Bridging the Generational Gap in the Hospitality Industry: Reverse Mentoring—An Innovative Talent Management Practice for Present and Future Generations of Employees

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Abstract: In the present generational context, talent management approaches and practices have evolved from the stage of "war for talent", defined by competitiveness and elitism, to a more collaborative and inclusive "post-war stage". Innovative solutions are increasingly important. In this framework, the main aim of the paper is to confirm that reverse mentoring, a talent management practice which appeared as a response to the necessity to bridge the present generational gap, can be considered a valuable approach in hospitality. Two case studies on the successful implementation of reverse mentoring in Swiss hospitality are presented: the Shadow Comex (Accor) and the ExCom-Y (Mövenpick). Results of a focus-group discussion on the topic of identifying the attitudes and opinions of Romanian employees regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring in hotels are further analyzed. Results support the idea that reverse mentoring has developed and offers great potential for innovation. The present study offers interesting and useful ideas to companies in hospitality on how to implement reverse mentoring. Results from the group discussion demonstrate that Romanian employees have high expectations and innovative approaches regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring, similar to the employees from Switzerland, but they lack trust in their employers regarding the real possibility to implement it.

Keywords: reverse mentoring; generational gap; talent management; Millennial generation; hotels

1. Introduction

The concept of "talent management" was formulated in the late 1990s as a response to the so-called "war for talent", which was the creation of McKinsey's consultants who wrote that in a highly competitive world, companies were forced to fight for the best talents to fill business-critical positions and bring huge competitive advantages to a company [1,2]. The first references to talent management attached an elitist definition to the word "talent", which indicated "the best-of-class employees" [2]. In this context, the so-called "war for talent" referred to the companies fighting for the best and the brightest employees for key positions [3]. However, most specialists agree that talent management is a dynamic topic and therefore it must be analyzed and understood in relation to the context in which it takes place [4–6]. Socio-economic context matters a lot in correctly understanding and defining talent management [4,5]. Factors such as mobility, business transformations, technology progress, sustainability concerns, globalization, or demographics determine important changes in talent "quantity" and "quality" [2,4]. From these factors, the present paper focuses on a popular demographic

factor—the present generational context—analyzing the way it influences talent management definition and practices.

In the early 1990s, William Strauss and Neil Howe formulated the "generational theory", explaining how people who were born in the same period share similar core values, expectations, and behaviors, which can determine important changes in society [7,8]. The generational theory gained popularity when the so-called Millennial generation, composed of people who were born approx. between 1980 and 2000, entered the workforce, causing major disruptions, strongly affecting the psychological employer–employee contract and the entire workforce dynamics [9–11]. The phenomenon is called "generational gap" and it refers to the fact that there is an abrupt separation regarding the core values, expectations, and behaviors of the members of generations previous to the Millennial generation and those of Millennials and post-Millennials. The problem with the present generational gap is related to the fact that it causes intergenerational conflicts and major disruptions in society.

The implications of the present conflicting multigenerational workforce in talent management have been reported as an important research perspective, with more empirical studies being needed [4,12]. In talent management, the generational theory was used by several researchers to explain how the present generational context, heavily defined by the disruptive Millennial generation, reshaped the definition of talent and the talent management practices [2,4,6,9,12–15]. For example, several authors stated that at present, the entire approach of talent and talent management has to be more inclusive, collaborative, and generative, focusing on a wider range of employees [2,3,13,16,17]. This change of perspective might be also determined by the disruptive traits within the profile of the Millennial generation compared to the previous generations [6]. In this context, the present article addresses the above-mentioned research need through its first objective which is to formulate an answer to the question: Has the generational gap, determined by the Millennials entering the workforce, put an end to the war for talent? Based on a comprehensive analysis of previous research articles, theories, and studies, the first contribution of this paper is to depict the influence of the present generational context on talent management practices and to support the idea that we are at present in a post-war phase.

In a generational context strongly defined by the present generational gap, several authors emphasized the need to find more creative solutions to "unleash" talents on both sides of the gap [2,18]. One such creative solution, called reverse mentoring, was successfully implemented in 1999 by Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, to improve his top executives' use of Internet through pairing a Millennial employee with an older top executive and offering the Millennial the opportunity to share his/her digital skills with the older one. The first definition of reverse mentoring referred to empowering young and unexperienced Millennial employees to share their digital knowledge to older employees. An interesting aspect regarding reverse mentoring is related to the fact that it actually appeared because of the present generational gap, with the main aim of bridging it [19]. Therefore, in the present generational context, it can be considered that reverse mentoring is a practice of key importance in talent management [15,19]. It is not for nothing Ubl and her colleagues [15] have recently stated that with the Millennials entering the workforce, "we entered the reverse mentoring era". As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, several researchers demonstrated that the present generational context, in particular the Millennial generation, reshaped talent management definition and practices. Due to its story, reverse mentoring is associated with the Millennial generation. A research gap can be identified regarding the development of reverse mentoring, as talent management practice, and therefore an important contribution of the present article is related to the study and identification of its evolution.

Referring to the importance of contexts, several specialists emphasized that talent management can be correctly understood only in specific industry contexts and country contexts [4–6], therefore Vaiman et al. stated in 2012 [4] that future research is needed to offer a better understanding of talent management approaches and practices at country level and industry level. Accordingly, this paper addresses this gap by placing the entire analysis into the hospitality industry context.

There are industries which are more affected by the present generational gap because of their specificities. Hospitality industry can be considered one such example, because it is an industry

based on the core values of the generations which preceded the Millennial generation, such as hierarchy, formalism (uniforms, courtesy etc.), loyalty etc. It is an industry which traditionally had high turnover rates and faced high disengagement of employees, mainly because of the hospitality jobs' specificity (low-paying, seasonal, repetitive work, odd working hours, physically and emotionally demanding etc.) [20]. The intergenerational conflict determined by the generational gap added pressure to the industry in fighting even higher turnover and disengagement rates of Millennial employees [14,18,21–23]. The main disruptions which characterize the present generational gap brought many challenges to traditional hotels [14]. The fact that the rhythm of implementing changes is slower in hospitality compared to other sectors [24], together with the previous factors, transform hospitality into a more vulnerable industry in the present generational context. In such situation, some good questions would be: How do hospitality companies address the generational gap? What practices do they employ to manage their talents in such challenging generational context? As noticed by several authors [11,14], there is a research gap regarding the research studies which address hospitality and tourism talent management practices in the context of the generational theory. Therefore, the present paper investigates a talent management practice—reverse mentoring—in the context of the present generational gap.

In the framework presented above, the main objective of this paper is to analyze how reverse mentoring is and can be implemented to bridge the generational gap in hospitality companies. Consequently, two main research questions were formulated. First: is reverse mentoring an effective talent management practice in hospitality? To answer this first question, two cases were analyzed, presenting how Accor group and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts have recently implemented reverse mentoring in hospitality. The entire analysis demonstrated that reverse mentoring implementation has determined major changes in both companies, showing that reverse mentoring has become a complex talent management practice. This genuine perspective and the entire demonstration can be considered contributions of the present paper to best practice illustrations in hospitality.

Baum et al. [18] have recently stated that future research regarding the impact of generational differences in hospitality industry should focus of qualitative understanding of the phenomenon with a greater consideration of the historical and social context of the nation where research is conducted. Both cases included in the present study refer to a Western country—Switzerland. A study conducted by Vaiman and Holden in 2011 [25] shows that talent management is new in most Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries and, in the present generational context, it might be considered one of the causes why the majority of young employees want to leave their countries for Western, more developed ones. To address the research need identified by Baum et al. [18] and to test the conclusion of Vaiman and Holden [25], the present article extended the research and, based on the results of the two cases mentioned above, a second major question was than formulated: What are the attitudes and opinions of hospitality employees from an Eastern European country (Romania) regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring? The focus-group discussion was used to answer this question. As Vaiman and Holden stated [25], because the importance of talent management has not penetrated the "thick barriers of traditionalism in CEE organizations", most research projects in CEE countries are based on case studies of Western best practice [25]. This was also the case for the present study.

The answers received from the focus-group discussions also revealed that reverse mentoring has become a more complex practice. In this context, the main contribution of the present study is related to the identification of an interesting dynamic of reverse mentoring in hospitality, with the observation that the evolution of this practice is actually congruent with the evolution of talent management, in general, determined by the present generational context. No other study dedicated to analyzing the evolution of reverse-mentoring practice in talent management was identified. Through the analysis of the way reverse mentoring evolved in hotels, this study offers interesting and useful ideas to companies in hospitality regarding the possibility to implement this talent management practice to bridge the generational gap. Results from the focus-group discussions are valuable for companies in Romania and other CEE countries because they demonstrate that Romanian hotel employees have

high expectations and innovative approaches regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring, similar to employees from Switzerland, but they lack trust in their employers when it comes to the real possibility to implement this practice.

The research approach being qualitative, trustworthiness of the results was ensured, as presented in Appendix A [26–28]. The specific analysis process follows the steps described in the previous paragraphs, in the logic depicted in Appendix A, Figure A1.

2. Connection of the Research Topic with Sustainability

In the last decade, sustainability has become of topical importance in the field of human resources management and work relations [29]. Thornthwaite and Balnave have recently stated that topics such as employee wellbeing, workplace equity, employee participation, joint decision-making and social legitimacy are of great interest for future research in the field of sustainable management of human resources [29]. The 8th and 10th Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly actively support this trend [30]. The 8th Sustainable Development Goal is related to offering decent work and supporting economic growth and the 10th is related to reducing inequality and all forms of discrimination [30]. As noticed in recent research studies, new sources of inequality and discrimination arise and therefore examining equity in the context of organizations has become of growing importance [31,32]. The present generational context, mainly due to the present generational gap, has given rise to a new form of discrimination in the workplace based on intergenerational differences. Belonging to a specific generation has become a source of inequity tension in the workplace, along with gender, age, and race. Gauguri and Guamac emphasized in 2017 that "discriminating against Millennials, known as reverse ageism, is, perhaps, a new form of discrimination in the workplace that becomes salient to take actions in its regard" [31] (p. 38). The intergenerational inequity in the workplace has recently been considered a fast-emerging topic of debate [32]. Reducing inequity tensions is a pressing managerial issue. In this context, North and Fiske suggested that more research is needed to identify practical solutions to reduce intergenerational tension and restore intergenerational equity in the workplace [33]. The present article responds to this research gap by indicating practical solutions to implement reverse mentoring in hotels with the main aim of offering quality jobs and workplace equity for employees from all generations. North and Fiske also suggested that more comparative research is needed to study Western–Eastern approaches to intergenerational tensions in the workplace. The present article also addresses this research gap and identifies several Western–Eastern congruencies regarding the trend followed by talent management practices, but also several Western–Eastern discrepancies regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring in hospitality. In the general conclusions, the paper includes several practical implications for hospitality organizations with high transferability o other sectors, which is another original contribution of the present study.

3. The Present Generational Context Reflected in the Workforce

3.1. The Generational Theory and Its Popularity in Human Resources Management

The generational theory, formulated by William Strauss and Neil Howe in the early 1990s [7], describes the core values, specific needs, expectations, preferences and behaviors of large cohorts of people based on their belonging to a specific generation determined by their birth year, a generation usually lasting for approximately 20 years. Strauss and Howe discovered that the generations' succession follows a cyclical pattern, each generational cycle being composed of four generational archetypes: prophet/idealist, nomad/reactive, hero/civic, artist/adaptive. The present generational cycle is composed of the following four generations:

(1)　the Baby Boom Generation, composed of people born approx. between 1940 and 1960 (prophet/idealist);

(2)　the X Generation, composed of people born approx. between 1961 and 1980 (nomad/reactive);

(3) the Millennial or Y Generation, composed of people born approx. between 1981 and 2000 (hero/civic);

(4) the Homeland Generation, composed of people born after 2001 (artist/adaptive).

There is no consensus regarding the exact birth years of each generation from the present generational cycle and research has also demonstrated that there is a generational delay in developing economies, compared to the developed ones [8]. The generational theory is not an age-related theory—because it is not the age which first differentiates the individuals from different generations, but the context (social, economic, political etc.) in which they were born and grew up [11,34]. Their shared experiences shape the generational profile of individuals and not their age. Of course, age also differentiates the older generations (Baby Boom and X) from the younger generations (Millennial and Homeland).

The generational theory became more and more popular when the members of the Millennial generation started to enter the workforce because they caused major human resources (HR) crises and the traditional HR methods proved to be ineffective in case of the Millennials [35]. In such problematic context, the generational theory offered the instruments to discern the situations through the understanding of each generation's profile. Knowing the core values of the members of each generation, their expectations, their specific needs and preferences and predicting the behaviors of large groups of employees proved to be a beneficial and profitable approach. The generational theory thus offered a valuable foundation for the comprehensive understanding of the complex work-related context, proposing strategic and tactical approaches which HR management could adopt. The impressive number of research studies and validated results in HR management support the key importance of the generational theory at present, with only isolated opinions suggesting that the generational differences are myths and should not be taken into consideration [36,37].

