

Connecting and Relating: HRD Perspectives on Developmental Relationships

Chapter Title: Assessing the impact of developmental relationships in a humanitarian context

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Abstract

We explore how developmental relationships in the context of human resource development (HRD) may be evaluated to assess impact within a humanitarian organizational setting. We examine the purpose, process, and perspectives of impact evaluation within one-to-one learning interventions, focusing on mentoring. The chapter highlights the importance of developmental relationships and establishing the purpose, specific to the organizational objectives as the first step to undertaking meaningful evaluation. Next, we present the case study, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which provides medical assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from healthcare. The MSF Operational Centre Brussels mentoring program, one of the older and most established mentoring programs in MSF was the basis for the two-year longitudinal mentoring impact evaluation project. Overall, the results suggest that the mentoring program is having a significant impact on mentees *and* mentors in supporting their personal and professional development. The mentoring relationship addresses core leadership and management competencies, also supporting the well-being of participants, reducing stress, and helping to prevent burnout. The case illustrates mentoring program evaluation in practice, sharing the approach, results, and key learning from the participants' experiences. Finally, we explore the importance of using a robust methodological approach to planning and implementing an impact evaluation study and highlight a number of practical considerations to assist those embarking on impact evaluation. This study provides a case research study contribution, shining a light on the application of multiple evaluation methods in assessing the impact of developmental relationships.

Index words: mentoring; developmental relationships; impact; humanitarian context;

Médecins Sans Frontières

Assessing the impact of developmental relationships in a humanitarian context

In this chapter, we explore how developmental relationships can be evaluated within mentoring programs, specifically drawing on a case study set in the humanitarian context. In our study, we define a developmental relationship as a growth fostering relationship between a mentor and mentee to support the mentee's personal and professional development. We explore the current literature on the evaluation of mentoring programs as well as draw on our own practitioner experience of undertaking impact evaluation studies. In the first section, we explore the research landscape in the context of impact evaluation and mentoring. The next section outlines some of the challenges individuals, teams, and organizations experience in the humanitarian sector and the critical importance of developmental relationships in supporting individuals' well-being and resilience. In the third section, we discuss a case study organization and their mentoring program followed by the description of a two-year longitudinal case study and the longer-term evaluation strategy. In the final section, we re-examine the variety of methodological approaches to undertaking program evaluation specific to evaluating developmental relationships, including the identification of practical considerations when embarking on an evaluation study.

Evaluating the impact of mentoring

Mentoring is an important form of HRD (Thurston et al., 2012) that typically involves a dyadic developmental relationship in which a more experienced mentor shares their knowledge or wisdom with the less-experienced mentee (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Wanberg et al., 2003, Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). As the field of mentoring continues to mature, it is imperative to understand the mechanism that accounts for the benefit and effectiveness of mentoring (Egan & Song, 2008). Thus, evaluations of the impact that mentoring has on learning, performance and growth, at the individual and organisational

level, through collaborative and interdependent mentor-mentee relationships (de Tormes Eby et al., 2014; Carter & Youssef-Morgan, 2019) is critical to HRD perspectives.

The primary purpose of evaluation of mentoring is to help us understand what we currently know about mentoring (Allen et al., 2008), recognize the evolution of key concepts (Allen et al., 2008; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), identify the effectiveness of mentoring programs (Gershenfeld, 2014; Underhill, 2006), and understand the landscape of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method research in mentoring (Allen et al., 2008; Chandler, Kram & Yip, 2011). Haddock-Millar's identification of critical issues in mentoring research (2017) and Allen et al's., (2008) meta-analyses, both identify that mentoring research is predominantly characterized by quantitative, cross-sectional research designs which typically only collect data from a single source (the mentee) using a single methodology and report that, in comparison to organizational and management evaluative research, longitudinal methodological approaches in mentoring are more limited. This is significant because mentoring studies are often concerned with identifying beneficial outcomes but a single point in time of analysis provides little evidence of development over time; the primary purpose of longitudinal design is to examine changes over time which is arguably more suitable in this regard.

The importance of evaluating mentoring programs has gained greater prominence in recent years. Clutterbuck (2005) highlights that effective measurement in mentoring must be valued by all parties as helpful, relatively unobtrusive, timely, and easy to apply. This can be achieved by integrating impact evaluation within the initial program design process and continually updating to ensure that both processes and output are measured at the program and relationship level. In 2016, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council launched the International Standards for Mentoring and Coaching Programmes (ISMCP), an independent accreditation awarded to organizations designing, delivering, and evaluating

mentoring and/or coaching programs either ‘in-house’ or externally, which identified ‘Effective Measure and Review’ as one of the core standards. The mentoring literature further highlights the use of both qualitative and quantitative evaluation and multiple sources of data and/or involving multiple data-collection points over time as most effective for evaluating mentoring (Chandler et al., 2011; Gentry et al., 2008; Higgins et al., 2010; Shen, 2010; Singh et al., 2009a, 2009b).

