



# TRANSLATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A STANDARDIZED TRAINING PROGRAM IN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION

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## **Abstract**

### **Problem**

Multinational companies play a significant role in the globalized economy. In this context, the trade-off between standardization and localization of practices and strategies is an issue that meaningfully influences the success of such companies abroad. This particularly applies to the field of human resource development (HRD).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the processes of a HRD measure of an internationally operating cooperation and how it was translated in the local context. Based on Kirkpatrick's (1994) training evaluation model the effectiveness of the implementation was also elucidated.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research design was chosen for this explanatory study to investigate one single case. Thus, 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with various stakeholders and themes were generated through a deductive analysis.

### **Results**

The study exemplified that contextual circumstances, individual ideas, and goals of multiple stakeholders affected the transfer of the standardized training program. A deficiency in communication and monitoring facilitated deviations of the original training targets. The results were coherent with the translation theory and supported its utilization in future research. The findings can likely offer valuable recommendations for effective standardized training programs.

### **Key words**

Standardized training program, translation theory, training effectiveness, Kirkpatrick

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## **1 Introduction**

Multinational companies (MNCs) have a significant influence on the international business market and economy. For example, in 2014 foreign subsidiaries of MNCs employed approximately 75 million people worldwide. In addition, global foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows (i.e. the value of inward direct investment made by non-resident entities) is projected to continuously increase in the coming years (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2015). While investing across borders MNCs actuate human capital and technological capabilities in developing countries (Li, Liu, 2005). Due to the important role these companies have on the global economy it is not surprising that there is a notable interest in analyzing the strategies and management practices of MNCs (Gammeltoft, Barnard, & Madhok, 2010).

Specifically, multiple researchers have investigated the operations of MNCs in their subsidiaries (e.g., Farley, Hoenig, & Yang, 2004; Law, Wong & Wang, 2004; Tregaskis, Heraty & Morley, 2001). A primary emphasis of these studies has been the global-local question, which is concerned with MNCs' pressure to adapt their practices and strategies to global policies without neglecting the local context. This dilemma has also been referred to as "institutional duality" (Kosta & Roth, 2002, p. 216) and the "think globally, act locally" paradox (Harzing & Pinnington, 2011, p. 541), which entails that in order to stay competitive companies try to maximize their efficiency through global co-ordination and by implementing best practices worldwide (e.g., Harzing & Pinnington, 2011; Kosta & Roth, 2002). Simultaneously, the same companies are under pressure to stay responsive to differences at local, national, or regional level (Cox, 2014). This creates a need to maintain legitimacy on both fronts (Kosta & Roth, 2002).

The subsequent trade-off between standardization and localization is regarded as an essential issue that meaningfully influences the success of MNCs abroad (Edward & Kuruvilla, 2005).

In particular, the global-local question frequently applies to the field of human resource development (HRD) processes, which can be defined as “a set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organization to provide its members with the opportunities to learn necessary skills to meet current and future job demands” (Werner & Desimone, 2011, p. 4). These procedures are typically significantly shaped by local circumstances which can lead to conflicts between host and home country. This duality is predominant if expectations and capacities for development measures (e.g., specific training programs) differ significantly between the MNCs’ headquarters and the employees in the respective countries. Perhaps therefore problems are especially evident in developing countries with low levels of education and training (i.e., limited capacities; Vo & Hannif, 2012). Despite these difficulties in implementing sufficient training measures, the creation and distribution of knowledge is one of the core components of strategic capability and the overall competitive positioning of a company (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). Grant (1996) argued that knowledge represents the most essential strategic resource. Thus, the practices of MNCs in regards to HRD procedures warrant further consideration within international business research.

One theory that has been utilized to study knowledge transfer of MNCs is Latour's (1986) translation theory (e.g., Becker-Ritterspach, Saka-Helmhout, & Hotho, 2010; Demir & Fjellström, 2012). Latour (1986) proposed that during the transfer of information (e.g., during HRD processes) content is constantly changed by the involved actors whose personal ideas, values, and goals affect the original material. This creates an editing process that combines old, new, foreign, and local elements (Becker-Ritterspach et al., 2010). Previous researchers have

mainly conducted broad investigations of knowledge transfer. In contrast, the current endeavor will aim to gain a more in-depth understanding of the implementation of a specific standardized training program. Hence, the proposed research will expand on previous research that utilized translation theory (e.g., Becker-Ritterspach et al., 2010; Demir & Fjellström, 2012) by exploring the influence of multiple stakeholders from a variety of job functions. In addition, previous studies on the transfer of HRM practices have primarily been conducted in Europe, America, and Japan (Hint & Thompson, 1999). Thus, an analysis of MNCs' HRM practices in a unique environment such as Vietnam with particular contextual influences seems warranted as it is still an emerging market. This appears valuable as since the liberalization of Vietnam's market in 1986 the country's trade volume has constantly increased which has led to steady influence of FDI (Sajid & Nguyen, 2011). Furthermore, the relatively low labor costs as well as the young and trainable workforce make Vietnam a highly attractive for foreign investors who will likely face respective translation issues in the future (UNCTAD, 2008).

### **1.1 Purpose and Research Questions**

The current study was designed to investigate the processes of a HRD measure of an internationally operating cooperation and how those are actually translated in the local context. This included a comparison between the expectations of different stakeholders involved in the training program. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the standardized training program was evaluated, which helped to identify potential deviations from the original training manual. A qualitative approach was utilized to gain a more in-depth understanding as it allowed me to “remain open to discovering relationships, concepts, and ideas about the topic they may not have considered prior to data collection” (Hill, Thomson, & Williams, 1997, p. 518). Specifically, it was designed to answer the following questions:



1. How do local stakeholders in MNCs translate standardized training programs in their subsidiaries?

2. How effective are standardized training programs of MNCs in their subsidiaries?

In order to adequately answer these questions the current research was conducted to explore a HRD measure within one particular case. More explicitly, the study's data was collected within a German company's Vietnamese subsidiary. Therefore, the endeavor was not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrate the heuristic value of exploring HRD measures and indicate the value for similar research.

## **1.2 Disposition**

In order to provide a better understanding of the analyzed case, this report begins with a description of the country and company in which the study was conducted as well as the explored HRD measure (i.e. standardized training program). This is followed by an illustration of the theoretical background (i.e., the translation theory). In the next step the previous research regarding the transfer of HRD measures and training effectiveness is elucidated. Subsequently, the underlying methodological approach and the results are presented. Finally, the paper will attempt to draw connections between the individual findings to offer potential recommendations about how an effective standardized training program should be organized and translation theory can be utilized.

## **2 Case**

The following section will display information regarding the company that participated in the current study as well as the local context. In addition, the standardized training program that was evaluated will be explained further.

## 2.1 Context

As previously mentioned, rather than analyzing developing countries, existing literature concerning the transfer of HRM across countries mainly focused on the interaction between firms within the European Union, Japan, and the United States of America (Hirst & Thompson 1999). According to Hong and Nguyen (2009), Vietnam has been particularly understudied concerning “locally embedded knowledge and appropriate transfer mechanisms for MNCs operating in this country” (p. 350). Ever since its economic liberalization starting in 1986, Vietnam has undergone a steady growth in its trade volume. In addition, this change of the Vietnamese capital market has led to a rapid inflow of FDI (Anwar & Nguyen, 2011), which amounted to \$8.9 billion in 2013 (UNCTAD, 2014). Furthermore, FDI stocks (i.e., the book value or historical costs of the share of cross-border investment by a resident enterprise) accumulated 47,9 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP; UNCTAD, 2014). However, while Vietnam attracts foreign companies with its continuing tax incentives, abundant and cheap labor force, and industrial land it still lacks in a skilled workforce (Anwar & Nguyen, 2011).

Thus, due to the lack of previous research within this particular context a Vietnamese subsidiary of a German company, which was referred to throughout the manuscript as German Tech (GT), was chosen for the current study. GT is an international operating global supplier of technology and services that is separated into four business sectors: mobility solutions, industrial technology, consumer goods and energy, and building technology. In 2014 GT had an overall sales revenue of roughly €50 billion. Worldwide the company has approximately 440 subsidiaries and regional companies in 60 countries as well as sales and service partners in 150 countries. In 2014 the company employed roughly 290.000 people; less than half of which (about

105.000) were located in Germany and around 82.000 associates were employed in the Asia-Pacific region.

The company started its operations in Vietnam in 1994 and as of 2013 had 1800 employees. The subsidiary in Ho Chi Minh City was established in 2008 and operates in the automotive technology sector with approximately 1200, mainly Vietnamese, employees. Its respective production volume has continuously increased and had tripled by 2015. In addition to Ho Chi Minh City GT is operating in three further Vietnamese locations: Dong Nai, Hanoi, and Da Nang. The current study was conducted in a high-tech manufacturing plant in Long Thanh in the Dong Nai province, which is located in the Southeast region of Vietnam. For the purpose of data collection I worked on-site within GT's Human Resource Department. The research received support from the representative HR business partner. Thus, I was granted full access to local personnel to recruit study participants.