3.2. The Key Importance of the Millennial Generation

Any quantitative research of the HR literature on generations would demonstrate that the most popular and researched generation is the Millennial. Of course, there are several reasons which support the importance given to this generation in both theory and practice.

The first reason is related to numbers. The Millennial generation is the most numerous generation [38]. Due to their present age, the members or the Homeland generation are the least numerous cohort active in the workforce. They are followed by the members of the X generation, because this generation is the least numerous cohort within the present generational cycle. The Baby Boom and the Millennial generations are the most numerous generations. However, because of their present age, many members of the Baby Boom generation have already retired or are going to retire in the next ten years. Statistics show that starting with 2016, Millennials have become the largest generation in the labor force in the USA and, by 2025, Millennials will comprise three quarters of the global workforce [38,39]. The situation is similar in many other countries. In Europe, recent studies considered that Millennials are a minority [39].

The second reason is related to its generational archetype. The Millennial generation is the "hero generation" in the present generational cycle. This name of the archetype was not given randomly by Strauss and Howe; after a comprehensive study of American history, they noticed that each "hero generation" produced important changes in society, usually through emblematic leaders. The entire generational theory being cyclical, in the present generational cycle it was the Millennials' turn to produce changes because they are the "hero generation" in these times. In addition, they actually did produce major disruptions in our society, in the workforce and in the workplace. As several authors noticed, the Millennial generation dramatically affected the psychological contract between employer and employee, resulting in new dynamics of the work relationships [9–11].

The third reason is related to dynamics. Recent research analyzes the fact that Millennials who entered workforce 20 years ago are not like Millennials who entered workforce five years ago; they seem to belong to different generations [40]. Several researchers and authors emphasized the

difference between old/early Millennials (born in the 1980s) and young/late Millennials (born in the 1990s) [15]. The evolution within the Millennial generation is a very interesting and unanticipated process, which definitely supports the statement that it is the most complex and dynamic generation in the present generational cycle.

The fourth and most important reason Millennials are the most studied generational cohort is related to their disruptive characteristics compared to the previous generations. Of course, as the generational theory explains, most of these traits are the result of the context (social, economic, political etc.) in which they were born and grew up, itself being defined by several factors leading to disruption. This major disruption within the present generational cycle, abruptly separating the Baby Boom and X generations from the Millennial and post-Millennial generations was called the present "generational gap" [35,41,42].

3.3. The Present Generational Gap Reflected in the Workforce

The concept of "generational gap" refers to the differences between generations related to values, opinions, beliefs and behaviors [43]. Generational gaps happened before [44], even between the Baby Boom generation and the Silent generation which preceded it, but they never determined such major turmoil affecting the entire society as the present generation gap did. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the present generational gap separates the Millennial and Homeland generations from the previous two generations. The problem with this gap is related to the disruptive characteristics of the Millennials causing unanticipated changes in society. That is why there are many authors who wrote about the significant "power", "influence" or "impact" of Millennials at all levels [38]. Taking into consideration the topic of the present article, the generational gap will shortly be analyzed from the HR management perspective. The main disruptions between the Millennial generation and the previous generations, which dramatically affected the work relationships refer to: technology, sustainability, and stress resistance.

- Technology

Prenski [45] coined the term "digital natives" for the members of the generations which start with the Millennial. The concept explains that their entire life depends on technology. Digital native employees are continuous learners in technology matters [46]. The learning effort is minimal for Millennials when it refers to technology [47], but for the members of the previous generations it can be critical because they are the so-called "digital immigrants" [45]. At work, Millennials prefer technology-based communication through messages over face-to-face communication, just the opposite of the members of the previous generations [44]. They need Internet connection 24/7 and their technological fluency strongly affects their interactions with other employees, managers, and customers. The Millennial generation of employees was shaped by the Internet and the World Wide Web [34]. They expect communication style at work to be open and unconventional [48–50]. Also, another key consequence of them being digital natives is related to speed—Millennials need speed in everything, they crave for immediacy. For Millennial employees everything must be instant—instant job admission (no formal admission tests or interviews), instant reward, instant feedback, instant access to information, instant respect, instant impact of their words etc. Because of the daily usage of social media, Millennials expect instant feedback and instant recognition of their accomplishments also in work contexts [51,52]. Speed made Millennial employees multitasking—they take multiple tasks simultaneously [24,48]. Also due to social media daily usage, and to the fact that most of them use mobile technology, Millennials expect their employers to allow them to continue chatting and posting during work. Millennials prefer to work smarter than harder—they expect their employers to implement technology at the workplace and to understand that technology strongly supports efficiency [51]. Millennials expect their employers to fulfill the needs of the information society's working life [53] (p. 580).

- Sustainability

The Millennial generation is the most socially conscious generation of employees [54]. As recent research shows, just like the members of Homeland generation, Millennials are sustainability implementors [55]; they value the sustainability-oriented behavior of companies and they have high expectations of their employers to act responsibly and ethically, not only to say they value ethics and sustainability [35,44,46]. Millennial workers expect their employers to be truly committed to produce positive impacts in society [3,37]. Millennials are socially conscious employees, eager to feel useful, to help others and their communities [46,51]. Sharing is in their DNA; they love to share their resources and expect their employers to share theirs as well. Data shows that most Millennials look for employers with social responsibility values that reflect their own [51]. Respect is one of them; Millennials believe everybody deserves respect and consideration [56]. Because they feel they do not get the respect they deserve, Millennials are often rules and hierarchy challengers and even breakers [24,44,57,58]. Recent findings show that Millennials want comfort and ease at work, with breakout and conversation areas and creative rooms, even sleep rooms, as a proof of the responsible behavior of their employers towards them [59]. They were called work–life integrators, opposite to their predecessors who are work–life dividers [35,60]. It means that they think an employee deserves to be allowed to deal with personal matters while at work and that the employer deserves that sometimes the employee solves some work problems in his/her spare time [10,21,35,54,60–62]. It is also related to acting responsible from both sides of the psychological contract.

- Stress resistance

The sociocultural and political environment in which Millennials were born, with political conflicts, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters as the order of the day, have imprinted on them a high level of stress resistance. The way Millennial employees perceive risks is significantly different compared to previous generations [47]. They have very high stress tolerance and most types of social interactions are appealing to them [50], with insignificant risks attached. This high stress resistance makes them the most disloyal employees, with no stress attached to repetitively leaving their jobs in search for new and more challenging ones [63]. The need for flexibility is the logical consequence of their high stress resistance. Millennial generation needs flexible working referring to flexible working time, flexible working space/location and/or flexible working patterns etc. [3].

3.4. Discrimination against Millennials—A New Source of Inequity Tension in the Workplace

Surveys demonstrated that approximately 60% of workplaces report the presence of intergenerational conflict, with over 70% of older employees expressing dismissal of younger worker abilities, and nearly half of younger employees dismissing their older colleagues' skills [33]. North and Fiske [33] have recently emphasized that surveys and research results support the idea that intergenerational conflict in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon and that it generates intergenerational tension caused by succession, identity, and individual manifestation. Generational stereotypes are also a source of intergenerational tension in the workplace. As noticed by Pritchard and Whiting, media highly contributed to the creation of contrasting generational stereotypes [64]. Belonging to a specific generation, mainly to the Millennial generation, can be a source of inequity tension, along with gender, age, and race. The difference is that generational discrimination is not formally recognized by law or international treaties, like the other forms of discrimination which lead to inequity tension.

Fighting against discrimination is a major goal in international sustainability policies. For instance, it is the 10th of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly [30]. At the European Union (EU) level, it is linked to work environment: the 2nd aim within the EU Sustainable Development Strategy states that organizations should provide "quality employment opportunities, offering fair pay and conditions for all employees and avoiding all forms of discrimination" [65]. Offering quality employment without discrimination, creating a supportive business environment, supporting creativity and innovation of all employees were included in the list of conditions that should be met if sustainability is to be achieved at EU level [65]. However, in the EU

legislation, discrimination in the workplace is included in the Directive 78/2000 only with reference to "combating discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation as regards employment and occupation" [66]. Therefore, equality legislation can be undermined by practices related to generational inequity [64]. One can say "I cannot work with you because you are a Millennial and I cannot rely on you" or "your ideas are not valuable because you are a Millennial and you are superficial" with no legal consequences under EU law. The intergenerational inequity in the workplace was considered a research gap by Bapuji and Mishra [32], in a context where new sources of inequity arise. Generation discrimination in the workplace can be considered a more complex form of discrimination because it includes age discrimination but it is mainly related to the system of values which describes each working generation. Therefore, it affects more profoundly the individuals.

As noticed by Gargouri and Guamac [31], generation discrimination is targeted mainly against Millennials and it takes place quite often in the workplace. Therefore, the authors suggested that this phenomenon needs to be properly addressed [31]. Several authors who studied intergenerational tension in the workplace agree on the fact that it is the prime responsibility of organizations, through their managers, to formulate strategies and interventions for restoring equity [31,33,67]. As noticed by Kanfer and Chen [68], employees "who perceive outcomes, procedures, and relationships as unfair were more likely to engage in lower levels of job performance (. . .) and/or higher levels of counterproductive behavior" [68] (p. 10). Millennials tend to solve the inequity tension by withdrawing from the situation—they leave their jobs. This pattern puts even more pressure on managers to find practical solutions to reduce intergenerational tension and restore intergenerational equity [33]. The basic requirement for success in such endeavor is related to the profound understanding of the main disruptive characteristics separating Millennials from the previous generations, as they are the source of inequity tension in the workplace. This approach is a component of the sustainable management of human resources.

The main disruptive characteristics of the Millennial employees, compared to the employees from the two previous generations, are summarized on the top of Figure 1. included in the Section 4.2 below. Without a doubt, the differences between the Millennial employees and both Baby Boom and X employees are much bigger and more complex. From the perspective of the present study, it is important to emphasize the main disruptions that define the present generational gap to understand the way they influence talent management.

4. The Influence of the Present Generational Context on Talent Management and Its Practices

4.1. Talent and Talent Management Approaches and Definitions

The concept of "talent management" was formulated in the late 1990s as a response to the so-called "war for talent", a catchy expression introduced by McKinsey & Company in 1998 when its specialists stated that "better talents are worth fighting for" [2]. In a highly competitive world, most theorists and practitioners spontaneously embraced the "war for talent" concept. Fighting for talents to gain the competitive advantage was an appropriate approach. The word "talent" logically referred to "the best-of-class employees", because the war consisted of fighting for the best and the brightest employees for key positions [1–3]. If this elite of talented employees was worth fighting for, it also needed to be properly managed. Therefore, the formulation of the "talent management" concept was a natural consequence of embracing the state of being at war for talent. In the beginning, talent management referred to managing that elite of best employees to occupy the key positions in companies. Fortunately, based on research and practice which proved that focusing only on star employees is not beneficial for companies' performance, the concept evolved and started focusing on a wider range of employees, rather than on "top talents" and even became synonymous with the entire workforce within a company [2,3]. Talent management has gained increased popularity, being a top priority for many companies at present [69].

As Gallardo-Gallardo [69] noticed, all the different approaches to talent management are actually based on the formulation of the concept of "talent" [69]. Therefore, a correct understanding of what "talent" refers to is key in all research papers that approach talent management topics. Considering the etymology of the word "talent", as presented within the Parable of Talents from the New Testament, talent first refers to the innate "gifts", the natural aptitudes and skills a person is born with (like the parable talents obtained by the servants from the Master) [69]. However, most people acquire and develop new aptitudes and skills during their entire life (like the parable servants who multiplied the talents they received from their Master). Hence, talent also refers to acquired qualities. Considering the previous elements, talent will be regarded in the present paper as a combination of innate "gifts" and acquired qualities [1,2]. From a numerical perspective, talents can refer to a very small number of people who have a unique combination of gifts. Generically, with no reference to a specific person, talent refers to an element or a combination of elements, innate or acquired, which may differentiate a person. Individuals are indeed unique and therefore talent/s potentially exist in every person. These statements are the core of the main approaches in talent management. First, from the perspective of the "quantity" of talents there are two types of talent management—the exclusive, which focuses on talent as a high performing person, and the inclusive approach, which focuses on the potential of each employee to be a talent [3]. From the perspective of the "quality" of talent, talent management may refer to the management of talented people or to the management of their gifts.

A more complex approach to defining talent and talent management is the theory of the four Cs [2,69] which describes the "talent" as an employee who is:

Competent—meaning he/she has the skills, knowledge, values etc., innate or acquired, useful for a company at present and future;
Committed—meaning he/she does his/her best to contribute to the company's performance;
Contributive—meaning he/she makes real, authentic and meaningful contributions to the company's life;
Consumer-oriented—meaning his/her contributions converge to customers' satisfaction.

