

The Benefits of Mentoring Programmes in the Irish Defence Forces.

Patricia Butler

Military organisations like the Irish Defence Forces (DF) face the growing challenge of personnel retention. Mentoring Programmes have emerged as a potential strategy to address this issue by fostering personal development, enhancing job satisfaction, and promoting a culture of commitment. This research aims to investigate the potential benefits that a robust Mentoring Programme could offer within the unique context of the DF. It seeks to illuminate how mentoring can contribute to enhanced performance, leadership development, the transfer of tacit knowledge, and increased satisfaction among DF personnel.

With an understanding of both the benefits and challenges of implementing such programmes, this research will provide actionable recommendations for designing, implementing and maintaining a mentoring initiative aligned with their specific organisational needs, ultimately addressing DF retention goals and contributing to the effectiveness of the organisation.

Drawing insights from an extensive literature review, the study explores mentoring's role in cultivating leadership, knowledge transfer, and organisational performance. A qualitative research approach utilising semi-structured interviews was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of DF personnel and experts from other militaries and civilian organisations. Thematic analysis revealed several key factors essential for a successful Mentoring Programme within the DF. These include the importance of building trust and confidentiality, targeted communication strategies to raise awareness, the involvement of mentors at varying ranks, and integrating mentoring into career progression paths. Findings also highlighted the potential of informal mentoring to complement structured programmes.

The Irish Defence Forces (DF) face a critical challenge: the increasing departure of skilled personnel across all branches. This exodus, also felt by international militaries, is largely driven by the allure of better compensation and working conditions elsewhere (Politico, 2024), and has significant consequences for the DF's operational capabilities and morale. This paper posits that a structured Mentoring Programme within the DF can significantly improve personnel retention, increase job satisfaction, and enhance overall organisational effectiveness. Mentoring offers tailored guidance, professional development opportunities, and a sense of recognition that can directly address the factors fuelling personnel departures.

The Representative Association of Commissioned Officers (RACO) surveyed people who took voluntary retirement between 2015 and 2019 (RACO, 2021). The numbers retiring were quite stark. RACO followed up this survey to establish what the motivation was for retiring before reaching the mandatory retirement age and to propose solutions to slow or reverse the



number of highly skilled individuals exiting, to assist in retention. While there were several reasons for seeking early voluntary retirement, one reason that stood out was that people felt their careers were not being facilitated and the Human Resource (HR) function within the DF was not conducting its function correctly.

As mentioned, the DF is not the only military facing retention problems. Other international militaries, such as the Australian Defence Forces (Defence Review, 2023), New Zealand Defence Forces (NZDF) (NZMoD, 2023), Bundeswehr (Bundestag Annual Report, 2023), and the Royal Navy (RN) (Telegraph, 2024), are all in a similar position. The focus has shifted from recruiting new personnel to convincing current personnel to remain in service. Pay may not be in the control of military leaders, but the implementation of a good working environment where employees can grow and develop is.

The DF follows a conventional hierarchical structure, emphasising command and control (C2). This has been effective in previous instances due to the inherent characteristics of the organisation and is frequently deemed necessary. Nevertheless, implementing Mentoring Programmes could substantially enhance the development of DF personnel on a personal and professional level, leading to greater job satisfaction, personal growth, and greater retention of skilled individuals in key essential roles.

Obtaining assistance from high-level executives and implementing a significant shift in organisational culture would be necessary to achieve this. The DF has capable and influential leaders. Failure to retain professionals possessing crucial experience and abilities has had a detrimental impact on DF productivity, while simultaneously intensifying the burden and stress on the remaining staff. Overcoming reluctance to change caused by the prevailing culture is a challenge, but it may be addressed by ensuring that the implementation of a learning environment is endorsed and encouraged by top-level management.

Aim of This Paper

Mentoring is a valuable tool for cultivating expertise in certain domains, assisting individuals in adapting to new responsibilities, nurturing and cultivating talent, and providing guidance during difficult periods or circumstances. Mentoring has several advantages, including heightened personnel satisfaction, fostering a sense of inclusion within an organisation, identifying, and nurturing talent, and contributing to employee retention.

The objective of this paper is to examine the advantages of a Mentoring Programme and the potential benefits for all involved in the programme, the mentor, mentee, and the DF. A meticulously structured mentorship programme could cultivate strong professional relationships, which could improve job satisfaction and then enhance retention rates within the organisation. This would have significant advantages for the DF at a time when its most valuable resources are leaving at a rate that recruitment cannot match (Irish Times, 2023).

Relevance to the DF

The implementation of a Mentoring Programme holds direct relevance to the DF in addressing the contemporary challenges of personnel retention and fostering a more supportive organisational environment. The Commission on the Defence Forces (CoDF)¹ identified the

¹ Following the CoDF Report release, the Government released a High-Level Action Plan (HLAP) and decided to transition to Level of Ambition 2 (LOA 2) in July 2022.

need for improved career and talent management, highlighting a key area where mentoring can have a positive impact. Mentoring programmes could directly address the issue of career stagnation raised by departing personnel, offering pathways for professional development and skill enhancement. The guidance and support offered by mentors can mitigate feelings of isolation and contribute to a greater sense of belonging within the organisation, a factor known to influence retention. This paper will argue for an inclusive mentoring framework accessible to all DF personnel, aligning with broader organisational goals. While the CoDF proposed a Mentoring Programme for women, which can be viewed as a positive initiative, this paper demonstrates the need for an inclusive mentoring framework that benefits all DF personnel, aligning with the strategic goals of improved talent management and retention.

The need to update the career, talent management, and promotion mechanisms within the DF has been long overdue and would be much appreciated by its members. Retaining enlisted personnel with specific skills is a strategic objective in most military organisations, as these individuals are the key to the organisation's capabilities (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). According to Armstrong (2017), companies should develop retention strategies by understanding the elements that influence employees' decisions to either quit or remain in the company. The implementation and coordination of a Mentoring Programme could contribute to career and talent management.

Structure of this Paper

The introduction has outlined the challenges facing the DF in the realm of personnel job satisfaction and retention, highlighting the potential for Mentoring Programmes to provide a targeted solution. Mentoring's ability to foster personal and professional growth, enhance job satisfaction, and cultivate a sense of value among service members that aligns directly with the factors influencing individuals' decisions to remain within the organisation.

The following parts will delve deeper into the theoretical foundations of mentoring, examine its successful implementation in other military contexts, and explore strategies for tailoring such programmes to the unique needs of the DF. The topic of mentorship was introduced above, explaining its relevance within the specific context of the DF. Part One will primarily examine the relevant literature on mentoring, encompassing both a broader organisational perspective and a military perspective, as well as talent management and retention. Part Two discusses the methodology selected for this research. Part Three provides a comprehensive examination of the main discoveries and analysis derived from the gathered data, aiming to address the study topic. Part Four consolidates the conclusions drawn in Part Three, considering the significant discoveries from Part One, which subsequently address the research inquiries. Proposed areas for future research will also be presented here.

PART ONE. Literature Review.

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive, yet concise, overview of the literature on mentoring, its potential benefits to organisations as well as its barriers to success. As this research in mentoring is quite broad-ranging, it is more appropriate to divide the research into different sections to gain a better understanding of how to deal with answering the overall research question. Therefore, this part is divided into the following sections:

- Explanation of what mentoring is

- Different types of mentoring
- Main themes in mentoring
- Mentoring components
- Benefits of mentoring
- Retention
- Barrier to successful mentoring

What is Mentoring?

Many definitions describe what mentoring is, the mentoring relationship and the types of mentoring available to individuals and organisations. The Defence Forces Leadership Doctrine (DFLD) (2023) definition of mentoring is:

The mentoring process is normally a less experienced person learning from a more experienced person, in a voluntary relationship, over a period. This process can happen in an ad hoc manner, or it can be a more structured process (DFLD, 2023).

Broadly speaking, a mentoring relationship happens when a senior, more seasoned employee (mentor) actively engages with a junior, less seasoned employee (mentee or sometimes referred to as a protégé in literature), offering guidance, support, and feedback on career goals and personal growth. Julie Starr is well regarded as an expert in the coaching and mentoring fields and describes mentoring clearly, “mentoring is a distinct relationship where one person (the mentor) supports the learning, development, and progress of another (the mentee) (Starr, 2014, p. xi).” This is also the case in the US Army, where mentorship is regarded as a developmental relationship between an experienced person and a less experienced person and the relationships can be either formal or informal (Lund, 2023).

Different Types of Mentoring

Understanding that there are various kinds of mentoring relationships is crucial because they can range greatly in terms of length, structure, and procedures (Eby et al., 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Among the various kinds of mentoring relationships are conventional mentoring partnerships, which can be formal, semi-formal, or informal, and structured as a relationship between a superior and a subordinate. Darwin and Palmer (2009) and Ragins and Kram (2007) have proposed additional hybrid types of mentoring partnerships, such as peer mentoring, group mentoring, cross-organisational mentoring, diversified mentoring, cross-cultural mentoring, and reverse mentoring. Mentoring can take on different forms, and two primary categories are formal mentoring and informal mentoring.

