

Mentoring in the Irish Defence Forces: Opportunities and Challenges

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This study explores the contemporary mentoring practices and opportunities that align with mentoring challenges in the Irish Defence Forces (DF). Mentoring is integral to the current DF Leadership Doctrine, relevant from tactical to strategic levels. However, there appears to be a disconnect between the stated aims of the DF Policy and the lived experience of mentoring within its personnel. This study aims to bridge the gap between the objectives of the mentoring policy and its real-world operation.

Conducting a workplace survey and semi-structured interviews, this study identified significant themes that shed light on the perceived limitations of the program, providing valuable insights for improvement. The research findings, crucial in the context of the DF mentoring program, indicate that a motivated and committed group of mentors is available to enhance the careers of military personnel through mentoring. However, the study also highlighted numerous obstacles that must be addressed to improve the program's effectiveness. These include a lack of awareness and understanding of mentoring, accessibility issues, cultural barriers, inadequate resources, and limited integration with career development initiatives. While positive mentor-mentee relationships exist, the study also highlights the 'dark side' of mentoring, necessitating awareness and mitigation strategies. It also identified contemporary mentoring methods such as Flash Mentoring and E-Mentoring, which, when employed appropriately, can enhance the mentoring experience for both mentor and mentee.

Mentoring is a structured process where an experienced person (mentor) helps another (mentee) to develop their skills and general professional competence (Starr, 2021). As Washington and Cox (2016) point out, formal and informal mentoring success can vary significantly based on the mentor's motivation and emotional intelligence. Research indicates that a successful mentor relationship requires trust between the mentor and mentee (Chopra, 2017; Tjan, 2017; Johnson & Smith, 2018). Formal and informal mentoring relationships are ongoing in the Irish Defence Forces (DF), and a formalised mentoring programme is now embedded within our leadership doctrine (DFLD, 2022).

Bretherton (1992) and Collins and Feeney (2000) contend that when an individual encounters uncertain surroundings (as when joining the military), their attachment system is activated. This system encourages the individual to seek protection and comfort from an attachment figure, known as the 'safe-haven' function. Attachment formation results from personal qualities and the whole ecological system, including formal and informal support (Bretherton, 1992).



Inzer and Crawford (2005) explain that informal mentoring occurs when mentors and mentees develop a bond based on personal and professional respect and that formalised mentoring in an organisational context is less effective than an informal approach. Some contrary analysis claims that mentoring, especially formal mentoring, is a powerful tool for addressing advancement barriers (Murrell et al., 2008; Dashper, 2019). It is unusual to find that for a topic so important to leadership development in the military, so little is known about it on an individual level (Ragins & Kram, 2007). The Irish Defence Forces (DF) have introduced a formal mentoring programme, the Policy on Coaching and Mentoring (2022: 5). It states that its purpose is to:

Entwine the Defence Forces values of moral courage, physical courage, integrity, loyalty, respect, and selflessness whilst developing innovation, motivation, and leadership attributes.

Mentoring is, therefore, embedded in the current DF leadership doctrine, spanning from tactical through operational to strategic in terms of its relevance. However, is the formal mentoring programme in the DF just 'placing old wine in the bottles', as Grogan and Crow (2004: 436) suggest? Is it just a case of formalising something present in the organisation since its inception? This article will analyse the existing formal mentoring program in the Irish DF and propose contemporary methods to overcome the identified challenges.

Research Aim

When leaders ask, "why do we do it this way?" and find out the only reason is because we've always done it that way, it is time for a closer look at this process.

(DF Leadership Doctrine, 2022)

The aim of this article is to answer the following central research question: What are the contemporary mentoring practices and opportunities that align with the challenges of mentoring in the Irish DF?

Four (4) research objectives support this question:

- RO 1: Identify contemporary mentoring best practices and assess their suitability to the Irish DF.
- RO 2: Determine stakeholder perceptions and experiences of DF Mentoring.
- RO 3: Establish the gap between current DF mentoring and organisational best practices.
- RO 4: Suggest recommendations to DF leadership to overcome or mitigate the challenges faced with mentoring in the organisation.

A mixed-method research methodology has been adopted in a step-by-step research process (Creswell, 2015). The paper will integrate the research by incorporating semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. This research has a theoretical framework based on the two components of opportunities and challenges. This will structure the investigation and help to determine whether the DF Mentoring Scheme supports its personnel's needs.

Overview of Mentoring Practice

Effective mentors are less teachers, than they are guardians of the flame of potential within another.

(Starr, 2021: xv)

As stated in the DF Leadership Doctrine (2022), leaders are responsible for providing knowledge and feedback to their personnel through counselling, coaching, and mentoring. Mentoring and Coaching are personalised approaches utilised by leaders to facilitate learning and develop professional capability in willing relationships. Organisations increasingly use mentoring to help new employees socialise, develop skills and potential and enhance their careers (Alcover et al., 2017; Grocutt et al., 2020). Organisations struggle to implement a sustainable mentoring framework despite its significance in retention, employee performance, and learning (Clark, 2017). Coaching is a structured and formal process that can be applied individually or in a team setting to positively impact personnel satisfaction and retention. In contrast, mentoring is a less formal approach that typically involves a less experienced person learning from a more experienced individual over a “period through a series of meetings, discussions, or social interactions” (DFLD, 2022: 115).

In today's workforce, employees seek resources to enhance their professional growth and development (Rogers et al., 2022; Saxena, 2023). The Irish DF has committed to mentoring and established a ‘Coaching and Mentoring Standing Committee’ in 2019 to allow oversight of a programme in the organisation. This voluntary committee was established to lead, guide, and ensure that the DF mentoring and coaching programmes are rolled out in line with international best practices. Both coaching and mentoring are developmental approaches intended to improve a person's skills, knowledge and work performance. The differences are primarily in that mentoring is longer term, does not measure performance, is one where the mentee drives the relationship, and the process is personalised, as opposed to standardised (Hicks & McCracken, 2009). Cultivating a culture that promotes employee development is crucial for facilitating high-quality learning experiences and fostering growth (Zachary, 2012; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring and coaching provide personal and professional support to help individuals assimilate into new roles and develop employment-related skills (Kutsyuruba & Godden, 2019). Mentoring benefits individuals and organisations and higher organisational performance is closely associated with more mentored employees (Clark, 2017). There is empirical evidence to support the belief that mentees experience better career outcomes, including job satisfaction and long-term success, as a result of having a mentor (Allen et al., 2004; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Underhill, 2006). Importantly, research has shown that organisations with a higher percentage of employees who have been mentored tend to exhibit improved levels of organisational performance, including higher levels of innovation and better decision-making (Ghosh & Reio, 2013).

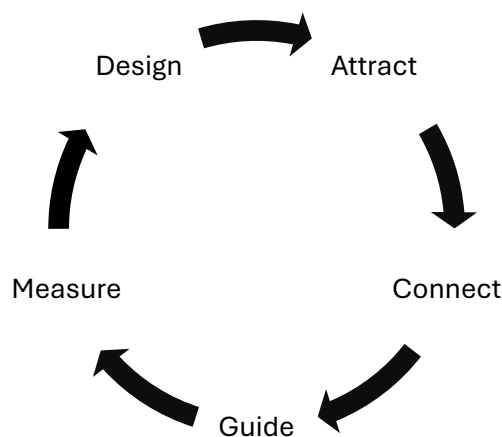
Mentorship is a professional, working alliance in which individuals work together over time to support the personal and professional growth, development, and success of the relational partners by providing career and psychosocial support (Byars-Winston & Dahlberg, 2019: 186).

In a recent Forbes article (Cantalupo, 2022), research reveals that many companies are fully committed to using mentoring to “engage, develop and retain talent”. The study highlights that 96 percent of the top Fortune 500 companies in the US have mentoring programmes, leading to significant improvements in their performance. A CNBC survey in 2019 reported that 90 percent of employees with a career mentor are happy at work, and mentoring can add value to retention goals. The CNBC survey also stated that “more than 4 in 10 workers who do not have a mentor say they have considered quitting their job in the past three months” (Wronski & Cohen, 2019: 1). Mentoring leads to higher levels of innovation, better decision-making, and improved overall organisational performance (Allen et al., 2009). The DF has had a formalised mentoring structure in place since 2020, and it has since further solidified its relationship with its academic partner, Kingstown College. Officers and NCOs continue to be trained in mentoring at certificate, diploma, and degree levels each year; approximately twenty have completed this course thus far.

Mentoring in the Irish Defence Forces

The importance of mentoring has become increasingly evident in the realm of leadership and management. The dynamic interplay between mentors and mentees contributes to cultivating effective leaders (Eby et al., 2007). It supports their professional expertise, critical thinking skills, and team-building abilities, enabling them to build a following and become successful leaders (Thomas & Thomas, 2015). As previously stated, the DF has a formal ‘Coaching and Mentoring Scheme.’ Informal mentoring is also ongoing in tandem with this formalised structure. Saxena (2023) proposes that organisations' mentoring systems should be designed with talent development in mind. The five-step process involves a cyclical process in which the mentoring programme in an organisation is designed to continuously feedback into the design to ensure that the process adapts while remaining flexible. Saxena (2023) contends that this is particularly important for the most recent generations entering the workforce.

Figure (i) – Mentorship Programme for Talent Development (Source: Saxena, 2023)



PART ONE. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review asks whether mentoring matters and, if so, how much. It offers a critical overview of the current knowledge of mentoring and its utility within the DF and serves as a foundation on which the following analysis will be built. It will begin by defining key terms used throughout the study.

The conceptual framework (see Fig 1.1) used in this paper is designed to enable (best practices in) mentoring and will be used to examine the opportunities and challenges for the Irish DF. The conceptual framework is enhanced by exploring concepts such as group mentoring, e-mentoring, reverse mentoring, and flash (one-time) mentoring (Xu & Hickey, 2021). This will allow for a later critique of the DF Mentoring Scheme through supporting qualitative research. It will also attempt to determine potential opportunities for mentoring within the Irish DF based on more recent developments in the mentoring field. Additionally, it will make it easier to investigate the challenges the DF mentoring scheme faces in an environment with increasingly difficult recruitment and retention issues.

The military association with mentoring is not a recent phenomenon. Derived from Mentor, who was chosen to advise, guide, and counsel Odysseus' son, Telemachus, during his military career (Kimball, 2015), mentoring focuses on developing personnel beyond what coaching can offer and lasts for an extended period. It entails imparting knowledge, expertise, and personal or professional experiences to assist and guide others in tackling obstacles (Hicks & McCracken, 2009). Research shows that mentoring provides benefits in several ways, yet oddly, little information exists regarding the level of success that formal mentoring has within the military (Xu, 2021). This paper will assess the literature surrounding the utility of mentoring in its broadest sense and identify the opportunities for mentoring and the gaps in the research on the subject through a DF lens. Mentoring is embedded in the current leadership doctrine, spanning from tactical to strategic in terms of its relevance.