In this framework, talent management refers to managing the unique competencies, the commitment, and contributions of employees towards satisfying customers. This definition is the most useful in practice because companies should actually care about the competence, the commitment and the real contributions of the majority of their employees and not about identifying an elite of employees to be competent, committed, contributive, and consumer-oriented. This definition is also neutral to the quantitative or qualitative approaches. For these reasons, this paper will employ the definition of talent management based on the theory of the four Cs.

4.2. The Influence of the Present Generational Gap on Talent and Talent Management Approaches and Practices

As Joss stated in 2018 [1], talent is never generic—it must be understood within different contexts. Based on rigorous research, many talent management specialists concluded that the sociocultural, economic and political context has a major importance in correctly understanding and defining talent management [2,4,5]. Several examples were mentioned in the literature such as mobility, business transformations, technology progress, sustainability concerns, globalization, or demographics. They all determined important changes in talent quantitative or qualitative approaches [2,4]. As mentioned in the previous section, the generational context is a very popular factor, combining demographics with sociocultural aspects, which dramatically impacts the work environment at present. Regarding the talent management, several researchers analyzed the impact on talent and talent management of the present generational context, strongly defined by the disruptions between Millennials and the members of the previous generations [2,4,6,9,12–15].

Regarding the "quantity" of talent, the present generational gap directly contributed to the popularity of the inclusive approach to talent management because Millennials like to share their resources, to work in teams, to cooperate, they challenge hierarchy and rules and they think they

deserve respect [24,57]. Although the exclusive approach dominated the academic literature on talent management for many years [13], more and more specialists concluded that at present, the entire approach of talent and talent management has to be more inclusive and collaborative, focusing on a larger number of employees [2,3,13,16,17]. This change of perspective is also determined by the disruptive traits within the profile of the Millennial generation compared to the previous generations [6]. Sparrow et al. [5] recently noted that the inclusive–exclusive approaches are actually a false dichotomy in practice because most talent management systems use a combination of both inclusive and exclusive approaches. From this point of view, the correct formulation would be that talent management evolved in the new generational context from a preference for the exclusive approach to a preference for a more inclusive approach (Figure 1).

Regarding the "quality" of talent, the present generational gap determined in talent management a very complex change of focus—from talents as people to talents as gifts. The explanation is related to the Millennials being sustainability implementers, who value the responsible behavior of companies towards their employees. For them, it is the responsibility of companies to create the most appropriate environment and culture for their employees to acquire new gifts, to be more committed and to bring valuable consumer-oriented contributions [63]. In many organizations, due to the inappropriate, unfitting organizational environment, talents are inactive. It is the responsibility of companies to activate talents (gifts) into their employees. Talent management consequently became the art of cultivating and activating gifts in employees [5,9,11,56,69]. As Sparrow et al. [5] wrote, the people approach considered that talent management is the management of talented people and the practices approach considers that talent management refers to the "sophisticated and advanced practices" employed to enable talent. The logical consequence of this evolution was that talent management started to focus more on practices and techniques which could contribute to the activation of talent/s. Usually talent management practices are related to: identification of talent, attracting talent to the company, supporting engagement of talented employees, retention of talented employees, developing talent, career management of talented employees etc. [5]. In the present generational context, due to the qualitative evolution of talent management, practices which cultivate, develop and activate gifts in employees became more important [13]. Such talent management practices are: mentoring, coaching, feedback, networking, reflection, individual development plans, deliberate practice, learning from experience, job rotation, training, psycho-social support, sponsorship etc. [5,9,16,17,70,71]. Some talent management practices are preferred by Millennials, such as mentoring [15].

In the new generational context, once the Millennial generation entered the workforce, the traditional relationship between employee and employer dramatically transformed [72]. As Cascio noted [9], because of the disruptive work expectations of the Millennials, the psychological contract between employer and employee was affected by significant changes, such as: uncertainty (before it was stability), temporariness (before it was permanence), flexible work (before there were standard work patterns), valuing performance and skills (before it was valuing loyalty), self-reliance (before it was paternalism), multiple careers (before it was linear career growth), lifelong learning (before it was one-time learning). In this context, traditional talent management practices must adapt to the dynamics of the new employer–employee relationship [72]. Because Millennials are rule-breakers and have very high stress resistance, it has been said that innovation is in their DNA; them being called "Millennovators" [73]. Organizations must keep up with them and implement creative, generative and cooperative solutions to activate talent/s because, in the new generational context, increasingly, traditional, standard and competitive solutions are no longer appropriate [13].

In conclusion, the generational shift to the Millennial disruptive profile was a key factor which actually contributed to the reshaping of talent management approaches and solutions (Figure 1). The combative approach no longer suits this new generational context. Because four generations with very different values and expectations must work together side by side, the present multigenerational workforce can be a source of more conflict or a source of learning [2,34,35,60,74]. Cascio [9] emphasized that the strategic approach of companies should be to better capitalize on the differences between

the present generations, embrace them. From this perspective, the generational gap is no longer a problem, but an opportunity to offer very different people the chance to learn the best from each other [9]. The concept of "war for talent" was based on the exclusive approach of talent management and was developed in the USA based on the American mentality and practice, strongly defined by competitiveness and combativeness [5,6]. The evolutionary process of talent management approaches towards more tolerance, inclusiveness, cooperation and support, influenced by the present generational context, has put an end to the war for talent stage (Figure 1) [2]. Twenty years after the war for talents began, the combative approach is no longer appropriate within the new generational context. The term "war" is obsolete, the majority Millennial generation determined the "beyond war" approach, when companies no longer fight for star employees, but instead try to find creative solutions to generate talent in most of their employees [2].
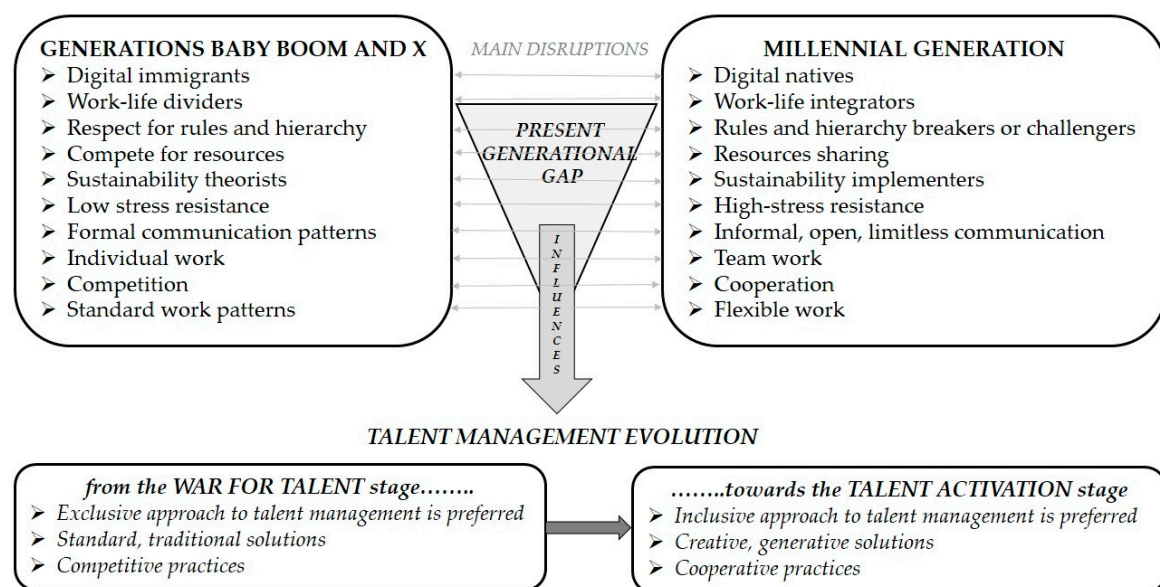

Figure 1. The influence of the present generational context on talent management.

The focus should be on bridging the present generational gap through innovative and collaborative techniques and practices. Such an example is reverse mentoring, a talent management practice which appeared in the present generational context with the aim of bridging the gap between Millennials and previous generations of employees [19]. Because it is a talent practice generated by the present generational context, which offers support to the demonstration of the evolutionary process of talent management, this paper focuses on reverse mentoring.

4.3. The Key Importance of Reverse Mentoring in the Present Generational Context

- The story of reverse mentoring

Recent empirical studies demonstrated that mentoring is one of the most popular activities for talent pipeline development in the present generational context [16,17,70,71,75]. Traditional mentoring refers to senior employees who guide junior employees [15,75]. In the generational context, traditional mentoring refers to a Baby Boom employee guiding a Millennial. Due to the fact that Millennials have "hot skills" related to technology, [72] stated that companies can no longer rely on traditional mentoring because, for example, employees can no longer expect support from their supervisors on all technical issues. He therefore considered that traditional mentoring has eroded [72]. A group of Millennial writers has recently written that Millennials still prove to be very interested in mentorship programs because technology transformed mentoring into a more "collaborative sport" than traditional mentoring used to be [15]. As Ubl and her colleagues noticed, mentoring model in the past was "I'll tell you what's what!", while mentoring model at present has become a two-way model of learning [15].

In the present generational context, a constructive and positive approach to talent management, strongly impacted by the generational gap, would be to create innovative solutions that acknowledge the generational differences, transcend them and solve intergenerational inequity tensions [19,31,33,76]. Reverse mentoring is such an example of innovatively transforming the traditional talent management practice of mentoring to satisfy the disruptive work expectations of the Millennial employees [2,19]. As its name says, reverse mentoring is still mentoring, but a reversed one, when a Millennial employee guides an older employee from the Baby Boom or X generations. As noted by Chen [75], the main functions of traditional mentoring, such as career development, psychological support, and role-modeling, remain in reverse mentoring. It is the roles that are switched between mentee and mentor, compared to traditional mentoring. From this perspective, reverse mentoring can be simply viewed as another type of mentoring [51]. However, as presented in the previous sections, the generational gap created major disruptions in the workplace. The fact that reverse mentoring appeared in this specific context as a response to the present generational gap and with the main aim of bridging it [35] is enough argument to support its individuality. Mentoring never aimed to bridge generational gaps, but to offer support to junior employees. In the present generational context, defined by the main disruptions between the Millennial generation and the previous generations, reverse mentoring per se is a more complex talent management practice than a mentoring type which is simply reversed. Therefore, reverse mentoring should be awarded its importance as a standalone practice. As mentioned in the Introduction, Ubl and her colleagues [15] recently declared that with the Millennials entering the workforce "we entered the reverse-mentoring era".

- The definition and benefits of reverse mentoring

The present generational gap produces conflicting expectations between opposing generations of employees. Referring to the three main disruptions which define the present generational gap, generations of employees can be divided into: digital natives (Millennial and post-Millennial) versus digital immigrants (Baby Boom and X); high stress resistant employees (Millennial) versus low stress resistant employees (Baby Boom and X); resources sharing advocates (Millennial and post-Millennial) versus individualist players/lone wolves (Baby Boom and X). As noticed by Srinivasan [35], there is little research on how the members of conflicting generations can be supported to adapt to each other's characteristics at work, in a way that reduces inequity tension and is beneficial to both companies and employees. The present generational gap being more abrupt than previous gaps, with the Millennial employee profile including many disruptive elements, new talent management solutions had to be created to support the traditional ones. The present paper focuses on the reverse-mentoring practice because it constructively maximizes the collective intelligence of the conflicting generations of employees in the current generational cycle [77] and it genuinely reduces the intergenerational inequity tension in the workplace.

Reverse mentoring has been defined as an unconventional mentorship technique which fosters the frequent exchange of ideas between employees of different generations, supports the creation of connections within companies and the nurturing of talent [78]. It has been recently stated that reverse mentoring is the most suitable practice for Millennials' retention because it fosters the creation of genuine relationships between them and the older employees of Baby Boom and X generations [23,43,78]. Actually, as Güğerçin [79] noticed, reverse mentoring is a management tool which was especially created by General Electric to deal with the generational gap between Millennial and Baby Boom employees. It has been said that reverse mentoring was derived from Millennials' disruptive work characteristics and expectations [80] (p. 78). Reverse mentoring is a new concept, created in 1999 by Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric to improve the top executives' use of the Internet.

Reverse mentoring was initially a simple mentoring practice focused on improving the Internet usage abilities of a digital immigrant top employee through allowing a digital native junior employee the possibility to offer him/her technical support. With the technological progress, reverse mentoring increasingly involved other technologies and innovations such as social media or mobile technologies [79]. In the beginning, reverse mentoring meant mentoring an experienced Baby Boom

supervisor by a young, less experienced Millennial employee [79]. In time, reverse mentoring turned out to be a more complex practice, the mentor–mentee pairing proving to be related to three potential elements: to power (manager–employee), to age difference (old–young) or to the position in the organization (senior–junior).