## **2.2 Standardized Training Program**

The training program that was evaluated in the current study was the first systematic development program for all managers and leaders at the production plants of GT worldwide. It was developed in Germany in 2007 by a team with members of different professional backgrounds to target all existing and potential team leaders (TL; i.e., those responsible for a line or work-group) and existing and potential leaders of multiple teams (TLM; i.e., those responsible for a number of lines or work-groups) in production or production-related sectors. Participation by the respective subsidiaries and its employees is mandatory and the program aims to enable production leaders to be more efficient within the company's production system. GT seeks to complete the program within a single plant in two years. The implementation of the training program in Vietnam started in September 2014 with approximately 100 participants from

different production or production-related departments (e.g. manufacturing, quality management, and logistics). The conceptualization and implementation was mainly done by a German HR representative who was employed in Vietnam.

The following training modules are integrated in the program for TL: role as leader work-group/team (2 days), communication with associates (3 days), working according to standards (3 days), problem solving (2 days), facilitation (2 days), legal and corporate principles. The program for TLM differs with the following training modules are: role as leader of multiple teams (2 days), communication with associates (2 days), working according to standards (3 days), problem solving (2 days), presentation (2 days), legal and corporate principles, pull and leveling (2 days). Overall, a total of 20 TLM and 80 TL participated in the training. The first, two day role as leader training for TL was hosted in March 2015, the respective training for TLM one month later in April 2015. While the training for TL was implemented in Vietnamese the training for leaders of TLM was held in English. Both training were conducted by an external trainer.

For every training module the headquarter offers a detailed concept plan that includes the specific objective, content, duration, methods, and materials that should be utilized. According to the manual the content of the leadership training should primarily be focused on teaching the company values, organizational culture, and guidelines for leadership at GT. The program should start with a local GT executive introducing the corporate culture as well as a video regarding GT's values for leaders. Participants should learn how to incorporate these principles into their work as a leader. Specific games and discussion topics are recommended to clarify GT's expectations for production leaders. In addition, future requirements of the job as a leader as well as personal strengths and weaknesses should be evaluated. The training should end with a

closing session with the local executive, who listens, answers, and summarizes comments on the company culture. In sum, the training was supposed to have a rather abstract focus instead of teaching classical leadership skills. The participants should learn about the company culture and values and incorporate them in their daily work as a leader.

### **3 Theoretical Framework**

The following section will provide insight into the theoretical foundation as well as the model that was utilized to evaluate the standardized training.

#### **3.1 Translation Theory**

During the implementation of organizational practices companies are frequently under extraordinary pressure to adapt to and be consistent with their institutional framework (Björkman, Fey, & Parks, 2007). Additionally, according to institutional theory (Zucker, 1987) contextual norms, values, rules, structures, and assumptions are influencing behavioral guidelines within the institutional context. Therefore, social justification and social obligation extend the economic based motives of human behavior (Zukin & DiMaggio, 1990) as practices are getting adopted for legitimacy reasons and not necessarily because of efficiency aspects (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This process is leading to isomorphism (i.e., adaption) with the environment increasing positive evaluation, resource flows, and therefore the probability of companies' survival (Zucker, 1987). While institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) recognizes the impact of contextual factors Scandinavian institutionalism and translation theory (Latour, 1986) further highlight the role of actors as mediators of institutions (Vigneau, 2014).

Latour's (1986) translation theory, also known as Actor-Network Theory (ANT; Callon, 1986), suggests that during the transfer of information content is constantly changed by all involved parties. Latour exemplified the importance of receivers of a new idea or process with

the paradox of power (1986). He explained that, “when an actor simply has power nothing happens s/he is powerless; when, on the other hand, an actor exerts power it is others who perform the action” (p.264). Therefore, the initiator of an idea or process is dependent on the receivers in order to have it spread into different contexts. In this development people are shaping information rather than diffusing it. Thus, these actors are actively influence the original content through their own personal ideas, values, and goals (Latour, 1986). For example, this proposes that translation evokes a reconstruction of ideas and local adaption when individuals transfer standardized practices or formal structures into action (Suárez & Bromley, forthcoming). Therefore, the transfer is conceptualized as an editing process in which practices are circulated and reedited (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996), creating new practices that combine old, new, foreign, and local elements (Becker-Ritterspach, Saka-Helmhout, & Hotho, 2010). In the current study a standardized training program with instructions given by the headquarter was implemented in a Vietnamese subsidiary. In accordance with the translation theory (Latour, 1986) I wanted to explore how individual actors utilized their power position during the translation process of the program. Furthermore, by analyzing the effectiveness of a training module I investigated potential changes made by the local stakeholders.

### **3.2 Evaluation Model**

The standardized training program was evaluated in accordance with Kirkpatrick’s (1994) four level evaluation model. This model has been used extensively and is widely regarded as the standard for training and learning evaluation as it provides an all-inclusive perspective (Kaufman & Keller, 1994). Kirkpatrick (1994) proposed four levels of evaluation, which include reaction, learning, behavior, and results. According to Kirkpatrick (1994) these levels represent a sequence of methods to evaluate a training program. To be effective none of the steps should be

bypassed because of missing interest or in order to save costs and/or time. Thus, the framework allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the training program through four different variables and at various time points (i.e., before and after). The current investigation explored reactions, learning and behavior.

The first level (i.e., reaction) measures how participants react to the training following its completion (i.e. how they perceive it). Kirkpatrick (1994) emphasized that this reaction might affect the potential outcome of the learning. Specifically, a negative perception of the training can decrease individuals' motivation to learn. The second level (i.e., learning) assesses to what extent participants have improved or gained knowledge and skills. It also measures potential changes in attitude. In turn, the third level (i.e., behavior) aims to determine to what extent the training has changed the actual behavior of the participants. This is contingent on changes occurring on the second level. Lastly, Kirkpatrick (1994) defined the fourth step (i.e., results) as the "final results that occurred because the participants attended the program" (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p. 25), which can include decreased costs, increased production, and higher profits. However, Kirkpatrick also indicated that it is "difficult if not impossible" (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p. 26) to measure this fourth step for training programs on topics as leadership, communication, motivation, and time management. Such training programs typically have non-tangible objectives, which cannot be measured in financial terms. More tangible goals are then regarded as the long-term effects of training.

However, it should also be noted that Kirkpatrick's (1994) evaluation model is not free of criticism. For example, Bates (2004) claimed, that the model illustrates an oversimplified view of training effectiveness because it does not consider individual or contextual influences in the evaluation process of the training. The author further explained that factors such as the learning

culture of the organization, goals and values, as well as the climate for learning transfer are essential for an effective evaluation but not included in Kirkpatrick's (1994) model. In addition, Wang (2002) argued that Kirkpatrick's (1994) model is "more a taxonomy or classification scheme than a methodology for training evaluations" (p.208) since it only provides general evaluation guidelines but not specific techniques for the evaluation of training programs. Nevertheless, Kirkpatrick's (1994) model provides a clear yet intuitive structure that fits the current study's research design and was feasible within the parameters of the case study and within the participating company. For example, it would not have been possible to add another survey which would have been necessary when utilizing other evaluation models. Through analyzing three of the model's levels I was able to identify whether the goals of the training given by the headquarter were met or deviations occurred (i.e., whether the training was effective or not).

#### **4 Review of the Literature**

In the following section the previous literature regarding the transfer of HRD measures and effectiveness of training programs will be reviewed respectively.

##### **4.1 Transfer of HRD measures**

In a qualitative study Cox and Warner's (2013) explored the transfer of HRD measures for three US and three Japanese MNCs operating in Vietnam. Cox and Warner (2013) revealed that both home and host country factors influenced transfer procedures. However, while US and Japanese firms attempted to apply formalised and centrally controlled training programs, home countries encouraged employer and employee opportunism. This entailed that weaknesses in the institutional environment, poor associations between employers' groups, and fragmented bargaining practices led to relatively high turnover rate among employees. Therefore, MNCs



hesitated to invest in development measures as trainings were refracted and diffused in the transfer process. Regardless, the Cox and Warner (2013) emphasized the low quality of the education system in Vietnam and suggested that additional HRD efforts would be necessary for MNCs to be successful in this particular market. Furthermore, MNCs have to offer development opportunities for highly skilled, local workers in order to attract them. In sum, these findings highlighted the difficulties associated with HRD implications but also emphasized the importance of training measures. Therefore, more research is necessary to provide implications for successful translation procedures.

In a similar qualitative study Hong and Nguyen (2009) investigated the broad mechanisms of knowledge transfer across borders within four Japanese subsidiaries in China and Vietnam. The authors identified several challenges associated with the transfer of knowledge, which included institutional and cultural distances, conflicting objectives, lack of proper attitude, and low levels of education (Hong & Nguyen, 2009). Hong and Nguyen (2009) indicated that there were significant limitations to implementing standardized knowledge transfer mechanisms without “considering local idiosyncrasies” (p. 347) and the support of local agents and institutions. Therefore, a more in-depth investigation of different stakeholders seems justified for the current study.