Background of Mentoring

The formal study of mentoring has been researched for over a century, with articles dating back to the early 1900s. However, most research on peer-mentoring groups has been conducted since the late 1990s (Kroll, 2016). One of the first attempts to study how mentoring works, especially in an organisational setting, was conducted by Kathy Kram (1985), a notable mentoring researcher, in the 1980s. Her work is considered seminal in modern mentoring research. In 1985, Kram's book "Mentoring at Work" presented an effective agenda for academic research on mentoring. She identified the factors that led to mentoring and its outcomes, discussed the two key functions of mentoring (career and psychosocial), highlighted the challenges of cross-gender relationships, and described the various stages of mentoring relationships. Kram's study has been widely praised, and since then, research in mentoring has been expanded, refined, and revitalised as a concept.

As Hieker et al. (2020) explain, organisations commonly outsource their people development initiatives regarding soft-skill training to external providers. This training type focuses on skills such as conflict resolution, communication, team building, and leadership competencies (Hieker et al., 2020). Coaches and trainers are hired to deliver off-the-shelf or tailor-made training programmes to develop the organisation's workforce. HR professionals use scorecards to measure progress and bring transparency to development initiatives. This reliance on outsourcing 'people development' to external professionals was considered the most effective method for structured, clear, and measurable talent development. However, the practice has led to some unintended consequences (Hieker et al., 2020). In the past decade, the Human Resource profession has realised that cultivating a well-trained and resilient workforce is far more complex than originally anticipated. Outsourcing meant that senior leaders began to distance themselves from the responsibility of developing their junior staff. This led to decreased involvement in their teams' daily inquiries and issues. Furthermore, budget constraints forced human resources sections to prioritise and minimise

expenses paid to external providers. This led to managers becoming more like coaches rather than mentors, which resulted in a potential role conflict when line managers would assess the performance of their staff members (Clutterbuck, 2018).

Saxena (2023) identified the benefits of mentoring to both the mentor and the mentee. Saxena argues that mentors can help individuals improve their leadership and communication skills and enhance their overall skills, ultimately leading to career growth. Mentoring can improve the mentee's networking skills and provide clear benefits regarding career advancement and mental health improvements. Generational changes in the workplace mean that organisations must become more adept and agile in adjusting to the needs of their employees. Contemporary mentoring methods are described as more inclusive and broader than traditional one-on-one mentor arrangements (Mangan, 2012).

Forms of Mentoring

There are various forms of mentoring relationships occurring in organisations. These can include mentoring in the workplace, youth mentoring, or academic mentoring and can take on different forms, such as group mentoring, reverse mentoring, peer mentoring (Cornu, 2005) and flash mentoring (Xu & Hickey, 2021). Typically, organisations match a more experienced person (the mentor) with a less experienced person (the mentee) to help speed up the mentee's progress (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). There is a clear distinction between mentoring and other types of relationships. Mentor-mentee relationships are distinct from other close interpersonal relationships, such as those with family, friends, or romantic partners. The former type of relationship is designed to serve the specific developmental needs of the mentees, providing them with guidance, support, and feedback to help them grow and achieve their goals.

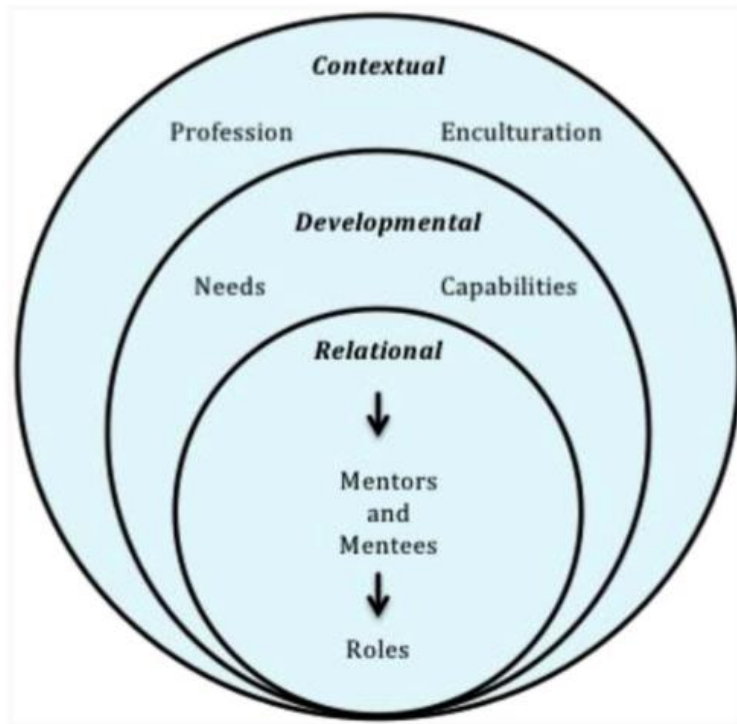
Johnson et al. (2007) argue that mentorship is a unique relationship that focuses on learning, personal growth, and professional development. Mentors are typically experienced and knowledgeable individuals who offer their time, expertise, and wisdom to help their mentees navigate career opportunities and challenges. Through regular communication, goal setting, and reflection, mentor-mentee relationships can foster trust, respect, and mutual learning, benefiting both parties.

Ambrosetti et al. (2017) explain that mentoring can be delivered in several ways: individually, in dyads, triads, and in groups. It can be conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or online and digital methods (e-mentoring). E-mentoring is a process that allows organisations to mentor at a great scale, and it can be adapted when required to fit the requirements of the organisation or unit (Kuok et al., 2023). Personalised, mutually beneficial mentoring relationships are possible regardless of time and location (Chong et al., 2020). E-mentoring complements face-to-face mentoring approaches, and blended programmes can be used to manage rapport-building challenges, especially in educational settings, as proposed by Chong et al.'s (2020) extensive review. Critics of e-mentoring state that carrying out role-modelling functions over electronic means can be challenging. There are also concerns about miscommunication and personal privacy.

Interesting research from an educational perspective in Australia has shown that using two or more mentors in a formal mentoring scheme vastly improves the outcomes for the mentee (Ambrosetti et al., 2017). As part of their research, they explored the triad approach to mentoring by placing two preservice teachers in a classroom with the mentee teacher. Their goal was to investigate the mentoring that took place within the group. They analysed

the group members' interactions, focusing on the relationship between the two preservice teachers as peers. Ambrosetti et al. (2012) used a theoretical framework that emphasised a holistic approach to mentoring to frame the research and analyse the data. It was discovered that the triads provided a comprehensive and all-encompassing mentoring experience by addressing each aspect of mentoring.

Figure 1.1 – Holistic approach to mentoring



(Ambrosetti, 2012)

Their findings showed that the mentoring triad model expanded the types of support that could be offered to preservice teachers. Triad mentoring allows individuals to benefit from the limited resource of a mentor (Ambrosetti et al., 2017). The nature of a triad relationship increases the mentee's network beyond what a single mentor can offer. Triadic mentoring provides an innovative solution to mentorship demands, fostering collaboration and maximising mentor resources. From a practical Irish DF perspective, this helpful research could alleviate the already overburdened personnel within the force.

Reverse mentoring is a more modern concept where a younger or less experienced professional provides guidance and advice to an established professional (Satterly et al., 2018). This practice is becoming increasingly popular as it can help professionals stay updated with the latest trends and practices in their industry. For instance, in a case study by Madison (2019), a schoolteacher was paired with a recent journalism school graduate as a mentor. The purpose of this partnership was to address the challenges faced in learning journalistic skills due to partisan politics in the United States. This approach can be applied to various industries to assist with critical thinking, informed decision-making, and diversity issues, which are relevant in any field. Overall, reverse mentoring can be a valuable tool for professional development as it allows professionals to learn from one another and gain fresh perspectives on their work. Reverse mentorship programmes recognise recent generations as critical

resources for utilising modern technology and influencing change, equipping more senior leaders with digital knowledge and language (Microsoft, 2018).

Generational differences have been identified regarding mentoring outcomes; Gen Y (millennials) and Gen Z (born from 2000 onwards) are redefining and changing talent management practices (Saxena, 2023). Hecht (2022) states that the leading group of individuals currently in most working organisations are Gen Y, also known as Millennials. Gen Z, born since 1997, is another significant cohort and is starting to enter the workforce in greater numbers. As Saxena (2023) states, this Gen Z, also known as 'zoomers' or 'iGen', is disrupting the workforce with their expectations, perspectives, and behaviours. These recent generations demand more innovative methods to develop and manage their careers. Organisations, therefore, need to carefully steer their investments, both in monetary and human capital terms, to support talent development and retention in the coming years.

Flash mentoring, also known as one-time or speed mentoring, provides organisations such as the US Coast Guard Cadets with excellent opportunities for networking and learning experiences (Xu & Hickey, 2021). It is also becoming extremely popular with Generation Y and Z (Saxena, 2023). By using the available pool of mentors, cadets can easily search for specific insights or advice and connect with mentors with the specific experience they need. Flash mentoring allows cadets to learn job-related skills, gain cross-speciality knowledge, explore diverse career paths, and build robust networks (Xu & Hickey, 2021). This form of mentoring could be particularly advantageous for inductees with busy schedules, as it does not require a minimum time commitment. Flash mentoring can be a great solution when employees need quick information. Unlike traditional mentoring, the mentee will have a one-time, short-duration meeting with an expert; despite time constraints, inductees can learn various skills, insights, and knowledge from multiple mentors (Saxena, 2023).

Organisations hold critical knowledge that can be cascaded to the next generation (Leonard, 2019). Leonard refers to these in her book 'Deep Smarts,' where tacit knowledge is shared and diffused to the learners through training sessions and other innovative mentoring methods. Leonard (2019) proposes that organisations miss out on this enduring wisdom and suggests that mentoring and storytelling are the most effective tools for strengthening these deep smarts. Leonard's work delves deep into high-performing organisations and is considered one of the most prominent experts in this part of mentoring. Swap et al. (2001) also noted that people unconsciously 'drink in' knowledge, and knowledge transfer can occur without the deliberate intention to teach or learn.

Mentoring typically involves four phases, as outlined by Kram (1983). These phases are (a) initiation, which involves the selection of a mentor and a mentee; (b) cultivation, which is the peak phase where both mentors and mentees realise the benefits of the relationship and mentoring functions are at their highest; (c) separation, which is when the relationship ends due to job change or geographic dispersion, and (d) redefinition, which is when the mentoring relationship evolves into a peer-like friendship. In summary, mentoring is a process that involves various stages, each with its unique characteristics and goals and can be formal/informal in nature.

Informal v Formal Mentoring

Informal mentoring can occur informally in various settings, such as the workplace, social events, and family activities. It is a natural aspect of relationships between two individuals where one benefits from the other's knowledge, wisdom, and support (Inzer & Crawford,

2005). The mentor can initiate the relationship to offer assistance, while the mentee can seek the guidance of a trusted individual to gain valuable insights. Informal mentors are crucial in providing their mentees with different types of career development functions (Kram, 1983), increasing their mentee's exposure and visibility. Conversely, Ugwueze et al. (2013) contend that whilst informal mentoring can offer flexibility, it may be less effective in achieving desired outcomes.

