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MENTORING PROGRAMME: NECESSITY FOR AIR LOGISTICS OFFICERS

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Exercice Solo Flight

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MENTORING PROGRAMME: NECESSITY FOR AIR LOGISTICS OFFICERS

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INTRODUCTION

It is hard to believe but the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is at the center of a fight on its own soil to attract, recruit and retain skilled members to accomplish its mission. The CAF is in competition with the industry on a daily basis to get the best from the labour available and retain its most precious assets, its people. Even within the organization, the different trades are in competition to keep their members. The air logistics community is no exception to that and it relies on its senior leaders to contribute even more than before to find ways to keep its officers in the ranks and not searching for another job. The leaders have a critical role in this challenging time as they have “acquired the role of trainers, coaches, mentors, perform recruitments activities etc.”¹ The new Canada’s Defence Policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* highlights the importance for the organization to remain agile and responsible to maintain its skilled resources.² A combination of formal and informal methods of mentoring, coaching and training programmes are being considered to be used and hopefully motivate its members to stay.

This paper focuses on the feasibility of the implementation of a formal mentoring programme for air logistics officers as a valuable approach to enhance the performance of its members. In the context of a shortage of experienced officers, the mentoring program is a necessity to implement in the air logistics community to enhance the knowledge of its officers, monitor their development and contribute to the retention of air logistics specialists.

¹Micu Angela-Eliza and Popa Daniel, “The Impact of Building Coaching and Mentoring Strategies on the Human Resources Sustainable Development,” *Ovidius University Annals, Economic Sciences Series* 18, no. 2 (2018): 497.

²Department of National Defence, *Strong, secure, engaged: Canada’s defence policy* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 20-21.

The paper will be divided into five sections: 1) Differences in the programmes; 2) Benefits of mentoring programme in the organization; 3) Selection of the appropriate mentoring programme; 4) Evaluation of the mentoring programme, and; 5) Counter effects of the implementation of a mentoring programme in the organization.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PROGRAMMES

In order to analyze the effects of a mentoring programme, it is important to take a moment to understand the differences with other similar programmes such as coaching and teaching programmes. Mentoring, coaching and training have often been interchanged because they have a common denominator: “they are conducted in a helping context, with no effort to impose a solution (which distinguishes them from directing or correcting).”³ Over time, the definitions have evolved and authors such as Hicks and McCracken explains in *Three Hats of a Leader: Coaching, Mentoring and Teaching* that the three terms are interconnected but there exists a difference that can appear subtle for some. The coach’s role is to help someone to find answers without proposing a solution. The key here is the self-discovery from the individual.⁴ In a mentoring approach, the relationship is invested in the sharing of knowledge and professional experience to permit the mentee to receive an opinion, an advice or even a solution about a problem. Finally, the teaching approach “provides a framework for understanding based on an objective body of knowledge, not necessary from one’s own experience.”⁵ The rationale analysis here is the reference.⁶ For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the usage of

³Hicks, Robert, and John McCracken. “Three hats of a leader: Coaching, mentoring and teaching,” *Physician Executive* 36, no. 6 (2010): 68.

⁴*Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁵*Ibid.*, 69.

⁶*Ibid.*, 69.

mentoring and coaching to determine the best course of action for the air logistics community as the teaching programme is already well presented in the military training institution for the logistics trades.

The selection between a mentoring and a coaching programme can be tricky. Authors such as Minter and Thomas present an interesting theory that helps for the selection. Their theory defines the best approach to develop employees through the use of coaching or mentoring. The authors use a set of assumptions for mentoring and for coaching. Based on the employee attitudes and behaviors, the employee is associated to the group of mentoring or coaching assumptions. The results suggest the best approach that will lead to the communication strategy to be used with the employee to enhance their performance development.⁷ As a side note, the theory also presents counselling as another strategy of communication but it is outside the scope of this paper because this approach is used towards individuals who are not meeting the initial standards which is not the focus of this analysis.

Minter and Thomas presents that the coaching approach should be prioritized with high performance employees. Their work presents that these employees react positively to monetary rewards and non-directive supervisory style, work environment that nurtures individualized work assignments, career training, advancement opportunities, and personal work recognized.⁸ A coach's approach, if selected, would then focus on the

⁷Robert L. Minter and Edward G. Thomas, "Employee development through coaching, mentoring and counseling: A multidimensional approach," *Review of Business* 21, no. 1/2 (2000): 44.