In sum, it appears that in order to operate successfully companies have to find a functioning balance between adaption and standardization of their training and development policies and practices abroad. However, the majority of research regarding the transfer of HR practices is based on large-scale surveys using questionnaires and/or interviews. Furthermore, these have been conducted with individuals at the management level, neglecting the perspective of several other essential stakeholders. In addition, only a limited number of studies specifically

investigated the actual translation process and thus the *how* of transnational HR implementation practices. Therefore, a more exploratory endeavour (e.g., a qualitative case study) investigating multiple perspectives appears warranted to gain a more in-depth understanding (Demir & Fjellström, 2012). In addition, the majority of research utilizing the framework of translation theory focused on the investigation of changes within organizations' headquarters as opposed to their subsidiaries (e.g., Löfström, 2003; Strannegård, 1998).

As an exception Becker-Ritterspach, Saka-Helmhout, and Hothos' (2010) utilized the theoretical frameworks of Scandinavian institutionalism, social learning perspectives, and comparative institutionalism to explore the transformational nature and the social constitution of learning processes within a German and a British subsidiary of a Dutch company. Becker-Ritterspach and colleagues (2010) found that the outcomes of learning initiatives differed based on the extent to which local actors "translate these practices into their own language, meanings and practices to identify with them and render them their own" (p.30). In turn, successful transfer requires a transformation of the transferred content as the translation process was based on local actors. However, whether individuals actively participated depended on the institutional context, such as the level of empowerment of the employees of the two subsidiaries. Overall, Becker-Ritterspach et al. (2010) argued that future scholars need to pay more attention to the different institutional contexts and the role of local actors in the translation process of transnational practices.

Similarly, Demir and Fjellström (2012) explored the process of knowledge translation in a Swedish MNC subsidiary in China. The findings of their in-depth case study highlighted three qualitatively different strategies for the translation of relational practices by the Chinese middle management: symmetrical, asymmetrical, and substitutive. Furthermore, Demir and Fjellström

(2012) concluded that these respective managers utilized different translation strategies depending on the extent to which the intentions of the top management were clearly understood, agreed upon, and enacted. This indicated that translation procedures depend on multiple factors, which therefore requires an in-depth exploration to fully understand elements that increase the likelihood of matching expectations and implementation. The current study will expand current research regarding the translation processes by analyzing the role of local agents who were actively involved in the process within a specific standardized training program in a unique case (i.e., Vietnam).

#### **4.2 Training effectiveness**

The continuous development of the workforce is one of the most powerful instruments for enhancing the productivity of individuals as well as communication of organizational goals (Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003). Due to the potential impact on organizational success and the costs associated with development programs Arthur and colleagues (2003) emphasized the importance of understanding the relation between the design, evaluation, and effectiveness of such training and development measures.

In their meta-analysis Burke and Day (1986) analyzed the effectiveness of managerial training, particularly within the areas of general management, human relations, self-awareness, problem solving/decision making, rater training, and motivation/values. To operationalize the effectiveness of the training programs among other dimensions the authors utilized three levels of Kirkpatrick's (1994) four level training evaluation model (i.e., learning, behavior, and results). Burke and Day (1986) reviewed 70 published and unpublished peer-refereed articles on managerial training and development spanning from 1951 to 1982. One of their main conclusions was "that managerial training is, on the average, moderately effective" (p. 232).

Furthermore, Burke and Day (1986) revealed that “trainers and organizational decision makers should not rely heavily on training program content descriptions and labels when choosing and judging the probable utility of a managerial training program” (p. 243) but rather on the “choice of a particular method that might be most effective in improving results related to a certain type of criterion measure” (p. 243). Additionally, the level of trainer experience significantly influenced the effectiveness of the training measures.

Utilizing a similar approach Arthur et al. (2003) reviewed published training and development literature from 1960 to 2000 in order to examine the relationship between training design and evaluation features and the effectiveness of training systems in organizations. The authors assessed all four of Kirkpatrick’s (1994) proposed levels of training evaluation (i.e., reactions, learning, behavior, and results). Their meta-analysis revealed medium to large effect size for organizational training on all levels. Additionally, the results showed that the method of training, the skill or task characteristics trained, and the choice of evaluation criteria were significantly related to the effectiveness of the investigated training measures.

While numerous studies have been conducted regarding the training effectiveness within companies’ home country, research regarding global HRD measures primarily focused on the preparation of employees to work effectively in other countries (e.g., expatriate training). Hence, there appears to be a lack of research regarding the effectiveness of training programs that have been developed in a specific cultural context and then implemented globally (Sarkar-Barney, 2004). Sarkar-Barney (2004) found that the effectiveness of a training program abroad depends on the adaptability to changing internal organizational and external conditions on the specific market. Therefore, more attention should be paid to implication of training employees with different cultural backgrounds and whose work environment differs from the home country.

Within the present study I followed this call for further transnational research by investigating the effectiveness of a training that was developed in Germany and subsequently implemented in a Vietnamese subsidiary.

## **5 Methods**

### **5.1 Procedures**

After receiving permission for the study from GT's head of the HR department all standardized training participants that were registered for the first role as leader training for TL ( $N = 20$ ) or the training for TLM ( $N = 10$ ) as well as their respective supervisors were contacted via email and invited to join the research. Subsequently, those individuals who were interested to participate were interviewed at two separate time points (i.e., before and approximately one month after the standardized training). Interviews were conducted with training participants (i.e., TL/TLM) and their respective superintendents to gain a more comprehensive understanding of training outcomes (see Appendix A). Furthermore, two human resources representatives, one supplier, and one trainer were asked to participate. This provided additional insight into the development and objective of the program. In order to assess the effectiveness of the standardized training measure the current study utilized Kirkpatrick's (1994) four-level evaluation model.

In the current study interviews were semi-structured in nature to allow for consistency in questions asked as well as the opportunity for follow-up questions and probes. Questions for the interviews were developed to assess the translation process of the training measure (e.g., "Who is/was involved in the implementation and execution of the training program? How did they influence the implementation?"), the expectations of the different stakeholders (e.g., "What are your expectations regarding the training program?") and the outcome of the training (e.g. "What

do you know about GT's values?"). In addition, the participants were confronted with the same critical incidents (e.g., how to deal with an unmotivated team member) before and after the training to assess whether their response (i.e., behavior) changed. Thus, the interviews allowed for an assessment of the first, second and third levels of Kirkpatrick's (1994) model of training evaluation (i.e., reaction, learning and behavior). To increase the likelihood of effectively exploring the constructs of interest, I conducted a pilot interview with a GT employee prior to the beginning of data collection. Based on the pilot interviews, the wording of several questions was modified to provide more clarity. Following the pilots, qualitative interviews (which lasted between approximately 30 and 90 minutes) were conducted by me in person and in English before and approximately one month after the standardized training. Three of the participants did not speak sufficient English in to obtain adequate data and therefore a translator was utilized who translated my questions and participants' answers verbatim. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In addition, I attended a standardized training session as a complete observer to collect field notes. This provided additional data and further helped me to gain more in-depth understanding of the training's content, methodology, and individuals' level of participation. Thus, it allowed for a more accurate analysis of interview data.

## **5.2 Researcher Subjectivity**

By highlighting the researcher's background and subjectivity the reader has the ability to gain perspective about their potential influence on the data analysis (Hill et al., 2005). I am a Caucasian male Master's student in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations. In addition, I have previous experience working in human resources and in MNCs. At the time of the study, I was employed as an intern in the participating company. Thus, I expected

the respective HR representative to closely adhere to the instructions given by the manual when implementing the training program in Vietnam. Due to the differences between Germany and Vietnam (e.g., the level of education) I further assumed that the effectiveness of the training will be limited and that participants will not react positively to the program. Before engaging in the data analysis I reflected on these assumptions and biases and continued to monitor them throughout the analysis. Such self-reflexivity is “considered to be honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842).

### **5.3 Data Analysis**

Due to the study’s purpose interview data was analyzed from an constructionist perspective, which “seeks to theorise [sic] the socio-cultural context, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). This epistemology aligned with the research’s objective to explore HRD process and the effectiveness of a standardized training program. These practices can likely produce and socially influence individual’s experiences, which therefore cannot solely be determined through direct objective measurement. Thus, the study utilized thematic analysis procedures which are independent of theory and epistemology and therefore allows for meaningful flexibility in the process. Thematic analysis includes, “...identifying, analysing [sic] and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This entails of six phases which include becoming familiar with the data, producing initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To become acquainted with the data I first read the transcripts multiple times across participants (i.e., each individual interview was read several times) and questions (i.e., answers to individual questions were read across interviews). Such familiarity is essential to synthesize

the data in structures that “faithfully represent how participants describe their own experiences” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 197). During this process I identified initial codes which are “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). From these initial codes I subsequently developed common themes and sub-themes. In this process, themes which capture “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) were aligned with theoretical presumptions from Kirkpatrick’s (1994) model of training evaluation. Thus, themes were generated through a deductive approach, which was chosen to allow for more comprehensive exploration of the constructs of interest. Next, these initial themes were carefully evaluated to assess whether they accurately reflected the essential meaning of the individual transcripts before finalizing the thematic structure.