Formal Mentoring

According to Ragins and Kram (2007), mentees in formal mentoring relationships are usually paired with a mentor by the organisation following training via an induction procedure or Mentoring Programme. Formal Mentoring Programmes have grown in popularity as a valuable tool for employee development (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Formal mentoring relationships are defined by researchers as developmental relationships that are established and sponsored by the organisation. In these relationships, a less experienced junior mentee and a more

experienced senior mentor are paired for a predetermined amount of time to develop the mentee and share organisational knowledge (Noe, 1988). Formal mentoring is a planned and structured relationship often established within an organisation and follows a predefined programme or framework. Mentors and mentees are usually matched intentionally and often based on specific criteria such as skills and career goals. There are well-defined goals and objectives for the mentoring relationship that may include career development, skill enhancement, or navigating new appointments. Formal mentoring also typically involves scheduled and regular meetings that provide a dedicated space for mentees to seek guidance and for mentors to offer support. There is often a system in place for feedback and evaluation. This helps both mentors and mentees assess the progress of the mentoring relationship and adjust as needed.

Informal Mentoring

Informal mentoring connections develop organically, typically between people who share values or interests. As informal mentoring generally evolves organically it is not necessarily part of a structured programme. It often happens spontaneously, driven by personal connections or shared interests. Unlike formal mentoring, there is no intentional matching process in informal mentoring. Mentors and mentees find each other through common interests, work proximity, or other natural connections. The dynamics of informal mentoring are more flexible. The relationship adapts to the evolving needs and circumstances of the individuals involved. Informal mentoring can develop over several years, starting with the initiation stage and progressing through cultivation, separation, and ultimately redefining the mentoring connection into a less intensive and more equal interaction between colleagues (Kram, 1988). Some research on mentoring suggests that informal relationships may be more beneficial than formal mentorships (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Nonetheless, Ragins (2016) proposed that the quality of relationships rather than the formality or informality of mentorships is what counts. Baugh and Fagenson-Eland (2007) believe that there are four main differences between informal and formal mentoring and these differences are intensity, visibility, focus, and longevity or duration of the mentoring relationship.

Outcomes Achieved Between Formal and Informal Mentoring

There is a consensus that outcomes related to personal learning, development and growth are equally relevant and important, despite the first two decades of mentoring research emphasising instrumental career-related outcomes such as increased performance, compensation, promotions, advancement, job attitudes, and career satisfaction (Allen et al., 2006; Noe, 1988). According to Kram (1985), the significant psychosocial benefits of mentoring include an improved "sense of competence, clarity of identity and effectiveness in a professional role" (p.22). Improvements in job performance, assistance in creating and maintaining networks and professional contacts, a rise in job satisfaction, and a larger or higher level of organisational commitment are all possible outcomes of a career Mentoring Programme (Kram, 1985). Seven studies comparing formal and informal mentoring on two mentoring functions—career and psychosocial support—were examined by Baugh & Fagenson-Eland (2007). Typically, career assistance entails a mentor giving a mentee hard work tasks and constructive criticism. A mentor offers a mentee psychosocial assistance through friendship, acceptance, and counselling. The mentee's work performance frequently improves when they receive career and psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). Research has indicated that informal mentoring is superior to formal mentoring in the following areas: career function only (Allen et al., 2006);

psychosocial function only (Bouquillon et al., 2005); and neither function (Tepper, 1995). Formal mentoring was not found to be superior to informal mentoring in any study. Mentees in formal Mentoring Programmes generally report receiving more psychosocial support from their mentors than career guidance (Noe, 1988). Additional research by Fagenson-Eland et al, (1997) and Ragins & Cotton (1999) indicates that while formal mentoring is preferable to no mentoring, it is not as successful as informal mentoring. However, according to one study, the sort of mentorship has no bearing on how successful it is (Allen & Eby, 2011).

Holt et al. (2016) made a good observation of the mentoring function when looking at informal and formal mentoring relationships. Time spent between mentor and mentee in a formal mentoring relationship was more than the informal mentoring relationship (Holt et al., 2016). It was suggested that the informal mentors may not have recorded contact time as the mentoring was happening naturally and without the mentee knowing. It may also indicate that there were fewer exchanges taking place. Getting the relationship right from the start is key for any positive mentoring to take place, whether formally or informally. Welsh and Dixon (2016) go further into examining the mentoring relationship. The benefits of personal development of the mentee were recognised when the mentee was able to implement and practice what they learned (Welsh & Dixon, 2016). Organisations have a part to play here and to provide support at the opportune time. Formal mentoring relationships have more focus on the organisation as this plays a key role in the development of future programmes. Key to fostering thriving, healthy, and inclusive informal mentoring relationships in organisations with strong formal Mentoring Programmes is the openness to diverse developmental alliances among those who have experienced effective mentoring and received thorough training in their respective roles (Clutterbuck, 2004).

Main Themes in Mentoring

Analysis of a variety of definitions provided by Rikard and Banville (2010), Eby et al. (2008), and Ragin and Kram (2007), reveals some recurring features of mentoring, including:

- a. Relationship-based mentoring.
- b. Developmental aspect of mentoring.
- c. Interchange of experiential learning between the participants in the mentoring relationship.

The common theme that can be assumed from these definitions is that people are empowered through facilitating self-directed learning, personal growth, and personal performance. Therefore, mentoring can be used to develop individuals in specific areas, support people in new roles, nurture and foster talent, and help individuals in a challenging area or time. The benefits of mentoring can lead to increased satisfaction amongst the personnel involved. It can be an opportunity for individuals to feel included in the organisation, which can then recognise talent. This could play a role in retention. Starr (2014) delves into the positive results of introducing mentoring into an organisation; “mentoring is seen as a way of nurturing talent and also a way to develop the skills of the people who are mentoring others” (p.11).

Mentoring Components

Mentoring consists of several parts. There is the relationship, the mentor, the mentee, and the environment in which they function. This environment could be one of friendship, family, or organisation. It is critical to define these elements (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). This will assist in ensuring all involved in the mentoring journey are aware of their roles.

The Mentor

While there are numerous descriptions of a mentor Starr (2014) gives clear guidance on what a mentor is capable of delivering in a mentoring relationship:

A mentor is someone who takes on the role of a trusted adviser, supporter, teacher, and wise counsel to another person. A mentor adopts a primarily selfless role in supporting the learning, development, and ultimate success of another person. (Starr, 2014, p. 3)

To improve learning opportunities and learn from prior problems, Jacobson & Kaye (1996) investigated mentoring successes and failures with the following being some distinct mentor roles that have emerged:

- A mentor's job is to encourage deliberate learning, that entails helping others reach their full potential by offering activities that broaden their learning
- Mentors ought to discuss and analyse the statistics of the organisation, including both achievements and failures
- Mentors ought to share their anecdotes like storytellers. These can offer insightful information while building a relationship with the protégé

A combination of ongoing occurrences, experiences, observations, research, and careful analysis goes into mentoring. Learning is a cooperative endeavour that involves both the mentor and the mentee sharing responsibility. However, it must be noted that “a mentor is not responsible or accountable for the performance of an individual” (Starr, 2014, p. 16).

The Mentee

The mentee is a person looking to achieve something in his or her personal or professional life. The mentee sets the general direction of the mentoring relationship and must be aware of what he or she desires. The mentor and mentee must communicate openly. Additionally, the mentee needs to prioritise situations needing help or action. “The important fact is that the mentee is involved in the relationship as an active partner. Passive completion of tasks is not the goal of mentoring or how mentoring should occur” (Inzer & Crawford, 2005, p. 34). In other words, the mentee must be a willing participant in the mentoring journey.

The Mentoring Relationship

Creating a strong mentoring relationship is one of the main goals of mentoring, not only for the individuals involved but also for the organisation. The quality of the mentorship will suffer in the absence of a relationship in which both parties respect and connect. Both the mentor and the mentee should be aware that the mentor's counsel might not always be effective in their relationship. The mentor should not be expected to know everything or to be an authority in every field by the mentee (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Another important area to consider is privacy. Confidentiality must be respected and observed between the individuals involved. The mentee should not be dependent on the mentor, and the mentor should listen more than offer guidance (Kellam, 2003). Kellam (2003) also makes a valid point that it is critical to identify a failing relationship early on and end it amicably. Poor pairing could jeopardise the relationship

before it even gets started. This is something that the official Mentoring Programme in an organisation needs to be aware of, especially in the beginning (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). There is no point in trying to carry on when clear signs indicate the mentoring relationship will not fulfil the desired result. “True Mentorship needs to exist outside the chain of command” (Lund, 2023). Having the mentoring relationship outside the chain of command will create a more open and honest relationship without any organisational pressures.