Although reverse mentoring was initially conceived as a technique which reversed the traditional mentoring function, allowing digital native employees to transmit their technology related knowledge to older digital immigrants, research demonstrated that it is actually a mutual mentoring practice [54], allowing employees from conflicting generations to exchange not only high-tech skills, but also high-touch skills, not only tangible, but also intangible returns [79,81–83]. In its first form, reverse mentoring contributed to the creation of a one-way bridge, such as the traditional mentoring technique. In the present generational context, with a majority workforce composed by the powerful Millennial generation, reverse mentoring creates a two-way bridge [18]. This evolution was determined also by technological progress. In a technologized world, it is vital to also focus on soft skills—these are skills that only humans possess and not machines. Millennials are a practical generation and from every relationship in which they are involved, they must gain something; win–win working relationships are the responsible approach for them. What could be their winnings in reverse-mentoring relationships? Millennials do not see their older colleagues and managers as content experts because the Internet always offers them multiple versions of one aspect. Therefore, reverse mentoring increasingly started to focus on the high-touch skills/soft skills of older employees, rather than on the information they have [46]. Such high-touch skills of older employees are related to: anger management, interpersonal face-to-face communication, time management, ethics, problem solving, politics, power structure, internal best practice, company's goals and strategy, spirituality, intuition, good taste in dressing, consistency, loyalty, the history of client relations, etc. [24,46,73,84–86]. Millennials' offerings can share their high-tech skills related to the Internet, social media, mobile technology, different apps, new electronics, SEO (search engine optimization) etc. However, more than the mutual winnings of the mentor and mentee, reverse mentoring proved to be a truly beneficial practice for companies which implemented it (Table 1).

Taking into consideration the main benefits of reverse mentoring summarized in Table 1, it can be considered a key talent management practice in the present generational context because it offers support for the simultaneous activation and nurturing of talent within employees from conflicting generations. Talents are easier to nurture in an open and penetrable environment. A major problem of the Millennial employees is related to their impenetrability due to them feeling disrespected and discriminated by older employees. Reverse mentoring genuinely solves this problem by offering mentor roles to Millennials, as a form of respect. The ingenious consequence is that inequity tension is reduced, and Millennials become more open, more penetrable individuals and they can more easily absorb the soft skills from their older and more experienced colleagues and managers.

The popularity of reverse mentoring is predicted to grow in the near future [15,79] because it supports building two-way bridges between conflicting generations [87], but its success "rests upon the dissolving of the barriers of status, power, and position" [82] (p. 3624). Such barriers are very difficult to dissolve in industries which are based on tradition, structure, and hierarchy, as the hospitality industry is [22]. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to place the entire analysis into the challenging context of hospitality.

Table 1. Benefits of reverse mentoring.

Benefits for Millennial Employees	Benefits for Employees from Baby Boom and X Generations	Benefits for Companies
High-touch skills [21,81,84,85]	High-tech skills [46,73,78,79,82,87,90]	Managers' continuous training [3,74,79,82,88,91]
Respect and empowerment from older employees [83]	Training tailored to their profile	Decrease in employees' turnover intentions, because employees feel closer to their managers [15]
Continuous learning through meaningful relationships [3,87]	Respect from younger employees [83]	The development of close relationships between older managers and younger employees [3,78,79,87]
The opportunity to make a difference [78]	Professional and personal development	Proper use of the "wisdom capital" of employees from Baby Boom and X generations [84]
Meaningful work, feeling that their work is valuable [15,73,78,87]	Change of generational misconceptions [3,79,90]	Genuine, ingenious ideas and solutions [73,78,79]
Feedback from their employers [54]	Discovering similarities with younger employees	Keeping the Millennials engaged, committed [3,46,78,83,91]
Understanding of roles within a company [54]	Appreciation for technology [90]	Retaining the tacit knowledge of older employees [79,84,85]
Professional and personal development [15,79]	Learn about the needs of young consumers [79,87,90]	Encourage sharing and innovation within company [73]
Change of generational misconceptions [3,79]	Ability to adopt change [79,82]	Technological literacy of all employees [46,79]
Finding multiple mentors with different backgrounds	Learn to gain support of employees [79,87]	Better interpersonal skills of younger employees [54]
Self-confidence [3,73,79]	Innovation and creativity skills [73,79]	The possibility to capitalize on generational differences—use the different skills to enhance the work in a team [73]
The feeling that the company values their uniqueness [15,73]	Relational learning [79]	Reducing training costs compared to traditional training of employees
Career development [54,79]	In touch with the future [3,82]	Creation of a learning environment [21,79,82,87]
Contribution to decision-making [79]	The feeling that the company still cares for them [84]	Attract and retain talent [79,82]
Gaining experience		Decrease generational conflict [79,87]
The possibility to know more about the reality of the working place [3,54,87]		Keep in touch with the future
Leadership development [54,78,79,82,87,88]		Facilitation of cross-generational relationships [21,54,78,87]
Relational learning [15,82,87]		Trust development
Discovering similarities with older employees		Comfortable work environment [73]
Access to key positions [54]		Fostering interactions [54,78]
Help Millennials see and understand their weaknesses—for example they can see that technology has limitations [89]		

5. Research Questions and Methods

5.1. Formulation of the Two Research Questions

As suggested in talent management literature [4–6,69], due to the fact that competencies are specific, talent approaches cannot be general; they have to be tailored to the profile of a sector, or a region, or a country or even of a company. It is another perspective on the importance of context in talent understanding. Vaiman and his colleagues [4] stated that future research is welcomed to contribute to a better understanding of talent management approaches and practices at country level and industry level. The main aim of this paper is to place the entire analysis from the above sections into the hospitality industry context. There are several reasons to support this choice. First, there is little research in hospitality related to talent management practices in the new generational context [11,14] and even less on reverse-mentoring implementation in hospitality companies. Hospitality can be considered an industry which is more affected by the present generational gap because some of its core characteristics are also the core values of the generations which preceded the Millennial generation, such as hierarchy, formalism, or loyalty. Most sectors defined by hierarchical structures and formalism usually employ exclusive approaches to talent management, implementing competitive or elitist solutions. The hospitality industry is such an example. Hospitality companies are traditionally composed of hierarchical structures and therefore talent management approaches have been mostly

exclusive, referring to talent as to a small group of highly competitive employees [1]. However, in the new context, with the Millennial employees who are rules and hierarchy challengers/breakers [24,57,58], there is need for a change of direction in talent management approach in hospitality companies as well, towards a more inclusive, open, informal, flexible and collaborative approach [49]. Hospitality industry is also traditionally characterized by high turnover and dropout rates and high disengagement of employees, mainly because of several characteristics of hospitality work, such as low-paying, seasonal jobs, repetitive work, odd working hours, physically and emotionally demanding work etc. [1,20]. The high stress resistance of Millennials and their expectations of responsible behaviors from their employers added more pressure to hospitality industry which started to confront even higher turnover and disengagement rates of Millennial employees [14,18,21,23]. The fact that the rhythm of implementing changes is slower in hospitality compared to other sectors [24], together with the previous factors, transforms hospitality into a more vulnerable industry in the present generational context. As Baum et al. [18] have recently stated, the hospitality industry "is still searching for innovative ways to appease the high demands and expectations" of Millennials.

In the framework presented above, the first research question of the present study was formulated as follows: Is reverse mentoring an effective talent management practice in hospitality, as it has already proved to be in other sectors?

Recent research [25] emphasized that the country context may also have major influence on talent management approaches and practices. For example, companies in countries from Eastern and Central Europe are not very familiar or open to embracing talent management [25]. In this context, and because the research team of this study was composed of researchers from both Western European and Eastern European universities, the second research question was formulated as follows: ***What are the attitudes and opinions of hospitality employees from an Eastern European country regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring?***

5.2. Research Methodology

Hospitality is a people-centric industry and therefore qualitative methods were suggested as better suited to the complexity of the phenomena that can be researched in this particular field [92,93]. The rigor of quantitative methods is not appropriate when the research focuses on complex and less studied topics related to understanding sophisticated relationships, people's expectations and attitudes [26,92]. Taking into consideration the two research questions formulated in Section 5.1, the qualitative approach was considered proper for the present study.

To answer the first research question (*Is reverse mentoring an effective talent management practice in hospitality as it has already proved to be in other sectors?*), the case study method was employed. The case study approach has many advantages when emerging areas of research are examined. Therefore, several authors concluded that case studies, best practices and area-specific discussions are characteristic research methods in hospitality and tourism [26,93]. As noticed in the tourism research literature, it is preferable for the case study method to include one or a reduced number of cases, intensively studied, using multiple data sources and data-gathering techniques [26]. Only isolated audacious examples of implementing reverse mentoring in hospitality were identified, the most visible and promoted being at Accor Hotels and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts. Evaluative research is usually employed "to test the effectiveness of a policy or a type of management practice" [26]. According to the classification made by Veal in 2018 [26], the case study in this article uses *an evaluative research approach* because *the purpose is to test the effectiveness and the results of implementing reverse mentoring in the two illustrative cases of Accor Hotels and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts*. The case study method offers a lot of flexibility in using data-gathering techniques [26]. In this study, the following techniques were used to gather data: *documentary evidence, oral presentations, and in-depth interview*. The sampling methods combined: *the key-criterion method* (because only hotels which implemented reverse mentoring were chosen), *the homogeneous method* (because only hotels that implemented reverse mentoring successfully and with visible results were chosen) and *the opportunistic method* (because of several reasons: one researcher from

the team attended the 4th World Research Summit for Tourism and Hospitality, where Olivier Chavy, the CEO of Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts delivered a comprehensive presentation of the implementation of reverse mentoring; one member of the research team had the possibility to conduct an in-depth informal unstructured interview with Sébastien Basin, the CEO of AccorHotels on the topic of the implementation of reverse mentoring and also because several oral presentations of Sébastien Basin are available on YouTube on the researched topic).

To answer the second research question (What are the attitudes and opinions of hospitality employees from an Eastern European country regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring?), the focus-group method was employed. In tourism and hospitality research, the focus-group approach was considered useful to achieve an understanding of a diversity of attitudes and expectations of people, especially when little is known about the research topic [26,94]. The method was implemented by a research team which included several young Millennial Master's students from a public university in Romania who were enrolled in a Tourism and Hospitality Master's Program at the Faculty of Food and Tourism, most of them (71%) with significant work experience in hospitality (more than two years). The members of the research team first discussed conducting classic face-to-face versus virtual-focus-group discussions and decided in favor of the virtual one, using Facebook. The panel was set at eight respondents per session, with three sessions. The qualitative sampling methods combined the convenience method with the criterion method. The choice and repartition of participants on the three groups of discussion is explained in more details in Appendix B and Table A1. The aim of the focus-group discussions was to investigate the opinions and attitudes of the respondents regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring and not to see differences between generational groups of employees. Therefore, the sampling structure was not designed to explore variations between the three generations.

The second research question was divided into three landmark themes for the discussion: (1) The general understanding of the reverse mentoring concept; (2) The attitudes of the respondents regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring in hotels and (3) The personal opinions and suggestions about potential ways to implement reverse mentoring in hotels. The final guide contained nine questions which were formulated in accordance with the three themes. To reduce the time of the focus group and to ensure better interaction between all participants, three teasers were performed before the discussion event itself. The participants were informed about 1. The generational theory and its relevance in work environment 2. The definition of the reverse-mentoring concept and how it was created 3. The case study of Mövenpick ExCom-Y. The participants were invited to search further information, in case they were interested. Three private events were created on Facebook, one for each group. Participants used their existing Facebook accounts. Each discussion had two moderators. One group moderator had to post the questions and together with the second moderator they had to ask follow-up questions, if needed, and to encourage elaboration of the answers. Because atmosphere is considered important in focus-group discussions, questions were prepared as slides, using evocative images to make them appealing to participants. Participants could interact with each other and were encouraged to like and/or dislike the comments of the other participants. A very important aspect is related to the fact that there were no conflicts during the discussions. Several ideas were strongly supported by the other participants.

All the information was processed and analyzed manually/"by hand", using Microsoft Word, and no specialized computer software was employed for data analysis, this procedure being considered valid for managing and sorting data in both case studies and focus groups [26,95]. *Case-oriented analysis* was used for the case study and *variable-oriented analysis* for the focus group. For the focus-group answers, the researchers first used the *coding data procedure* to classify the answers (posts and comments, including simple emoticons) and, after several iterations, *data was registered by theme/sub-theme*. Answers were also numbered (N) to establish the frequency of answers (posts and comments) and to determine the *relative frequency* [96].