Formal mentoring programmes are widespread in organisations; Inzer and Crawford (2005) argue that much of the literature explores the effectiveness of formal mentoring and its various aspects, as not everyone can develop an informal mentoring relationship. Therefore, organisations must invest in their employees and develop each to their fullest potential. This is why formal mentoring programmes are designed and operated within organisations. While formal mentoring may not be as powerful as informal mentoring, it is still a process organisations should pursue. The benefits are too important to overlook. Therefore, organisations should develop a mentoring programme that is well-planned, implemented, and supported with adequate resources. Mentoring can help develop skills and abilities in two ways (Khojah & Asif, 2020). Trainee teachers receive standardised and featured mentoring through overt practices. Mentors demonstrate and deconstruct teaching methods for pedagogical growth and the study concluded that a formal mentoring programme is a valuable and appropriate approach to professional development (Khojah & Asif, 2020).

A survey of Fortune 500 companies found that over 70 per cent of these companies adopted formal mentoring programmes (Cantalupo, 2022). When these formal programmes become more developed, and rules and regulations are utilised to form mentoring relationships, research suggests that the level of interaction and quality of the relationship decreases (Johnson & Anderson, 2009). In situations where formal mentoring falls short, it is common for mentees to seek out an informal mentor to obtain the benefits not received through the formal programme (Holt et al., 2016).

The effectiveness and optimal format of formal mentorship programmes are debated in mentoring literature. Previous research suggests that mentoring relationships that occur organically via self-selection within the organisation are the most effective, while formal programmes compel participation are mostly ineffective (Johnson, 2007). However, Ragins et al. (2007) argue that the quality of the relationships matters, regardless of whether the mentorship is informal or formal, but that the informal approach to mentoring has gained momentum and has now become more common in organisations (Bynum, 2015).

Giacumo et al. (2020) examine how mentoring relationships can improve individual and organisational performance. They conducted a literature review of electronic databases, identifying 26 studies that provided relevant information on mentoring and mentor programmes. Using a multiple-studies-review (MSR) approach, they synthesised the findings and identified ten elements contributing to successful outcomes in workplace mentoring programmes. The Giacumo et al. (2020) model highlights the increasing emphasis on mentors, including their role, qualifications, approach, and learning. While formal mentoring has been linked to workplace learning and performance improvement, few studies have explored the connection between mentoring programmes and organisational performance.

Challenges of Mentoring

While mentoring is widely recognised as crucial for improving employee retention, enhancing performance, and creating a culture of development and learning (Clark, 2017), organisations still struggle to implement a long-lasting framework for mentoring to flourish, and limitations can present even in the best mentoring programmes. Atkinson and Mitchell (2008) noted that these challenges include extreme time constraints, the obligations and responsibilities of the mentor, comprehension and anticipations, staff positions and classifications, reluctance on the part of either side to engage in mentoring, and variations in work culture and surroundings. Neale (2021) contends that recognition for mentors is a key element of any successful mentoring initiative.

Long (1997) identified thirteen challenges related to mentoring. These included the time-consuming nature of the process for all parties involved, inadequate planning for the mentoring system, ineffective coordination between mentors and mentees, a lack of knowledge about the mentoring system, the inability of mentoring to lead to conflicts in the workplace, the shortage of mentors, primarily women, the overuse of available mentors, the inability of mentoring for women in small groups, and the emergence of unhealthy relationships between mentors and mentees. Other problems include having high expectations for a mentoring programme, not knowing if mentoring helps mentees advance in their careers, insufficient budgets, or having funding cancelled before the programme shows potential benefits (Long, 1997).

Ehrich & Hansford (1999) list several obstacles that can hinder mentoring in organisations, which include mismatched mentors and mentees, a lack of top-down support, the creation of erroneous expectations for promotions, resentment among those who are not a part of the programme or the perception of favouritism, gender issues, and a blurring of roles. Unrealistic expectations, excessive dependence on the mentor or mentee, jealousy or resentment from others, ineffective mentoring pairs, excessive time and energy commitments, and unfair manipulation by the mentor or mentee are other difficulties that can arise in mentoring relationships (Ehrich & Hansford, 1999). Senior leaders can be challenging to mentoring programs because they may be reluctant to discuss critical organisational issues with others (Stead, 2005). When a mentor does not have management responsibilities for a mentee, they are more likely to concentrate on the individual than the mentee's activities or assignments (Starr, 2021).

Gender Considerations with Mentoring

Studies indicate that those mentored by female mentors experience the least quantifiable advantages from their mentoring relationships (Day, 2000). Day's research suggests that female mentees of female mentors receive the lowest level of return for their participation in the mentoring process. Shapiro et al. (1978) posit that women often lack mentors or sponsors who can help them advance in their careers. Understandably, mentorship was reported as not practised as much for women's career advancement as it is for men (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010).

There is research on the challenges of female military personnel receiving competent mentors (Lane-Washington & Wilson Jones, 2010), but this research fails to develop strategies to solve these issues. The Commission on the Defence Forces (2022: 82) recommended a "female mentoring programme to allow women in the Irish DF to benefit from the experience of identified role models and mentors"; however, research indicates that

it is not a panacea for gender-specific mentoring issues (Carter, 2011). Despite having more mentors than men, high-potential females still face the same promotion and pay gaps. Upon closer examination, it was found that male mentors tend to be higher-ranking, giving them an edge in receiving sponsorship. It is sponsoring, which is needed, Carter (2011) contends, to progress further in an organisation as a woman.

Mentor-Mentee Matching

The success rate of mentoring may be affected by how the mentor-mentee relationship evolves (Washington & Cox, 2016). Their research examined a regional public service mentoring scheme in the UK as a case study. The study evaluated a developmental relationship mentoring model developed and used to guide practice. Their study indicated that outcomes vary significantly on the mentor's motivation and emotional intelligence. Washington and Cox (2016) contend that this can be minimised by an awareness of how the relationship should develop and evolve. Contracting in the early relationship stages can limit mismatched expectations, while mentor actions in other stages reduce potential failure.

Matching mentors and mentees can be a challenging engagement, attempting to match the informal process in a structured manner is foolish and unnecessary (Cox, 2007). The attempt to do so challenges the organisers, she contends. The presented research is based on qualitative evidence from a community mentoring project. Cox's (2007) research findings suggest that careful mentor selection and appropriate training can render matching mentors and mentees unnecessary, except for geographical location and time availability. The study shows that unexpected coincidences between mentor and mentee often emerge later in the relationship, and these associations are often not anticipated by the organisers of the mentoring scheme.

Participants are not typically involved in the matching process of mentors and mentees in mentoring programs (Hallam et al., 2012). However, a match's success relies heavily on both parties' willingness and enthusiasm to contribute, communicate, and learn. Mentees should (Hallam et al., 2012) complete a needs analysis survey, while mentors must provide a brief application outlining their interests. Hallam et al. (2012) contend that a suitable match can be made based on the information gathered from mentees and mentors, the program's goals, expectations and commitments, and shared interests, goals, or professional expertise.

The Counter Argument: The Dark Side of Mentoring

Despite the connections between mentoring and organisational performance improvement, mentoring has been found to have some negative aspects or a dark side to it (Eby, 2007; Ehrich & Hansford, 2002). There is evidence that unhealthy mentoring relationships exist in organisations and can even progress to become destructive or toxic (Eby & Allen, 2002). A growing body of research on negative mentoring experiences has identified various issues reported by both mentee and mentor (Eby, 2007). Baranik et al. (2010) highlighted the importance of carefully selecting organisational mentors. Negative mentoring experiences can reflect poorly on the organisation; therefore, organisations must carefully choose and encourage only suitable individuals for mentoring roles.

While healthy mentoring relationships can be beneficial, conflicts and adverse events can also occur. The darker side of mentoring can range from minor issues such as a disagreement or argument right up to physical or psychological abuse (Eby et al., 2000). Many

mentoring relationships can be positive but may also have negative experiences for both parties. It is worth noting that research on mentorship has found that “positive and negative experiences are distinct” (Eby et al., 2010: 82). This means a negative mentoring experience requires significant challenges before it is considered to be negative. Mentoring relationships can sometimes become dysfunctional for the mentee where they fail to meet their needs or suffer distress in the relationship.

Scandura (1998) identified three common dysfunctional mentoring relationship patterns. Firstly, destructive relationships are distinguished by jealousy, where the mentor intentionally sabotages the mentee's chances of advancement. Secondly, the mentor creates a dependent environment where the mentee feels suffocated within the relationship. Lastly, the mentee may receive a lack of support due to the mentor's unrealistic expectations. To minimise issues, organisations should provide training and coaching for mentors and mentees, instilling a realistic understanding of what mentoring can offer and the responsibilities each party owes to the relationship (Eby & Allen, 2002).

It is important to recognise that mentoring is a relationship, and like any other relationship, there is the potential for problems. Therefore, it is helpful for both the mentor and mentee to be aware of the possibility of the dark side of mentoring. The existence of negative mentoring experiences has implications for mentors, mentees, and organisations offering mentoring programs. Hieker (2020) claims that insufficient resources for supporting, structuring, and monitoring mentors, mentees, and the mentorship process can lead to the failure of a mentor program. A crucial factor that can influence the success of a mentor program is the active involvement of senior leaders as visible and vocal stakeholders, leading by example and being seen to be available as mentors themselves. A poorly executed mentor program can undermine the entire concept of mentoring, and negative experiences can cause senior leaders to withdraw and refuse to serve as mentors (Hieker, 2020).

Gaps in the Literature

Few studies empirically investigate mentoring in military organisations, and the limited available research is typically within the US military. Literature on mentoring is also generally focused chiefly on the mentor's role in developing the relationship rather than on it being a reciprocal arrangement (Ghosh et al. Reio, 2013). This gap in literature makes it important to study skill development, personal learning, identity growth, and personal adaptability from the perspectives of both the mentee and mentor. It would also be helpful to ask whether it is a two-way relationship and consider the challenges both mentors and mentees face (Hieker, 2020). For example, how can we ensure equal benefits for all mentees? Mentors are typically individuals who belong to the dominant groups within organisations or institutions. As a result, potential mentees from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds may face obstacles when initiating and participating in mentoring relationships.