Tacit Knowledge

The kind of knowledge that you get from everyday life is called tacit knowledge (Indeed, 2023). This kind of information is personal, informal, and unique to each person and their surroundings. The principle of experiential learning is a fundamental aspect of social learning theory, which posits that employees' behaviours can be altered or adjusted through the process of witnessing and emulating the actions of supervisors or colleagues who encounter similar work circumstances (Dee et al., 2011). In a study by Al-Zoubi et al. (2022) on tacit knowledge transfer, they conclude that the engagement of trainees in social training techniques such as structured on-the-job training, mentorship, and work rotation might facilitate their assimilation and internalisation of tacit information. When the workers resume work autonomously, it is quite probable that they apply the newly acquired knowledge from their training to their actual job tasks.

Mentoring is largely employed to facilitate the transmission of tacit knowledge from senior employees to their junior colleagues, thus promoting personnel development and fostering a sense of well-being in the workplace. Laiho and Brandt (2021) expect mentoring to be increasingly used in the future, with the possible outcomes of bolstering competence management, fostering well-being, and improving an organization's image.

The Organisation

The setting, or organisation, in which mentoring occurs, is the final element that particularly affects formal mentoring. Formal mentoring is considered a Human Resource Development (HRD) practice in organisations (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2008). Therefore, HR professionals are assumed to be the most knowledgeable in providing information on mentoring within their organisation (Stone, 2004). So, if formal mentoring is in place, it cannot be taken for granted or left to chance. The company needs to take an active part. Instead of invading the privacy of the mentoring relationship, the organisation should use education and training to cultivate mentors and mentees. It should give the staff members the time and resources they need to participate. The organisation should ensure that it is easily reachable for intervention, support, and correction. It should also consistently evaluate its procedures through the use of coordinators and advisory teams. It is important to acknowledge that the perspectives of future mentors and mentees are directly shaped by the answers of the participants. Creating standards of trust, promoting cooperative behaviour and collaboration, and cultivating a culture of achievement are all compatible with an organisation characterised by high rates of mentor/mentee achievement (Feldman, 1999).

Benefits of mentoring to all involved

The benefits of a Mentoring Programme can be felt by all involved, the mentor, the mentee, and the organisation. A Mentoring Programme can facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge

from experienced mentors to mentees. This exchange can enhance the mentees' skills, contributing to their professional growth and job satisfaction. Mentors, in turn, may find fulfilment in sharing their expertise, reinforcing their skills, and fostering a sense of accomplishment. Chun et al. (2012) recognise the positive impact felt by mentors when they see results from their mentees and the impact they have made in increasing their work commitment, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. Mentoring has been positively associated with several benefits for mentees including increased job satisfaction, greater promotion potential, opportunities for higher pay, enhanced self-esteem, and a heightened sense of professional competence (Allen et al., 2006). Mentors may perceive that their role in nurturing up-and-coming talent will boost their chances of career progression (Kram, 1988). This is ultimately a two-way feeling for both mentor and mentee.

In summary, while formal mentoring is structured and planned, informal mentoring is spontaneous, organic and more flexible. Both have their advantages and are valuable in different contexts, depending on the goals and preferences of the individuals involved. Mentoring can play a crucial role in leadership development. This leadership pipeline can contribute to long-term retention by offering a clear path for career progression and development.

Retention Through Engagement

Talent management is a term that was first recognised towards the start of the twenty-first century by HR consultants who worked at McKinsey & Co. Now it is a term that is widely used and recognised. Talent management is essential for any organisation to achieve its goals. Organisations need capable and well-qualified people. People need talent to do their jobs well. Through their immediate efforts, they make a difference in organisational performance, demonstrating their ability to learn and grow, and holding the potential to make significant contributions in the future (Armstrong, 2017). Keller (2017) posits that superior competence can result in up to eight times greater productivity. Therefore, it can be assumed that having such talent or skill should be nurtured to ensure that job satisfaction is achieved and retained in the organisation. The war on talent is worth fighting for (Chambers et al., 2018). Based on the research that was examined, it seems that most people agree that skilled workers are important for organisations in all fields and should be recognised to retain them.

Engagement through Mentoring

Engagement is pivotal in retaining skilled workers. A mentoring programme offers an additional layer of engagement, providing mentees with a vested interest in their professional development. For mentors, the opportunity to contribute to the growth of colleagues can be a rewarding aspect, potentially increasing their commitment to the organization. As mentioned above, the DF is a traditional hierarchical model, with C2 being at the forefront. This has been effective in the past due to the nature of the organisation and is often necessary. However, mentoring could benefit the DF by allowing service people to develop personally, and professionally, to be creative, and collaborative and to gain a sense of belonging. This requires support from senior management and a recognition of the organisation's culture. The organisation naturally has good effective leaders, but the benefits of mentoring would add an extra layer of strength to remain relevant and effective in a changing world.

As alluded to in the Introduction, the retention of key people with expertise and skills has affected the DF's outputs and increased the pressure and strains on the remaining

personnel. Overcoming resistance to change is a challenge that organisations, including the military, can address by ensuring that the implementation of a learning environment is endorsed and encouraged by top-level management. Recognising potential and facilitating the development of skills and performance in individuals is crucial for organisations. Organisations should prioritise allocating more time and attention to this specific area to retain highly qualified individuals. Younger et al. (2007) corroborate this viewpoint, as they recognise the significance of fostering internal growth. According to Armstrong (2017), employees are more inclined to remain in an organisation if they perceive themselves as being appreciated. This will incentivise employees to stay and have a favourable effect on employee retention.

Recognising Talent and Retaining Talent

Retaining enlisted persons with specific skills is a strategic objective in most militaries, as these individuals are considered to be the key to maintaining capacity (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). Armstrong (2017) believes that organisations' "retention strategies should be based on an understanding of the factors that affect whether or not employees leave or stay" (Armstrong, 2017, p.292). The DF are currently working on an updated Human Resource Strategy and are likely to address this area in detail:

Learning-oriented individuals who act as mentors find psychological meaningfulness in their work, which in turn enhances their work engagement. By setting acceptable meaningful goals for Mentoring Programmes, practitioners can minimize the negative outcomes of mentoring. (Lin et al., 2021, p.183)

Abdullahi and Jarma (2023) recommend internal training programmes. The right training plan can boost employee loyalty, performance, productivity, and job satisfaction. Success depends on programme communication and employee buy-in. Military personnel retention is not a new issue for the DF. Many foreign military struggle to retain their troops since civilian organisations offer better chances and pay (Capon et al., 2007). Warn (1994) notes that inducting and training new hires owing to departing staff is costly. Warn (1994) described how high Australian Army soldier turnover affected key outputs. High turnover negatively affected the army's capability since skilled workers' corporate knowledge was hard to replace and took time to restore. High turnover can negatively impact an organisation's performance, leading to additional costs like hiring and training replacements, performance gaps and reduced productivity, loss of experienced personnel and their valuable knowledge, and emotional toll on remaining employees like morale, burnout, and absenteeism (Adidamm, 2006).

Moynihan and Pandey's (2008) research into what factors can influence retention is still valid today. They concluded that three factors, environmental (economic), individual (generational) and organisational all affect employee turnover. Job satisfaction is closely tied to a sense of belonging and support within an organization. Mentoring relationships can create a support network, helping mentees navigate challenges and integrate into the organisation more effectively. This social aspect can positively impact job satisfaction and overall morale.

Retention is the ability of an organisation to keep its most valuable and desirable employees in its workforce (Govaerts et al., 2011). If this is happening, then organisations need to invest in talent management to enhance their retention rate amongst their workforce (Younas & Bari, 2020). Another point to note is that one of the best methods for rewarding staff members and lowering turnover is mentoring (Kellam, 2003). The result is an organisation's growth and enhanced efficiency.

Challenges to Mentoring Programmes

Implementing a successful mentoring programme requires careful planning. Factors such as mentor-mentee compatibility, training for mentors, and establishing clear goals are crucial. Additionally, addressing any potential power dynamics or conflicts within the mentoring relationships is essential for the programme's success.