6. Research Results

6.1. Case Study Method: The Effectiveness of Reverse-Mentoring Implementation at Top Executive Level in AccorHotels and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts

As stated before, the case study approach is evaluative, the purpose being to understand if the implementation of reverse mentoring within AccorHotels and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts was efficient. As noticed in the tourism research literature, it is preferable for the case study method to include one or a reduced number of cases, intensively studied, using multiple data sources and data-gathering techniques [26]. Documentary evidence was composed of textual analysis of digital mass-media articles (from websites, digital magazines and journals), oral presentations and interviews available on YouTube and the oral presentation of Olivier Chavy, the CEO of Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts at the 4th, World Research Summit for Tourism and Hospitality. In-depth informal unstructured interview with Sébastien Basin, the CEO of AccorHotels, on the topic of the implementation of reverse mentoring, was also conducted. The information obtained from these sources was structured as a story about the implementation of reverse mentoring in the two hotels. At the end, a common synthesis of the innovative ideas materialized in both cases after reverse-mentoring implementation is included. *The story-like structure* was preferred because *both cases can serve as best practice for other hotels worldwide*.

6.1.1. The Shadow Comex

In 2016, Sébastien Bazin, the visionary CEO of AccorHotels, had the idea of implementing reverse mentoring through the creation of the first executive committee composed of Millennial employees. He noticed that 80% of the hotel chains, such as the one he managed, had a hierarchical, vertical organization, based on force relationships. Sébastien Bazin admitted that "young people have a sharper ability than us to anticipate the world of tomorrow" [97]. He noticed that most of the successful start-ups in the world are related to the digital and were created by young entrepreneurs aged less than 35 years [97–99]. Therefore, he called the young Millennials "the locomotives" and decided to infuse AccorHotels with the high-tech skills and innovative ideas of the Millennial generation, through reverse mentoring implemented at the top executive level [90]. Referring to the present conflicting generations, Bazin admitted that in chain hotels there are "two tectonic plates" [100] who must communicate and to respect each other. He emphasized that if he did not give the power to the young Millennials, they would leave. In 2016, the Shadow Comex was created as a supporting structure for the existing executive committee. The Shadow Comex was initially composed of 13 young Millennials (six boys and seven girls); at present, there are only 12 members, aged 25 to 35. They are considered the 12 "talents" of Accor [97]. The Shadow Comex is a very diverse group—seven nationalities, different expertise background, boys and girls [99]. The most important mission of the members of the Shadow Comex is to work on "disruptive and innovative projects" [99]. The mandate of the Shadow Comex is for one year; after this period, other young people replace the 12 members [99]. This decision of the one-year mandate aims to maximize the innovative input and the freshness of the creative ideas within AccorHotels [99]. All decisions within AccorHotels are made based on their consultation. They have access to all the information, and they are the first to formulate a decision. To bridge the generational gap in communication, the young members of the Shadow Comex were given a coach for supporting them in the formulation of their messages addressed to the Executive Committee of AccorHotels [99]. The term "shadow excom" actually comes from the British political vocabulary where "shadow cabinet" refers to the parallel government of the opposition [98]. Therefore, the entire approach shows that there is still a generational conflict between the two Executive committees. The practice of "shadow borders" existed before, for example at IBM [35]. What AccorHotels did was to implement the innovative practice of reverse mentoring in an industry defined by major barriers such as tradition, hierarchy, and structure.

Several innovative ideas were generated by the Shadow Comex and successfully implemented within Accor group. In this paper, two examples are provided and shortly analyzed: the concept

of open-house hotel and the reverse-mentoring pairs. Both demonstrate that the implementation of reverse mentoring at AccorHotels had a major impact on the company itself, therefore offering a comprehensive and convincing affirmative answer to the first research question.

The members of the first Shadow Comex proposed the idea of opening Accor *open-house hotels*. They convinced Basin that hotels are not being used to their full potential [101] and the available space and resources should be shared with the locals. This is the main idea of the open-house hotel concept—integrating hotels into the local community [101]. The pioneers who first implemented the concept of open-house hotel were the small businesses Zoku Hotels in Amsterdam [102] and Green Rooms in London [103]. The open-house hotel concept is a "home–office hybrid concept" [102] which disrupts the notion of traditional hotel. Within the open house, the focus is shifted from the sleeping area to the living, working, and playing area. The Jo&Joe open-house hotel concept was born at Accor in September 2016 like "a new kind of hospitality" [99,104,105]. Jo&Joe is described on its website as "a bubbling living space, an open house welcoming the outside world, designed to meet the expectations of Millennials and anyone who embraces their attitude to sharing, spontaneity and experience" [105]. Within the open house, the Millennials can share sleeping spaces and activities such as cooking (collaborative kitchen), playing, learning or working [105]. Local food and beverage products are included in the menus within the open house, therefore the entire approach is socially responsible [105]. By 2020 Jo&Joe is expected to grow, getting to more than 50 locations worldwide [105]. Marriott followed Accor's example and implemented the concept of open house, creating the Moxy Hotels brand [106]. The opening of Jo&Joe open-house hotel has been considered to be a disruptive approach with positive results [105] demonstrating the major impact that reverse mentoring can have in hospitality.

In 2017, a pilot project started at AccorHotels involving 50 *reverse-mentoring pairs*—each pair putting together a digital native with a digital immigrant within the company to support them, share mindset, values, skills, and leadership approach. This idea shows that the management of AccorHotels admitted the benefits of reverse mentoring at top level and decided to implement it to lower levels to support talent development at all levels of the group. It demonstrates that the success of the exclusive talent management approach triggered the implementation of a more inclusive talent management approach related to reverse mentoring.

For establishing the Shadow Comex, the Accor group was awarded the "Grand prix de l'innovation digitale" in 2016 [97]. After the success of Shadow Comex, Accor group decided to strongly and publicly support the idea that to gain competitive advantage in the present generational context, hospitality businesses have to "share the decision-making power" with the members of young generations [97].

6.1.2. The ExCom-Y

In 2017, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts followed the example of AccorHotels and created the ExCom-Y, a parallel executive board composed of young and successful Millennials [99]. The ExCom-Y was composed of ten members—five men and five women—six of them being from the inside and four from outside the company (young business leaders). Five times a year, the ExCom-Y is invited to take part to the executive meetings at Mövenpick. Olivier Chavy, the CEO of Mövenpick, admitted in his presentation at the 4th World Research Summit for Tourism and Hospitality that it was his Millennial son who inspired him to create the ExCom-Y [107]. Compared to Accor's Shadow Comex, Mövenpick decided to present each member of its ExCom-Y publicly and proudly [108]. Therefore, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts made an important step forward with their ExCom-Y by responsibly and openly assuming their executive board composed of Millennial employees. It can be said that Accor's Shadow Comex has been "brought into the light" at Mövenpick. The ExCom-Y is a diverse group, like the Shadow Comex, being composed of young men and young women, from different countries and different areas of expertise, including front office, digital content, and strategy, sales, marketing, F&B, and brand and quality assurance [108]. The members of ExCom-Y must analyze and offer a deep understanding of the mindset, lifestyle, values, preferences and behavior of the

Millennials to bring real support to the hotel chain in the conception of its strategies. The managers of Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts admitted that ExCom-Y made the executive committee at Mövenpick more "open-minded" [109].

Several innovative ideas of the ExCom-Y have been implemented within Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts. In this paper, four examples are provided: the lobby reorganization, the implementation of geo-social networking, the creation of new jobs in social media and the post-stay guest questioning via WhatsApp. All four demonstrate the complex beneficial consequences of the implementation of reverse mentoring at Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts, which benefitted the entire company.

Based on the importance that Millennials give to their workplace, to work/life integration, to respect and to responsible corporate behavior, the members of ExCom-Y convinced Chavy to test the concept of "being at work, feeling at home". Several Mövenpick hotels redesigned the entire lobby space, transforming it in a sort of hotel "living room", a space for interactions, with many home-like elements, allowing guests, employees, and even locals to feel like home [107]. This approach was positively disruptive in the context of the traditional hotel concept and is very similar to the idea of open-house hotel.

Mövenpick, as with most hotels, was facing a problem related to the low rate of responses received from guests through the post-stay questionnaires. The members of ExCom-Y helped Mövenpick solve this problem in an innovative and reduced-cost way. The team convinced the executive management of Mövenpick to change the post-stay guest questionnaire with one question via SMS or WhatsApp. The members of the executive committee wanted to create an app for this functionality, but the young Millennials from the ExCom-Y convinced them that Millennial guests need peer-to-peer interaction and therefore WhatsApp is better suited to their profile [107,109]. As stated by Olivier Chavy, the results were amazing related to the quantity of feedback data from the guests and the idea of ExCom-Y also helped the company save money because it was based on using the existing resources [107].

Following ExCom-Y's advice, Mövenpick also implemented geo-social networking in several locations. As Chavy said, in hospitality, digital interaction must be adapted to regional specificities and not approached at a corporate level [110]. Geo-social networking employs the GPS capabilities which are included within most smartphones, enabling users to share their photos, comments, preferences, and needs with each other in real time, based on what they are doing in a specific location [111]. For Mövenpick, geo-social networking means that within a defined area of a hotel, there is the possibility to capture in real time anything anyone posts on Facebook and Instagram and some other social media websites that mentions the word "Mövenpick". The consequence is that the specific needs of the customers are instantly known by the hotel's staff and can be properly addressed almost instantly. For example, as Chavy stated "if a guest takes an Instagram shot round the pool—saying it is a hot day, I would love some ice cream... the social media people (from Mövenpick) see it in real time and then can send a message back..." or even bring the vanilla ice cream [110]. This idea helped Mövenpick in getting closer to its guests, offering better tailored services.

Mövenpick also decided to create several key positions related to social media, based on the ideas of ExCom-Y. A very important aspect is related to the empowerment of the employees working within social media departments. They can communicate freely with guests and to make decisions such as the one to deliver a specific product. As Olivier Chavy said, the hospitality business is about delivering to the guest exactly what the guest needs in the most appropriate moment [110].

6.1.3. Synthesis of the Results Obtained from the Two Cases

Based on the theory of the four Cs [2,69], all six ideas which were materialized at AccorHotels and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts after implementation of reverse mentoring at top executive level brought real contributions to the development of competencies, commitment and consumer-oriented contributions (Table 2). Therefore, *both cases presented above demonstrate the effectiveness of reverse mentoring in hospitality talent management*. Thunnissen [112] noticed that the positive effects of talent management practices on organizational performance are mainly presumed and not validated or

quantified in research studies; therefore, a contribution of the case study research from the present article is related to validating the positive effects of reverse mentoring on organizational performance.

Table 2. Analysis of six innovative ideas materialized at AccorHotels and Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts after implementation of reverse mentoring at top executive level.

Hotel Chain	Reverse Mentoring Team	Implemented Ideas (Examples)	Talent Management			
			C1[a]	C2[b]	C3[c]	C4[d]
AccorHotels	Shadow Comex	▶ Open hotel	X	X	X	X
		▶ Reverse-mentoring pairs	X	X	X	
Mövenpick	ExCom-Y	▶ Lobby reorganization	X	X	X	X
		▶ Geo-social networking	X	X	X	X
		▶ New jobs in social media	X	X	X	X
		▶ Post-stay guest questioning via WhatsApp	X	X	X	X

C1[a] Fosters employees' use and development of *competencies*. C2[b] Fosters employees' Commitment/Passion. C3[c] Fosters employees' Contribution to the organization. C4[d] Fosters employees' Consumer orientation.

AccorHotels announced in the autumn of 2018 that they finished the acquisition of Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts. As Sébastien Bazin admitted, Mövenpick's "committed and talented teams fit perfectly with AccorHotels' core value" [113]. Mövenpick is expected to bring a real contribution related to technology innovation within AccorHotels [114]. Experts agree on the fact that it was not a simple expansion, a simple acquisition of new locations, but an acquisition of growth [114] and talents.

6.2. Focus-Group Method: The Attitudes and Opinions of Hospitality Employees from an Eastern European Country Regarding the Implementation of Reverse Mentoring

The focus-group discussions in each group were moderated to go through all three landmark themes. Several sub-themes have been formulated and nine questions have been conceived to allow the participants go through each theme and sub-theme (Table 3).