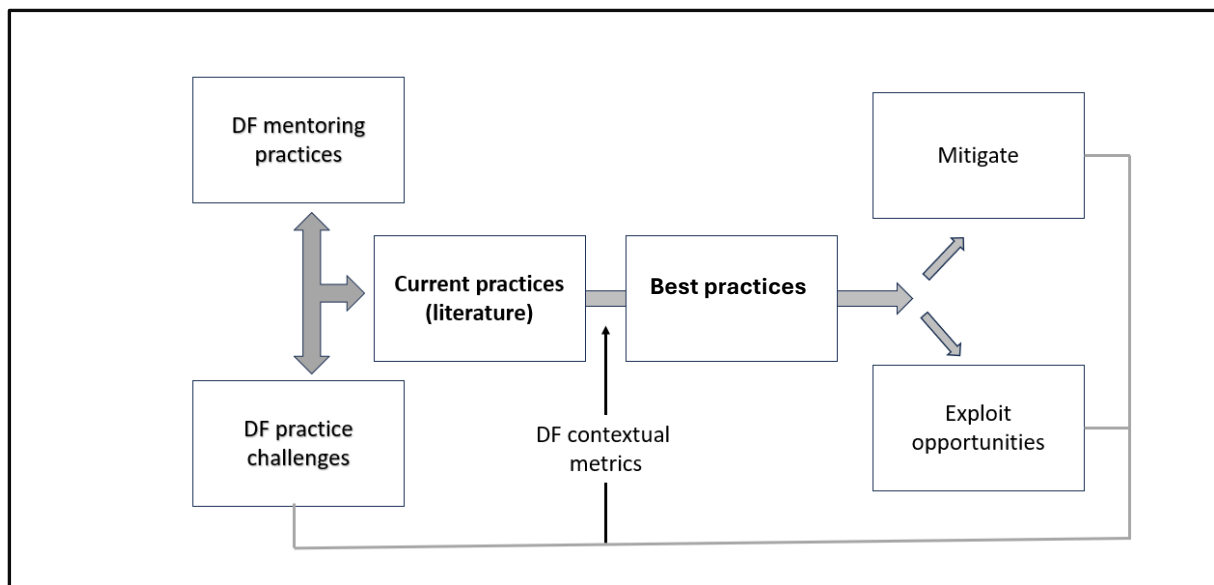
The power dynamics and interests within organisations can hinder the mutual attraction necessary for a successful mentoring relationship (Ragins & Kram, 2007) and could be considered another gap in the literature. Formal mentoring programs have failed to remove barriers to advancement for marginalised groups (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Most of the research on mentoring has been done at a distance through questionnaires. Although some qualitative research on mentoring has been completed, more qualitative studies are needed to give a holistic (Ambrosetti, 2017) and in-depth understanding of mentoring relationships, knowledge transmission (Leonard, 2019), management, and mentee

socialisation. Additionally, there are limited studies of formal mentoring in practice, and few mentoring studies collect data over time.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is shown below in Figure 2.2. This framework will be used to examine the opportunities and challenges of mentoring in the context of the DF. It will explore the most up-to-date, innovative forms of mentoring and utilise best practices from civilian and other military organisations. The study will also evaluate the formal mentoring scheme within the DF. Mentoring should be evaluated in every organisation where a formalised structure is used (Gray et al., 2016). Starr (2021) contends that if something is evaluated within an organisation, it is emphasised in terms of importance. The evaluation of mentoring also allows DF personnel to assess whether they should continue mentoring, change mentors, or cease the process for a time.

Figure 1.1 – Conceptual Framework



(Courtney, 2024)

Summary

In summary, Part One provides a synopsis of the scholarly research on mentoring, emphasising the opportunities and challenges linked to this practice. The analysis delves into various types of mentoring and their applicability in military environments. Intriguing insights were gleaned from the literature, notably the formidable hurdles that must be overcome to introduce a formal mentoring initiative within an organisational framework successfully. Despite these challenges, the literature suggests that there are many opportunities for mentoring within the military context. Within this paper, key themes related to best practices, opportunities, and challenges emerged in mentoring in general and the military specifically:

- Mentoring has clear and evident benefits for both the mentor and the mentee (Pascale, 2019).
- Informal and formal mentoring is ongoing in the Defence Forces (DFLD, 2022).
- Leonard (2019) challenges organisations to develop their 'deep smarts' and explains how to achieve it.

- Reverse mentoring is an emerging concept where a younger or less experienced professional provides guidance and advice to an established professional (Microsoft, 2018).
- Flash mentoring, also known as one-time mentoring, provides mentees with a focused, time-limited opportunity for networking and learning experiences (Xu & Hickey, 2021)
- As they begin to dominate the majority of workers in organisations, Gen Y and Z are demanding more innovative, disruptive mentoring methods to assist with their career development (Saxena, 2023).
- Participants are not typically involved in the matching process of mentors and mentees in mentoring programs (Hallam et al., 2012).
- Research must explore whether mentoring is a two-way relationship and consider the challenges mentors and mentees face (Hieker, 2020).
- Although research has identified the challenges faced by female military personnel in receiving capable mentors, no effective solutions have been proposed (Carter, 2011).
- Despite the research describing mostly positive experiences during mentoring relationships, there is a 'dark side' to mentoring that both mentors and mentees should at least be aware of (Scandura, 1998).

PART TWO. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

A mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) research strategies, has been adopted for this study. The mixed-methods approach, or "multi-strategy", is a research methodology that combines quantitative (QUANT) and qualitative (QUAL) methods (Johnson et al., 2007). In a content analysis study conducted by Byrman (2006) on over two hundred social science journal articles, he discovered that most studies utilised both QUANT (surveys) and QUAL (interviews) methods. As in this study, combining methods is a widely accepted practice in the social sciences.

Questionnaire items

A questionnaire (Appendix 1) was created to understand the awareness, perception, and potential challenges of the DF mentoring scheme. It had five sections. The first section (Q1-3) aimed to gather demographic information about the respondent. The second section (Q4-5) determined the respondent's knowledge of the mentoring programme currently being carried out in the DF. The third section (Q6-7) investigated the respondent's experience and involvement (if any) with the DF mentoring scheme. The fourth section (Q8-9) was intended to gather the respondents' opinions on the impact of the DF mentoring scheme on both individual and organisational levels. The survey included closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions ask respondents to choose the most suitable answer from a list of options, while open questions invite them to express their opinions.

Table 2.1 Questionnaire Structure

Sections	
Section 1	Demographics
Section 2	Mentoring Program Awareness
Section 3	Mentoring Experience
Section 4	Impact of Mentoring
Section 5	Suggestions for Improvements

The author decided to collect data online using software that enhances the accuracy and efficiency of data collection (Ruel et al., 2016). A total of 70 personnel completed the survey, and 120 were sent out—a response rate of 58 percent.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken as these offered the most effective method for gathering information and “with reasonably specific topics combined with being very flexible in the order and follow-up questions” (Beaney, 2009: 90). In the social and behavioural sciences, interviews are a frequently used research method to gather qualitative data that aligns with an interpretive approach. Researchers can obtain valuable insights by allowing participants to construct their understanding of the subject matter. As Creswell (2014) and (Sierra, 2016) suggest, open-ended questions should be used, encouraging participants to share their perspectives and experiences. One should carefully listen to what is said to understand the topic under study better. Moreover, they enable researchers to garner a deeper understanding of complex phenomena while letting the interviewee elaborate and discuss topics they feel to be significant (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews incorporate open-ended and theoretically driven questions to elicit data grounded in the participant's experience and existing constructs in the relevant discipline (Galletta, 2013; Adams, 2015). The six interviews undertaken helped address gaps in understanding from the literature review. Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible framework for data collection that combines the structure of structured interviews with the open-ended nature of unstructured ones, allowing for a more in-depth and detailed exploration of the topic (Adams, 2015).

Research Sample

The snowball sampling method was used to send out a mentoring survey during to support this research. Researchers use snowball sampling and ask initial informants for referrals to other participants in the study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Gile & Handcock, 2010). Probability sampling was chosen as the most appropriate method for this research, as the researcher's opinion did not influence the sample selection (Naderifar et al., 2017). This results in the selected sample being a representative of the DF and ensures a variety amongst rank and appointment. In research, one must ensure that there are enough participants and that they are representative of the population; failure to do this can lead to sampling and selection bias (Middleton, 2023).

A total of seventy (70) DF completed the survey. The author identified several known individuals and requested that the survey be disseminated. The interviewees were selected based on their extensive experience mentoring prominent business leaders of both genders and within the DF. Five military officers were chosen, one a current Brigadier General and the other a recently retired Major General.

PART THREE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Part Three provides insight into the results and examination from data collection through document analysis, the Defence Forces (DF) mentoring survey, and semi-structured interviews. The analysis is organised according to the framework introduced above. It begins by examining the 'Defence Forces Coaching and Mentoring Policy' to comprehend how mentoring is incorporated into the DF and how its senior leadership intends mentoring to be executed. Subsequently, this Part presents the findings and analysis obtained from the survey. The analysis from the semi-structured interviews is interwoven thematically within the documentary and survey analysis sections.

Demographic Data of Participants

The demographic data of the survey participants is displayed below.

Figure 3.1 Rank of participants

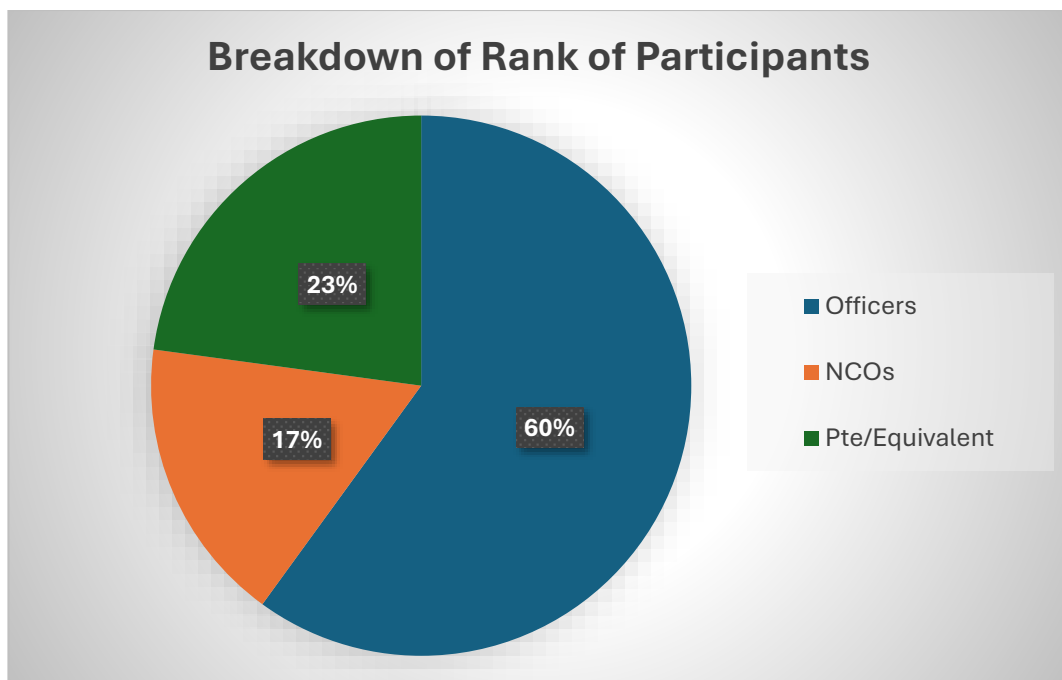
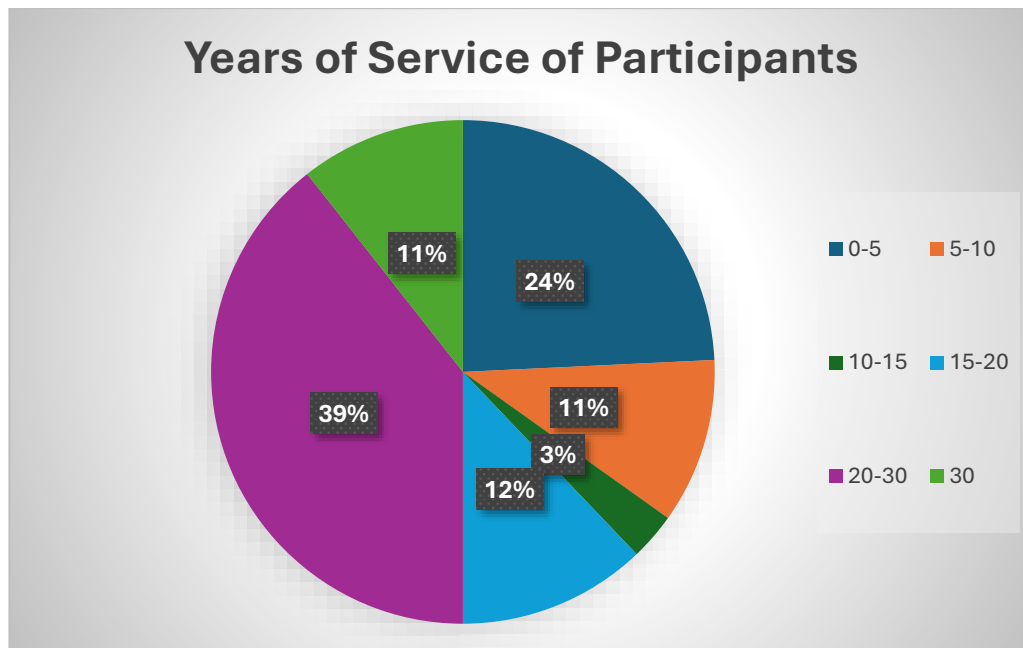