Nonetheless, despite the growing number of survey reports that highlight the importance of this aspect of mentoring program design and management, measurement and evaluation continue to be one of the most challenging areas. From an impact measurement perspective, the mentoring literature and empirical studies have been criticized for the narrow focus on findings and outcomes (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). The character and outcomes of the relationship between mentors and mentees are shaped by a combination of three factors: ‘supply-side’ (the mentor); ‘demand-side (the mentee) and ‘contextual’ (e.g., culture, economic environment, infrastructure, institution, and geography). Arguably, less attention is paid to understanding the causal explanations. Exploring the connectedness between the ontogenic system (mentees’ internal systems including personality and behaviors), microsystem (mentees’ work-related organizational system) and macrosystem (wider environmental system) can enhance the understanding of the ecological perspectives about the impact of mentoring (Chandler et al., 2011).

Multidimensional outcomes are helpful in determining construct validity and relevance (Janssen et al., 2015; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). The indications are that the most effective and insightful forms of evaluation incorporate case studies and in-depth qualitative approaches, which can assess mentoring processes and their ‘softer’ impacts on confidence-building (Wood et al., 2012). A single data collection point is a deeply inadequate method to approach the evaluation of mentoring relationships, whereas longitudinal methods facilitate

analysis over time (Cull, 2006). Moreover, there appears to be a general gap in understanding the complexities of the developmental relationship between a mentor and a mentee, and research is needed that quantifies the benefits, effectiveness, and overall impact of mentoring (Wanberg et al., 2003; Egan & Song 2008; Thurston et al., 2012). In establishing the effectiveness of mentors, mentees, and the mentoring relationship, researchers and authors so far appear to have taken an approach that assumes a sequential and linear developmental pathway (Sullivan, 2000). However, it is important to note that in most situations, mentoring programs operate within a complex, adaptive system where both internal organizational dynamical systems as well as external environmental factors will impact on behaviors, both individual and group, which in turn will affect the interaction between mentors and mentees (Haddock-Millar, 2017; Sanyal, 2017). Also, organizational antecedents such as organizational culture and structure will have an effect on the mentoring program (Hegstad & Wentling, 2005).

Similarly, current approaches to mentoring success and outcomes do not appear to consider societal factors such as individual lifestyles or life histories and the impact this can have on the relationship. Thus, a mentor's or mentee's family circumstances, beliefs, religious practice, economic status are often not considered to understand the mentor-mentee relationship development. Assessment of such comparative or multiple factors, can be effective in building a robust analysis of mentoring outcomes (Sanyal & Rigby, 2017). Evaluating the relationship through adopting a theoretical framework at each stage of the mentoring program (initiation, goals, and action plans; cultivating the relationship; evaluating the relationship) helps to comprehensively elicit attitudinal factors that enable mentees and mentors to consider how the value of the program aligns with anticipated outcomes, and optimally, with the goals set earlier in the process as influenced by broader societal and contextual factors (Scerri et al., 2020). Additionally, Kunaka and Moos (2019)

have further shown that phases of mentoring have a positive relationship with skills transfer outcomes and entrepreneur resilience outcomes, respectively, but not with knowledge transfer outcomes and business outcomes. This suggests that the respondents should make sure that they continue through all phases of long-term mentoring relationships and highlight the need for longitudinal impact evaluation.

In summary, it is important to undertake the evaluation of developmental relationships using a robust methodological approach. A holistic examination and evaluation of ongoing mentoring programs need to encompass the views of all the stakeholders involved: the mentees, mentors; program facilitators, and those with overall strategic oversight for the programs. Moreover, an important aspect of program evaluation is to understand how these dynamic relationships develop over time, throughout the program, and beyond its completion. Thus, a longitudinal methodological approach, integrated within the initial program design is highly recommended to capture the multidimensional mentoring outcomes. Our case study, presented below, employs a longitudinal and mixed-method approach to highlight the multi-faceted impact of mentoring for the individuals and organizations involved in the process.