6.2.1. The General Understanding of the Reverse-Mentoring Concept

The answers provided by the 24 participants to Q1 demonstrate in the case study of Mövenpick ExCom-Y that they all had read before the discussions, offered them support and influenced their understanding on the concept of reverse mentoring. Responses were grouped in three categories: age-related responses, level of employment related answers and community related answers (Table 4). Several respondents formulated mixed responses. The researchers expected the case study to have greater impact on participants, and therefore anticipated the highest relative frequency to be for the answers related to the level of employment because the ExCom-Y paired B-level employees with top executives. The generational theory seems to have impacted more the participants, because the highest number of responses focused on defining reverse mentoring through the lens of age, as the practice of exchanging information, knowledge, ideas etc. from young employees to old/older employees. A curious aspect regarding the results for Q1 is related to the fact that no answer was expressly related to the generational theory. This aspect validates the idea that the generational theory and the names of the present generations are not very popular in some of the developing countries in Eastern Europe, such as Romania. An innovative perspective on the understanding of the reverse-mentoring concept was introduced by the five answers related to the idea of a community of employees, where employees are equal and share ideas. Follow-up questions were addressed to the participants who formulated these answers to understand how they got to these definitions. All the explanations were related to the case study of Mövenpick. They explained that it was the stories of lobby reorganization and geo-social networking that helped them understand that reverse mentoring is a broader concept which can potentially involve all employees or groups of employees within a hotel. In this context,

it is important to notice that the participants only had contact with the exclusive talent management approach through the story of how reverse mentoring was first created by Jack Welch, before reading the case study. The case of Mövenpick actually helped them see the fact that this talent management practice transformed into a more inclusive one. The positive impact of the case study on participants was confirmed through the answers to Q2.

Table 3. Research themes, sub-themes, and questions.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Questions
1. The general understanding of the reverse-mentoring concept		Q1. What is reverse mentoring in a hotel?
2. The attitudes of the respondents regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring in hotels	2.1. The general attitude of the participants toward the implementation of reverse mentoring within Mövenpick Hotels and Resort	Q2. What do you think about the Mövenpick case study?
	2.2. The attitudes of the participants toward the implementation of reverse mentoring within their own hotels	Q3. Is reverse mentoring real/possible in your organization?
		Q4. Why?
	2.3. The general importance given by the participants to reverse-mentoring implementation in hotels	Q5. How important do you think reverse mentoring is in hotels?
3. The personal opinions and suggestions about potential ways to implement reverse mentoring in hotels.	3.1. Ideas of the participants regarding the way/s reverse mentoring could be implemented in hospitality	Q6: If you were a hotel manager, how would you implement reverse mentoring?
		Q8: How would you like your hotel to implement reverse mentoring?
	3.2. Ideas of the participants regarding the knowledge content which can be transferred through reverse mentoring	Q7: What would you like to share with your colleagues and managers?
		Q9: What would you like your colleagues and managers to share with you?

Table 4. The definition of reverse mentoring.

Category	Frequency (N)	Relative Frequency	Examples
Age	18	0.52	exchange from young to old employees
Level of employment	12	0.34	level-B employees teach level-A employees; employees teach managers; ordinary employees share their ideas with managers;
Community	5	0.14	information exchange between employees; sharing ideas to each other
Total	35 [a]	1.00	

N—number of answers (comments and posts). [a]—Several respondents gave multiple category answers.

6.2.2. The Attitudes of the Respondents Regarding the Implementation of Reverse Mentoring in Hotels

This research theme aimed to identify if the general attitude of the participants toward reverse-mentoring implementation in hospitality is positive or negative and to evaluate the intensity of its perceived importance.

The general attitude of the participants toward the implementation of reverse mentoring within Mövenpick Hotels and Resort was analyzed using the technique of associations. The participants

were asked to provide an adjective or a short adjectival answer they associated with the case of ExCom-Y. All participants agreed on the fact that the case study was best practice, because they employed or supported attributes such as brilliant, great, very interesting etc. Two participants in two separate groups added some negative traits after agreeing on the fact it was a good example of reverse-mentoring implementation. The first added " ... but it can never be done here" and five of his group colleagues used supportive emoticons. The second added " ... but risky" and only two of his group colleagues supported the answer. It is important to notice that the negative associations were not related to the attitude toward reverse-mentoring implementation. For the two groups where the negative associations were formulated, the discussion continued with Q3 and Q4 to identify the attitudes of the participants toward the implementation of reverse mentoring within their own hotels and only after that continued with Q5. For the group where no negative associations were provided, the research continued with Q5 to first test the general importance given by the participants to reverse-mentoring implementation in hotels and only after that continued with Q3 and Q4. This change determined quite significant differences between groups regarding the importance awarded to reverse-mentoring implementation, with lower scores awarded by the two groups that had contact with the negative associations. To determine how important was reverse-mentoring implementation in hotels from the participants' point of view, a Likert-type scale was used with 1 "not at all beneficial," 2 "slightly beneficial" 3 "somewhat beneficial," 4 "very beneficial" and 5 "extremely beneficial." A mean score of 3.8(3) was calculated, indicating that the participants considered the implementation of reverse mentoring quite important in hotels. Researchers consider the differences between the groups demonstrate that the case study had an important impact on participants. For those participants who had to evaluate the importance of reverse mentoring right after the positive appreciation of the ExCom-Y case, the group mean score was of 4.375, more than one unit higher than the mean score of the other two groups that thought about their own employers before considering the importance of reverse mentoring in hotels.

The attitudes of the participants toward the implementation of reverse mentoring within their own hotels was negative; several 22 participants answered "no" to Q3 and only two participants answered "maybe". It is interesting to notice that when the researchers further explored the reasons for this negative attitude, the participants demonstrated to be eager to share their arguments, with a mean of 2.5 answers per participant. Example of responses to Q4 are displayed in Table 5. The 60 answers were divided into three categories after data coding: organizational culture reasons, managerial style reasons, and cultural differences reasons. The majority of the answers can be related to the general talent management approach, which is either absent (answers like: inertia, no organizational culture in this direction, for chain hotels; for international hotels) or exclusive (answers like: hierarchy, discrimination, favoring expertise, lack of transparency) in the six hotels. It can be considered a warning signal for the six hotels, for the hospitality industry in Romania, but also for other privately owned hotels in other Eastern and Central European countries. The high intensity of response to Q4 also draws attention to the intensity of the participants' dissatisfaction and frustration regarding talent management approaches in their organizations and country.

Table 5. Arguments in support for the negative attitude of the participants toward the possibility to implement reverse mentoring within their own hotels.

Category	Frequency (N)	Relative Frequency	Examples
Organizational culture	27	0.45	Hierarchy; for big hotels; for chain hotels; for international hotels; no organizational culture in this direction; inertia—things are working anyway;
Managerial style	21	0.35	Discriminatory practices; lack of open-mindedness; impersonal; favoring expertise; lack of transparency;
Cultural differences	12	0.20	Not ordinary in our country; for rich hotels in rich countries; it works in Switzerland, not here
Total	60 [a]	1.00	

N—number of answers (comments and posts). [a]—Several respondents gave multiple category answers or multiple answers in the same category.

6.2.3. The Personal Opinions and Suggestions about Potential Ways to Implement Reverse Mentoring in Hotels

The main aim of the third research theme was to discover innovative ideas of the participants regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring in hotels, related to means and substance.

Questions Q6 and Q8 had the same purpose—to identify ways of implementing reverse mentoring in hotels. The researchers considered that a double perspective would add value to the research and therefore, in Q6 the management perspective was employed, while in Q8 the employee perspective was used. To avoid redundancy, Q7 was inserted between the two questions. After summarizing the answers provided to Q6 and Q8 and coding the information, nine categories of ways to implement reverse mentoring were identified (Table 6): events and other activities for employees, shared spaces, volunteer activities, sharing ideas, interaction platforms, formal and informal trainings, job rotation, personal discussions, new departments/jobs. All respondents gave or supported multiple category answers and multiple answers in the same category; a total of 263 comments and posts were included. The response intensity was high, with a mean of 10.9 answers (posts, comments and emoticons) per participant. The impact of the case study is demonstrated by several categories of answers, inspired by the story of Mövenpick ExCom-Y: "shared spaces" was inspired by the idea of "Lobby reorganization", "new departments/jobs" was inspired by the idea of "New jobs in social media", "interaction platforms" was inspired by the ideas of "Geo-social networking" and "Post-stay guest questioning via WhatsApp". An important aspect to be noticed is that all the above-mentioned categories are related to the positive effects of implementing reverse mentoring at Mövenpick.

The participants' opinions and suggestions regarding the ways which hotels can use to implement reverse mentoring demonstrate a more collaborative and inclusive approach. Thus, most of the answers are related to creating the right environment, virtual or not, for groups of employees to interact and exchange ideas and knowledge in an informal and open way: events and other activities, shared spaces, volunteer activities, interaction platforms, sharing ideas, personal discussions. The responses of the participants to these two questions validate the qualitative evolution of talent management in the direction of stating that it is the responsibility of companies to activate talents (gifts) into their employees through the creation of the most appropriate, open, informal, and friendly work environments, spaces and cultures [5,9,11,15,41,49,50,56,58,59,61,62,69,74,86,115–118].

Table 6. Ways to implement reverse mentoring proposed by participants.

Category	Frequency (N)	Relative Frequency
Events and activities	69	0.26
Shared spaces	43	0.16
Volunteer activities	32	0.12
Interaction platforms	27	0.10
Sharing ideas	27	0.10
Trainings (formal and informal)	23	0.09
Job rotation	17	0.07
Personal discussions	13	0.05
New departments/jobs	12	0.05
Total	263 [a]	1.00

N—number of answers (comments and posts). [a]—Several respondents gave multiple category answers.

Taking into consideration that the practice of reverse mentoring is based on knowledge transfer from mentor to mentee or between them, questions Q7 and Q9 had the same purpose—to identify ideas of content knowledge that can be transferred through reverse mentoring. The double perspective was also employed: Q7 used the personal perspective and Q9 employed the others' perspective. Example of responses to Q7 and Q9 are displayed in Table 7. Answers were classified into six categories of reverse-mentoring knowledge content (Table 7): ideas, personal life, technology, life values, company, and professional skills. The highest relative frequency of the answers referring to "ideas" once again demonstrates the impact of the case study on the 24 participants because it focused on the way Mövenpick successfully implemented the innovative ideas of the Millennials from the ExCom-Y.

The participants' opinions and suggestions regarding the potential content knowledge which might be transferred through reverse mentoring are broad-minded and demonstrate the evolution of their expectations toward a more informal, open, limitless communication in work-related contexts. It also demonstrates the qualitative evolution of talent management practices because the 24 participants included in their responses many references to personal aspects (mistakes, failure, personal experiences, family, kids, places they like to visit, vacations, specific needs, personal problems, empathy, respect, manners, friendship, life–work balance) and to soft skills (mistakes, failure, empathy, respect, manners, friendship). These aspects also support the transition to a work–life integration stage in talent management as well. Several specialists wrote about this transition to the work–life integration in the new generational context [18,35,48,54,60,61,63] and the present study brings additional support to this idea in the hospitality industry. The results to questions 6, 7, 8, and 9 also sustain the idea that technology facilitates work–life integration [38,60] because many answers of the participants suggested that technology should be used as talent enabler in reverse-mentoring implementations.

Through the content knowledge of reverse mentoring proposed by the 24 participants, the concept of "holoptism" is supported. This means having horizontal knowledge of what the contributions of the other colleagues and vertical knowledge of the aims of a certain decision or project [119]. Responses show that employees in hospitality need access to information within the hotel (goals; shareholders; ownership; HR policy; jobs; acquisitions; brand values; short term strategies); they need the decisional process to be transparent and they prefer to be able to see the roles and contributions of the other colleagues. Reverse mentoring therefore seems suitable to support holoptism in hospitality companies. The case study method also sustains this idea because the Millennials from both ExCom-Y and Shadow Comex were offered open access to all strategic information in the two companies.

A generic analysis of the answers provided by the 24 participants to questions 6, 7, 8, and 9, leads to a very important aspect which should be emphasized—the high expectations and broad-minded ideas of the participants, despite the fact that they do not see reverse-mentoring implementation possible in their organizations. This discrepancy between their expectations and the real situation in their organizations should be seen as alarming, related to the general talent management approach in the six hotels and in the entire country.

Table 7. Knowledge content of reverse mentoring proposed by participants.

Category	Frequency (N)	Relative Frequency	Examples
Ideas	83	0.32	Innovations; best practices; mistakes, failure
Personal life	72	0.28	Experiences; family, kids; places they like to visit; vacations; specific needs; personal problems (not intimate)
Technology	43	0.16	Social media; apps; information search; software
Life values	34	0.13	Empathy; respect; manners; friendship; life–work balance
Company	17	0.06	Goals; shareholders; ownership; HR policy; jobs; acquisitions; brand values; short term strategies
Professional skills	12	0.05	Sales techniques; marketing; software; management;
Total	261 [a]	1.00	

N—number of answers (comments and posts). [a]—Several respondents gave multiple category answers or multiple answers in the same category.

