)

**Culture, environment, and atmosphere**

  • Could you describe the internal environment (not to use the word culture) in your company? Is there a sense of internal competitiveness?
    o “Yes” and “no”: Why do you think this is?
    o Any impact on knowledge management?
Interview guide for interviewees involved as mentees

Knowledge Management at The Case Organization

- Is knowledge management or managing knowledge something made explicit in The Case Organization?
- So how do you feel that knowledge management or managing knowledge is approached at The Case Organization?
  - Formally, only among management?
    - If so why do you think so?
  - Is it of interest to all employees?
    - Should it be? If so why?
  - Is it acknowledged by all employees?
    - Do all employees understand what it means?
    - If not, do you think they need to? Why?
- Do you think that there are certain persons at The Case Organization that possess vital knowledge, or is the important knowledge spread out among everyone?
  - Do you feel a need for initiatives being taken for managing knowledge at The Case Organization?
- Do you feel that some people’s jobs at The Case Organization are more dependent on the knowledge that they possess than others?
  - Do you think the necessary knowledge for a job is easily accessible for, say, a newcomer?
    - If not, do you have an example of this occurring or?
- Do you feel as if knowledge is actively shared among employees (e.g. either formally encouraged or initiated, or day-to-day over lunch/coffee breaks, when working in teams etc.)? If so, how?

People retiring

- I am interested in hearing about what happens when people go into retirement and what happens to their knowledge.
  - Do you have any experience or an example from people’s knowledge leaving with them (not just for retirement)?
    - If so, how did you come to realize it?
      - What happened as a result of that?
        - Were you the only one who suffered?
        - Did you report it somehow, or is it a recognized problem?
      - What about after you have left a position, have you noticed this happening, after someone has taken over your job?
        - Why do you think this happens?
        - Do you think something could be done to keep (retain) this knowledge?
  - Do you see this happening still (knowledge leaving)? Do you see this happening in the future? If so, is it a concern for you? Do you believe it is a concern for your company and companies as a whole?
  - How do you think it can be prevented in a long-term kind of way?
- What about after people retire? Why? Do they come back ever?
- Have you ever documented you own knowledge in any way?
  What about the others, do they document their knowledge?

Mentoring
- How have you taken part in mentoring at The Case Organization?
  - Why do you think they wanted you?
    - Did they make it explicit?
    - How were partners chosen?
      - Did you have an influence?
  - Were you motivated to take part in it? Why?
  - What about the others taking part?
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  - Why do you think they were initiated?
    - What was the reasoning?
      - Did it make sense to you?
    - What were the goals?
      - Were they achievable?
- Tell me about your experiences of having been part or being part in mentoring.
  - How did they work in practice?
    - Did mentors and mentees know each other beforehand?
      - Does it affect how a mentorship goes?
        - Is it better to have someone you know?
    - How many meetings? Were they prescribed?
    - Were meetings pre-outlined for you?
      - Why?
        - Is it better when they are structured?
    - Could you outline a typical meeting?
    - How was vital knowledge assessed/How did you know what need to be passed on?
    - How many meetings did people generally have?
      - Why?
      - Do you think the amount of meetings is important?
  - Do you think it takes a certain kind of person to be a mentor or mentee?
  - What did you get out of it?
    - Do you think the others involved feel the same?
      - Why/Why not?
    - Do you think the official goals were reached?
      - Why/Why not?
      - Is it the HRD’s responsibility to make sure that mentor relationships work, or is it something you can’t predict?
  - In your opinion, was your mentoring relationship a success? How was it successful/unsuccesful?
    - Why do you think so?
    - Could you give an example of why it was successful/unsuccesful?
- Would you do it again? Why?
  - Could you have done it differently?
  - (Did you learn to be a better mentor?)
    o Do you think the whole program itself was successful and why?
      ▪ How do you think they could be improved or could have been done better?
    o Are employees in general satisfied with the mentoring programs?
      ▪ Why do you think so?
    o What were other employees’ (mentors, mentees, those not involved) opinion on initiating in mentoring?
      ▪ Do you think there is an overall acceptance or motivation for these kinds of initiatives? Why?
- (Any anecdotes or memorable moments from your mentoring experience?)
  o (What about from others’ mentoring experiences you have heard about?)