Negative mentoring relationships are costly to organizations in numerous ways. Energy channelled into maintaining difficult relationships could be spent in more productive ways. Also, difficulties in mentoring relationships could lead to absenteeism and staff turnover. (Scandura, 1998)

Therefore, any organisation needs to be aware of the importance of certain areas that may impact the successful implementation of Mentoring Programmes. McDonald and Hite (2005) highlighted the following areas:

- Organisational culture
- Selection of mentors
- Training of mentors and mentees
- Mentoring relationships
- Supervision of all aspects of the Mentoring Programme
- Awareness of potential ethical issues should be included in training for mentors and mentees

Organisational culture

The environment and key components of the DF as an institution are referred to as its culture. It is the strategic leaders who have the responsibility for maintaining the organisational culture. "Culture can be defined as the values shared by the organisation's members and the tacit assumptions or unspoken rules which may only be evident to those who are serving in the organisation" (DFLD, 2023, p. 43). The UK Army Leadership Doctrine (2021) is quite similar in its understanding of an organisation's culture is derived from its collective attitudes, values, and beliefs, which are then reflected in the behaviours that are considered acceptable.



Figure 1: Organisational Culture (Schein, 2010).

Culture can lead to both favourable and unfavourable consequences. It can be a substantial obstacle to change by exerting pressure on staff to adhere to traditional practices instead of embracing diversity and change. It is the intangible and less apparent beliefs, values, sentiments, attitudes, conventions, and assumptions that lay beneath the surface, referred to as the 'cultural iceberg' which have an influence, either positive or negative on an organisation. Figure 1 shows Edgar Schein's description of organisational culture broken into three sections of the culture iceberg based on what is seen on the surface, the vision of the organisation and the unconscious beliefs held amongst employees:

The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, these cultures will manage them. Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead. (Schein, 2010, p. 22)

Therefore, recognising the culture within an organisation is essential when implementing a new change, particularly something that impacts members, directly or indirectly as it can result in either a positive or negative outcome. Hence, culture must be considered when implementing a Mentoring Programme.

Selection of mentors

In a formal Mentoring Programme selecting and training mentors is very important. It is not always the case that an organisation's greatest workers make the best mentors. Mentors must be adaptable and possess strong interpersonal abilities. They should possess the abilities, convictions, and morals that they will attempt to inculcate in future mentees, be well-respected among the staff and management, and be competent in their positions. They ought to possess two essential mindsets. They must first like instructing, mentoring, and training others and be able to provide a narrative from their professional lives where a mentor helped them to follow

their dreams (Lawrie, 1987). Organisations must recognise and understand the importance of securing the assistance of capable mentors willing to participate in a Mentoring Programme in their own time. Time management must be considered, and other work commitments are not jeopardised at the same time.

Training of mentors and mentees

Inzer and Crawford (2005) firmly believe that official training for all mentors should be developed by organisations based on their specific requirements. Nonetheless, a competent professional's high-quality instruction is still essential to the programme's success. Mentoring history, participant responsibilities, success criteria for matching mentors and mentees, helpful tips and recommendations, and basic expectations between mentors and mentees should all be included in the training.



Figure 2: The Mentoring Map (Starr, 2014).

Figure 2 gives a good description of 'The Mentoring Map' (Starr, 2014) that assists the mentor in preparation to mentor and gives guidance during the stages of the mentoring journey. This map will assist the mentor and the supervisor in remaining on track with the process, but also allow the supervisor to understand the stages being addressed during the journey without interference. A summary of the goals, policies, guidelines, programme structure, and evaluation standards should also be included in the training. Effective communication is at the core of mentor training (Williams, 2000). Effective listening is essential to building up a relationship and ensuring connection, trust, and engagement. The decision to become a mentor may be influenced by the expected results of the role (Ragins & Scandura, 1999) which may have a positive or negative result.

Dysfunctional Mentoring

Scandura (1998) noted that not much has been written about relational dysfunction that can arise in mentoring relationships. It was also picked up by Merriam (1983), "There are no studies

which attempt to document the prevalence or seriousness of the negative effects of mentoring. Only successful mentoring relationships have been reported” (p. 170). This remains true in the current time. However, dysfunctional mentoring cannot be ignored or discounted by any organisation which has existing Mentoring Programmes or plans to implement one soon. Chopra and Saint (2017) make clear points about mentorship malpractice. The mentor can be seen in a position of higher power than the mentee and therefore can use this in a manner that is negative to both parties and potentially careers. The main points Chopra and Saint (2017) refer to are:

- Usurping the primary role on the mentees' projects or claiming credit for their ideas.
- Requiring the mentees to progress the mentor's projects instead of letting them create original content.
- Shackling the mentee to the mentor schedule so that they cannot advance as quickly as the mentor does.
- Preventing the mentees from looking for other mentors.
- Letting mentees make typical mistakes that lead to self-destruction, or ‘mentee missteps,’ without intervening to stop them.

Organisations that have formal Mentoring Programmes must ensure this does not occur as it would be extremely detrimental to the mentee as well as the Mentoring Programme.

Conclusion

Overall, the array of benefits linked with mentorship is astounding. According to the literature research, mentoring facilitates the transfer of knowledge, gives mentees access to meaningful social networks and information, allows them to emulate the conduct and demeanour of seasoned and accomplished role models and equips them with a supporter who advocates for their professional goals while offering both emotional and professional assistance. By doing this, the groundwork is laid for mentees to successfully take on more responsibility and lead to job satisfaction and retention (Ivey & Dupre, 2022).

What was apparent from the research, was how a well-designed Mentoring Programme in any organisation, particularly a military organisation like the DF, has the potential to significantly impact job satisfaction and retention among both mentors and mentees. It aligns with the organisation's commitment to professional development, fostering a positive and supportive environment.

There has not been a lot of research into mentee engagement with Mentoring Programmes. Without engagement from mentees, any Mentoring Programme is not worth pursuing. The target audience must be potential mentees. Addressing this area may also contribute significantly to job satisfaction and retention of skilled personnel within the DF. This is an area that perhaps should be pursued in future.

PART TWO. Research Methodology

This Part explains the methodology adopted for this research. This follows a Social Constructivist approach that focuses on the collaborative aspect of learning and recognises the significance of cultural and social environments. To maintain research rigour and validity, it is crucial to have a structured design when collecting qualitative data, as it tends to be iterative and inductive

(Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2013) think that qualitative research typically employs smaller sample sizes compared to quantitative research. However, “there are no rules for sample size to qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 244). Given the limited duration of Mentoring Programmes in the DF and the specific focus of this research, the sample size of participants will be small at five but actively engaged in mentoring in military and civilian organisations. Additionally, according to Creswell (2003), an appropriate number of participants for phenomenological investigations falls between the range of five to twenty-five.

Table 1 shows the list of participants and whether they are within the DF or external to it.

Table 1: List of participants for semi-structured interviews.

Participant	ID Code	Appointment	Organisation	Internal / External
1	DFCM1	DF C&M Committee	Defence Forces	Internal
2	DFCM2	DF C&M Committee	Defence Forces	Internal
3	HSE1	Coaching & Mentoring HSE South	HSE	External
4	NZAF1	Head of Mentoring Programme	New Zealand Air Force	External
5	MAT1	Mentoring Advisory Team Member	Defence Forces	Internal
6	M1	Mentor Participant	Defence Forces	Internal
7	M2	Mentee Participant	Defence Forces	Internal

Semi-Structured Interview

Interviewing is a cornerstone of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). Interviews fall into three categories: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Saunders et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews require careful sample selection and well-defined research questions (Hammersley, 2013). Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility, allowing the interviewer to tailor questions for more insightful responses. Ideal for understanding mentoring within an organisation, this approach is personalized and less intimidating for interviewees. Follow-up questions are a key advantage of semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012), though they can increase interview time. This format also poses the challenge of comparing interviews objectively. In summary, semi-structured interviews are well-suited to explore perceptions and benefits of mentoring within the DF.

Analysis

With regard to analysing data, Willig (2001) posits that “a good qualitative research design is one in which the method of data analysis is appropriate to the research question, and where the method of data collection generates data that are appropriate to the method of analysis (p. 21)”. The review of themes is a crucial stage that involves an iterative process of analysing data and producing insights. At this stage, candidate themes are often validated, and assessed, and may be discarded if they prove to be ineffective (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher can identify significant themes, patterns, and linkages that arise during the data collecting and analysis

process due to its interactive character (Sauders et al., 2012).

It should be noted that data obtained through semi-structured interviews is subject to constraints due to the potential for personal interpretations or bias introduced by both the interviewer and interviewee during the qualitative analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). According to Brannick and Coghlan (2007), researchers can express hidden knowledge that has been divided due to being part of a social system by using reflective awareness. They can then transform this knowledge into theoretical knowledge. The researcher had to be aware of this significant area because of her previous involvement with the DFC&MC and delivering Mentoring Programmes.

PART THREE. Research Findings.

The objective of this Part is to present and discuss the findings derived from the research conducted. The overarching topics that surfaced during the literature review determined the research direction. Several issues emerged during this process were explored in the semi-structured interviews to acquire a deeper insight into how the DF can enhance its performance through a robust Mentoring Programme.