HRD within the humanitarian sector

The international humanitarian sector comprises a network of governmental and non-governmental organizations that are engaged at a global and/or local scale in providing humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, or disasters. It employs more than 250,000 aid workers worldwide (James, 2016), many of whom work in highly volatile and high-risk environments.

Over the last 20 years, there has been increased recognition that humanitarian workers are subject to stressors that can negatively impact on mental health if individuals are not effectively supported.

In the short term, continued exposure to stressors can result in anxiety and depression; in the long term, without sufficient support, exposure to stressors can result in burnout. Stressors include, amongst others, difficult living conditions, increasing work demands and the 24/7 cycle, work conditions, team dysfunction, and conflict. There are clear links to the retention and high turnover rates associated with the sector. These issues can be addressed in several ways, such as: enabling humanitarian workers to stay connected with the personal networks through the telephone or Internet for personal communications, encouraging workers to try and separate work and social time, actively engaging in social activities, limiting work hours and providing conflict resolution support in teams. Our interest in this chapter is in connection to meaningful and supportive relationships. Humanitarian workers frequently lack the developmental networks (i.e., networks of multiple developmental relationships; Yip & Kram, 2017) that others in less demanding environments access. The support of a mentor to a newly appointed humanitarian worker can provide much needed professional friendship, reassurance, and comfort, where more experienced mentors share their knowledge or wisdom with the less experienced mentee (Kram, 1985; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Wanberg et al., 2003, Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).

MSF and mentoring: Case Study Background

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), referred to in English as Doctors Without Borders, is an international humanitarian medical non-governmental organization. Staff work in extraordinary circumstances within varying contexts, performing functions within roles, which often stretch them personally and professionally. The environment can be physically and psychologically demanding due to different institutional structures, economic and political instability, ethnic, and religious rivalries, political complexities, insecurity, and high-risk situations. Optimizing performance in any national, regional, or organizational context can often be an elusive ideal. In the humanitarian environment, workers are particularly

disposed to a number of challenges and barriers to optimizing performance including the professionalization of the humanitarian sector, aligning individual and organizational values with the local context and culture, retention, sustaining energy, and coping in highly pressurized environments, maintaining physical and mental health, including resilience, stress, and burnout.

With high turnover and missions ranging an average of six to twelve months, managers often not only want but also need to work on their competencies while they are actively in the role to meet the demands placed on them. Mentoring within the parameters of a formal program, allows MSF as an organization, to retain knowledge and reinforce desired managerial traits in the staff through mutual growth and learning. Consequently, the professional development of the mentee and their personal journey within the context of their MSF mission is the primary focus of the mentoring relationships of all mentoring programs in MSF.

Mentors are usually experienced in the role the mentee is presently in and may or may not have experience in the same context (country, type of mission/intervention). Whilst the focus on the relationship is not on the mentor sharing their experiences, this information is readily accessible should the mentee ask for it. Mentors are independent of the management line of the mentee and adhere to non-interference with operations. This means that mentors guide mentees in their analysis of the situations they face in their work, but the clear responsibility for decisions rests with mentees and their line managers. For mentees to make the most of this developmental support, confidentiality between the mentor and the mentee is a foundational principle. Additionally, participating in the mentoring programs is voluntary for mentees and mentors. From the mentee perspective, this means that the mentoring relationship is a chosen part of their development pathway and they themselves recognize the value in this type of professional relationship. For mentors, this means MSF is able to access

a dedicated pool of senior staff who are looking to engage in developmental relationships and commit to the programs.

MSF MCHub mentoring program impact evaluation

In September 2017, MSF Mentoring and Coaching Hub (MCHub), Oslo, Norway, commissioned a two-year impact study of how mentoring supports the personal and professional development of MSF Field Managers and contributes more broadly to the strategic priorities of the MCHub. The project began on Monday 11th September 2017 and was completed on Tuesday 5th March 2019. The intention was that the study would inform the ongoing monitoring of the MCHub's mentoring program and provide a framework and model from which other Operational Centres could implement and adapt to evaluate the impact of mentoring. There were two key outcomes. First, the research team created a mentoring impact evaluation toolkit and shared it with all Operational Centres to support the ongoing evaluation of their mentoring programs. The evaluation toolkit included four aspects related to the approaches and methods of evaluation including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and visual metaphor. The toolkit provided examples of each method and highlighted the considerations that need to be taken into account when designing and developing an evaluation approach and data collection methods. The Operational Centres agreed to trial the toolkit for at least 12 months to provide ongoing feedback. Second, the mentoring program team agreed to consider specific support interventions for mentees and mentors, including an enhanced continuing professional development program with a greater focus on psychosocial needs.