⁸*Ibid.*, 44-45.

creation and maintenance of these conditions. Feedback and guidance would be provided to the employee as required.⁹

Minter and Thomas prefer the usage of mentoring for the broader group of employees who are considered performing but would not do well with a coaching approach that builds on a less-monitored and more flexible approach that motivates that category of employees. A mentor focuses on getting to know the member to identify skills, knowledge and abilities that could require help to further the development of the individual. The relationship also becomes a social contract between the mentor and the mentee and the latter must agree that the help provided will be for specific skills, knowledge and/or abilities. The relationship could be on a short or long-range basis. There will be performance indicators for the mentor that will be used to assess the progression of the mentee. Continuous feedback will be provided through the relationship between the mentor and the mentee.¹⁰

For the air logistics community, the comparison between those two approaches should lean toward the implementation of a mentoring programme because of the broader audience it can reach. The belief is that high performing employees would still get positive results from a mentoring approach as would less performing employees.

BENEFITS OF A MENTORING PROGRAMME IN THE ORGANIZATION

The benefits of a mentoring programme are multiple and not only for the mentee. The organization will get a positive outcome from the programme as well as the mentor who will also get something out of the relationship with the mentee. This section will

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 44-46.

discuss the benefits from these three perspectives: The organization, the mentee, and the mentor.

From an organizational perspective, a mentoring programme brings a lot of positive effects. According to Lyle and Smith, the mentoring programme is “designed to shape employee development, screen for performance, leverage networks, inspire employees, and instill organizational norms.”¹¹ In a military context, the United States Air Force adds that it “promotes a climate of inclusion.”¹² It shows that a mentoring programme is applicable also to the military as it helps the member to learn the organizational values and apply them in the work environment. In a military environment, the members are going through a series of training activities to learn skills to apply in operations or in garrisons. There are researchers that have analyzed the benefits from a combination of training with mentoring and/or coaching programmes. Olivero mentions that training activities increase the productivity of workers by 22% but the addition of complementary programmes (mentoring, coaching) can increase the productivity up to 88%.¹³ In addition, Kahle-Piasecki mentions that a mentoring programme helps for the transfer of knowledge within the organization and the overall effect contributes to the retention of the employees.¹⁴ With these results, the air logistics community would have vested interest to look at the implementation of a mentoring programme for its officers that would enhance their productivity, knowledge and sense of belonging.

¹¹David S. Lyle and John Z. Smith, “The Effect of High-Performing Mentors on Junior Officer Promotion in the US Army,” *Journal Of Labor Economics* 32, no. 2 (April 2014): 230.

¹²United States Air Force, *Air Force Mentoring Program*, Air Force Manual 36-2643 (Washington, D.C.: United States Air Force, 4 May 2017), 3, accessed 22 Apr 2019, https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/afman36-2643/afman36-2643.pdf.

¹³G. Olivero, Bane K.D. and Kopelman, R.E., “Executive Coaching as a Transfer of Training Tool: Effects on Productivity in a Public Agency,” *Public Personnel Management* 26, no. 4 (1997), 461.

¹⁴Lisa Kahle-Piasecki, “Making a mentoring relationship work: What is required for organizational success.” *Journal of Applied Business and Economics* 12, no. 1 (2011): 46.

Benefits for mentees are numerous considering that a mentoring programme is designed for them in the first place. A relationship mentor-mentee is investing in the professional and personal growth. According to Hollywood, a mentoring programme fosters the commitment from the individuals to the organization which in turn enhances motivation to excel in the work environment.¹⁵ It is important to note that a mentor will usually offer the mentee an access to a network of individuals well developed over the years. That access would not have been possible to get for the mentee without the support of the mentor.¹⁶ In the military context, a research from the University of Chicago conducted on the United States Army demonstrated that “junior officers who were counselled by a high-performing mentor were 29% more likely to be selected for early promotion to the rank of major.”¹⁷ A mentoring relationship provides various benefits for the mentee. Ouerdian, Malek and Dali mention other benefits of a mentoring programme such as visibility and credibility for the member which is highlighted by a faster progression for the individual.¹⁸ There is a myriad of benefits for a mentee and the air logistics community should be interested in those to help with the development of its members.

As much as the organization and the mentee get profitable benefits of a mentoring programme, the mentor also gets a lot of returns from the time and effort invested in the relationship. According to Lagacé-Roy and Knackstedt, there is certainly a feeling of

¹⁵Kathryn G. Hollywood, Donna A. Blaess, Claudia Santin, and Lisa Bloom, “Holistic Mentoring and Coaching to Sustain Organizational Change and Innovation,” *Creighton Journal of Interdisciplinary Leadership* 2, no. 1 (2016): 33-34.