The primary themes addressed include:

The benefits of introducing a Mentoring Programme

- Mentoring training programmes
- Mentoring relationships
- Barriers to Mentoring Programmes
- Retention and job satisfaction
- Attracting mentees to the Mentoring Programme
- Ownership of the Mentoring Programme

Participants

As described in Part Two, seven semi-structured interviews were carried out. Five interviews involved DF personnel who have either been directly involved in the establishment of mentoring in the DF or who have participated in the DF Mentoring Programme. Each interviewee was assigned an ID Code to maintain their anonymity. Sutton and Austin (2015) emphasise the significance of maintaining authenticity towards participants in qualitative research and employing the grounded theory approach for doing such research. This approach enabled the discovery of valuable insights into the professional and personal experiences of the individuals who were interviewed.

Benefits of Introducing a Mentoring Programme

The research analysis revealed numerous advantages of initiating a Mentoring Programme, and the interviewees highlighted additional personal benefits they had encountered. All respondents unanimously acknowledged that the personal growth of those engaged in mentoring is a significant advantage for all participants in the programmes.

Self-Awareness and Self Improvement

DFCM1 was clear in describing how the DF gives so much to all its personnel in training and developing them that it is important for people to have self-awareness. This aligns with Welsh and Dixon's (2016) view of personal development gained from mentoring relationships. MAT1 asserts that individuals participating in Mentoring Programmes have utilised these programmes to enhance their personal development and make notable progress. Specifically, some individuals have achieved success in job interviews and promotions by seeking mentors to enhance their confidence and communication abilities. MAT1 also described the benefits for mentees:

Mentees also realise there are other ways to improve themselves, not just professional courses. In the military structure you join as a recruit or cadet, then go on to do some Officer or NCO training. Then you go on and do senior courses. It's a very structured organisation and you kind of have to wait your turn for your next training course. So Mentoring Programmes are other avenues open to people to not just wait around for career courses to happen, but they can use the Mentoring Programme to develop themselves. (MAT1)

M2 was clear on what they experienced through their engagement with the Mentoring Programme:

I cannot ignore the personal growth I know I have achieved since beginning this journey. (M2)

Learning from Previous Experiences

Bennis (2003) and Kouzes and Posner (2002) made a connection between mentors and assisting mentees in developing their skills and talents and potential for learning from their own mistakes. This was an area that both the DF and HSE recognised as a benefit to their mentees. Both organisations work in ever-changing environments where mistakes or errors can be costly from an economic, organisational, or human side. DFCM2 described the benefits to the mentee:

So, one of the great benefits for the mentees is that they're able to make mistakes in a safe environment. They are guided in a direction to avoid making those mistakes, and they are probably given the benefits of learning from somebody else's mistakes as opposed to making their own (DFCM2).

This was a similar benefit described by HSE1 but within a different environment that is always changing:

There is a lot of room for mistakes, but there is no room for mistakes at the same time (HSE1).

HSE1 confirmed this statement by indicating that nurses and midwives regularly handle patients who may be critically ill and require treatments that, if mishandled, can have a significant impact on patients' lives.

Mentoring Training Programmes

Inzer and Crawford (2005) propose the establishment of formal training programmes for mentors, customised to meet the specific requirements of companies. Nevertheless, the

effectiveness of the Mentoring Programme is contingent upon the proficiency and quality of instruction delivered by a knowledgeable practitioner. This aligned with what all the interviewees said. All people engaging with Mentoring Programmes, mentors and mentees, receive formal training before commencing mentoring relationships. DFCM2 confirmed why this training is important:

It is mainly about how to mentor others. So, a lot of it is focused on the skills required of a mentor and the roles and responsibilities of the two parties involved, the mentor and the mentee. How to go through the whole relationship from the beginning, the start setting up a contract, setting your boundaries, explaining what is involved breaking down the barriers, and getting to know your mentee. (DFCM2)

Trust and Confidentiality

A key area that emerged in literature was the importance of trust in a Mentoring Programme. Starr (2014) describes “a mentor as someone who takes on the role of a trusted advisor (Starr, 2014, p.3)”. It is an area HSE1 ensures is addressed in training programmes:

Trust and confidentiality are deeply important. People are reminded of this, and I put these points across very strongly in training sessions. (HSE1)

In addition to this, during mentoring training, HSE1 makes a strong point of ensuring that a psychologically safe space is created before commencing a mentoring session and that everyone involved leaves feeling safe and good:

Once that is done properly, then the mentees realise that they're not the only ones feeling this way. Other people have had the same experiences. And one of the reasons we talk about confidentiality is that it works for both. The mentee should always be protected. But the mentor might share things that have gone badly for them, as well as things that have gone well. And what the learning from it is knowing that you're not alone, knowing that you have somebody to support you. And then the general notion that the organisation is supporting you (HSE1).

DFCM1 expanded further on this point:

In a mentoring relationship, if it has trust at its heart, and everybody understands what the motivation for the relationship is, you learn so much because people speak honestly and openly. You learn an awful lot. (DFCM1)

Communication and Listening

Williams (2000) was clear that mentor training revolves around the fundamental aspect of effective communication. MAT1 confirmed that communication skills are the areas that are focused on during training and are essential during mentoring relationships:

For the mentor, it is mainly your communication skills, your listening skills, and how to focus on listening. I find this very beneficial, particularly in how to correctly ask open questions and give the mentee time to think about the answer to the question without trying to answer yourself. (MAT1)

M1 supported this section of training during the mentoring relationship but also in their own working and personal lives:

My communication skills have grown, and I now actively practice proper listening skills and try to only speak when I can contribute positively to the conversation instead of talking for the sake of talking. This I can see has empowered those I converse with to communicate their problems and ideas knowing they have been listened to, and properly engaged with, leading to better working relationships which subsequently lead to better productivity and positive workplaces. (M1)

HSE1 also believes that listening and attitude are important skills for a mentor to have. Nurses and Midwives undergo a significant amount of training in this area during the undergraduate training programmes due to the nature of their work. Mentors need to be highly skilled at listening to mentees and have a good attitude:

Mentors need to be prepared to take a mentee and listen to what they need, and not try to form a mentee into what they want them to be. So, I think our attitude towards each other and our unconditional positive regard for each other and everything is very, very important. Yes, I suppose you can't ever know how good somebody will be. But I'm all for adequate preparation. (HSE1)

Leadership Development

Mentoring is essential for the development of leadership skills. Mentors, while guiding their mentees, may also be nurturing potential future leaders. All interviewees did see mentoring as a leadership style and confirmed it is discussed during mentor training. DFCM2 believes the effectiveness of being a good mentor is determined by one's personality traits. Furthermore, it is undeniably influenced by your approach to leadership. HSE1 discussed that mentoring is delivered as part of their leadership programmes and confirmed how it can be used as a succession tool:

Mentors themselves up their leadership skills. It improves their self-esteem, and it is enormously beneficial to the organisation because it helps with succession planning if mentees can go to a mentor and be shown the way they went. (HSE1)

NZAF1 have people who participate in Mentoring Programmes because they want leadership training:

After all, the programme is leadership-based. (NZAF1)

Mentoring Relationships

Organisations incur significant costs because of negative mentorship relationships. Allocating energy towards maintaining challenging relationships could be redirected towards more fruitful endeavours. In Part One, Scandura (1998) indicated challenges encountered in mentoring relationships that have the potential to result in increased rates of absenteeism and attrition. Therefore, ensuring a good mentoring match is essential to ensuring the that mentoring relationship will commence smoothly and will succeed.

Each interviewee proved the effectiveness of the matching process. Based on the mentees' reasons for seeking a mentor, they are provided with a selection of mentors to pick from, assuming there is an adequate number of mentors available. An area that was brought up by the interviewees in the DF was the organisation's size. The programme has limited capacity, with

several mentors available for a small number of mentees, making it challenging to achieve successful pairings. Officer and enlisted ranks are not mixed. MAT1 described how matching is dealt with:

We look at the applications, and one of the benefits we have is that it is not a huge organisation. We know a lot of people from our time in the service. We look at the mentee's applications, what was raised and what they would be interested in mentoring. If there was a crossover there that was an automatic selection. (MAT1)

HSE1 described the lead person of mentoring in a unit as having a database with all available mentors. Mentees will be offered the opportunity to choose the most suitable mentor for their needs based on the information in the database:

The lead organiser has a database in their hospital or their community area of all of their mentors. When mentees look for mentoring, they give them the database. The people who have trained to be mentors will put in a little bit about themselves so that people know what their speciality is, and what their interests are. The mentees are offered the opportunity to look at the database, pick somebody and make the call themselves, or, if they're having a hard time doing it, then the lead will of course help them to connect. They will then carry the sessions themselves. (HSE1)

NZAF1 described a different matching process to what the DF is currently doing. The NZAF matches are not specific to rank:

Our matches are all over rank. It doesn't matter if you're an officer or you're not an officer. We have mentors mentoring officers, we have non-officer ranks mentoring officers. So rank doesn't play a part in it. It's just what you feel like you can offer or what you want to get out of it when you come into it. (NZAF1)

NZAF1 did describe another difference between the DF and HSE by indicating that civilians who are associated with the NZAF are also included in Mentoring Programmes:

We invite civilians to be part of our programmes. So, it's not just uniform people. If you're associated with the Defence Force in some form, you can be a part of the programme. We have external people as well, like the police who are part of our programme and are external mentors. (NZAF1)

Support for Mentoring Programmes

Executing a meaningful mentoring initiative necessitates meticulous and strategic preparation. Introducing such an initiative is reliant on receiving support from senior management in any organisation. Before introducing Mentoring Programmes in the DF, DFCM1 confirmed there was little resistance from management on the official side when the idea of mentoring was approached. NZAF1 indicated that the Chief of Air Force (CAF) is highly supportive of the programme and is also an active mentor. HSE1 confirmed the same as it is included as part of their training programme. HSE1 also spoke on how senior management sees the benefits to everyone who engages with it:

I think without top-level management, you're lost. I found with mentoring, Directors of Nursing and Midwifery are very happy to engage. They think it's a great idea and they're very anxious to keep people, to retain staff and want to support their staff.