6.2.4. Research Limitations

There are specific limitations related to both case study and focus-group research methods. Although the case study, as a research method, may not result in generalization, the findings were considered valuable in case of evaluative research in relation to policy and implementation of management practices [26]. While the focus group was criticized as being "cheap and quick to execute", this method has proved to have many strengths in tourism and hospitality, being considered "a key method of gathering insightful data" [94]. As Veal [26] has recently emphasized, there is a golden rule in choosing the most appropriate qualitative research method and sample—the available resources of time, money, and people. Since it was a common project of a team which included Master's students, the Facebook focus group was the most appropriate research method for answering the second research question in the present study. Involving Master's students in research projects is a common practice [94], strongly supported by the European Union and the member states. They have the official status of young researchers and therefore their work is as valuable as the work of any other researcher.

There are also research limitations related to the general qualitative approach which limits the generalizability of the results by definition. As mentioned above at Section 5.1, qualitative methods were considered better suited to hospitality and tourism topics connected to understanding complex phenomena related to people [26,92,93].

Another research limitation is related to the fact that the focus in this article was put on hotels. Therefore, more studies with a focus on other hospitality entities, such as restaurants or clubs, would be beneficial to validate the findings within this article regarding the implementation of reverse mentoring in hospitality. The focus-group research method focused only on hospitality employees of Romanian nationality. The single-country perspective may be restrictive. However, there is a very important element in support of this approach. According to the 2017 edition of the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report [120], Romania is the country with the lowest ranking among the EU member states. Also, in Central and Eastern Europe, there are only a few countries with lower rankings, which are not EU member states. The present research identified that hospitality employees in this country share similar complex opinions and expectations related to reverse-mentoring implementation as in Western economies—Switzerland. These findings strongly support the evolution of reverse-mentoring implementation in hospitality, all the more as they come from a country with one of the lowest rankings in travel and tourism competitiveness in Europe. Of course, a study which brings a multicultural perspective over the issue could add significant value.

7. Discussions on the Evolution of Reverse Mentoring in Hospitality Talent Management

The information obtained from both case study and focus group supports the idea that reverse mentoring is a more complex talent management practice than it used to be when it was first implemented. The important aspect emphasized in this study is that this evolution of reverse mentoring related to its complexity also stands in hospitality industry, despite the specific barriers of this industry. The evolution of reverse-mentoring complexity is related to both quantitative and qualitative approaches to talent management.

Referring to talent quantity, both cases and the focus-group discussions support the transition of reverse mentoring towards the preference for a more inclusive and collaborative approach, focusing on a larger number of employees. In the early days of reverse mentoring, it was a one-to-one technique, based on pairing a Millennial with a Baby Boomer. Both ExCom-Y and Shadow Comex are examples of group reverse-mentoring implementation. Also, many suggestions of the participants to the focus-group discussions referred to group implementation of reverse mentoring in hotels. The results from both research methods demonstrate the evolution of reverse mentoring from a focus on top-level, key positions toward the focus on middle and even low-level positions. Although reverse mentoring was first implemented at both Accor Hotels and Mövenpick at top executive levels, further developments in both hotels favored more inclusive implementations, such as the lobby reorganization at Mövenpick or the open-hotel idea and the reverse-mentoring pairs at AccorHotels. A major aspect supported by the information from both case studies and focus-group discussions is related to the evolution of reverse mentoring from the "one-way street" approach towards the more collaborative "two-way street" approach in which both mentees and mentors transfer knowledge to each other. The ideas of open hotel, lobby reorganization or geo-social networking, implemented at Accor and Mövenpick, are all based on collaborative sharing of knowledge. Also, several suggestions of the participants to the focus-group discussions regarding potential ways to implement reverse mentoring are related to collaborative environments: events and activities, shared spaces, interaction platforms, sharing ideas, volunteer activities. The fact that the respondents suggested that many personal aspects and soft skills should be shared through reverse mentoring also supports the more inclusive and collaborative approach.

In conclusion, both case studies and focus-group discussions show that at present, reverse mentoring is and should be more equalizing and more oriented toward the community of employees. Specialists called this phenomenon the shift from vertical hierarchies to networks of specialists or even "networks of work friends" [9,15,58,86]. Several authors have recently written about the hotel seen as a community of persons, or hotels as hubs [101,115,119]. The present study offers additional support to these perspectives. Most comments and posts of the 24 participants to the focus group supported the idea of community, when they suggested that reverse mentoring could be implemented through events and other activities, shared spaces, volunteer activities, sharing ideas, and interaction platforms.

Referring to talent quality, both cases and the focus-group discussions support the idea that at present, reverse mentoring in hospitality is more about the practice itself than it is to specific people. It is the creation of the most appropriate work environments and cultures for employees' gifts to become active that really matters.

Ubl and her Millennial colleagues [15] recently stated that once the Millennials entered the workforce, the "reverse mentoring era" began. Reverse mentoring is conceptually attached to the Millennial generation and the entire complexity evolution of this talent management practice can be therefore analyzed in the context of the evolution within the Millennial generation itself. As stated in Section 3.2, the Millennial generation is the most complex generation at present mainly due to its disruptive traits but also due to the fact that it has suffered internal transformations from the old Millennials to the young Millennials [15,40]. The main differences between old and new Millennials are related to the progress of technology and to having a grip on reality. Young Millennials are more realistic, more practical, and more comfortable with new information and communication technologies (ICTs) use [15]. They are also increasingly concerned about responsible behavior. In this context,

young Millennials consider that their responsibility as employees relies on the practical and efficient contributions they bring to the companies that employ them. Their concern is to actually bring useful, feasible, real inputs at their workplace. In such framework, with reference to the talent management theory of the four Cs, both case study and focus-group methods actually showed an evolution of reverse mentoring in hospitality from the focus on the first C—competencies towards a focus on the second and third Cs—commitment and contribution. In the present generational context, the focus is not on building competencies, as it used to be in the beginning of reverse-mentoring implementation, but on bringing real contributions and on building relationships (which led to commitment). The case study demonstrated that reverse-mentoring implementation gave birth to innovative ideas which were successfully implemented in both Accor and Mövenpick, with significant positive influence on both companies. The members of the executive committees from both Accor and Mövenpick acquired no new competence through the creation of ExCom-Y and Shadow Comex. However, both companies gained competitive advantage through the implementation of the Millennial mentors' ideas. In consequence, both cases were more about bringing real, tangible, major contributions, than about acquiring new competencies. The responses of the participants to the focus-group discussions also supported this idea, because many suggestions formulated by the participants regarding the possible ways to implement reverse mentoring actually show their willingness to bring real, tangible contributions. Young Millennials are the true "Millennovators" because they share a passion for innovation [73]. The highest number of posts and comments (83) of the participants to the focus group regarding the information they would like to share at work refers to "ideas". In the present generational context, ideas are considered valuable contributions to companies [56,76,116].

The information obtained from both case studies and focus-group discussions also supports placing greater emphasis on building commitment of hospitality employees. Millennials are committed only to meaningful relationships that they develop with their colleagues and supervisors; they are no longer committed to organizations [3,23,89]. Therefore, companies should concentrate on activating talents within their employees through such meaningful relationships. Results from both qualitative methods endorse the idea that reverse mentoring is a practice which supports the creation of meaningful relationships at work, and, through them, sustains the commitment of hospitality employees.

Young Millennials are also considered even more tech-savvy than old Millennials. They feel comfortable with exploring new technologies, they prefer mobile technology, all kinds of apps which offer support for daily routine tasks, and they are fans of gamification. This transformation within the Millennial generation, generated by the progress of technology, also determined an evolution of reverse mentoring. This statement is supported in hospitality as well by the research results from both case study and focus-group methods. Several ideas implemented at Mövenpick were based on new technologies and apps, such as the geo-social networking, the post-stay questioning via WhatsApp and the new jobs in social media. The participants at the focus-group discussions also suggested that reverse mentoring refers to sharing knowledge about social media, apps, software, or information search engines. They also proposed that reverse mentoring should be implemented through interaction platforms. Several authors have recently emphasized the critical importance of social media use and implementations in hotels (social media platforms, social media as promotional tool, social media jobs etc.) [52,121–123].

In the context presented above, the problem is no longer related to accepting reverse mentoring as a suitable talent management practice in hospitality, but to actually implementing reverse mentoring in productive ways, using new information and communication technologies (ICTs) as enablers for talent management [12,117].

8. General Conclusions

The literature review included in the present article directs attention to the evolution of talent management approaches and practices generated by the present generational context, strongly defined by the generational gap determined by the disruptive Millennial generation. Once it entered the

workforce, it caused the reshaping of the entire employee–employer relationship. It is a generation of key importance within this generational cycle and a true force of change [14]. Under the influence of the Millennial generation, talent management approaches evolved from the stage of "war for talent", defined by competitiveness and elitism, to a more collaborative and inclusive "post-war stage". This transition has significant social and practical implications. The paper analyzes several implications of both quantity and quality of talent. The conclusion is that in the present generational context, implementing innovative, collaborative, inclusive talent management solutions is increasingly important. In this particular framework, the focus of this research was put on reverse mentoring, a talent management practice which appeared as a response to the present generational gap, with the main aim of bridging it. Reverse mentoring was therefore considered a practice of key importance at present. Several authors considered that we have been living in the era of reverse mentoring for the past 20 years [15]. In this period, reverse mentoring has become increasingly complex, demonstrating the same evolutionary path as talent management in general. It appears that reverse mentoring has a symbiotic relationship with the Millennial generation and just as this generation of employees is predicted to grow in the following period, in both number and importance, the popularity of reverse mentoring is predicted to grow in the near future [15,79].

As recently stated by Deshwal [82], the future success of reverse mentoring rests on breaking down the barriers of status, power, and position. There are industries where these types of barriers are very difficult to dissolve because they are based on tradition, structure, and hierarchy. The hospitality industry is one such example. Therefore, the main aim of this paper was to place the entire analysis into the challenging context of hospitality and to find answers to questions related to real and potential implementations of reverse mentoring into hotels. Two qualitative methods were employed to answer to the research questions: the case study and the focus-group discussion. The two cases of ExCom-Y and Shadow Comex demonstrated that reverse mentoring can be successfully implemented in hospitality talent management with major positive consequences for both hotel chains that did it—Accor Hotels and Mövenpick Hotels and Resorts. Despite the specific barriers of hospitality, the analysis of the present state of reverse mentoring in the two hotels, compared to the initial implementations of this practice in other industries, shows that it followed the same evolution in this industry.

Information obtained from both case study and focus-group methods reveals that reverse mentoring in hospitality evolved from a simple to a much more complex talent management practice, its present complexity referring to both talent quality and talent quantity. Reverse mentoring has become a more inclusive, collaborative, equalizing practice, which has been increasingly oriented toward the community of employees. Innovative forms of group implementation, compared to the traditional one-to-one pair, can also be seen and are expected to happen in hotels. An important aspect regarding reverse-mentoring transformation is that at present, it mainly refers to the creation of the most appropriate work environments for employees' gifts to become active. Today reverse mentoring in hospitality is more about the practice itself than it is to specific people. The function of activating talents/gifts in employees is in focus.

Due to the symbiotic connection between reverse mentoring and Millennials, the transformations that happened within this generation determined changes in reverse mentoring. Young Millennial employees are more concerned about the real, tangible contributions they bring, and they can be loyal mainly to meaningful relationships. Therefore, with reference to the theory of the four Cs, reverse mentoring in hospitality switched the focus from the first C (competencies) towards the second and third Cs (commitment and contribution). New Millennials are also more comfortable with new technologies and therefore, the study shows that reverse mentoring in hospitality should use new ICTs as enablers for talent activation.

9. Future Directions for Research and Practical Implications

All these transformations are confirmations that reverse mentoring followed the same evolution in an industry with specific barriers as it did in general. However, taking into consideration the

present complexity of this practice, should it be redefined? Has it transformed into something different than it was initially meant to be? Additional research is needed to answer these questions, especially in a dynamic generational context, with the new Homeland generation just entering the workforce. This generation shares most of the disruptive core values and elements of the Millennial generation [123]. In the next several years, Homeland employees will represent about 20% of the employees [20]. In this framework, Garavan et al. [17] noticed that informal talent development techniques are expected to be increasingly used and researched; reverse mentoring can be one of them.