This analysis embraced multiple criteria for excellent qualitative research as proposed by Tracy (2010) to control for the trustworthiness of the analysis and consequently the quality of any conclusions. Specifically, the process was conducted with rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, and to provide significant contribution. *Rich rigor* is developed through the use of, “...sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs, data and time in the field, samples, contexts, data collection and analysis processes” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). Specifically, the results were grounded in strong data which included a total of 28 interviews with different stakeholders, supported by field notes, and further enhanced by an extensive engagement in the environment as I spent four months onsite. As previously mentioned I deliberated and monitored personal assumptions and biases throughout the analysis in order to ground conclusions in the data instead of subjective interpretations. This self-reflexivity was a valuable mean in achieving *sincerity*



(Tracy, 2010). In addition, reliable findings “are those that readers feel trustworthy enough to act on and make decisions in line with” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). According to Tracy (2010) such *credibility* can be established through thick description, crystallization, multivocality, and member reflections. Therefore, to control for the accuracy of the data the individual transcripts were sent to each respective participant prior to data analysis, which allowed them to offer any feedback; no modifications were suggested. Furthermore, results were supported by multiple quotes which provided additional breadth and complexity to the individual themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. These quotes were selected from as many of the participants as possible to provide a multifaceted perspective of the respective experiences. All names associated with quotes in the following sections are pseudonyms selected by the participants. In addition, to provide for *crystallization* of the analysis, multiple data sources (i.e., interviews with different stakeholders and field notes) were examined since “if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Finally, the study made a *significant contribution* as its findings offer valuable insight that allows MNCs to enhance their HRD processes.

#### **5.4 Participants**

Except for the head of the HR department in the subsidiary I was able to interview all participants involved in the translation process of the standardized training (see Appendix A). This enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation procedure from a variety of perspectives. Participants were 16 individuals (2 female and 14 male) involved in a standardized training program for GT’s Vietnamese subsidiary. This sample represented two GT TL, four TLM, and their respective superintendent ( $n = 12$ ), as well as two GT human resources

representatives, one external supplier, and one external trainer with an average of 3.55 years ( $SD = 4.56$ ) of experience in their respective position. The longest tenured participant spent four years at GT while the shortest-tenured individual had only been there for a year. Participants ranged between 29 and 42 years of age, with an average age of 37.31 years ( $SD = 8.40$ ). The sample included 13 Vietnamese, two German, and one British citizens. All except for one had obtained university degrees, including Bachelor's ( $n = 12$ ), Master's ( $n = 1$ ), and Diploma ( $n = 2$ ).

### **5.5 Ethical considerations**

The names of participants and the company were substituted for acronyms in any reports to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, participation in the proposed study was completely voluntary and individuals were able to terminate their involvement at any time with no penalty. All participants were at least 18 years of age and race or gender were no selection criteria. Individual participants were provided with transcripts of their interviews and asked to provide feedback as a form of member reflection (Tracy, 2010). This allowed for a more accurate representation of their opinion. Finally, I respected and protected sensitive information, strategic matters, and personal experiences. The findings will focus on addressing the issues under consideration.

### **5.6 Limitations**

Participants were interviewed approximately one month following the training which may not have been ample time to assess potential changes in behavior. Furthermore, the utilization of a translator could have possibly affected the results I obtained from the interviews as the translator could have conveyed information inaccurately between myself and the three non-English speaking participants. Additionally, the fact that I was employed in the HR

department of the case company might have led to social desirability as participants potentially offered answers they deemed adequate instead of their honest opinion. Finally, due the complexity to measure the result of the studied training program but also because of the limited time, the fourth step of Kirkpatrick's (1994) model of training evaluation was not evaluated in this research.

## **6 Results**

Through the qualitative analysis two main interrelated themes emerged from the data: (a) *translation process* and (b) *training evaluation*.

### **6.1 Theme 1: Translation Process**

The first objective of this study was to investigate how the standardized training program was translated. This process included communication and information flow between the various stakeholders that were involved in the implementation, which resulted in changes that were made from the training manual.

**6.1.1 Communication and information flow of multiple stakeholders.** The first information Klara, the HR representative in Vietnam who was responsible for the implementation, received was the official manual regarding its worldwide implementation of the standardized training program. She explained:

My former supervisor, the head of the HR department came and dropped the training handbook coming from the headquarter in Germany on my table and said 'here you go, introduce it.' In the handbook is designed from Germany exactly to spread and implement the program in the different countries where GT is present. So there is quite a lot of information and also some ideas of how you approach this implementation, so what

steps you need to do, not super detailed but there is a target group definition and then you just have to adapt it to the situation here.

Despite the handbook Klara stated that she was not provided with any other information by the headquarter. She described, “To me it was a big challenge that I at the beginning had no support or I had nobody I could go to and ask. I was on my own, trying to figure out how this thing could work.” When asked about communication between her and the headquarter she mentioned that there was none and explained:

Maybe they expect that if we have questions that we will approach them more, but I think that they see themselves more approachable than they really are. Because obviously they have eight million other things to do, and if I book the calendar and how can I get a spot and I’m not going to call for every stupid question.

Klara also claimed that she received no support from her supervisor who was the head of the HR department as she described, “I got super little information from him. Through the whole process I also did not have the impression that he had any idea of what we were doing.” Klara had extremely limited prior experience in the field of training and development. Since she thought that the training manual did not include enough information, she contacted other plants that had previously implemented the same or similar programs in China, Malaysia, and Germany because, “for me it [training manual] wasn’t sufficient so I started asking around, trying to see if I can get lessons learned and experiences and support or ideas from others who have done this maybe before.” In addition, Klara had limited knowledge about production processes when she started with the implementation of the training program. Thus, in order to get more information about these procedures and the department structures she talked to different engineers within the company. This was beneficial as, “they helped quite a lot giving me an understanding of how the

shop floor works and that was super important for the implementation.” Klara thought that the different training modules could not be transferred identical to the Vietnamese circumstances. Therefore, she conducted a training need analysis (TNA) in order to get a more in-depth understanding of the situation at the plant. She explained:

How can I assume that the current situation coming from Germany is the same here. So we need to figure out how this is here first. Before we can decide for here what the goal can be, we cannot simply assume that it is the same thing. So what I did to figure that out is talk to the head of departments, so the management team, talked to the supervisors, and to figure out how our situation is. Then the questions I designed from which trainings are we offering. Because I know I had to stick to the trainings that they are giving and within these, the goals of these trainings I tried to figure out what is the situation here.

In order to find a supplier who could conduct the training Klara asked her colleagues in the HR department and finally contacted two of the recommended organizations. She sent them both a version of the training targets from the manual and the results of the TNA. She met Hip, the technical director of the company she chose, and discussed the outline. However, according to Klara, the supplier failed to adapt her suggested changes to the outline adequately:

We were really angry, but then eventually after the third we met them again they did some and finally they realized they need to do some changes and then finally we got it in a way we could accept it and like it.

In contrast, Hip described receiving insufficient information from GT:

Personally I would have liked to have more details of the training program. I know that there are technical components and people doing this and that. But I would have ideally liked a bit more awareness of what the program really was, what it achieved to Germany.

The Trainer, Quang, on the other hand conducted the training solely according to the outline prepared by the supplier and was not involved in the design of the program. He explained:

Everything was arranged based on the material by the supplier. And I'm a trainer deliver the material. But I am very familiar with the material because I work for [Hip] more than about 10 years and I use to conduct the same program for many big companies just like [other company]. I used this training material for a long time.

It was apparent that multiple stakeholders were involved in the translation of the training program. The manual provided by the GT headquarter served as the first and only source of information given by the headquarter. However, a variety of people in different functions appeared to use their power positions to extend this information with their individual knowledge and thinking.

**6.1.2 Deficiency in monitoring.** In addition to the relative absence in communication between the headquarter and the people implementing the program there was also a lack of supervision in the implementation of the training program. Since the beginning of the training program in September, 2014, Klara was in contact with the headquarter only two times (i.e., an email and one phone call). She described:

There was one time the head of the department asked me to fill out this chart, excel chart, were it was asked to which percentage existing leaders are trained for the different topics, so we had to give a percentage number and sent it to them. There was a report end of 2014. And the conversation we had was in maybe March or February 2015, since then no report.

Even though the headquarter received a document that included training information such as the number of participants, Klara described a conversation with the headquarter in which the person

did not even know that the program had already started in Vietnam. Klara explained that all monitoring was through quantitative data as:

They communicate in different channels, they communicate in the manual as I said, implement it this way and this is the way it's supposed to be. They also communicate the expectations that we adjusted to local circumstances. They communicate actively until when it has to be finished. Maybe they can also do this because they say 'hey here is how you should do it and we tell you to when, because in the manual it says quite clear on how you should do it.' And this is a standardized program so they can rely on when it will be done and how it will be done so therefore I think this is why they can focus so much on numbers. So now expectations are very numbers driven of course.

The representative of GT in Germany, Nora, recognized this limited use of monitoring and explained:

The funny thing is, the corporate said for every supervisor and team leader the program is a absolute must, but the corporate is not mentoring it, it is GB's [the respective business unit] responsibility to do that. But if nobody controls it from above they will not do it.

This is what is happening in the GT world, that only the hard skills were taught but soft skills were not taught. Ya, it is not monitored in a good way.