(HSE1)

This support from senior management in the interviewee's organisations has been positive in commencing this type of programme.

Barrier to Mentoring Programmes

Despite the potential benefits of mentoring, programmes often face barriers within organisations. Even with senior management support, resistance to change can arise from various factors, including organisational culture and communication challenges. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing strategies to overcome them and ensure successful implementation.

Culture

An organisation's culture encompasses shared values, beliefs, and established practices. Introducing Mentoring Programmes can disrupt existing norms, requiring individuals to learn and adopt new approaches to development and support. MAT1's experience highlights a generational divide and resistance rooted in attachment to traditional approaches:

Some people are stuck in past ways of doing business which have worked in the past, but they're not relevant to the modern Defence Forces going forward. (MAT1)

MAT1 considered culture to be one of the biggest barriers when building awareness of the programme in MAT1's unit:

This is a big change in how we deal with our people, how we motivate our people and how we develop our people. And that was probably the biggest barrier. (MAT1)

Messaging

Successful implementation of a Mentoring Programme depends on a strategic and well-executed communication plan aligned with the organisation's existing communication practices. Failure to articulate the benefits, purpose, and mechanics of mentoring can lead to misunderstandings and reluctance to participate, impacting programme uptake and overall success.

I spoke to my ranks who were very wary and unsure about the programme. I had to explain what it was all about. Some felt it was unnecessary. Some didn't see the benefit of it. Some thought it was ongoing anyway like informal mentoring. Some of them had never heard of it before or had come across it before. (MAT1)

MAT1 indicated that more work needs to be done on the communication strategy and all available resources such as internal communications apps, emails and noticeboards will be used this year to get the message across to all serving members. DFCM1 did agree that work has been carried out previously and even currently to ensure the key messaging of what mentoring is about. DFCM1 felt this has been spurred on due to recent new initiatives and opportunities being announced in the DF:

There's significant transformative change happening in the organisation such as medical cover and pay rates for younger soldiers, sailors, airmen and women. All of

that is going on so what I'm hoping to do as part of that, is renew and reactivate the messaging around mentoring and see if we can get people to engage with it. (DFCM1)

While NZAF advertises mentoring courses to their personnel, NZAF1 encourages participants in training courses to verbally talk to colleagues about what the programme is about to quell any misunderstandings:

At the end of my training course, I tell people to go debunk these myths about what you thought mentoring was about, go to the next person and explain it is like this, and it is not about that. We can push things out. We can give you documents on what it means and definitions and stuff like that. But I think our personal one-on-one stories are probably the best way of advertising. (NZAF1)

While formal communication channels are important, the power of word-of-mouth and personal endorsement cannot be underestimated. Misconceptions about the nature of mentoring can create unnecessary resistance. M1 did say the posters and messaging around their work area and unit caught their attention and spurred a curiosity to find out more:

I remember being first attracted to the posters. It was something new. I've never seen anything like that before. So I applied, not fully understanding what I was applying for. I knew the Mentoring Programme. It was black and white plain to see but I didn't understand exactly what it meant. (M1)

Time

Mentoring does require time and commitment. In the current environment, the DF, NZAF and HSE are below strength in the numbers delivering all tasks. This is a factor that DFCM1 raised as an issue with getting the message of mentoring out to all serving members:

The challenge here, of course, is bandwidth and capacity, we're doing our best with a group of very passionate, committed people. But they're all doing two or three jobs. So that is a limitation for us. (DFCM1)

It is important to find time to schedule mentoring sessions during regular working hours. M2 first encountered challenges in finding available time to perform the sessions, as the members of M2s unit were unfamiliar with the procedural aspects:

It was difficult to get time away from work at the start as my boss did not understand the process. Once I explained it to him, he understood and was fully behind it. I didn't encounter a problem again. (M2)

This links to the importance of getting the message and understanding of what mentoring is to all areas of an organisation.

Retention and Job Satisfaction

Empowering people was identified by Rikard and Banville (2010), Eby et al. (2008), and Raginand Kram (2007) as a common theme in mentoring. M1 was clear in describing the power of mentoring and believes it is a good retention tool:

A lot of large and small companies use and recognise the benefits of Mentoring Programmes now. For me personally, I want to be part of an organisation that

empowers me and others to reach goals and be supported in doing so. To be heard and listened to, and to see my different strengths I have to give, not only in my current role but as a leader and an experienced service person. (M1)

Armstrong (2017) referred to the link of an employee feeling value which would influence their decision to remain in their current employment. The sense of feeling valued within an organisation was also a point shared by NZAF1 during the Mentoring Programme. In current times, organisations must change their thinking and focus on people and well-being. NZAF1:

A real focus of our Directorate is to take care of our people. Mentoring slots in here very easily. When you have a mentor or when you're mentoring somebody, you feel valued to feel a sense of belonging, which can feel like you are giving back to the organisation. That is the focus on the people part. When I think back on the past, so many were so much focused on operations and doing business. People felt like they were just a number in this thing. So they left because they didn't feel valued by the organisation. If we can have a piece of a project of something that values them, they'll stay a little bit longer. (NZAF1)

DFCM2 believes a good mentoring relationship will lead to job satisfaction for both the mentor and mentee:

The mentee would have a sense that he or she has been given a key to unlock the box or unlock a door and all of a sudden, it's open and there's a world of possibilities there. And for the mentor, it's a case of I've opened the door for that person or that group of people if they have more than one mentee. And they've allowed them to blossom and to reach their potential and to strive. So yes that would be a connection there with job satisfaction (DFCM2).

DFCM1 did refer to mentoring being part of best HR practice and a tool leading to job satisfaction and ultimately retention of personnel:

Mentoring was recognised as best practice in terms of HR and we identified it as part of a retention practice. If people had access to this, it would help the organisation retain and give people job satisfaction (DFCM1).

HSE1 also feels there is a link between mentoring and job satisfaction but does not have evidence to confirm this as a fact due to the low numbers of mentees engaging with the programme. HSE1 indicates it is an area that the HSE are researching, but did confirm a strong link with job satisfaction among mentors. DFCM2 approached the area of retention and mentoring in a different light. While he agreed retention of personnel, particularly highly skilled technicians, is impacting the DF, he does not believe mentoring will play a role in retaining such high skills:

Technicians are motivated by other things, such as career satisfaction, and monetary recompense for the skill that they exhibit. The public sector, particularly the DF cannot match those expectations. (DFCM2)

NZAF1 deliberated on the recent proposal put forth by the Chief of Air Force (CAF), which emphasised the importance of prioritising personnel and highlighted how initiatives such as the Mentoring Programme might contribute to the retention of service members:

Our CAF just put up this plan recently on focusing on our people, because we've

lost so many people. We can't fly our planes because we don't have enough people. So we need to make sure we focus on our people with sustaining types of situations, train, retain, whatever it is. So it's a real focus on our directorate to make sure that we take care of our people. This is where mentoring slots in very easily. (NZAF1)

Attracting People to Mentoring Programmes

A common theme that came through in all the interviews was getting mentee engagement and participation. The number of mentors was strong, but the number of mentees was low. HSE1 pointed out the big step it takes for mentees to ask for a mentor:

It is a huge act of courage for a mentee to come along and ask for mentoring, particularly when they're very junior. This is precisely the time we want to help them. So I think that there's a message in there that we need to make sure they know it is available to them once they have settled down and allow them to gather up their courage a little bit. (HSE1)

MAT1 feels new inductees should be briefed on Mentoring Programmes early in their career to give them an idea of what will be available to them in the future and should remain voluntary:

I think there should be an awareness that this will be available to them later in their careers once they get on their feet and up and running. They could use it to their benefit after about three or four years of service. I think it should be voluntary and not lose that spirit of volunteerism and contribution. (MAT1)

DFCM1 felt that trust may also be impacting mentees engaging with the programme. The issue may be due to the differences in ranks amongst the mentors and mentees within the DF:

The challenge is not necessarily getting mentors, but convincing mentees that this is something that could be of value to them. And the issue here is a trust issue. If the mentee or the prospective mentee doesn't trust what's going on and the motivation for the programme, then it is not going to grow as we hope it will grow. (DFCM1)

DFCM1 expanded on his point regarding the potential impacts of rank differences:

The mentor's primary responsibility is to establish a safe relationship whereby they address the mentee's questions, honestly and openly, don't take advantage, and make sure that the power relationship is balanced. (DFCM1)

Mentoring Champions

Mobilising champions of mentoring, such as senior leaders or previous programme participants, to promote the value of mentoring through informal discussions and personal recommendations can be a powerful tool for attracting people to a Mentoring Programme. It also has the potential to overcome messaging barriers indicated in Section 4.7. This aligns with MAT1's observation that positive messaging needs to permeate the organisation for maximum impact:

We need a senior officer to come on board as the champion for our organisation, such as OIC PMS or the HR department. But I know they are over-tasked. Even

someone at HQ level could get it introduced into general conversation and speeches, so the message is getting out, and people are hearing it and thinking that this is a worthwhile programme that could benefit them. (MAT1)

DFCM2 suggested the Senior Enlisted Leaders Advisory Group² (SELAG) should be advocating the Mentoring Programme for enlisted personnel:

There is also a role for the SELAGd Leaders Advisory Group and the DF Sergeant Major to champion this. (DFCM2)

NZAF1 did confirm the support of the Chief of Air Force who acts as a champion and advocate for their Mentoring Programme, emphasising the importance of the growth and self-development of people:

CAF came out recently and acted as a champion for our programme. He said people who are self-developing and who seek out self-growth and self-development are the people we want in our AF. (NZAF1)

Currently, the DF Mentoring Programme is overseen by the MATS with guidance coming from the DFC&M Committee. DFCM1 indicated that this will change in the future and the programme will rest with Strategic HR:

Mentoring is going to be nested into Strategic HR. They'll be ultimately responsible, but maybe the working group would continue to be drawn on to advise and provide guidance. (DFCM1)

Mentoring in the NZAF comes under the Director of People and Culture who has four portfolios in total with each portfolio led by an officer. NZAF1 did indicate that:

Within our directorate of People and Culture, we are the only directorate that is 100% people-focused. Everybody else is focused on operational outputs. Each one of those portfolios is led by a specialised officer. (NZAF1)

Informal Mentoring

Informal mentoring relationships arise naturally, usually among individuals who have similar values or interests and is not necessarily a component of a formalised programme. It frequently occurs without prior planning, motivated by personal relationships or common interests. Informal mentoring does not involve a deliberate process of matching, unlike formal mentoring. Mentors and mentees establish bonds based on the same interests, close working relationships, or other organic affiliations. Informal mentoring is characterised by greater flexibility in its dynamics. The partnership adjusts to the changing requirements and situations of the individuals involved. Informal mentoring can span multiple years, commencing with the initiation phase and advancing through cultivation, separation, and ultimately transforming the mentoring relationship into a less intense and more equitable interaction between coworkers (Kram, 1988). HSE1 did raise informal mentoring being a reason why some people may not

² Senior Enlisted Leaders Advisory Group is made up of Senior Non-Commissioned Leaders in the DF who advise the DF Board and DF enlisted personnel on matters relating to the welfare of the organisation.

engage with the formal Mentoring Programme:

So, we're trying to figure out why they're not taking it up. What's coming up is that people are engaging in informal mentoring quite a lot. I suppose the other way we can look at it is that there could be no training and people will mentor anyway. People will always be giving advice and doing it anyway. So, if we are putting a little bit of extra thought into it, it is only going to help (HSE1)

According to Noe (1988), individuals participating in structured Mentoring Programmes typically indicate that they receive a greater amount of emotional and social support from their mentors. Further studies conducted by Fagenson-Eland et al. (1997) and Ragins and Cotton (1999) suggest that although formal mentoring is better than no mentoring; it is not as effective as informal mentoring. DFCM2 indicated that informal mentoring happens all the time, where people, particularly in the technical trades of the NS and AC, learn from each other:

In my organisation, we have been doing informal mentoring all along without realising it. We just never put a title on it. The only difference with implementing a formal programme is to slightly change our thinking. All we're doing is formalising helping others learn from others' experiences. (DFCM2)

Conclusion

Having previously explored the potential that a robust Mentoring Programme would enhance the performance of individuals and the organisation, this Part brought the research journey closer to a conclusion, it helps in answering the research question surrounding the benefits a Mentoring Programme can bring to an organisation like the DF. The literature review identified key themes, which ultimately shaped the research direction. Building upon these insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve deeper into these themes and gain a richer understanding of how such a programme could benefit the DF.

When implemented thoughtfully, mentoring facilitates personal and professional development, fosters leadership growth, enhances knowledge transfer, and positively influences job satisfaction and retention rates. The interviews align with the literature reviewed in Part One and underscore the significance of comprehensive training for both mentors and mentees, emphasising the development of trust, effective communication skills, and an understanding of roles and boundaries. Strategic matching further promotes the success of mentoring relationships. Unequivocal support from senior leadership would signal the organisation's commitment to mentoring, thus encouraging broader participation. Table 2 provides a summary of the key findings in Part Three.

Table 1: Key findings in Part Three

NUMBER	KEY FINDINGS IN Part Three
1	To fully optimise the potential of a Mentoring Programme, it is important to emphasise the substantial personal and professional development opportunities that it provides for both mentors and mentees
2	Investing in comprehensive training for mentors and mentees ensures the development of trust, effective communication, and the understanding of appropriate boundaries, which are fundamental to a successful mentoring experience.
3	A well-designed matching process that carefully considers the needs, goals, and expertise of both mentors and mentees is essential for creating productive and fulfilling mentoring relationships.
4	Securing strong support from senior leadership lends credibility to the mentoring programme, sends a positive message about its value, and encourages widespread participation, increasing the likelihood of success.
5	Proactively addressing potential barriers to mentee participation, such as fear of vulnerability, cultural resistance, and time constraints, plus actively promoting the benefits of mentoring, will increase engagement and maximize the programme's impact.

Several recommendations have emerged throughout the research and these recommendations will feed into areas that warrant further research. The conclusions and recommendations identified will be discussed in the next Part.

PART FOUR. Conclusions and Recommendations.

This study embarked on a comprehensive exploration of the potential benefits Mentoring Programmes could offer to organisations like the DF. Grounded in a thorough literature review, insights gleaned from semi-structured interview, and a careful analysis of the data, a comprehensive understanding of mentoring's role in enhancing performance, fostering job satisfaction, and impacting retention has emerged. Key themes identified include the significance of trust and confidentiality, the need for targeted communication strategies, the power of mentoring champions, and the importance of aligning mentoring with career progression. This final Part synthesizes these findings and translates them into tailored recommendations to unlock the full potential of mentoring within the unique context of the DF. The following subsections will describe the six recommendations.

One-Target Mentoring Awareness

Part Three revealed significant barriers to Mentoring Programme uptake, including misconceptions and a lack of clarity surrounding the programme's purpose and benefits. This aligns with the insights from Part One, which highlighted the importance of clear communication for promoting successful mentoring initiatives (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Williams, 2000). The DF must develop a tailored communication strategy that dispels myths, emphasizes the value and positive outcomes of mentoring, and addresses the specific concerns and motivations of both potential mentees and mentors. This targeted approach will foster greater understanding and enthusiasm, leading to increased participation across all levels of the organisation.

Findings in Part Three underscored the impact of personal accounts and peer-to-peer recommendations in encouraging programme engagement. The DF's communication strategy should capitalize on the power of positive testimonials from past participants. Furthermore, explicitly integrating the DF's Mentoring Programme with existing talent management and career progression initiatives can position mentoring as a clear pathway to acquire valuable skills and experiences. These skills and experiences can directly align with opportunities for advancement. Engaging senior leaders as visible champions of mentoring will lend the programme credibility and signal organisational commitment, significantly influencing participation. This multi-faceted communication approach will effectively address the current knowledge and perception gaps, fostering a culture where mentoring is celebrated as an essential tool for personal and organisational development.