Figure 3.2 Years of service of participants

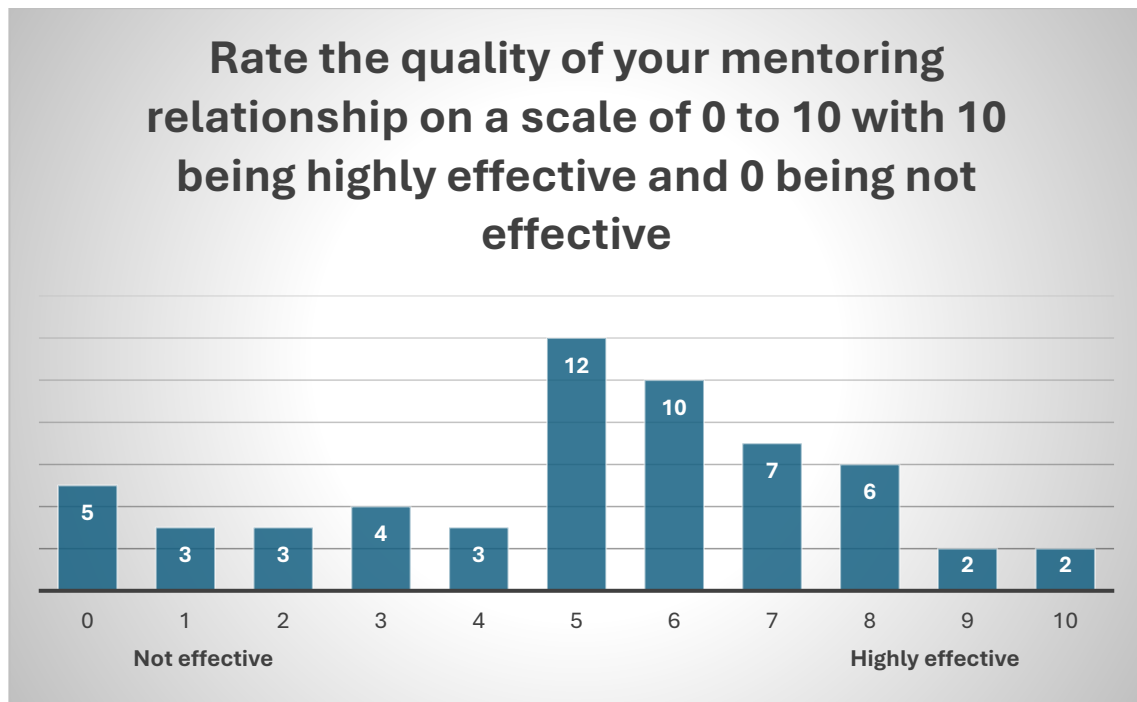


Documentary Analysis

To commence the analysis, key DF policy documents were examined. Within these policy documents, mentoring is combined with coaching. This is somewhat problematic as mentoring is often confused with coaching. Importantly, the Defence Forces Leadership Doctrine (2022) firmly places mentoring on an equal footing as coaching in terms of what the organisation sets out and what a “great leader” (DFLD, 2022: 31) should be able to carry out within his/her role.

The Defence Forces Coaching and Mentoring Policy (2023-2026) sets out guidelines for which mentoring should be carried out in the organisation. It contains the scheme's definitions, codes of ethics and evaluation metrics. Whilst the policy contains many of the requirements of any policy document, the details of the methods that could be employed as a mentor are lacking. This policy also lacks focus on mentoring; instead, it concentrates on coaching to a large extent. The author also contends that it is designed with the traditional mentoring model in mind and does not introduce or explain the alternative contemporary mentoring methods examined in this study. The policy, published in 2023, includes metrics for evaluating the mentoring scheme and states that the performance goal will be achieved when "90% of participants are satisfied with their mentoring relationship". According to the mentoring survey conducted in January 2024 as part of this study, only 7 percent of the respondents considered their mentoring relationship ‘highly effective’. Additionally, 30 percent of the participants claimed that their experience of DF mentoring was ‘not effective’. Figure 3.3 illustrates the survey results on the quality of mentoring relationships.

Figure 3.3 Quality of mentoring relationships in the Irish Defence Forces



Thematic Structure of the Research

Three main themes emerged from the primary research. These were: (theme 1) the lack of awareness and understanding of mentoring within the DF and the requirement for promotion of the scheme (theme 2) the transient nature of a DF career and its effects on mentoring, (theme 3) the conditions required for mentoring to be successful, and the contemporary mentoring methods to adapt to the generational changes in the workplace. Each theme contains various sub-themes that were analysed to assess their impact and influence on the wider theme and overarching research topic – see Table 3.1 for the themes and sub-themes around which this Part is structured.

Table 3.1 Summary of Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
1. Awareness, understanding and access to Mentoring	• Benefits to both mentor and mentee • Access to mentoring resources
2. Challenges to Mentoring in the DF	• Transient nature of DF career • Mentor/mentee suitability • Time constraints • The dark side of mentoring

3. Conditions for success	• Recognition and support • Mentoring as part of professional development • Contemporary mentoring methods
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The themes presented in this study are grounded in the participants' shared, lived experiences. These themes serve as a unifying thread that runs through the research area, representing recurring perceptions that shed light on the subject.

Theme 1: Awareness and understanding of Mentoring programmes

A recurrent theme within the research was a lack of awareness and understanding of mentoring within the DF. This permeated through each rank that engaged with this research. Only 38 percent of the respondents were 'very aware' of the mentoring scheme within the DF. Participant #14 indicated that they:

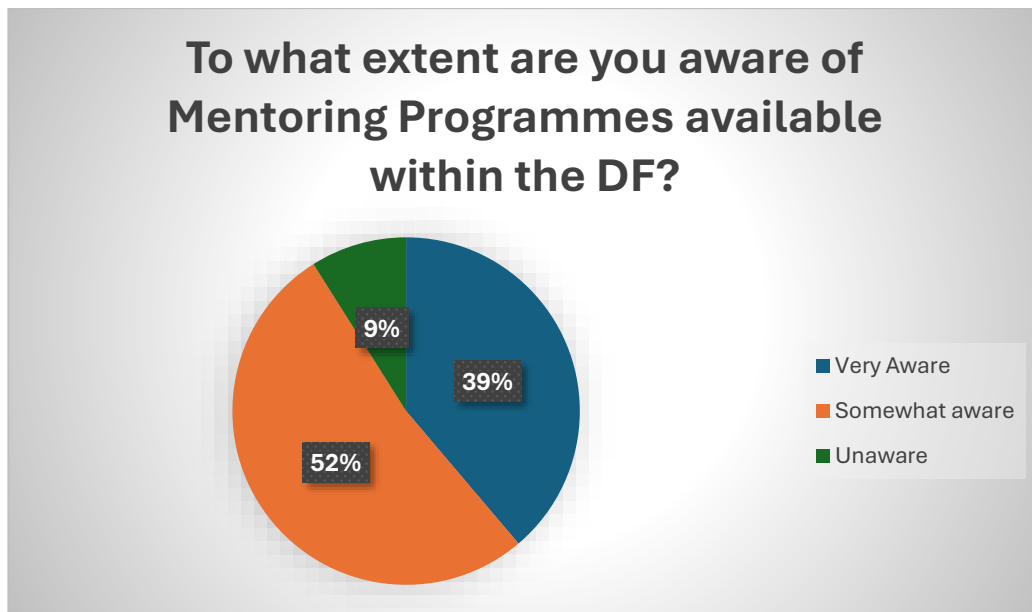
haven't engaged with the official mentoring scheme because by the time I learned about it, I had completed an overseas trip and built relationships with a number of different people I considered to be mentors to me. With this in mind, I did not feel the need to engage in an official mentor relationship. I imagine the same was true for several of my contemporaries.

Other responses mentioned that although they were aware of mentoring and its existence, they did not truly understand it and its benefits to both parties (participants #10, #62). Participants #10 and #5 stated that roadshows should be completed specifically on mentoring to explain the benefits to those associated with mentoring. Participant #40 stated they felt it is "quite challenging communicating the potential benefits of mentoring to those that could use it, getting buy-in". Another participant (#2) was "unaware of the existence of the mentoring scheme completely".

During our interview, General McGuinness stated that the Standing Committee on Coaching and Mentoring emphasised the importance of advertising mentoring within the DF, using the new 'Connect App' as a potential vehicle to promote it further and admitted that it could be utilised more for mentoring-specific purposes. General McGuinness also stressed the importance of running formal and informal mentoring programmes concurrently in the organisation, allowing the mentee to benefit from both.

Participant #65 believes that "the biggest challenge is the fear of the unknown and perceived opinion personnel will place on someone seeking mentorship". One of the major challenges identified in this has been advertising mentoring for all ranks and attempting to explain its benefits; participant #31 recommends conducting roadshows and workshops on mentoring specifically. Another participant (#65) stated that within their CIS (Communications and Information Systems) Corps, they think "there is a good opportunity for a mentor/understudy program for the likes of projects or big contracts in the CIS Corps". It is clear from the research findings that there is a gap in the effective advertising of the mentoring scheme but, most acutely, the understanding of mentoring in terms of its benefits to both mentor and mentee. This aligns with Long (1997), who details the difficulty of understanding mentoring schemes in her research.