When he was asked if the content is also monitored he replied, "This will be difficult but if I have the feeling that something goes wrong or not in the good direction then I will also go in the monitoring of the content." In sum, it became evident that the headquarter received limited information regarding the training and simultaneously failed to monitor the implementation.

**6.1.3 Changes.** As mentioned previously Klara did not think that the information about the implementation of the training program in the manual is transferable identically to the

Vietnamese circumstances. She recognized differences between the plant in Germany and Vietnam mainly in regards to the maturity of the working processes and standards:

I think the circumstances here being a super young plant, being a super immature plant. I mean in Germany we have the situation that there are shift leaders and supervisors that have been in this position for 20 years or longer. And here we are talking about 2 years or shorter. So processes are not as stabilized and standardized.

Therefore, she conducted a TNA in order to get a more comprehensive impression of the local conditions. Subsequently, she utilized the results of the TNA to change emphasis of training content. She described the process of conceptualizing with the supplier, “When they sent it [training outline] back we went through it and then specifically mentioned these focus points again and said we take a little more of this, reduce this but extend this and just time wise during the training.” Hip explained:

We were given quite a lot of flexibility with the training program because we do have knowledge of the market. One of the things that we did do is, we had worked with some of the people attending previously, so one of the things we did was we made sure that all of the material used was new and fresh. So we looked through the audience and we knew that they had been to several programs before so that made the program potentially stronger because it was really focused on where they were. So I think this was a strength of us working on the market, because we knew the market and we knew the people.

Quang, stated, that he adapted the material to the local circumstances during the training. He used his own experiences to make the content relevant and understandable for the Vietnamese participants. He stated:



I think the material is standard. The standard is everywhere. How to apply the good in the book to the reality is different. That's reason why the local trainer is essential because the local trainer knows the Vietnamese circumstances.

While according to the training manual coming from Germany the main objective of the training program was to learn the values of GT and how to incorporate the company culture into the work as a leader these topics were only discussed sporadically in the actual training conducted in Vietnam. Hip supported this by stating, "The values were incorporated I think. But there could be a stronger link between the values and the actual training program". He further explained, "If you have a strong value driven culture within the organization, training can then support it, but I don't see that within GT. Some organizations are strong in corporate culture and values; diplomatically GT is medium in my estimation." Hip even suggested giving external trainers a special training regarding the values and the way of working in the company.

Besides these modifications in the content of the leadership training changes were also apparent in the general training design. Those changes included the absence of an individual development plan for the participants which should have included information about the various development measures. Klara's explanation for why the plan was not utilized in Vietnam was rather vague, "In the manual there is some sort of development plan intended. We didn't do that. I don't know why to be honest. Too complicated, or too big or something." In addition, other aspects of the manual were changed by Klara as she summarized:

There is a mentor structure, there is a mentor foreseen in the manual, but not for the task we are giving. And then the whole post training activities that's different and there is also a kickoff [first information meeting regarding the training program] really detailed described, how you can do it and how you need to do it. We didn't exactly follow this,

we did our own way. I mean and at the end of the day it says the same purpose so it will be similar. But we just did it the way we wanted it and not looking in the manual.

Klara mainly made the modifications based on the TNA and her own ideas. She did this despite thinking that that autonomous decisions were not wanted by the headquarter:

I mean if they want us to make more autonomous decisions then they would involve us more in the development process of the program itself and consider that there are different locations all over the world. And I'm not sure how far that has been done maybe you can find out but I don't have a feeling it has been.

Nora, explained that during the development process of the training concept they had different pilot trainings in various locations around the world in order to test its transferability and efficiency. He explained that the company did not have to make many changes because:

We find out that the culture in GT is not 100% similar but really close because of the leaders above, they also have the exchanges and so the culture similar, I will not say same because this is wrong, but it is similar. So the changes were not so much.

Furthermore, he explained that the implementation in the different production plants has to be as close to the manual as possible:

They can change the implementation if they have such kind of a program in their site.

Then they only have to teach the missing parts, this makes it a little bit faster. This is one of the things and otherwise they have no chance, cause this is always the baseline, this is what you have to do, more yes, less never. So you cannot do 3 days training in 1 day training, this is not allowed.

There were several changes during the implementation of the training although it became apparent that such modifications were clearly not in the interest of the headquarter. In the following the outcome of the training will further be illustrated.

## **6.2 Theme 2: Training Evaluation**

The training was assessed based on participants' individual expectations as well as three (i.e., reaction, learning, behavior) of Kirkpatrick's (1994) four level training evaluation model.

**6.2.1 Contrasting expectations of stakeholders.** Several different stakeholders were either involved in the design and implementation of the standardized training or participated in the program. Through the interviews it became apparent that the expectations regarding the training outcome differed between these individuals. Training participants sought to improve their general team management skills. In particular, they wanted to learn how to motivate their subordinates in order to reach their production targets. For example, Tornado supported this by mentioning, "I want to improve my skills, motivate others and build a very strong team and also strengthen my relationship with them [team members]." Similarly, Luis stated, "I want to learn how to manage the line with my team to reach the targets, make the team satisfied, and find what they need from me."

In contrast, the production leaders' superintendents mainly expected their subordinates to improve their communication skills during the training. Specifically, they hoped for a change in the way TLs and TLMs communicate with their respective subordinates. Doremon mentioned, "I hope he will be open to his team. Because he is a leader, he should understand and have open communicate with the team more. He knows how to make his team share themselves with him." As a result of these improved leadership skills the superintendents anticipated a relief in their own work as Rooney said:

He will help me a lot if he can manage well, because he's a direct supervisor for the people. If he manages well, I can reduce my task a lot. If he manages not well, then I get more complains or more conflict to come.

Finally, the expectations of Hip and Klara were comparable. Both wanted the productions leaders to develop the necessary skills to deal with different leader situations. Hip stated:

The biggest change that we would like to see is people's ability to deal with people by situations. So whereas before if you were a supervisor you had two options to a problem, after the training we would like you to have three options. Now whether you chose what we believe would be the best option, we can't say. But we need to equip people with the skills and the knowledge to have different ways to manage different situations.

Klara expressed similar expectations:

That our shift leaders get some instruments in their hands to deal with difficult leadership situations, such as aggressive operators, some are afraid of the operators. And I hope they won't be after and I hope they will learn how to deal with it.

She added:

I also expect that they get new inputs, new ideas, new inspiration on how to lead such an amount of people. Or do things more, maybe they have done things in the past perfectly out of their gut feeling right, but now they have a like a theoretical fundament behind they can use or that backs their gut feelings and they know he actually what I did is right.

Quang struggled to formulate specific expectations. He explained that he did not have the opportunity to talk to the respective supervisors of the participants and therefore was not sure what was primarily needed:

That's a difficult question because if I'm their boss I will know what I want them to apply but sometimes the complication of the company and their trainer is not crystal clear. For example, for a good training we must have expectation of the manager. At the moment, I just understand that the expectation of organizer, of HR. Maybe if both HR and the line manager communicate each other. And I want to see the demand of the line manager.

Nora expected a more general knowledge flow regarding the role as a leader in GT. He described, "That supervisors and team leaders are aware of what is GT thinking so that they can match or they can discuss the things and adapt. There should be a deep discussion regarding leadership". Furthermore, he explained that, "GT's values are an absolute must in the training."

In sum, individuals at the subsidiary in Vietnam expected a rather general improvement in the participants' leadership skills (e.g., communication and motivation skills). However, in contrast the person who actually designed the training program mentioned specific goals such as the importance of the "GT way" to lead a plant, the company values, and its culture. Thus, there appeared to be differing expectations between the stakeholders involved in the standardized training program.

**6.2.2 Positive reaction but suggested improvements.** Overall the participants had a positive perception of the leadership training. They reported that the content was relevant for their daily work and their role as a leader. Tornado supported this by stating "I receive the training, the leadership training and it's very useful and also helps in terms of my career." He continued, "I wrote all my expectations and after the end of training, they all meet my expectations, my personal expectation". Furthermore the trainer was described as being

professional and suitable for leading the training. Luis concluded “Great training. If we have chance, we will get more training like that”.

Following the training participants offered suggestions that they believed would improve the program’s effectiveness. These recommendations were focused on case studies, trainers’ explanations, and disruptions during the training. First, throughout the program the trainer included several case studies in which participants discussed and solved different leader situations and challenges. However, the production leaders claimed that those cases were not suitable for the situation at GT. Lia mentioned:

I have one request about the case study. It must be interesting because in the training course, none of us were so impressed with the case study. We prefer the trainer should ask us to give the real case study in GT because daily work, we find a lot of situations.

Second, TLs and TLMs criticized that the trainer did not always give sufficient explanations for why certain topics were important for their role as a leader. Tornado described, “He jumped from topic to topic but forgot the explanation. He didn’t emphasize why we need it, why it is important to us. He’s just jumping and keeps everything moving so fast”. Participants also complained that explanations were missing during the group work and exercises as Nguyen explained, “The participants don’t understand what is it used for or how it connects the relevance to the content and the trainer did not clarify them. So somehow they feel that, ‘waste time.’”

Third, both participants and the trainer were concerned with disruptions during the training. Several participants had to leave the training at different times for various reasons. The trainer explained:

Sometimes they are interfered during the class for example they have the meeting so they have to join the meeting. For me if the company invests in the training we should assign

the time for the training only. And the manager must understand that his or her staff must attend the training so they'll arrange the meeting time different.