Two - Promote Trust and Confidentiality

A key finding highlighted in Part Three is the paramount importance of trust and confidentiality for fostering a successful mentoring relationship within the DF. This aligns with the extensive literature examined in Part One, which emphasises trust as a core element of effective mentoring (Starr, 2014; Williams, 2000; Scandura, 1998). Building trust enables honest and open communication; empowering mentees to share vulnerabilities and challenges without fear of judgment or negative repercussions. Additionally, confidentiality reassures mentees that sensitive information shared within the mentoring space will be protected; creating a safe environment essential for personal and professional growth.

Addressing the specific concerns about rank differentials and potential power imbalances raised in Part Three, emphasis on confidentiality is paramount. The DF should explicitly address these concerns within mentor and mentee training, outlining clear boundaries and safeguards for sensitive information. By prioritising trust-building measures, the DF can create a Mentoring Programme where individuals feel safe to learn, explore their potential, and seek guidance without fear of compromising their careers or reputations. This foundation of trust will ultimately strengthen the programme's effectiveness and yields greater benefits for both mentors and mentees.

Three - Mentoring Champions

Research in Part One consistently emphasised the pivotal role of supportive leadership and organisational culture in the success of Mentoring Programmes (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Kram, 1985). The findings in Part Three corroborated this point, as interviewees stressed the importance of visible leadership endorsement for legitimising the Mentoring Programme and

combating cultural resistance within the DF. By engaging senior leaders as active mentoring champions, the DF can signal a firm commitment to investing in its personnel's development. This top-down support will foster greater confidence in the programme and incentivise broader participation.

Mentoring champions within the DF can play a crucial role in promoting the programme throughout the organisation. Their endorsement can elevate mentoring's perceived value, encouraging potential mentors and mentees to view the programme as a career-enhancing opportunity. Senior leaders participating as mentors themselves, would demonstrate a powerful commitment to leadership development and a willingness to share their expertise and experience. This direct involvement would not only enhance the mentoring experience for participants but also inspire a culture of mentorship and knowledge sharing within the DF. This would ultimately lead to the enhanced performance, retention, and job satisfaction explored in the research question.

Four - Incentivising and Integrating Mentoring for Career Development

Part Three revealed the importance of addressing the time commitment associated with mentoring and ensuring both mentors and mentees feel valued for their participation. This aligns with the research in Part One which highlighted the need to recognise the contributions of mentors and mentees to boost programme sustainability (Stone, 2004; Kellam, 2003) and the positive impact of mentoring on job satisfaction, retention, and professional growth (Armstrong, 2017; Allen et al., 2006).

To address these factors, the DF should consider implementing a system of incentives to acknowledge the dedication and value created through mentoring. This recognition could include offering professional development opportunities specifically designed for mentors, providing tangible and intangible rewards, and linking formal recognition of mentoring contributions to career progression. Such incentives will reinforce the importance of mentoring within the DF culture and enhance perceptions of the programme as a worthwhile, career-positive activity.

Explicitly integrating the DF's Mentoring Programme with existing talent management and career progression initiatives can position mentoring as a clear pathway to acquire valuable skills and experiences that directly align with opportunities for advancement. This aligns with research in Part One, which underscored the importance of mentoring for career advancement, leadership development, and facilitating the transfer of tacit knowledge (Laiho & Brandt, 2021; Noe, 1988; Kram, 1985). Part Three further highlighted the value mentees placed on mentors who could guide them through challenges and provide insights into career development pathways within the DF.

Connecting mentoring with career development will help the DF identify and nurture high-potential individuals, creating a visible talent pipeline for future leadership roles. Mentees who demonstrate growth and development through the programme can be flagged for further professional development opportunities, leadership training, or specialised assignments. This strategic alignment of mentoring with career progression directly addresses the research question's focus on enhancing performance, retention, and job satisfaction within the organisation.

Five - Informal Alongside Formal Mentoring

Research in Part One highlighted the prevalence and potential benefits of informal mentoring, where relationships develop organically based on shared values, interests, or workplace proximity (Kram, 1988). Informal mentoring offers flexibility and the opportunity for immediate guidance, fostering a sense of belonging and support within an organisation (Noe, 1988). In Part Three, interviewees acknowledged the ongoing practice of informal mentoring, particularly among experienced personnel within technical trades in the DF. This underscored the natural inclination for individuals to seek informal guidance and knowledge-sharing. However, interviewees also raised concerns about the limited reach of informal mentoring, especially for newer or less-connected personnel.

Recognising the value of informal mentoring, while addressing its limitations, suggests that a strategically-linked approach with formal mentoring could be beneficial for the DF. A formal programme can offer structure, broader access, and targeted development goals, while informal mentoring allows for responsiveness, relationship-building, and personalised support. This integrated approach leverages the strengths of both, maximizing the DF's investment in personal growth and development.

Addressing Potential Challenges

This research identified two major obstacles to Mentoring Programmes that must be recognised and resolved.

Time Commitment and Workload

Part Three highlighted the need to prioritize mentoring within work schedules. In demanding environments like the DF, finding dedicated time for mentoring is a persistent challenge. To address this, the DF must establish explicit time allocation policies for mentoring. This will prevent mentoring from being sidelined by operational pressures and signal the organisation's commitment to the programme's importance.

Navigating Cultural Shifts and Resistance

While senior management support might exist, cultural resistance can still be a factor, as evidenced in Part Three. To ensure long-term sustainability and widespread buy-in for the Mentoring Programme, the DF needs to proactively address this potential challenge. Ongoing communication which highlights success stories, leadership endorsement, and aligning mentoring with larger organisational goals will foster a cultural shift; mentorship could then be viewed as an essential part of professional development within the DF. This proactive approach will create a receptive environment for mentoring, which in turn will help to overcome any lingering resistance and then pave the way for a programme that thrives in the long term.

Areas for Further Research Recommendations

Two recommendations for future research arose from this paper.

Understanding Mentee Hesitation and Motivators

While Part Three identified the overall importance of mentee participation, deeper exploration is needed to fully understand the specific factors that hinder or encourage mentees within the DF to engage in mentoring. Research suggests that potential mentees may be dissuaded by perceived stigma, fear of appearing vulnerable or uncertainty about the programme's potential benefits (Fagenson-Eland et al., 1997; Noe, 1988). Conversely, they may be motivated by a

desire to gain specific skills, access knowledge held by more experienced colleagues, or develop their professional network (Allen, et al., 2006; Kram, 1985).

A qualitative study within the DF, employing surveys or focus groups, could shed light on the motivations behind mentee participation or reluctance. This would offer insights on the hurdles the DF's Mentoring Programme needs to tackle, along with the benefits to highlight for potential mentees. Such findings could guide improved communication, incentives, programme modifications, leading to enhanced participation and its positive effects on DF performance, retention, and satisfaction.

The Need for Long-Term Tracking

While Part Three presented promising findings indicating the potential benefits of mentoring, a comprehensive understanding of the programme's true impact on the DF necessitates a longitudinal assessment approach. This type of research, conducted over an extended period, would enable the DF to track the career trajectories, skill development, retention rates, and job satisfaction of Mentoring Programme participants in comparison to non-participants. Such analysis can provide robust evidence of the programme's efficacy in enhancing performance and cultivating a more satisfied, committed, and resilient workforce.

A longitudinal assessment would empower the DF to make informed, data-backed decisions about refining the Mentoring Programme, maximizing its effectiveness, and justifying continued investment. Quantitative data on key metrics such as promotion rates, skill acquisition, and retention, complemented by qualitative insights from participants, would offer a multi-dimensional view of mentoring's impact. This comprehensive evidence would enable the DF to demonstrate the value of mentoring to key stakeholders and leadership, building a strong case for its ongoing expansion and integration within broader DF development initiatives.

Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate the potential benefits a robust Mentoring Programme could offer a military organisation like the DF. Guided by an extensive literature review and insights from semi-structured interviews, the findings have illuminated the diverse ways mentoring can elevate individual performance, strengthen organisational capability, and positively impact job satisfaction and retention.

To fully realise the potential benefits of mentoring within the DF, the findings from this research suggest several key recommendations. Prioritising trust-building measures and providing options for mentorship outside the direct chain of command will alleviate concerns related to rank dynamics. Tailored communication strategies can dispel misconceptions and highlight the value of mentoring to both potential mentees and mentors. High-profile leadership engagement as champions will validate the programme, boost visibility, and inspire broader participation. Furthermore, integrating mentoring with career progression will solidify its role as a powerful development tool within the DF.

The recommendations outlined hold promise for addressing the challenges identified in the research and for establishing a successful Mentoring Programme that aligns with the DF's unique needs and culture. Future research to pinpoint specific mentee motivations within the

DF context and future longitudinal studies to assess mentoring's impact on career development and retention would provide invaluable insights. This paper underscores the transformative power of mentoring as a tool for enhancing the capabilities, well-being, and commitment of the DF's most valuable asset – its people.

Please note that the views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and should not be taken to represent the views of the Irish Defence Forces or of any other group or organisation.

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