The origins of the mentoring program

In 2010, MSF Operational Centre Brussels (OCB) took the strategic decision to move towards a Human Resource Development (HRD) approach based on competencies. The main objective was to develop the competencies of individual positions within the Operations

Centres. This strategy was partly in response to one of MSF's major challenges of finding, selecting, and developing future Project Coordinators and Heads of Mission. This challenge prompted the need for developing new HR tools and programs to support these growing needs. OCB requested a review in late 2010, early 2011. From this review, it was determined that mentoring in the first six months of a new management position is associated with greater career success and progression within the organization in question. As a part of the HR Development Strategy, the mentoring pilot was initiated in mid-2011. This pilot phase continued until 2013. Initially, support was focused on two roles: first-time Field Coordinators and Heads of Mission.

In 2013, an internal evaluation of the mentoring program was conducted. The official program objectives were altered and improved in direct response to this evaluation in 2014. In addition, support was extended to a broader range of roles including: Medical Coordinator and Deputies, Project Coordinator and Deputies, Project Medical Referent and Deputies, Head of Mission and deputies, and Human Resource Coordinator and deputies. Following this, pilots were conducted for a range of positions: - Field Communications Officer and deputies, Logistics Coordinator and deputies, Personal Development Manager and deputies, Field Communications Manager and deputies, Supply Chain Coordinator and deputies and Finance Coordinator and deputies – whilst the following positions remain on hold or their status is unknown: WATSAN Coordinator and deputies, Hospital Director and deputies, Asso Coordinator and deputies and, Medical Activity Manager and deputies.

As the program grew from 2014 to 2016, the decision was made to apply for Transformational Investment Capacity (TIC) funding in late 2016. At the same time a secondary partnership was initiated between MSF Norway and Operational Centre Barcelona and Athens (OCBA) in order to share expertise and resources, and most importantly launch a

number of coaching pilots. TIC Funding was received in 2017 for a period of 3 years. At the end of 2013, beginning of 2014, the following mentoring program objectives were developed:

- Provide mentoring support to first-time coordinators, to improve and strengthen key competencies.
- Support the mentee in building his/her own resilience capacity.
- Create more space and enable more knowledge transfer inside the organization through dialogue and sharing of experience.

Approach to Mentoring

The MCHub team developed their context-specific definition of mentoring:

- It is a process of learning from a senior colleague.
- The mentor provides advice when appropriate, shares knowledge and experiences, and supports the development of the mentee using a self-discovery approach.
- The mentoring relationship accompanies the mentees while they address issues in their work environment.
- The Mentor does not “fix” issues in the project/mission; rather helps the Mentee to identify his/her own solutions and remains of the Mentee’s management line.

The focus of the mentoring support is the development of the mentee’s competencies, at the same time providing the space and time to reflect and vent. The MCHub created a visual of their approach to mentoring and shared it with both mentors and mentees prior to commencing their mentoring relationships (see Figure 17.1).

Insert Figure 17.1 here – Figure 17.1 MC Hub Mentoring Model

The *development of competencies* focuses on the role of specific competencies relevant to each mentee, typically including leadership and management-related areas. *Vent*

provides the space where mentees can be honest about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, without fear or judgment. *Reflect* provides the opportunity for mentees to step back from their role and their day-to-day responsibilities to unravel their thoughts, make sense of their experiences and generate new insights.

Methodology

The evaluation case study presented here adopted a longitudinal, mixed-methods approach over a two-year period to identify patterns and underlying relationships through close examination of the emerging data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We describe the case as MSF and the sub-unit within the MCHub mentoring program and their participants (Yin, 2017). Through this approach we were able to explore different perspectives of the mentors and mentees that were context-specific, enabling an overall impact evaluation of the mentoring program. The objective for the case is the evaluation of the nature and impact of developmental relationships within the humanitarian environment in a variety of background settings.

One key facet of longitudinal mixed-methods data generation is that it is iterative, drawing on what was learned previously to understand what has changed to tell a story over time. The evaluation team analyzed the data from quantitative surveys administered to mentoring program participants, including mentees *and* mentors, followed by in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with them. Use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods helped to form insightful corroborative explanatory evidence which filters out halo effects and negative bias. Employing multiple sources of evidence within a case-study design enhanced construct validity to provide a consistent interpretation of the concepts under investigation (Yin, 2017). Moreover, collecting data from all major stakeholders operating within the case study lent credence to the internal validity of the findings (Seale, 1999). Prior to the field research, a desk-based study was conducted which involved a review

of key journals to understand what studies had already been undertaken in the context of mentoring in the humanitarian field, which would help to inform the study and design of the surveys and interview questions.