In sum, participants thought that the training could be improved by utilizing better case studies which are closer to real working situations at GT, explaining the topics better, and implementing better time management in order to allow them to be present during the whole training.

Nevertheless, the overall positive reaction regarding the program possibly increased the likelihood of learning effects and behavioral changes after the training.

**6.2.3 Mixed results regarding learning.** The learning outcome of the leadership training was ambiguous as participants' conception of the awareness of team members' needs as an important leadership skill increased but they still had a limited knowledge of the company values. As previously highlighted a main objective of the training was to teach the participants how to become organized to function as a leader and motivate their subordinates. However, in order to motivate and lead their respective team the production leaders first had to learn to care about employees' needs, concerns, and behaviors.

Throughout the interviews it became obvious that the participants learned to become more aware of their subordinates' personality. Tornado supported this by stating: "It's all about the attitude. The key thing, I repeat, to be a good team leader, is to have positive attitude. I have to be a good listener, have to care about employees, have to handle the mistakes." Similarly, all leaders acknowledged the importance of giving support and encouragement to the ideas and wishes of their subordinates. Furthermore, the participants learned to successfully recognize and react to individuals' needs and abilities as Luis explained, "I learn how to hold a meeting with my team. How to talk with the team. If we understand the team, we know how to satisfy them and they will work for us." Maslow's hierarchy of needs (i.e., self-actualization, esteem,

love/belonging, safety, physiological; Maslow, 1954) was taught as an instrument to determine the needs of the subordinates and almost all participants were able to remember the model and how to utilize it. Anh explained, “As a leader, we have to understand the need of the people. The Maslow pyramid helps to understand the need of the people. And we know them, and know how to motivate the people.”

In addition, the training contained a rather short section on the boundary of operations for a GT leader. This module included the company values and ways to use them to determine leadership (i.e., how can the values be demonstrated in the daily work? How can the values be promoted in a team?). It became obvious that participants had a very limited knowledge of those values before and after the training. When asked about the company values following the training Lia explained that, “It is too difficult to remember GT’s values. I’m sorry, I really don’t remember because it’s a very long sentence and when we learn, we have GT’s value, GT’s vision, really difficult to remember.”

Overall, positive learning effects became apparent that were in line with training participants’ and the responsible HR person’s interest. Nevertheless, the changes did not fully meet the expectations given by the headquarter as they were primarily regarding general leadership skills and not the GT specific requirements.

**6.2.4 Improvements in leadership behavior.** Even though the results of the learning outcomes were mixed changes in the leadership behavior of the training participants were noticeable, especially in regards to the capacity to self-reflect, offer support, motivate, and establish standards.

As previously mentioned participants learned the importance of individual and team needs during the training. Additionally, they were also able to incorporate this knowledge into



their daily work as a leader. For example, Tornado was asked how he would deal with a subordinate whose work deteriorates and who does not follow his orders. Before the training he stated, “I have to sit with him and discuss his expectation versus the key responsibility that is stated clearly in his contract. It is the basic need from company to you to do the job”. His answer was mainly based on explaining the company rules and the expectations concerning the job. In contrast, following the training he was more supportive and concerned about the origins of the problem:

The key thing is to ask why, why he does that. Maybe he’s lacking in knowledge, skills or even process, working instruction or something related to how to do that. So I have to work more, ensure that this guy receives a full of knowledge to do the right job, even the right tool to do the right job.

Tornado’s supervisor acknowledged this supportive behavior when mentioning:

One thing I see really clearly that when he discusses with the operators, he uses the tool to encourage the guy to develop ideas and get the feedback from the operator and also has connection between operator and supervisor. Some cases are better than before the training.

The production leader Luis expressed this change in engagement concerning his subordinates by stating:

If I don’t meet them regularly, I can’t understand them what they want. I just do my expectation. I just do if I want. It’s not good. And after the training, I hold the meeting with them, and I come and see them and work with them. It’s very good. And we know the expectation of them.

As previously mentioned participants were not able to internalize the company values. However, they appeared to incorporate GT's working standards. During the training the trainer frequently emphasized the importance of standards for an efficient cooperation in a team, as mentioned by Tornado, "He [trainer] told me it's important to set up a new standard tailored to your way of working and your team and set up expectation in very mutual way". Standards thereby meant established rules and principles concerning the general collaboration and work within the team. The interviewees showed that individuals incorporated these recommendations and highlighted the usage of standards after the training. Anh exemplified this when being asked how to respond to a person who is not following his orders, "We have the standard and he or she has to working according to standard. We cannot break the rule. He or she has to do according on standard, according to the rule, according to the company rule". While this statement primarily supported the use of existing standards participants were also convinced that new and team specific team standards should be established. Lia explained:

Yes I respect your way, respect your point, you can write you suggestion so I will check and if it's ok, you can implement standard for everyone. If it's not ok, please stop because we work in the team with many people. So standard is set up, if you would like to change anything, we are willing to listen to your suggestion. We need to review to implement so we have many proposals from suggests to review, to implement, to check, recheck until it's ok and make it a standard.

Bi explained how he uses a standard to react to a specific situation in which people in a team treat each other disrespectful:

As the leader, I have to establish the standardization like internal rule for the team so no matter where you come from the variety culture of background, everybody must follow.

For example, clear tasks and responsibilities for every member so the duty to fulfill, to implement the task successfully.

Not only the establishment of standards was a behavioral change that occurred but participants also adapted more reflective leadership style based on situations. Lia demonstrated this in her reaction to one of her subordinates surprisingly retiring:

We need to check why he left, if the working environment is not good we must improve.

For example, the work lot is so high, or the benefit, or the salary or the communication between the team, internal team or between the team to other department, we need to find this reason is from the guy left or is in the team.

This exemplified that the leaders learned to search for an explanation regarding issues. This new more reflective way of leading a team also included a sophisticated self-reflection. For example, when talking about the same situation Bi mentioned:

Maybe the guy, he is not satisfied with the manager, with the leader or with the company in general so that why he quit. So I would like to have the meeting the with the remaining team members to get to know the root cause. Or it's just subjective feeling from the guy who left GT because he didn't like the company. For example, in case that it's true because the manager, the leader impose to everybody, so put a lot of pressure. So from the leadership skill, I need to reflect myself and change. The change now is necessary otherwise I can lose the people or even I have to go, I have to quit GT.

Overall, the positive learning effects that were mentioned previously appeared to be internalized by participants and thus resulted in behavior modifications by the production leaders. Still the changes did not meet the expected goals given by the headquarter.

**6.2.5 Feelings of appreciation.** In addition to the described effects on participants' leadership behavior the training also influenced the way the production leaders thought about the company. The program in the current study was the first leadership training for most of the interviewees. It became obvious that the training raised feelings of appreciation and gratitude as Bi expressed:

I changed totally my opinion about the company. The GT management cares for the lower level of management like shift leader or group leader so they receive like investment or development from the company and it's also a good chance to improve myself first and then I can improve the whole team. And in general, all company can be improved and it is only at GT I see that and never ever in other companies.

Nguyen underlined that this appreciation is not the case in all companies in Vietnam, "I think GT always takes care for the employees, it's a good culture because I never see before. I worked many companies but I never see the company before like GT". Hip supported the motivational aspect of training programs in general and emphasized its positive side effect on the employees:

Globally people are motivated and sometimes people forget that as a reason to training. If you got a shift leader who is going in position for the next ten years that person needs to be nurtured. Training is possibly a nurture process. If you don't nurture through training you get de-motivated people and then you get problems. And at the end of the day the investment is small. But do something which is meaningful, upgrade their technical skills or whatever dimension. Maybe the operation doesn't need it but maybe for motivation purposes that would work for the shift leaders"

Thus, it became apparent that the training did not only have positive effects on participants' knowledge and behavior but also improved their attitude towards the company.

## **7 Discussion**

In the following section the current results will be discussed in order to draw conclusions relevant to the investigated research questions. Overall, the purpose of this case study was to explore the translation process of a standardized training measure as well as to determine how effective the company is with this endeavor. Therefore, the present findings can potentially offer valuable information for human resource practitioners who conceptualize and monitor a standardized training program and/or implement this measure in a respective subsidiary. Furthermore, linkages between the current and existing studies will be illustrated and suggestions for further research will be exposed.