**Culture, environment, and atmosphere**

- Could you describe the internal environment (not to use the word culture) in your company? Is there a sense of internal competitiveness?
  o “Yes” and “no”: Why do you think this is?
  o Any impact on knowledge management?
Interview guide for interviewees involved in management (HR)

Knowledge Management at The Case Organization
- Is knowledge management or managing knowledge something made explicit in The Case Organization?
- So how do you feel that knowledge management or managing knowledge is approached at The Case Organization?
  - Formally, only among management?
    - If so why do you think so?
  - Is it of interest to all employees?
    - Should it be? If so why?
  - Is it acknowledged by all employees?
    - Do all employees understand what it means?
      - If not, do you think they need to? Why?
- Do you think that there are certain persons at The Case Organization that possess vital knowledge, or is the important knowledge spread out among everyone?
  - Do you feel a need for initiatives being taken for managing knowledge at The Case Organization?
- Do you feel that some people’s jobs at The Case Organization are more dependent on the knowledge that they possess than others?
  - Do you think the necessary knowledge for a job is easily accessible for, say, a newcomer?
    - If not, do you have an example of this occurring or?
- Do you feel as if knowledge is actively shared among employees (e.g. either formally encouraged or initiated, or day-to-day over lunch/coffee breaks, when working in teams etc.)? If so, how?

People retiring
- I am interested in hearing about what happens when people go into retirement and what happens to their knowledge.
  - Do you have any experience or an example from people’s knowledge leaving with them (not just for retirement)?
    - If so, how did you come to realize it?
      - What happened as a result of that?
        - Were you the only one who suffered?
        - Did you report it somehow, or is it a recognized problem?
      - What about after you have left a position, have you noticed this happening, after someone has taken over your job?
        - Why do you think this happens?
        - Do you think something could be done to keep (retain) this knowledge?
  - Do you see this happening still (knowledge leaving)? Do you see this happening in the future? If so, is it a concern for you? Do you believe it is a concern for your company and companies as a whole?
  - How do you think it can be prevented in a long-term kind of way?
What about after people retire? Why? Do they come back ever?
Have you ever documented you own knowledge in any way?
What about the others, do they document their knowledge?

**Mentoring**
- Have you had a role in initiating the mentorships at The Case Organization?
- Tell me about how the mentoring programs were initiated?
  - Why were they initiated?
    - What was the reasoning?
      - Did it make sense to you?
    - What were the goals?
      - Were they achievable?
- Tell me about your experiences the mentorship programs.
  - How did they work in practice?
    - Did mentors and mentees know each other beforehand?
    - Does it affect how a mentorship goes?
      - Is it better to have someone you know?
    - How many meetings? Were they prescribed?
    - Were meetings pre-outlined?
      - Why?
        - Is it better when they are structured?
    - Could you outline a typical meeting?
    - How was vital knowledge assessed/How did you know what need to be passed on?
    - How many meetings did people generally have?
      - Why?
      - Do you think the amount of meetings is important?
  - Do you think it takes a certain kind of person to be a mentor or mentee?
  - What did your company get out of it?
    - Do you think the mentors/mentees involved feel they got something out of it?
      - Why/Why not?
    - Do you think the official goals were reached?
      - Why/Why not?
    - Is it the HRD’s responsibility to make sure that mentor relationships work, or is it something you can’t predict?
  - In your opinion have the mentoring relationships been successful? How were they successful/unsuccessful?
    - Why do you think so?
    - Could you give an example of why they were successful/unsuccessful?
    - Do you think The Case Organization should continue with mentorships? Why?
      - Can it be done differently?
  - Do you think the whole programs themselves have been successful and why?
• How do you think they could be improved or could have been done better?
  o Are employees in general satisfied with the mentoring programs?
    • Why do you think so?
  o What were other employees’ (mentors, mentees, those not involved) opinion on initiating in mentoring?
    • Do you think there is an overall acceptance or motivation for these kinds of initiatives? Why?
• (Any anecdotes or memorable moments from your mentoring experience?)
  o (What about from others’ mentoring experiences you have heard about?)

Culture, environment, and atmosphere
• Could you describe the internal environment (not to use the word culture) in your company? Is there a sense of internal competitiveness?
  o “Yes” and “no”: Why do you think this is?
  o Any impact on knowledge management?
• How about the organization as a whole, do you think it has strict hierarchies?
  o Do you feel that hierarchies are formed more through the formal or informal structures and relationships between employees?
    • Could you give me an example of how you experience this?
• Do you think that people are generally motivated in doing what they do?
  o How do you think this may impact on knowledge sharing?