Several researchers noticed that there are differences in talent management approaches and practices between developed economies and developing ones [124]. This study brings added support to this observation, first because cases of reverse-mentoring implementation in hospitality were found only in developed West European countries. The focus-group discussions were therefore planned in a developing Eastern European country, Romania. Participants confirmed that reverse mentoring was a too avant-garde and ground-breaking practice to be implemented in their hotels. The focus-group discussions also revealed, however, that the expectations of the hospitality employees from a developing Eastern economy (Romania) are as high and complex as the expectations of hospitality employees in developed economies (Switzerland). This might explain the general tendency of young employees from CEE countries to leave their countries. These findings also have important practical implications for hospitality companies from Eastern developing economies, which should acknowledge that the present generational context dramatically affected the psychological contract [9] in all countries. As a result, employees have different beliefs, expectations, and needs and therefore employers correlatively have different informal obligations. Organizations should align their talent management approaches and practices to the present trends and evolution. The most recent Tourism Competitiveness Report produced by the World Economic Forum in 2019 supports the discrepancy between Western and Eastern European countries related to the perception of employers on their potential and actual employees [125]. For the indicator "Ease to find skilled employees", most Central and Eastern European countries are ranked much lower than Western European countries. Several sample ranks are: Switzerland—6/140, Germany—7/140, United Kingdom—8/140, France 28/140, Spain—41/140, Bulgaria—122/140, Czech Republic—125/140, Romania—133/140, Hungary—138/140 etc. [125]. These ranks, as well as the results of the focus-group discussions presented in this paper support the conclusion formulated by Vaiman and Holden in 2011 [25] regarding the fact that talent management is new in most Central and Eastern European countries. The generational delay identified in these countries might be a possible explanation [8]. The two cases presented in the article demonstrated that hotels in Western European countries started to align their talent practices to the new psychological contract; they have responsibly correlated their informal obligations with the new needs and expectations of their potential and real employees. Hospitality organizations in Central and Eastern European countries should follow the same path and manage their human resources in a more sustainable way, adapted to the present generational context. The research results presented in this article can be a source of inspiration for them to formulate strategies and authentically implement reverse mentoring or other talent management practices with the aim of reducing generational inequity tension in the workplace. Three such strategies are shortly presented below:

(1) Changing inputs and outputs of employees

This strategy is related to the empowerment of employees. The "inputs" of an employee refer to what the employee brings within the company and the "outputs" refer to what the employee gets from the company. Results from both research methods demonstrated that hospitality employees at present can have valuable inputs that are very different from the traditional contributions of hospitality employees. Members of both Shadow Comex and ExCom-Y suggested valuable ideas to their employers, which were successfully implemented in both hotel chains. Discussing about the knowledge content of reverse mentoring, the participants of the focus-group discussions mentioned original potential sources for improving both inputs and outputs of employees: ideas, personal life, and life values. The responsibility of organizations relies on creating the proper environment, formal

and non-formal, for this exchange of ideas and aspects related to personal life and life values to take place. An important first step in this direction requires accepting that such non-traditional aspects can and should be considered real inputs of hospitality employees.

(2) Changing the perception of their own and other employees' inputs and outputs

This strategy is related to the need to address generational stereotypes in the workplace. In an industry strongly defined by hierarchies, formalism, and loyalty, existing stereotypes favor employees who belong to generations which preceded the Millennials. This is the reason this strategy should be a priority in hospitality organizations. They should offer real possibilities for employees from different generations to dismantle negative stereotypes. Discussing about the knowledge content of reverse mentoring, the participants of the focus-group discussions suggested several original ways to implement it through reverse mentoring, for example: creating the wright environment, formal or non-formal, for employees from different generations to exchange stories about their personal experiences, failure being included, about their personal problems or life values. Original suggestions of non-formal environments were also proposed by participants: volunteer activities, shared spaces, events, and interaction platforms. The main aim of this strategy is to restore equity in the workplace.

(3) Matching intergenerational mindsets with those of the organization

Previous research demonstrated that when group members work for a superordinate goal, their differences transform into assets and are more easily accepted by the other members of the group [33]. Therefore, it was suggested that organizations should strive to emphasize superordinate goals and involve all employees in the process of reaching those goals together. Both cases of Shadow Comex and ExCom-Y demonstrated how this strategy can be implemented through group reverse mentoring at the highest level of hospitality organizations, with multiple positive effects. Discussing about the knowledge content of reverse mentoring, the participants of the focus-group discussions also mentioned "the company", with specific references to "goals; shareholders; ownership; HR policy; jobs; acquisitions; brand values; short term strategies". Hospitality organizations in Central and Eastern European countries can start implementing this strategy by sharing ideas with their employees from all generations and positions regarding the goals and strategies of the companies. It can be implemented through interaction platforms or through special events, these ways being also suggested by respondents from the six Romanian hotels.

The above-mentioned strategies are just three examples of the practical implications that the present research results may have. All three strategies can contribute to activating talent in the Millennial employees, restoring generational equity and making Millennials stay. In tourism and hospitality, employees are included in the tourism experience of guests, therefore, employees are a principal source of competitive advantage. As highlighted by EU experts [65], the perception of the tourism sector as a career choice has to be improved by enhancing the quality of jobs through the implementation of well-designed and innovative practices, such as reverse mentoring, in authentic ways, adapted to the new generational context.

Appendix A

The entire research approach in this paper is inductive and qualitative, trying to answer the following questions in the specific context of hospitality industry: Did reverse-mentoring implementation change in the new generational context? How did it evolve? What was reverse mentoring in 1999 and what has it become after 20 years? In the general conclusions, the authors open a new direction for future research by formulating the questions: Do the transformations of reverse mentoring justify redefining the concept? Has it transformed into something different than it was initially meant to be?

In the last two decades, it has been demonstrated that the concepts of validity and reliability are not always and fully appropriate in the process of analyzing the value of a qualitative research [26,27]. Therefore, the concept of trustworthiness was introduced to replace validity and reliability, with at least three components: credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity) and dependability/durability (paralleling reliability). To ensure the trustworthiness of the results, the research team used a mixed methods approach, without triangulation, each method being employed to answer a different research question. The choice of each research method is explained in detail in Section 5. To increase credibility for the case study method, triangulation was employed for data-gathering, as depicted in Appendix A, Figure A1. Henderson stated in 2016 that "a thorough reporting of the processes and the results of qualitative data collection and analysis is the key to justifying and assuring that trustworthiness exists in the study" [28] (p. 231). The present article includes an elaborate reporting of processes (focus-group organization and conduct) and results (case studies and focus-group discussions).

Appendix B

For the choice of the hotels, the convenience method was employed because the selection of participants was made from hotels which are partners with the university. It has nine partnership agreements with important hotels in Brașov, Romania. The "independent hotel" criterion was further employed for the selection of hotels. Two of the partner hotels are part of hotel chains and therefore they were excluded, and another hotel is partially state-owned and therefore it was excluded as well. A short questionnaire was conceived using Google forms and sent to the HR managers in the six remaining hotels asking him/her to direct it to B-level employees who are computer users from all three generations (Baby Boom, X, and Millennial). Several 39 Millennials completed the form, 19 members of generation X and only 11 Baby Boomers. Three discussion groups were organized. The group repartition was based on the frequency of their active posting on Facebook (criterion method) —they were asked how often they post comments on Facebook 0–3 times/week, 4–8 times/week and more than 9 times/week (Table A1). All employees who answered they never post comments or maximum 3 times/week were excluded from the groups. The first and the second groups were composed of 5 Millennials and 3 members of generation X, each from those employees who post comments on Facebook more than 9 times/week. Group no 3 was composed of 4 Baby Boomers and 4 members of generation X (Table A1). This segmented form of organizing the three groups was used to avoid disruptions between members. In conclusion, in the final selection of the members for the three groups, the criterion method was employed—the respondents had to be active employees in hospitality, possess a Facebook account, and be active on the Internet.
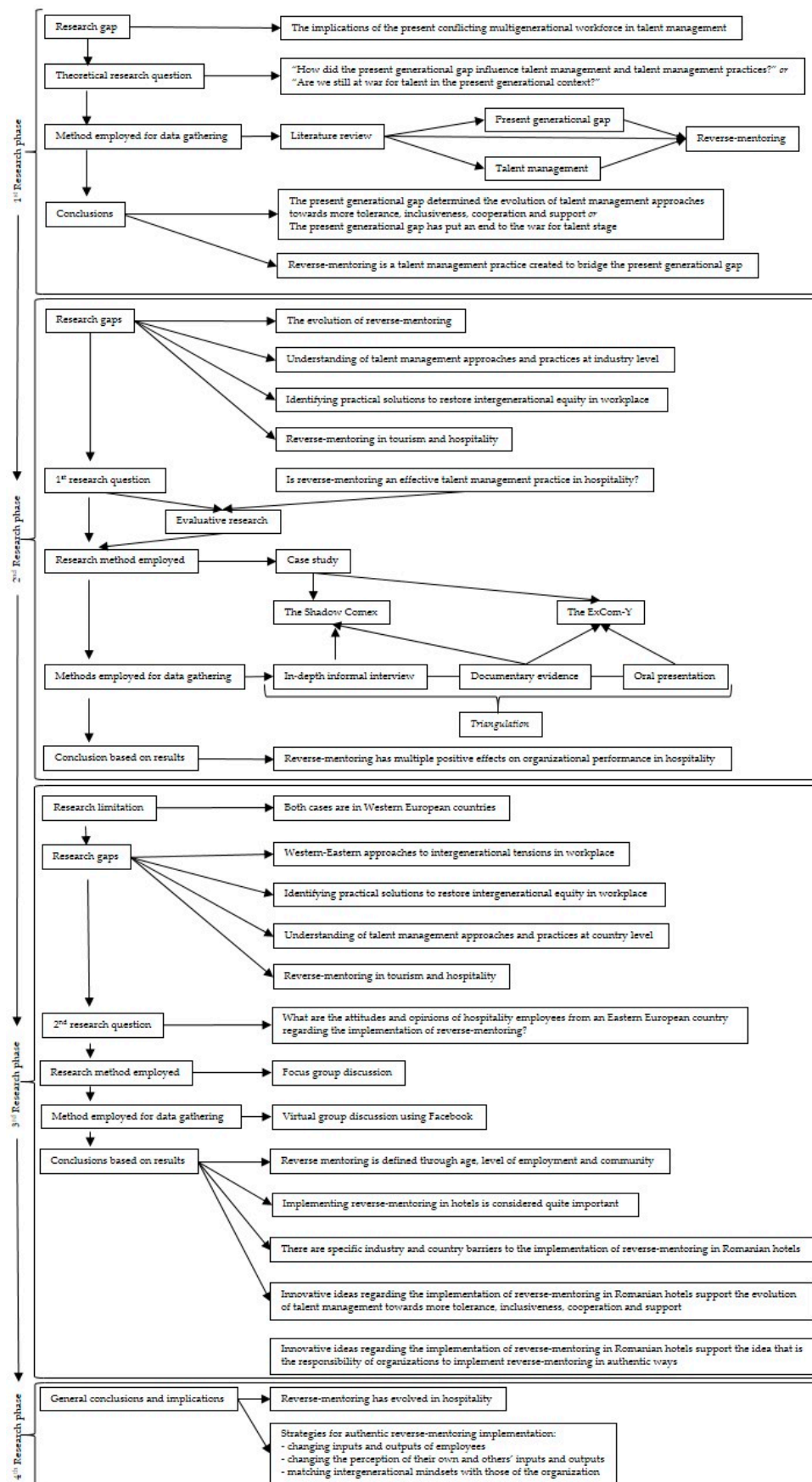
Figure A1. Research design—phases and steps.

Table A1. Repartition of participants on the three groups of discussion.

	Employees Who Completed the Form (N)			Employees Who Have Personal Facebook Account (N)			Employees with a Personal Facebook Account Classified Based on the Frequency of Active Posting on Facebook (Number of Posts/Week) and the Selection of the Participants for the Three Groups of Discussion (N)								
							0–3 posts/week			4–8 posts/week			9–posts/week		
	M[a]	X[b]	B[c]	M[a]	X[b]	B[c]	M[a]	X[b]	B[c]	M[a]	X[b]	B[c]	M[a]	X[b]	B[c]
Hotel 1	12	5	2	12	5	2	-	1	-	4	-	1	8	4	1
												1G3[f]	1G1[d] 1G2[e]	1G1[d] 2G3[f]	1G3[f]
Hotel 2	5	2	3	5	1	3	-	-	2	1	-	1	4	1	-
												1G3[f]	1G1[d] 1G2[e]	1G1[d]	
Hotel 3	9	4	2	8	3	1	-	1	1	6	-	-	2	2	-
												1G2[e]		1G1[d] 1G3[f]	
Hotel 4	3	2	-	3	2	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	1	-
												1G1[d] 1G2[e]		1G2[e]	
Hotel 5	8	4	3	8	2	2	-	1	1	4	-	1	4	1	-
												1G1[d] 1G2[e] 1G3[f]		1G2[e]	
Hotel 6	2	2	1	2	2	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	2	-
												1G1[d]		1G2[e] 1G3[f]	
Total number	39	19	11	38	15	9	-	3	5	17	1	3	21	11	1

Note: M[a]—Millennial employees (birth year 1980–2000). X[b]—Employees from X generation (birth year 1960–1980). B[c]—Employees from Baby Boom generation (birth year 1940–1960). G1[d]—first group of discussions. G2[e]—second group of discussions. G3[f]—third group of discussions.

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