Figure 3.4 Awareness of Mentoring Programmes in the DF



4.5.1 Benefits to mentor and mentee

During her interview, Ms Orla Farrell emphasised the significant advantages of the 'NEXT-GEN' mentoring program at Musgrave Ireland. This program connects members of their organisation based on age and has proven to be a mutually beneficial arrangement. While the mentees benefit from valuable insights and guidance, the mentors also profit from gaining fresh perspectives and enhancing their digital knowledge and language skills. Commandant (ret'd) Jim Gavin, who managed the Dublin Senior Footballers from 2013 until 2019, recalled organising the squad based on their experience level. He stated that he paired a younger player with a more experienced one, and on reflection, he admits it was a form of mentoring, although he did not recognise it as such at the time. The respondents to the survey varied in age from sixty to nineteen; the potential for closing the generational gap with reverse mentoring is promising. One potential challenge associated with this form of mentoring in the military was identified during the survey when some participants (#32, #45) mentioned that rank may be an obstacle to establishing an open and mutually beneficial mentoring relationship.

Reverse mentoring is more than just about seniors acquiring tech skills; it involves gaining fresh perspectives, challenging norms, and understanding the lived experiences of younger generations within the DF. Group Captain (ret'd) Debs Wright states that:

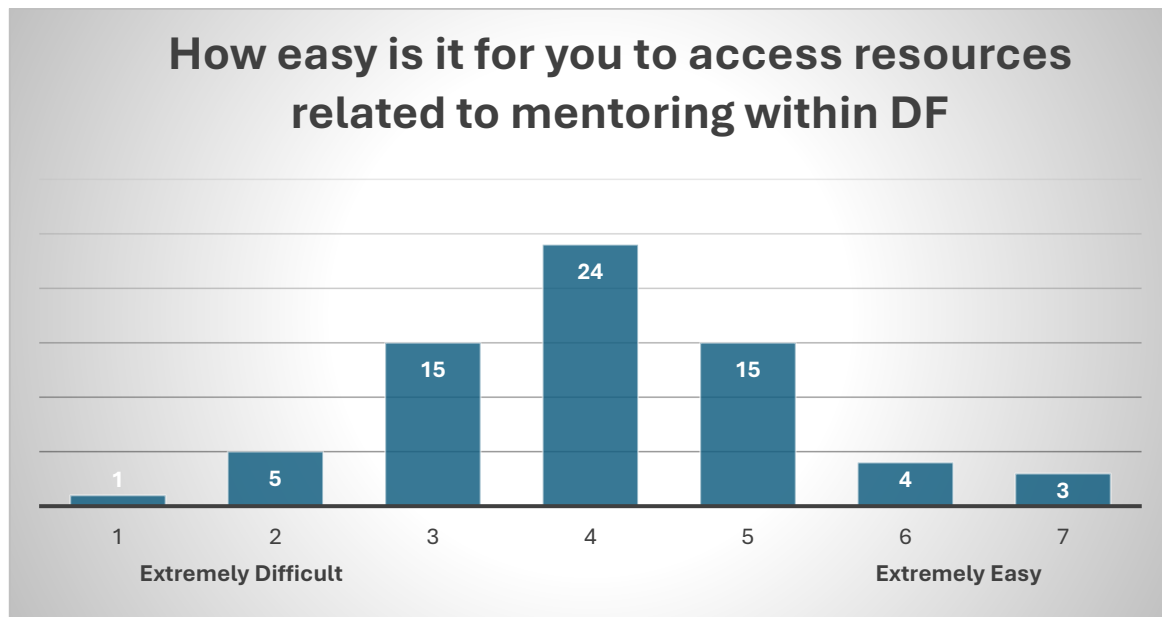
In the last few years of my regular service it was a hugely positive experience. I always felt guilty because I gained so much from it as a mentor, and I just loved that line of work.

Satterly et al. (2018) suggest that inexperienced personnel can guide seniors. During his interview, Jim Gavin agreed that reverse mentoring occurred when he organised older and younger players together. From his observation, the older players learned as much as the younger players. Reverse mentoring addresses the shift in generational expectations and fosters a learning culture at all levels.

Access to Mentoring Resources

Some participants (#42, #17) pointed out that communications concerning mentoring for more junior ranks have been poor; however, they acknowledged that recent developments such as the 'Connect App' have improved this aspect of the internal communications process. However, only ten percent of respondents stated that it was easy to access mentoring resources. This clearly indicates that we need to do more to ensure that all members of the DF, not just those in formal mentoring education programmes, have easy and comprehensive access to resources such as the Libby library application.

Figure 3.5 Ease of access to mentoring resources



Theme 2: Challenges for Mentoring in the Defence Forces

Transient nature of a career in the Defence Forces

Brigadier General McGuinness explained that when he was a junior officer in the 1980s, he was 'mentored by multiple Captains in an organic way'. The DF currently has a total number of approximately 7,500 personnel of a recommended strength of 9,500. As a result, General McGuinness explained that the pivotal ranks (Captains and Sergeants) where these 'organic' mentoring relationships used to take place are now sadly not. He alluded that due to this informal mentoring not occurring organically, DF leadership decided to develop the formalised mentoring scheme. Participant #17 states, "The personnel turnover is quite high, and Officers are only in a unit for 18 months to 2 years, making it difficult to maintain the mentor-mentee relationship". Figure 3.7 displays the engagement level with mentoring within the DF. The survey revealed that 68 percent of members surveyed had never been mentored or acted as a mentor in the formal DF scheme.

Major General Maureen O'Brien, DSM (Distinguished Service Medal), retired from the DF in October 2023 after forty-two years of service. She paved the way for female members of the DF, and her retirement sheds light on the loss of valuable experience from the organisation, especially regarding her journey as a female progressing in her career during the eighties and nineties. The Association of Retired Commission Officers (ARCO) recognised the need for a mentoring scheme and established one, but engagement has been slow due

to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ARCO-led mentoring scheme has significant potential to address the issues highlighted below, particularly the challenge of confusing sponsorship with mentoring. Retired senior officers can mentor serving personnel without any conflict of interest or threat of straying into sponsorship. This scheme can provide clearer guidance and ensure that other forms of support do not dilute the intent of mentoring when implemented and supported.

Figure 3.6 Transient nature of a career in the Defence Forces

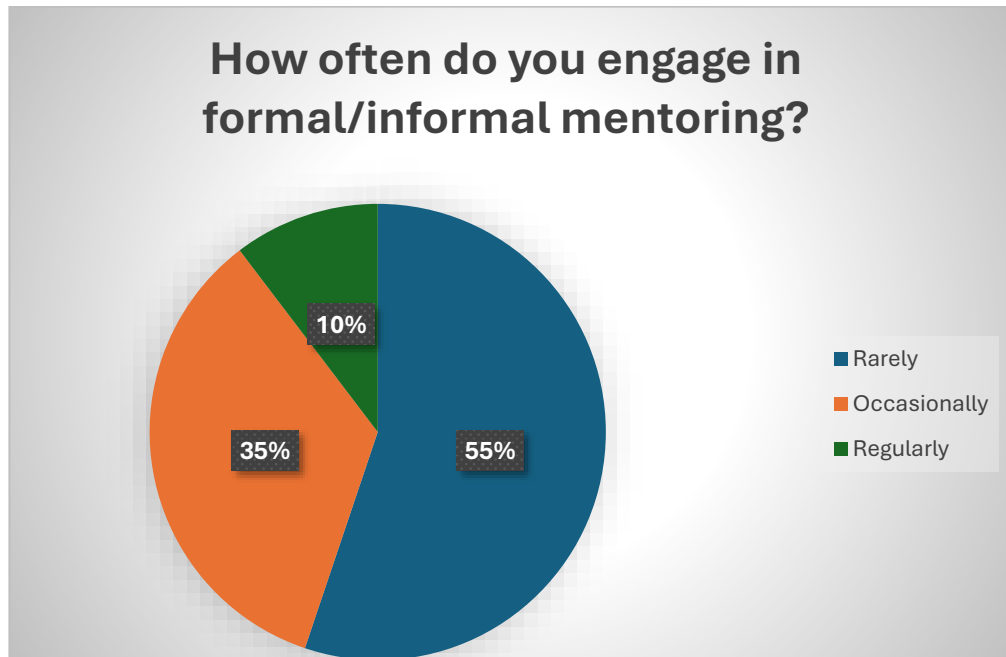
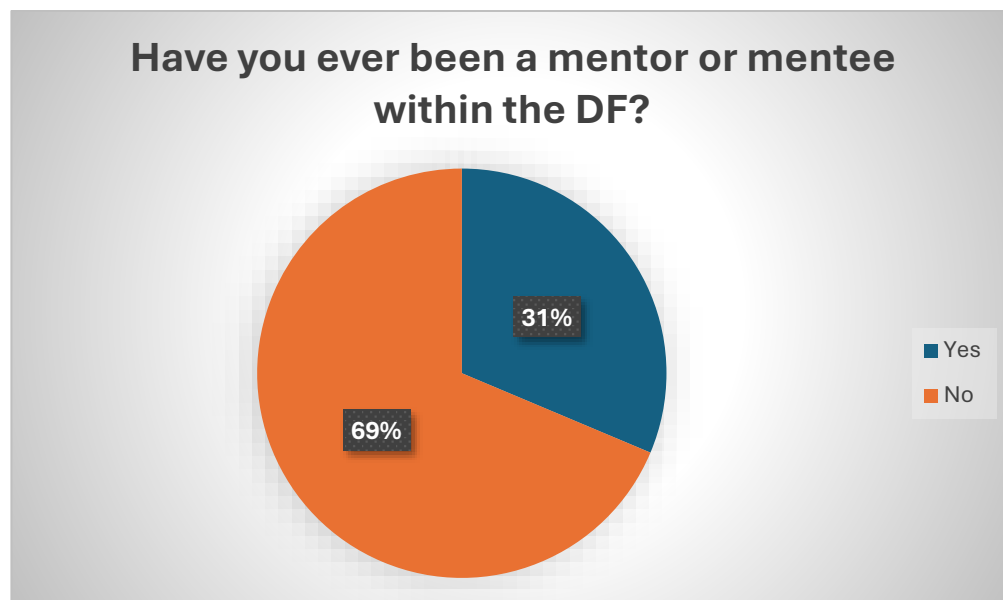


Figure 3.7 Engagement with DF Mentoring



Suitability of Mentor/Mentee

Orla Farrell's interview highlighted the importance of mentor-mentee suitability in organisations and its importance for the DF. She shared her experience of having two influential mentors who were informally matched without a formal process. However, she also highlighted the rigorous monitoring, assessing, and evaluating of mentoring relationships

in Musgrave Ireland to ensure their appropriateness and efficiency. Brigadier General McGuinness underscores the need to carefully select mentors, as not all volunteers may be suitable. While Hallam et al. (2012) argue that the matching process does not involve the mentor or mentee, the author believes there may be better practices with the generational shift in organisations than this traditional formal matching approach. As Xu and Hickey (2021) propose, flash or one-time mentoring allows personnel to learn job-related skills, gain cross-speciality knowledge, explore diverse career paths, and build robust networks.