### **7.1 Research Questions and Results**

The study's first research question was concerned with the ways local stakeholders in MNCs translate standardized training programs in their subsidiaries. A comparison between different stakeholders involvement in the translation process exemplified that expectations between different stakeholders regarding the standardized training program can vary significantly. A relatively detailed training manual was conceptualized by the headquarter in order to assure a standardized implementation and execution. Nevertheless, extensive changes were made by different actors involved in the implementation at the subsidiary. Those modifications affected the structural realization (e.g., no utilization of the individual development plan) of the program as well as the content of the analyzed leadership training (e.g., limited focus on company values). For example, the local HR representative decided to not utilize the suggested individual development plan and the company values appeared to receive limited attention during the training. The reasons for such changes were not always fully transparent and comprehensible. However, it became obvious that not only local circumstances

but individual goals and ideas meaningfully influenced the translation of the standardized training program. Changes were facilitated and spurred through a lack of communication, information flow, and effective monitoring between the different stakeholders. Especially the sporadic interaction between the headquarter and the person who implemented the training program in the subsidiary appeared particularly influential. This resulted in insufficient mentoring and monitoring. Simultaneously, the trainer likely did to not have sufficient information about the overall program, the participants, and the actual objectives illustrated in the manual. It seemed as if the trainer conducted his “standard” leadership training which he had executed similarly in other companies. In sum, it appeared as if local stakeholders interpreted and translated the training manual based on their individual ideas and expectations instead of adhering to headquarter expectations. They actively changed structural parts of the training program as well as the content of the analyzed leadership training. A divergent training program was created that was based on a combination of the standardized and newly integrated elements

To further evaluate the final outcome of the training the study’s second research question was concerned with the effectiveness of standardized training programs of MNCs in their subsidiaries. Overall, participants shared positive perceptions of the leadership training. They primarily learned an increased awareness of team members’ personality and their individual needs. However, their limited knowledge of the company values did not increase as a result of the training. A transfer of the learning aspects was identified and behavioral changes occurred. Participants’ capacity to self-reflect, offer support, motivate, and establish standards within their team increased due to the training. The changes in their leadership behavior can clearly be received as favorable for all involved stakeholders. Still those modifications primarily met the expectations of the stakeholders in Vietnam (i.e., the participants, their superintendents,

the local HR representative, the supplier and the trainer) rather than the intended outcome of those who designed the program in the German headquarter. GT intended for the production leaders to learn, incorporate, and ultimately act according to the company values and principles. This was supposed to be a primary focus of the training program. However, these topics appeared to receive inadequate attention during the training and participants learning and behavior change was extremely limited. It became obvious that while standardized training programs can be evaluated positively by certain stakeholders this does not always automatically pertain to all involved parties. In the current case the leadership training was effective according to local stakeholders but not to the headquarter.

## **7.2 Contributions towards Industry**

In general, the current findings suggested that standardized programs in the local setting may vary significantly from the original conceptualization as both training content and structure were modified by various stakeholders. It appears essential for MNCs that communication, information flow, and monitoring procedures are sufficient and effective to guarantee more equivalence between the expected and the actual outcome of the training measures. This will increase the likelihood of creating standardized training measures. Furthermore, it appears of practical significance that participants had three suggestions to improve the leadership training. First, case studies should match the actual working situation in the company. Second, the trainer needs to explain the practical value of the training content and exercises. Third, disruptions during the training (e.g., due to meetings) need to be avoided. Additionally, the results indicated that a standardized training can likely increase participants' feelings of appreciation and gratitude towards the company. This could possibly create a bond between leaders and the company and

result in enhanced motivation and productivity. In sum, the findings of the current investigation should encourage MNCs in their investments in employee development measures.

### **7.3 Contributions towards Advancing the Research Field**

Overall, the present research contributed to previous literature utilizing translation theory (Latour, 1986) by employing the framework in a new contextual setting (i.e., Vietnam) and by analyzing a specific HRD measure (i.e., a standardized training program). Furthermore, this study helped to gain a more in-depth understanding of the chain of information and communication flows between multiple stakeholders. In this attempt, the current findings highlighted that the implications of translation theory (Latour, 1986) are also applicable to standardized HRD measures even when diffusion (i.e., identical implementation) might be desired by headquarters.

The theory evokes a reconstruction of practices when individuals transfer them into action, which was supported by the current findings as multiple stakeholders influenced the translation process of the standardized program actively and thereby affected the outcome of the training. In addition, it became obvious that an investigation of multiple actors' expectations and ideas is valuable when investigating the transfer of standardized training concepts in varying locations as they can meaningfully influence both content and structure. In particular, potential differences in the expectations of subsidiaries and headquarters may be of importance for future training evaluations. Furthermore, the findings evoked an important question that should receive consideration in future research: Exactly how *standardized* are standardized training programs when they are getting transferred to different locations?

Overall, it appeared that the involved stakeholders in the current study adopted an asymmetrical translation strategy when implementing the standardized training program in



Vietnam. Derrida (2001) explains, “Asymmetrical translation does not have the capacity to carry over the whole context – the material and the phenomenal – to another site” (p. 264). Demir and Fjellström’s (2012) indicated that asymmetrical translation emerges because, ”(a) misalignment between the logic of practice and the contextual features of practice, or (b) insufficient information and/or instructions expected to be accessed from explicit knowledge sources (for example, training, formal guidelines) and/or top management” (p. 386-387).

While the current study offered some valuable findings it was not free of limitations. Primarily, the research was conducted utilizing single in-depth case study which limits the generalizability of its findings and conclusions. Additionally, the participants were primarily male with academic backgrounds and university degrees. This made it impossible to analyze if and how low educational levels affected the training outcome, which have been shown to have meaningful influence on HRD measures (Vo & Hannif, 2012). Thus, future research should be conducted to investigate standardized training programs in other companies, branches, and geographical settings and utilize more heterogeneous samples. Furthermore, a more in-depth focus on the reasons of executed changes and procedures to reduce deviations of the training result could be valuable for HR practitioners.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

In sum, the current investigation was able to provide several findings with both practical and theoretical value to the field of HR. It became apparent that multiple stakeholders likely influence the translation process through their personal ideas and expectations. This had a direct impact on the effectiveness of the training program as headquarter expectations were not achieved. Therefore, it appears important for companies to closely monitor the implementation of standardize training programs.

## 8 References

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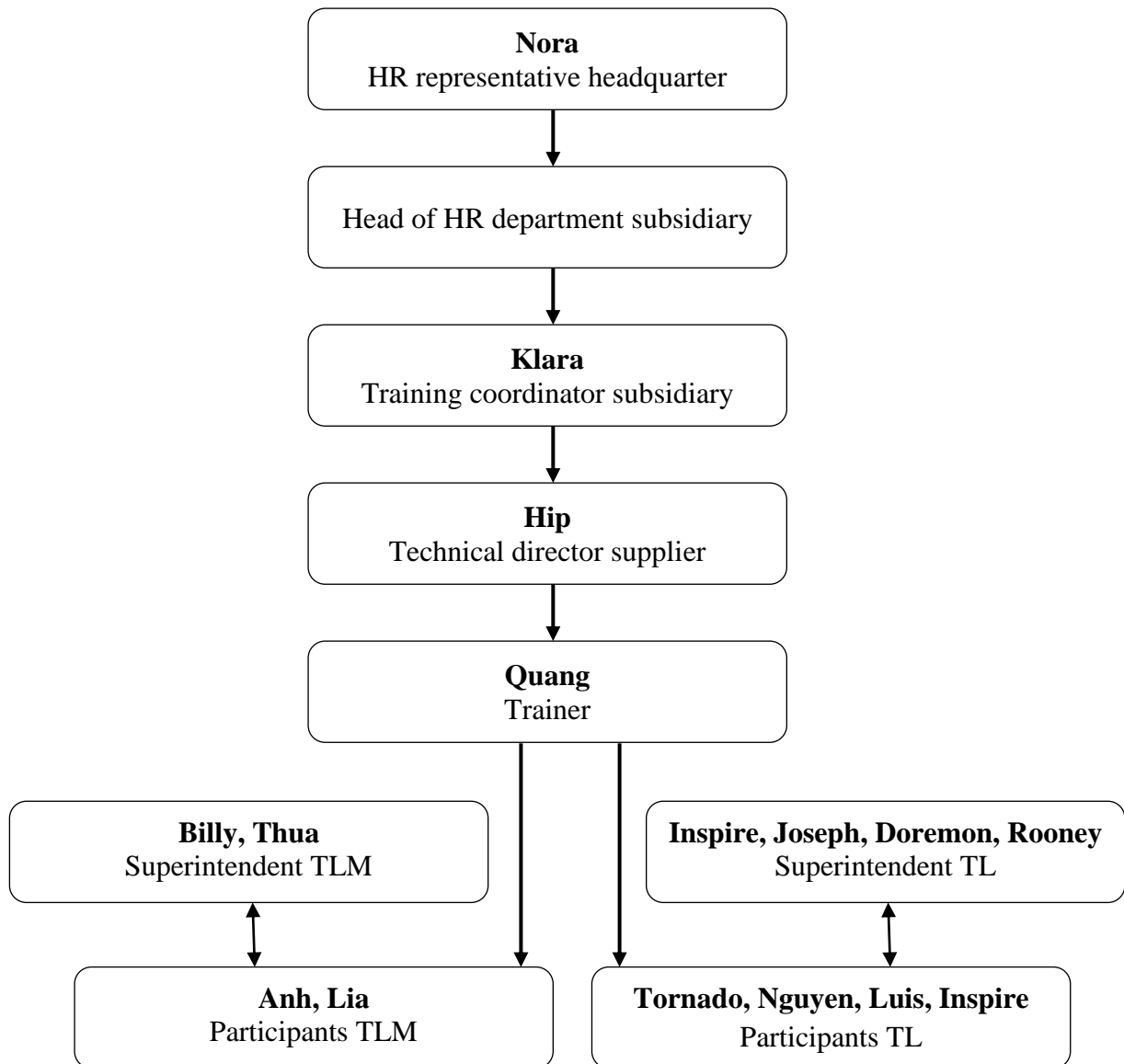
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## Appendix A: Participants and information flow



## **Appendix B: Interview guides**

### **Participants before the training**

#### ***Demographics:***

What is your biological sex?