Our study engaged participants involved in the mentoring program since the beginning of 2014. Mixed methods included an online survey for mentees and mentors, semi-structured interviews with matched mentees and mentors, in addition to non-matched participants and key stakeholders including the Programme Manager and Careers Advisors. Participants also provided visual representations as a metaphor to demonstrate the impact of mentoring. The visual metaphor was a data collection method used to engage mentors and mentees in a graphic interpretation of the impact of mentoring. Table 17.1 outlines each of the phases, data collection methods, and sample. Overall, the research team conducted 81 interviews; 45 interviews in Phase 1 from September 2017 to May 2018 and 36 in Phase 2 from September 2018 to March 2019; 14 matched pair interviews in Phase 1 and 10 matched pair interviews in Phase 2. The participants from Phase 1 were invited to take part in the data collection for Phase 2, therefore all Phase 2 participants had already undertaken either an interview and/or survey in Phase 1. All mentors and mentees that had participated in the mentoring program from 2014 onwards were invited to take part in the study. Of all eligible mentors and mentees, in Phase 1, 48% of eligible mentors, 27% of mentees participated in the survey and 52% of mentors and 18% of mentees participated in the interviews. In Phase 2, 86% of mentors from Phase 1 and 65% of mentees participated in the follow-up survey and 91% of mentors and 76% of mentees participated in the follow-up interviews. Typically, the mentees were new to their position, with some experience of MSF and another humanitarian organization, by comparison, the mentors were very experienced within MSF, having undertaken a variety of roles, within different missions and countries.

Insert Table 17.1 here - Table 17.1 Summary of the evaluation phases

The topic areas within the surveys and interviews included:

- Participant profile, background, and experience
- Entry into the mentoring program and current engagement
- Mentoring training and support received
- The mentoring relationship including purpose and relationship pragmatics
- Mentoring relationship outcomes
- Overall perceptions of the mentoring program

The team designed both the survey and interviews for the purpose of evaluating the outcomes of the mentoring relationships, in addition to the recruitment, selection, matching, training, and ongoing support. One of the most significant areas of operational impact for any organization, regardless of the context is retention and succession planning. The negative impact of staff leaving mid-appointment or at the end of an appointment not only affects the mission but the longer-term succession planning. When commissioning this evaluation, the MCHub was interested in exploring retention for both the mentoring program and MSF - e.g., mentors volunteering again to continue to mentor, mentees become mentors. In Phase 2, the positive impact of mentoring in relation to retention of mentees was clearly evident in the interview transcripts of mentees and mentors, as several mentees described that they would have left MSF had it not been for their mentor; this view was corroborated by the mentors. At the heart of the mentoring is the desire to support the personal and professional development of MSF Field managers; contribute to mobilizing their full capacity for the benefit of the organization and those MCHub seeks to assist. There is a desire to understand how mentees *and* mentors may benefit personally and professionally from the mentoring program and the degree to which there is reciprocal learning. There are some additional areas of interest, including multidimensional outcomes such as:

- To what extent has the mentoring had any operational impact?
- To what extent does mentoring enable the mentee to build his/her own resilience capacity?
- How does mentoring feed into mentees and mentor future career aspirations?
- If diversity issues were relevant on the mission, to what extent did the mentoring support address this?
- How can more space be created to enable more knowledge transfer inside the organization through dialogue and sharing of experience?

Data analysis proceeded in stages: survey data were analyzed using summary statistics, with a focus on emphasizing the differences and consistencies between the two-time points of data collection. Interviews with participants were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2012), with transcripts and visual metaphors included as evidence supporting the elaboration of key themes. Analysis of qualitative data was undertaken at both time points and mentoring relationship outcome themes were identified. This process was carried out following the first phase of the interviews. Themes in the second phase were identified and compared and contrasted with the first phase to understand the degree of similarity across both phases. The findings presented in the next section provide a consistent and reliable account of mentoring relationships, outcomes, and impact within the MSF case study.

Findings

Phase 1 Findings

The impact of the mentoring program on mentees' *and* mentors' personal and professional development was clearly evident in Phase 1, as demonstrated in the survey responses, interviews, and visual representations. First, we present the quantitative findings, followed by the qualitative findings, including the interviews and visual metaphors.