Major General O'Brien's interview provided valuable insights into the world of mentoring. She shared her first mentoring experience, where she was assigned a mentor unfamiliar with his responsibilities and lacking proper training. Conversely, she described a highly beneficial mentoring experience through her involvement in a Women's Forum. The forum, consisting of individuals from diverse backgrounds, naturally fostered mentoring relationships within the group. She expressed that she gained a wealth of knowledge simply "through osmosis," a term also used by participant #42 when describing their experience of mentoring by Officers within their unit. The findings in the section seem to point to successful informal matches and mentoring without a formal structure being enforced.

Time Constraints for Mentoring

Atkinson and Mitchell (2008) identified time constraints as a major challenge for mentoring. Several participants (#43, #61) identified a significant theme in the survey —finding enough time for mentoring. This issue appears to arise from a combination of factors, including understaffing and a work culture that does not place a high value on mentoring or provide the necessary conditions for effective mentoring to occur. To tackle this challenge, it is recommended that measures be taken to reduce workload pressure and ensure that mentoring is fully incorporated into the expected workload of DF personnel. The survey revealed that more time needed to be allocated for mentoring. Coupled with this challenge is the transient nature of the DF career and the requirements to move frequently between appointments and locations. Participant #22 stated that they:

Have been engaged in mentoring as a mentee and mentor for 12 years with varying degrees of success. I find that because people move so much, it's nearly impossible to tie each other down for meetings.

The Dark Side of Mentoring

Brigadier General McGuinness acknowledges a potentially critical issue: the potential "dark side" of mentoring within the DF. While he has not witnessed this first hand within the DF, a civilian case he shared showcases the disastrous consequences when trust in a mentoring relationship breaks down. This concern is further amplified by participants #6 and #18 in the survey, who highlighted how mentoring can unintentionally veer into sponsorship territory. Group Captain Wright (retd) stated, "One of the reasons I avoided being mentored when I was junior was that within my specialisation, she saw mentoring as one step away from nepotism". General McGuinness strengthens this point by emphasising the importance of keeping mentoring and sponsorship distinct. This aligns with Carter (2011) (refer to Part One), highlighting this crucial difference, especially for female personnel who require sponsorship opportunities. General McGuinness acknowledges the challenge of maintaining this distinction within a close-knit organisation like the DF. However, he emphasises the critical need for transparency. Sponsorship, he argues, is not inherently negative. However, for

mentoring to reach its full potential and cultivate trust, all parties involved must be clear about the nature of the relationship from the outset.

As discussed in Part One, Lane-Washington and Wilson-Jones (2010) argue that mentoring does not support women's career development to the same extent as men's. The Commission on Defence Forces Detailed Implementation Plan (2023:9) has made several recommendations for the organisation to complete by the end of 2024. Among these is the establishment of a 'Female Mentoring Programme'. Based on the author's interpretation, this programme will be run independently. Group Captain Wright (ret'd) contends "that women are over-mentored and under-championed". The author argues there is no need for a separate mentoring scheme for women as it can be effectively carried out within the current DF mentoring scheme. Mentoring can be successful as a career development tool when the organisation invests in both the process and the assets of mentoring and when the mentors and mentees receive the support and resources they need (Neale, 2021).

Theme 3: Conditions for Success

Cultivating a culture that promotes employee development is crucial for facilitating high-quality learning experiences and fostering growth (Zachary, 2012). For a mentoring programme to be enhanced and sustained, the conditions and the culture within the DF must be appropriate to enable it. Major General O'Brien contended that getting advice and guidance from her male superiors was difficult when she was a young officer. The advice given to her was largely unhelpful and misguided, as she felt it was leading her down a path that would not serve her well in terms of her professional development and career progression. She was confident in her ability to make informed decisions about her career, and she knew that following advice that did not align with her goals and aspirations would only hold her back. In short, she knew the best course of action was to trust her instincts and make choices to help her achieve her full potential. In contrast, Orla Farrell remembers how her mentors would encourage her to take on more challenging roles even when she doubted she could do them herself. Group Captain Wright (ret'd) added to this point when she stated that her mentor: "instilled in me this bit of a sense of just give it a go, and not be too worried about rejection."

Some participants, specifically #22, #23 and #33, pointed out a major issue in mentoring in the DF. They noted inadequate spaces for mentoring sessions within barracks or units. The current division of recreational facilities based on rank limits the chances for personnel of different ranks to interact in a more informal setting. This physical separation likely reinforces a sense of hierarchy that can hinder open communication, a point further emphasised by Brigadier General McGuinness. He acknowledged the power dynamics inherent in military structures and how a mentor in the direct chain of command might not be the most suitable fit. Research by Hieker (2020) and Ragins & Kram (2007) supports this notion, suggesting that mentors outside the direct chain of command can foster more open and fulfilling mentoring relationships. Group Captain Wright (ret'd) contends that:

I personally think that because of the nature of mentoring that creates a power dynamic, which is not necessarily helpful for the women, because actually the power dynamic becomes about the woman being in a more subservient position being mentored.

Participant #44 contends that:

It is difficult to have an effective scheme in such a small organisation as many of the mentors/mentees will have been in the same chain of command or may be in the same command chain in the future.

In 2021, the Association of Retired Commissioned Officers (ARCO) implemented a new programme in collaboration with the DF, reinforcing their motto of 'Camaraderie Through Service'. During his interview, McGuinness highlighted the element of power that is associated with rank in a military organisation and admits that it is a barrier to open mentoring relations; Participant #65 supports this point by stating that there is a “conflict of interest of the ranks and the willingness to engage with a more senior rank”. This expanded role aims to mentor serving officers and could address some of the challenges related to power dynamics.

Recognition and Support

Neale (2021) identifies a significant challenge mentoring programs face - the tendency for organisations and their leaders to view mentoring as a panacea for all their issues. Neale draws on her experience in running such programs to note that people often fail to recognise the true value of something offered to them for free. Participants #32 and #12 echoed this sentiment, pointing out the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation given to individuals who take on the roles of mentors or mentees within the organisation. This lack of recognition could potentially discourage program participation. However, participant #60 suggested a possible solution by including recognition of mentoring contributions in annual performance reviews, which could enhance the attractiveness of both mentor and mentee roles. Neale (2021) underscores the importance of fully integrating mentoring with all development initiatives.

Mentoring as part of Professional Development

Orla Farrell explained that within Musgrave Ireland, mentoring is included in the induction briefs given to all members of their graduate programme. Farrell contends that this inculcates mentoring at the embryonic stage of a person's career. She explained how they have a formal structure; however, it does not exclude informal, organic mentoring relationships from occurring and tick a box for their own benefit, not the mentee's. Participant #44 stated that:

I think it can be a very powerful development tool for our personnel at all levels. It allows for frank and personal conversations that help our service members identify their perceived weaknesses and develop medium—and long-term goals.

Figure 4.8 supports this, showing that only 7.9 percent of participants felt mentoring had "significantly" contributed to their professional development. This aligns with Participant #31's observation that:

The focus of mentorship tends to be on headlines and issues rather than on day-to-day and practical mentoring. This is a symptom of having HQs fully staffed and effectively having spare/free personnel time to get involved in projects.

Colonel Kajanmaa of the Finnish Defence Forces acknowledged the role of mentoring during this professional development; however, for him, it was an informal mentoring interaction as the Finnish Defence Forces have no formal structure in place. He stated that:

The first one was my platoon leader during my conscription—he advised me to join and apply to the military academy. In his career, the same officer was later chief of personnel and supported me again (for example, when I deployed overseas).

Group Captain Wright (ret'd) recalls one of her mentors and his impact on her career:

I was informally mentored. [My mentors] drive, determination, and work ethic were absolutely phenomenal. But he was also a brilliant leader, and I used to see how he would connect with people and talk to them, somehow recognising the importance of investing in his own career while doing that in the service of others in a way that I've never seen since but which I found really quite inspiring.

Figure 3.8 Contribution of mentoring to professional development



Contemporary Mentoring Methods

As outlined in Part One, Saxena (2023) suggests the current generation, commonly referred to as 'zoomers' or 'iGen', is reshaping the workforce by advocating for innovative and disruptive career development and management practices. This shift in demand is not fleeting, Saxena (2023) contends, but rather a fundamental change in how organisations approach career growth. The mentoring survey results, which covered various age groups, and the insights from the semi-structured interviews all point to the same conclusion: the Irish DF must adapt to these evolving demands by implementing contemporary mentoring methods that enhance the overall experience for its personnel.

E-Mentoring

Brigadier General McGuinness shared his experience of an electronic mentoring relationship with a mentee based in Dubai. He described the relationship as very fulfilling for both parties involved. This aligns with Chong et al.'s (2020) contention that e-mentoring relationships can be established regardless of time and location. The development of electronic platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet and other methods has enabled a richer, more immersive e-mentoring interaction than previously available. However, participant #14 notes that mentoring relationships can be difficult to sustain due to the transient nature of DF careers. E-mentoring may help mitigate this challenge, as participant #32 argues that mentors should still commit to an agreed-upon period of time with their mentees, even if it is online. Colonel Kajanmaa shared a personal anecdote about a US War College classmate who continued to mentor a junior officer despite being moved thousands of miles away from his original base. The importance of e-mentoring as a contemporary tool is explained by Group Captain Wright (ret'd) when she stated:

It's just opened the breadth of who you can mentor again....I don't think I would have mentored somebody in the Navy because I just wasn't at that time anywhere near Navy bases. So that was brilliant to be able to do that by virtual means.

Flash Mentoring

During the interview with Brigadier General McGuinness, flash mentoring was discussed. As posited by Saxena (2023) and explained in the literature review, this innovative approach can revolutionise how we approach mentoring. The idea intrigued General McGuinness, having previously encountered a similar concept under a different name. He referred to it as a "chemistry check", where mentors and mentees would evaluate their initial rapport with each other. This could help ensure a better mentoring match and potentially reduce issues later in the relationship. In today's fast-paced workplace, with multiple demands and limited time, mentoring can often become a low priority (Landry & Lewiss, 2020).

The benefits of flash mentoring are undeniable. It can give individuals the support and guidance they need to achieve their goals and reach their full potential. Hence, flash mentoring can potentially revolutionise how mentoring is conducted (Saxena, 2023). Individuals can receive the support they need without a significant time commitment by allowing quick, targeted mentoring sessions. This was further highlighted in the survey, where Participant #12 explained their struggle with limited time for mentoring due to multiple job responsibilities. In the Irish DF context, implementing flash mentoring could improve outcomes, allowing personnel to conduct mentoring more efficiently.

Landry and Lewiss (2020) explain how mentors should use a more 'fuel efficient' approach to conserving the mentor's energy without compromising the quality of the relationship. Drawing on the analogy of a 'time budget', they propose a system where the mentor shares their available time with a mentee; this, they argue, makes the relationship more 'fuel efficient.' The onus is then put onto the mentee to conduct some preparatory work before engaging with the mentor, cognisant of their restricted time with their mentor. Landry and Lewiss (2020) argue that this creates independence and confidence for mentees to problem-solve themselves first. Within the Irish DF context, personnel are being asked to do more with less in terms of tasks and responsibilities. Becoming more 'fuel efficient' within our

mentoring relationships could assist with improving outcomes. These approaches are not merely trendy; they address specific challenges and changing needs of the DF workforce. Implementation should be considered strategically, aligning with the DF's culture and operational requirements. Participant #22 suggests that:

Mentees should take the lead, figure out who they would like to work with and allow the process to be much more informal. In my experience, this has worked much better and yielded far greater results both as a mentor and mentee.