What is your current age in years?

What is your nationality?

How long have you been working for GT?

What is your current position/job title?

How long have you been in this position?

How many subordinates do you have?

Have you ever worked for GT abroad previously to this assignment? If yes, where and for how long?

#### ***Expectations***

1. What were your expectations regarding the training program after the kickoff-meeting? Have these expectations been met so far?
2. What are your expectations regarding the training this week: Getting started as a leader? (content, the trainer, and practical implications)

#### ***Program Evaluation***

3. Can you describe the main qualities and skills a leader needs to have?
4. What do you know about the basic human needs?
5. What do you know about GT values?
6. How do you feel your behavior is influenced by these values? (Examples)
7. How do you motivate yourself? (Examples)



### ***Cases***

8. One of your subordinates surprisingly retires. He was extremely popular among the coworkers. Since he left your other subordinates are unhappy and not motivated. How do you react?
9. A new associate joins your team. After a couple of weeks his work begins to be bad and he does not follow all of your orders. How do you react?
10. You are put in charge of a new team of workers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. You notice that the subordinates treat each other dishonestly and unfairly. How do you react?
11. You have been invited to a meeting by your HOD. When you get to his office only an intern is present and tells you that she will be talking to you instead. How do you feel?
12. You have one more day before an important production deadline. An important member of your team gets a message that his daughter has been hit by a car and needs to go to the hospital. How do you react?

### ***Conclusion***

13. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?

## **Participants after the training**

### ***Expectations***

1. Can you tell me about your impression of the training program overall?
2. In what ways, if at all, did the training program change your opinion about GT as well as the companies culture?
3. The training program was developed in Germany. Did you experience any issues with its implementation in Vietnam?
4. Can you tell me about your impression of the leadership training?
5. In what ways did the leadership training meet your expectations (content, trainer)? What were the main things you learned from the training?
6. Do you have suggestions to improve the leadership training?

### ***Program Evaluation***

7. Can you describe the main qualities and skills a leader needs to have?
8. What do you know about the basic human needs?
9. What do you know about GT's values?
10. How do you feel your behavior is influenced by these values? (Examples)
11. How do you motivate yourself? (Examples)

### ***Cases***

12. One of your subordinates surprisingly retires. He was extremely popular among the coworkers. Since he left your other subordinates are unhappy and not motivated. How do you react?
13. A new associate joins your team. After a couple of weeks his work begins to be bad and he does not follow all of your orders. How do you react?

14. You are put in charge of a new team of workers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. You notice that the subordinates treat each other dishonestly and unfairly. How do you react?
15. You have been invited to a meeting by your HOD. When you get to his office only an intern is present and tells you that she will be talking to you instead. How do you feel?
16. You have one more day before an important production deadline. An important member of your team gets a message that his daughter has been hit by a car and needs to go to the hospital. How do you react?

***Conclusion***

17. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?

## **Superintendents before the training**

### ***Demographics:***

What is your biological sex?

What is your current age in years?

What is your nationality?

How long have you been working for GT?

What is your current position/job title?

How long have you been in this position?

How many subordinates do you have?

Have you ever worked for GT abroad previously to this assignment? If yes, where and for how long?

### ***Background***

1. What are your primary reasons to work for GT?

### ***Expectations***

2. What are your expectations regarding the training program? Have these expectations been met?

3. What are your expectations regarding the training: Role as a leader? (content, the trainer, and practical implications)

### ***Program Evaluation***

4. Can you describe the main qualities a leader needs to have at GT?

5. Can you describe Person As, Person Bs leadership style?

6. What do you know about GT's mission, vision, and values?

7. How do you feel As, Person Bs behavior is influenced by this mission, vision, and values?

8. In what ways does Person A, Person B try to motivate his/her subordinates (yourself)?

***Conclusion***

9. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?

## **Superintendents after the training**

### ***Expectations***

1. Can you tell me about the influence the overall training program has on your subordinates?
2. The training program was developed in Germany. Did you experience any issues with its implementation in Vietnam?
3. Can you tell me about the influence the leadership training has on your subordinates?
4. In what ways did the leadership training meet your expectations (content, trainer)?
5. Do you have suggestions to improve the leadership training?

### ***Program Evaluation***

6. Can you describe the main qualities a leader needs to have at GT?
7. Can you describe Person As, Person Bs leadership style? (Examples)?
8. How do you feel Person As, Person Bs behavior is influenced by this mission, vision, and values? (Examples)
9. In what ways does Person A, Person B try to motivate his/her subordinates (yourself)?  
(Examples)

### ***Conclusion***

10. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?

## **HR representative Vietnam**

### ***Demographics:***

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest academic degree? What major? \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been working for GT?
2. Have you ever worked for GT abroad? (Where and for how long?)
3. Have you ever visited the GT headquarter in Germany? (For how long?)
4. What is your current position/job title? How long have you been in this position? What are your main responsibilities at GT?

### ***Implementation***

5. Can you please describe your role in the training program?
6. How were you introduced to the training program? (During what stage? From what source?)
7. Who is/was involved in the implementation and execution of the training program? How did they influence the implementation? Were there any modifications from the manual?
8. Can you please describe advantages (and disadvantages) of implementing a standardized program.
9. To what extent is the training program influenced by GT culture and values?
10. In what ways can local stakeholders make autonomous decisions about the implementation?
11. Have there been any issues or challenges with the implementation to local circumstances?

### ***Expectations***

12. What expectations does the HQ communicate regarding the training program? (for supervisors/for shift leaders) How are these expectations monitored?
13. What are your expectations regarding the training program? (content, the trainer, and practical implications)
14. What expectations does the HQ communicate regarding the training: Getting started as a leader? (for supervisors/for shift leaders) How are these expectations monitored?
15. What are your expectations regarding the training: Getting started as a leader? (content, the trainer, and practical implications)
16. What kind of feedback about the program have you received from the different stakeholders?

***Conclusion***

17. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?



## **HR representative Germany**

### ***Demographics:***

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest academic degree? What major? \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been working for GT?
2. Have you ever worked for GT abroad? (Where and for how long?)
3. What is your current position/job title? How long have you been in this position? What are your main responsibilities at GT?

### ***Implementation***

4. Can you please describe your role in the training program?
5. How were you introduced to the training program? (During what stage? From what source?)
6. Can you please describe advantages (and disadvantages) of implementing a standardized program.
7. To what extent is the training program influenced by GT culture and values?
8. In what ways can local stakeholders make autonomous decisions about the implementation?
9. Have there been any issues or challenges with the implementation to local circumstances?

### ***Expectations***

10. What expectations does the HQ communicate regarding the training program? (for supervisors/for shift leaders) How are these expectations monitored?
11. What are your expectations regarding the training program? (content, the trainer, and practical implications)

12. What expectations does the HQ communicate regarding the training: Getting started as a leader? (for supervisors/for shift leaders) How are these expectations monitored?
13. What are your expectations regarding the training: Getting started as a leader? (content, the trainer, and practical implications)
14. What kind of feedback about the program have you received from the different stakeholders?

***Conclusion***

15. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?

## **Interview guide Supplier**

### ***Demographics:***

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest academic degree? What major? \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your current position and your job title?
2. Have you previously worked with GT?
3. Did you work in Germany before?

### ***Implementation***

4. What role did you play in designing the training: Getting started as a leader?
5. What kind of information did you get from GT?
6. Who is/was involved in the implementation and execution of the training: Getting started as a leader? How did they influence the implementation? Were there any modifications from the manual?
7. To what extent is the training program influenced by GT culture and values?
8. How was the implication of the training influenced by local circumstances? Have there been any issues or challenges?

### ***Expectations***

9. What expectations are communicated with you regarding the training: Getting started as a leader? From who? How are these expectations monitored?
10. What are your expectations regarding the training: Getting started as a leader?
11. What kind of feedback about the program have you received from the different stakeholders?

## ***Conclusion***

12. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?

## **Trainer**

### ***Demographics:***

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest academic degree? What major? \_\_\_\_\_

13. How long have you been working as a trainer?

14. Have you previously worked with GT?

### ***Implementation***

15. What role did you play in designing the training: Getting started as a leader?

16. Who is/was involved in the implementation and execution of the training: Getting started as a leader? How did they influence the implementation? Were there any modifications from the manual?

17. To what extent is the training program influenced by GT culture and values?

18. How was the implication of the training influenced by local circumstances? Have there been any issues or challenges?

### ***Expectations***

19. What expectations are communicated with you regarding the training: Getting started as a leader? From who? How are these expectations monitored?

20. What are your expectations regarding the training: Getting started as a leader?

21. Did the training for shift leaders follow the script?

22. What kind of feedback about the program have you received from the different stakeholders?

### ***Conclusion***

23. Is there anything else you would like to add related to what we have talked about today?