Quantitative findings

In the Phase 1 survey, mentees *and* mentors were asked to identify three areas that they found most beneficial in relation to their mentoring relationship. Mentees' top three areas included:

1. Increasing personal confidence and self-esteem (55%)
2. Developing the ability to adapt, bounce back, and cope with challenges (50%)
- 3= Being able to perform effectively in the role (45%)
- 3= Learning about personal strengths and development areas (45%)

For mentors, the top three included:

1. Developing the ability to adapt, bounce back, and cope with challenges (50%)
2. Being able to perform effectively in the role (45%)
3. Improving decision making (45%)

A key aspect of the mentoring program is the development of competencies. In Phases 1 and 2, mentees were asked to identify the degree to which they had been assisted to develop their core competencies; mentors were also asked the degree to which they were able to assist their mentees. In the Phase 1 survey, there was a high degree of convergence with both mentees and mentors identifying the same three competencies as the areas of greatest assistance.

Mentees' top three areas of competence development included:

1. People management and development (68%)
2. Leadership skills (61%)
3. Teamwork and cooperation (53%)

For mentors, the top three included:

1. Teamwork and cooperation (56%)
2. People management and development (55%)
3. Leadership skills (53%)

Qualitative findings

The pivotal role of competence development in the mentoring relationships was also reflected in the Phase 1 interviews with mentees and mentors. A number of mentees and mentors referred to competence development within their interview narrative and gave specific examples of how mentoring enabled personal and professional growth and development. One mentee described: *“The mentor helped me to identify areas to focus on improvement and assist me in finding constructive ways to address these issues and in the process building personal growth.”* Another mentee described the impact of mentoring as: *“Confidence building and decision making; I think it is incredibly important.”*

In Phase 1, evidence from the interview analysis suggests that mentoring assists mentees in developing their resilience in their role and in the field. Mentees and mentors were able to describe the benefits of mentoring in helping them to overcome the physical and mental stresses they find themselves in humanitarian contexts. This is illustrated by the following mentee interview comments :

- *“My mentor helped me to identify areas to focus on improvement and find constructive ways to address these issues.”*
- *“Mentors can help the mentee interpret events which can reduce stress levels by providing reassurance.”*
- *“Mentoring relationships represent strength and overcoming difficulties ... at an intense pace.”*
- *“Empowerment to see me like a lion, not a cat ... the belief in myself , that I am able to accomplish what I am assigned to.”*

Mentor interview quotations further illustrate the benefits of mentoring:

- *“Mentoring is a breathing space, it allows me to recharge my batteries, it allows me to see the horizon, a quiet seaside ... distance, and reflecting.”*

- *“Mentoring ... opened my eyes to a new world that was unknown and new territories.”*

In Phase 1, participants were provided with the opportunity to provide a visual metaphor to illustrate the impact of the mentoring program. One mentee provided a visual metaphor that demonstrated the impact of mentoring to empower and shift attitudes from ‘I can’t do it to ‘I can do it thus, positively influencing self-confidence and belief (see Appendix 17.1). Another provided a visual metaphor of the cat that becomes a lion – *“the mentoring experience to me was an empowerment to see me like a lion, not a cat; to improve my self-confidence and the belief on myself; that I am able to accomplish was I am assigned to”* (see Appendix 17.1). For many, this was an immense step forward to being able to successfully complete a mission in a new role or the first mission in a new role.

Phase 2 Findings

First, we present the quantitative results, followed by the qualitative findings, including the interviews and visual metaphors. The impact of the mentoring program on mentees’ and mentors’ personal and professional development is clearly evident and was demonstrated in the survey responses, interviews, and visual representations.

Quantitative findings

The findings from the survey in Phase 2 closely mirror those seen in Phase 1. Again, in the Phase 2 survey, mentees and mentors were asked to identify three areas that they found most beneficial in relation to their mentoring relationship. For both mentees and mentors, the most beneficial aspects of mentoring include developing the ability to adapt, bounce back and cope with challenges, being able to perform effectively in the role, and increasing personal confidence and self-esteem. The impact of the mentoring program on mentees’ and mentors’

personal and professional development is clearly evident, with similar results from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

In Phase 2, mentees' top three included:

1. Being able to perform effectively in the role (59%)
2. Developing the ability to adapt, bounce back, and cope with challenges (47%)
3. Increasing personal confidence and self-esteem (41%)

In Phase 2, for mentors, the top three included:

1. Developing the ability to adapt, bounce back, and cope with challenges (61%)
2. Being able to perform effectively in the role (50%)
3. Increasing personal confidence and self-esteem (44%)

In Phases 2, again, mentees were asked to identify the degree to which they had been assisted to develop their core competencies; mentors were also asked the degree to which they were able to assist their mentees. In the Phase 2 survey, there was a high degree of convergence with both mentees and mentors identifying the same three competencies as the areas of the greatest assistance, with similar results to Phase 1.