Implications

The following are some of these implications regarding the previously identified themes. Experienced personnel are leaving the DF in significant numbers; this loss of institutional memory results in the loss of valuable knowledge and prevents lessons learned from being effectively transferred; this aligns with Leonard (2019), where she implores organisations to ensure knowledge is transferred from retiring personnel to serving personnel. The transient nature of a DF career has been covered extensively in this Part; one direct result and implication of this factor is a hindered succession plan, particularly with high-potential individuals who could have been mentored effectively and encouraged to stay within the DF. Jim Gavin recalls that his application to leave was accepted, and no senior member or peer was present to advise him otherwise.

Mentoring can assist with building trust between individuals within their unit (Johnson et al., 2007); if this key tool is not functioning correctly, relationships can become fractured, and the cohesion of the military unit can suffer, which is a key requirement for military units operating in stressful operating environments. In turn, the individual loses a sense of belonging within their unit and the wider DF, which risks disengagement. Retaining personnel, particularly highly skilled individuals, is a major issue for the DF. Personnel of all ranks and corps may become disillusioned with the lack of continuity and development opportunities, leading to skill loss and a reputational loss for the DF within a highly competitive labour market.

Mentoring is not penetrating the DF workforce as much as it should. The survey revealed that only 31 percent of the participants had been mentors or mentees. There is a possibility, of course, that these personnel could have been informally mentored, but unless they understand what mentoring is and the benefits of the scheme, how would they know they have been involved in the process? The DF champion innovation, and the Chief of Staff holds annual awards for personnel with the best innovative ideas or designs. Without an open exchange of diverse and innovative thinking, which mentoring fosters, the organisation may become stagnant, hindering its adaptability to modern challenges. Mentoring also connects different perspectives, as General O'Brien explained in her interview, where she recalled being mentored by a wide and diverse cohort of high-achieving female leaders. Group Captain Wright (ret'd) added to this point when she recalled when she was able to mentor a Naval colleague stationed a great distance from her because of E-Mentoring, aligning with Starr's (2021) contention that technology has become an enabler for mentoring. These factors set the conditions to assist the DF in producing leaders of 'character and competence' as explained in the DF Leadership Doctrine (2022).

Conclusion

The Part highlights the need to move beyond traditional, structured mentoring approaches within the Irish DF. While formal programs offer structure and familiarity, military service, with its fast-paced and demanding nature, often creates logistical challenges and mismatched mentoring relationships. The advertisement and promotion of mentoring in the DF appear satisfactory from a superficial viewpoint. However, delving deeper, the message conveyed and understanding of that message seems less clear. The survey of serving personnel (stakeholder) and their perceptions of the current mentoring scheme presented in this part highlights these findings and highlight that the DF stated objectives for its mentoring policy have not been achieved.

This Part offers contemporary mentoring practices that could mitigate some of the challenges faced by the Irish DF. Flash mentoring, in particular, is promising as it provides focused, targeted support without requiring extensive time commitment. This aligns with the preference for a more informal, mentee-driven process, which fosters greater ownership and relevance and matches the demand (by the younger generation) for innovative and disruptive development tools. The DF could benefit from embracing a more flexible, dynamic mentoring model. By offering a mix of formal and informal options, the organisation could better address the diverse needs of its personnel. Flash mentoring and similar approaches deserve deeper exploration, as they can empower mentees, increase the impact of mentoring, and ultimately lead to a stronger, more adaptable DF. This paper's fourth and concluding Part will culminate the study's findings and provide a conclusive response to the research question. In this section, recommendations will be put forth for DF leadership's consideration, and suggestions for future research avenues will be proposed.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article aimed to answer the central research question (RQ): *What are the contemporary mentoring practices and opportunities that align with the challenges of mentoring in the Irish Defence Forces?* This RQ had four subordinate research objectives (see Section 1.2) that served to unpack the RQ identified. Parts One and Three helped identify several contemporary mentoring methods that align with and appear suitable for the Defence Forces (DF). This section presents an in-depth analysis of the results from Part Three, underscoring the potential impact or implications these findings may have on the DF and its members. Drawing upon relevant literature and these findings, actionable recommendations are provided for the DF leadership's consideration. Additionally, some strengths and limitations of the present study are explored, and avenues for future research are suggested.

Summary of Findings and Implications

Documentary Analysis

An analysis of documents revealed that mentoring is highly valued in the Defence Forces' Leadership Doctrine (2022). Moreover, as the Detailed Implementation Plan (2023) specifies, there is a need for a dedicated mentoring program for women. The Defence Forces Policy on Coaching and Mentoring 2023-2026 also states that these two development tools should be 'entwined' with the DF values. Although these documents collectively acknowledge the significance of mentoring in the DF, there are some challenges in achieving the goals of the

mentoring scheme. Failure to reach the stated DF Mentoring Policy (2023-2026) effectivity goal of 90 percent, as reported in the survey of DF personnel conducted, is a worrying result.

DF Mentoring Survey and Interviews

The DF mentoring survey was conducted on personnel from all ranks within the organisation and from all services. The study yielded an amount of quantitative and detailed qualitative data. It revealed that nearly 70 percent of DF personnel had not engaged with the mentoring scheme either as a mentor or a mentee. Interestingly, 38 percent are very aware of the scheme's existence, with only 9 percent not being aware of the scheme at all. This implies that there is adequate exposure to mentoring by the personnel of the DF; however, within the survey, respondents divulged that whilst they were aware of the scheme, they did not understand it fully in terms of its benefits to the mentor or mentee. Based on the survey findings, this issue appears to be due to the confusion between coaching and mentoring, and personnel see the scheme as overly complicated and self-serving to people who engage with it.

Challenges to the DF mentoring scheme include time-constrained mentors, the transient nature of a DF career, lack of recognition, mismatched mentor/mentee relationships, and the power dynamics involved within a military organisation. The author believes this has resulted in a DF that does not have a culture currently conducive to mentoring that is definitionally longer-term and based on extended conversations. Organisations must create and support environments that allow individuals to showcase their strengths and seek out potential mentors in areas requiring guidance. Such environments can take various forms, including Saxena's (2023) flash mentoring concept. Other environments can include military sporting teams and after-work social gatherings. Sports and social events enable unit members to share ideas and get to know each other better. Jim Gavin agreed with this assertion and supported the contention that much of the support happens outside the work environment.

Summary Reflection

The author contends that the DF is not sufficiently supporting the mentoring scheme by providing safe spaces, generationally appropriate methods or allocating sufficient time for mentoring. These are all elements that the DF mentoring policy explicitly states that the chain of command should encourage. Generational shifts have caused mentoring methods to be redesigned and reimagined. Fuelled by the demand for disruptive career development tools, the DF must close the gap between these contemporary best practice methods and current, more traditional models, which do not appear to be working. Mentoring is set apart from coaching by the level of engagement and the relationship duration. Therefore, it is essential to integrate these approaches to ensure the long-term development of the military professional. Engaging in acquiring knowledge in a chosen field can transform one's perspective and enhance one's original stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Sol & Heng, 2022).

Recommendations

One of the aims of this study was to provide recommendations to DF leadership to mitigate the challenges faced by mentoring in the DF. The following are the recommendations derived from primary research to identify the opportunities which may assist in overcoming and mitigating the evident challenges of the DF Mentoring Scheme. These recommendations are divided into short, medium and long-term recommendations.

Short term

- Promotion and Outreach: Increase awareness through roadshows, increased usage of the Connect App for mentoring, career course integration, showcasing successful mentor-mentee pairings, and focusing on the understanding of the benefits of mentoring.

Medium Term

- Formal and Informal Tracks: Offer structured formal programs and options for less-formal mentoring relationships based on specific needs (Group Mentoring).
- Training and Support: Provide mentorship training to designated mentors and those interested in informally guiding colleagues.
- Focus on Accessibility: Provide diverse mentor options (rank, gender, expertise, corps specific) and explore utilising contemporary mentoring methods (E-mentoring, flash mentoring, group mentoring and designated mentoring spaces).
- Incentivise Participation: Investigate rewards for mentors and mentees, such as recognition through annual appraisals, dedicated mentoring time, or connecting participation to professional development.

Long Term

- Evaluate: Conduct regular surveys on the mentoring scheme to evaluate its effectiveness, aiming to achieve the policy's stated aim. As Saxena (2023) explained (See Figure 1.1), the results of this evaluation should be fed back into the mentoring scheme's design process.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

This study was enriched in three ways. The first was the active participation of members of the Irish DF, who represented every rank and generation serving in the organisation. Second, the open sharing of experience and the honest opinions of Major General (ret'd) Maureen O'Brien, Brigadier General Brendan McGuinness, Colonel Petteri Kajanmaa, Commandant (ret'd) Jim Gavin, Group Captain (ret'd) Debs Wright and Ms Orla Farrell were invaluable. Third, and lastly, the use of the extant literature on organisational mentoring helped provide valuable insights into contemporary mentoring practices. These insights were supplemented by the pleasantly surprising level of response to the mentoring questionnaire from DF members. Their response displayed the genuine interest in (and perhaps embrace of) the research topic.

There are some limitations in this study. Time was one limitation. Additional time would have allowed a deeper study of the subject. That said, the rich feedback from the various sources helped mitigate this limitation. This includes the difficulty of examining a (mentoring) scheme as an insider. The author was researching within their own organisation, and while great care was taken to remain objective, it is possible to let biases and preunderstandings affect the interpretation of the data. This risk was mitigated by the use of rigour in the research process and by regular review with the support of a research mentor.

Further Research

This research represents a time-constrained review of the DF mentoring scheme. Mindful of the limitations of the research, implementing the recommendations requires a more focused investigation into members' attitudes towards the DF mentoring scheme. Specifically, an

understanding of the influence and efficacy of mentoring as a tool for retention in the DF and an examination of those members who have left the organisation for varied reasons. Such an understanding was outside the time and scope of this research.

Closing Remarks

The research findings indicate that the DF are committed to achieving excellence in mentoring. However, temporal challenges such as the transient nature of a DF career, poor resourcing, a poor understanding of the benefits of mentoring and a culture not conducive to mentoring all appear to impede otherwise passionate and motivated mentors and mentees from achieving this goal. Despite the potential challenges, the study suggests that the opportunities for mentoring in the DF far outweigh these challenges, particularly with the advent of contemporary mentoring methods and modern technologies.

In closing, as part of my mentor training, I was encouraged to ask the mentee what success looked like for them in their career. I now ask the same question of the DF Mentoring Scheme. What might success look like for DF Mentoring? As a staunch advocate for mentoring within the military, I have examined the perceptions of DF personnel of the scheme. I have found opportunities in both military and civilian environments that could help address the challenges the DF faces in implementing its mentoring program. These opportunities can close the significant gaps in understanding and integrate mentoring into professional development initiatives. This study provides an actionable way ahead to address the DF's mentoring challenges and improve staff outcomes such as retention and leadership development.

Please note that the views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author 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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