Mentees' top three areas of competence development included:

1. Leadership skills (67%)
2. People management and development (53%)
3. Teamwork and cooperation (47%)

For mentors, the top three included:

1. Leadership skills (71%)
2. People management and development (61%)
3. Teamwork and cooperation (50%)

One competence area that differed from Phase 1 to Phase 2 in the survey results was leadership, moving from 61% in Phase 1 to 67% in Phase 2 for mentees and 53% in Phase 1

and 71% in Phase 2 for mentors. This can be attributed to mentees' growth and development in the role and their increased confidence and understanding of what it means to be a leader within the context of their role and environment.

Qualitative findings

The interview data shows that mentees and mentors adopt a variety of approaches to their relationship, including the communication methods, frequency, dialogue, and position. Mentees seek a level of comfort in the matching process; on the one hand, they wish the mentor to challenge their thinking, on the other they wish to have some degree of familiarities, such as a shared native language and cultural background. In the majority of cases, mentors do feel equipped to address all of their mentees' needs; however, there are some further learning opportunities in the areas of stress management, burnout, and well-being.

The interview analysis showed that mentees recognized the intense pace of their role, the challenges associated with their project, and the high-risk - in some cases – volatile and violent environmental context. Mentors were able to provide a safe space for mentees to vent, reflect, gain perspective and recognize their strengths and needs. As a result of the mentoring, the majority of mentees were able to shift from a constant state of panic to a 'stretch zone', where mentees felt a sense of empowerment, greater confidence, and self-esteem, alongside an enhanced ability to see and understand their development areas and access resources to support their needs. One mentor described his mentee as initially feeling overwhelmed and the importance of supporting with coping strategies:

“MSF is quite brutal. If you don't have coping mechanisms the brutality of the environment and mission can be too much for some. This is where mentoring is able to support, it is crucial to help people avoid burnout. My mentee expressed his intention to resign three times, I never told him to do it or don't do it but I was able to

give him the support he needs. In the end, he has been successful and gone on to further missions.”

A mentee described how he is able to impart his new knowledge and understanding gained through mentoring to support his team:

“Stress management, health, and work-life balance are still issues. This is due to the nature of the work. People find it difficult to cope and try to achieve some degree of work-life balance. I try to help my team to identify their coping mechanisms and utilize them effectively. First, they need to understand what they need.”

The Phase 2 interview analysis shows that for the majority of mentees the greatest impact of mentoring was the growth and development in their role, their confidence, and self-esteem. In the majority of cases, mentees enter an unknown environment in a new role. They are constructing their own professional identity, developing and changing as they transition into a more senior leadership and management role. At the same time, they are often supporting large teams and hundreds, if not thousands of beneficiaries. The combination of these variables requires support that is ‘outside of the traditional hierarchical system as mentees navigate their role, team, and environment. This is illustrated by the following mentee quotations:

- *“The main challenge was to construct my identity and my image as a professional, as a first appointment Coordinator. I lacked confidence. Now, in my second mission, I am more in control, more self-aware, I have grown as a leader and a manager.”*
- *“The mentoring program has been critical to my professional growth as a first mission Field Coordinator.”*
- *“The mentoring experience enabled me to transition from a manager to a leader, to become a strategic leader and transform my identity.”*

In Phase 2, participants were provided with the opportunity to provide a new visual metaphor to illustrate the impact of the mentoring program, having reflected on the mentoring relationship over a period of 6 to 12 months. One mentee provided the same visual metaphor as Phase 1 which she felt captured the impact of mentoring to empower and shift attitudes from ‘I can’t do it to ‘I can do it from both Phase 1 to Phase 2 (see Appendix 17.2). One mentor provided a picture of a horizon which felt captured the start of a cycle with opportunities on the horizon but also *“for my mentees, they often tell me mentoring is also a breathing space for them, take distance and reflecting, allows them to move forward. It’s pausing, taking time to reflect.”*

One of the greatest benefits of longitudinal evaluation from the organizational perspective, is the ability to track the mentoring relationship status. Enduring relationships tend to indicate satisfaction and value. The relationship status can be categorized as follows:

- Mentoring relationship continuing.
- Mentoring relationship formally closed and informally connected.
- Mentoring relationship formally closed and not connected.

We interviewed 15 matched pairs of mentees and mentors. Of the 15 we interviewed, 2 mentoring pairs were still in a continuing relationship and 13 were formally closed and still informally connected. The informal connections varied but in most cases, the mentees and mentors were in contact on a *‘needs basis’*. If the mentee wanted to re-connect for any reason, the door was left open to do so.

Long-term evaluation strategy for MSF

One of the key outcomes of the case study research was the development of a long-term evaluation strategy and the impact evaluation toolkit, for use across all MSF mentoring programs. At present, there are eight mentoring programs within MSF that the MCHub supports. To implement the impact evaluation toolkit program, managers were required to

endorse its usage with their mentors and mentees. In order to test the impact evaluation toolkit, the MCHub decided to pilot it for 12 months without any modifications. Whilst the programs can use the toolkits without the support of the MCHub, if they wish to participate in the pilot they need to commit to the following requirements:

- the toolkit would be used as is, and a review period would commence after the pilot where changes could be proposed;
- program managers are required to send out the pre and post-relationship surveys as a minimum requirement for participation in the pilot. The mid-point survey is optional and it is up to the discretion of the program manager as to whether they distribute it to their mentors and mentees;
- summary reporting will be provided to each individual program every 3 months;
- a report will be compiled at the conclusion of the pilot comparing data from all programs; and,
- the pilot began in early 2021 and aims to create a well-rounded picture of the mentoring relationship lifecycle across mentoring programs.

Implications and Conclusion

This case study has given us the opportunity to explore key considerations in integrating impact evaluation of developing relationships within an established mentoring program in an organizational context. This case study confirms that undertaking a robust longitudinal assessment of mentoring programs is vital for effective and insightful evaluation (Allen et al., 2008; Haddock-Millar, 2017).

At the planning and design stage of the evaluation approach, practical aspects such as the availability of sufficient resources to carry out a longitudinal evaluation at baseline and at subsequent time-points throughout the developmental relationship are an essential consideration. This is a key practical consideration for any organization considering

embarking on impact evaluation of developmental relationships; we, therefore, extend the literature in this area.

Establishing a clear timeline which details when data collection will occur, how long the process will take, and how it will be undertaken is important to understand what is feasible and within what time frame it is realistic to expect the evaluation to be done. This should be specific to the organizational purpose and objectives so as to ensure that the process is focused on obtaining meaningful findings and implementable actions. In this case, MSF had clearly addressed the resource implications by commissioning the impact evaluation research and identified the evaluation objectives of the mentoring relationships: performance, i.e., leadership and management competency development, building confidence and teamwork; learning, i.e., self-awareness and understanding of own areas of strength and development and well-being, i.e., building resilience, coping strategy, and adaptability.

Another impact evaluation consideration is to encompass the views and voices of all the stakeholders involved: the mentees, mentors, program facilitators, and those with overall strategic oversight for the programs (Clutterbuck, 2005). Moreover, an important aspect of program evaluation is to understand the development of the dynamic relationships during the program and beyond its completion. In this case study, the two-year longitudinal impact evaluation study encompassed the collection of quantitative and qualitative data from mentors, mentees, program managers, and wider program team members at two specific points in the developmental relationship. Ideally, this should be planned at entry, mid-point, completion of the program, and a follow-up beyond exiting the program, enabling the assessment of the long-term meaningful impact of mentoring.

Final thoughts

Overall, the results suggest that the mentoring program is having a significant impact on mentees *and* mentors in supporting their personal and professional development. The

mentoring relationship addresses core leadership and management competencies while supporting the well-being of participants, reducing stress, and helping to prevent burnout. The most valuable outcomes relate to increased self-esteem, confidence, leadership, and management capability. Evidence shows that mentors are supporting mentees to build their resilience capability and this in turn is having a positive impact on retention, demonstrated in their intention to stay with MSF on the completion of their mission. We know that resilience can be developed through the process of dialogue, inquiry, and deliberate practice and that mentors work to create a psychologically safe space where work-life balance issues can be addressed, helping mentees to adapt and thrive even in volatile, uncertain, difficult times. Mentoring positively impacts mentees' ability to bounce back and cope with challenges. The final results show that mentoring is a vital resource, supporting mentees to successfully transition into their role, complete their mission and commit to further missions. The impact of mentoring reverberates throughout MSF, at all levels in the organization, as individuals question the institutional, culture, and political environment in relation to the degree to which learning, development, management, and leadership are effectively supported.

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Insert Appendix 17.1 - Phase 1 Visual Metaphors

Insert Appendix 17.2 - Phase 2 Visual Metaphors

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