¹⁶Stéphanie Mitrano-Méda and Lucien Véran, “Une modélisation du processus de mentorat entrepreneurial et sa mise en application,” *Management international/International Management/Gestion Internationale* 18, no. 4 (2014): 73-74.

¹⁷Lyle and Smith, *The Effect of High-Performing Mentors...*, 240.

¹⁸Emna Bach Ouerdian, Adnane Malek, and Najwa Dali, “L’effet du mentorat sur la réussite de carrière: quelles différences entre hommes et femmes?,” *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 73, no. 1 (2018): 124.

accomplishment that comes from the opportunity to share experiences and transfer knowledge with someone. It contributes greatly to the personal and professional development of the mentee. It can be also perceived as a gesture of loyalty towards the organization. The experience of being a mentor can be seen as an opportunity to reflect on the importance of details and organizational values to share with the mentee. The relationship that will result between the mentor and the mentee will stimulate discussions and questions that the mentor would not have thought of. The mentor will learn as well from these sessions and that will contribute to the mentor's personal and professional development.¹⁹ The air logistics community could use these benefits to convince potential mentors to join the mentoring programme and help future mentees.

SELECTION OF THE APPROPRIATE MENTORING PROGRAMME

There are multiple ways to consider the implementation of a mentoring programme once the organization makes the decision to do it. This section will look at the advantages of the type of approach such as: formal, semi-formal, and informal. Thereafter, the different forms of mentoring will be explained and compared: group mentoring, tri-mentoring, reverse mentoring, cross-functional mentoring, and e-mentoring.

At first, the organization must choose the type of its mentoring programme based on factors such as: its organizational goals, its budget, and its time and human resources that it will wish to allocate. A formal mentoring programme has a coordinator assigned and money is allocated for training of the mentors and mentees. Those people

¹⁹Daniel Lagacé-Roy and Janine Knackstedt, *Mentoring Handbook* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2007), 10.

participating in the programme are matched by their compatibility and competencies.²⁰ As opposed, the informal mentoring is left to the individuals to set up and manage. Most of the time, it is a natural relationship that develops over time because “a person believes in someone’s potential, and an individual who views someone as a role model.”²¹ This type is functional but does not exploit the full benefits that could develop from a formal mentoring programme by the absence of training and budgets. Finally, the semi-informal type is a hybrid between these two. The difference resides in the flexibility of the organization to control the process where there could be an allocation of resources (coordinator, budget) or not depending on the direction the organization wants to take.²²

Once a type of mentoring is selected by the organization, the form it will take will depends on its needs and goals. The group mentoring corresponds to a gathering between mentees and one or more mentors to discuss specific topics. This form benefits a larger audience and it is more efficient if it is contained to a group of ten people maximum. The size of the group encourages peer discussions as well which will enhance the experience.²³ The tri-mentoring as it states involves a relationship between three participants. There is a senior member; the second is less senior than the first one; and the last member is junior to those two. They get together to share their experiences and skills with the others.²⁴ The benefit of having a third person added into the relationship permits for the person in the middle to help both the senior and the junior members to relate to the experiences shared. That middle person is usually closer to the understanding of the role and responsibilities of the others and facilitates the discussions. The reverse mentoring is

²⁰*Ibid*, 7.

²¹*Ibid*, 8.

²²*Ibid*, 7.

²³*Ibid*, 8.

²⁴*Ibid*.

where a senior person will establish a relationship with a specialist, usually low in the organizational chart, to discuss specific skills.²⁵ The cross-functional mentoring is a relationship developed between people with completely different backgrounds. The aim is to share the common areas where they have challenges, such as management issues for example.²⁶ Finally, the e-mentoring corresponds to experiences and skills that are shared using technological tools such as emails, webinars, blogs, etc.²⁷ This type is useful when the organization has remote locations which are hard to reach and the technological tools makes it easier.

Nevertheless, the type and form of mentoring selected by the organization, the air logistics community should have vested interest to implement a mentoring programme as it will permit the individuals to acquire additional knowledge and complement the training programmes in place at its trade school. The selection for a formal approach seems to be the ideal choice to get the greater outcome of the mentoring programme but it would require resources to invest in the programme. Regardless, if the air logistics community is not willing to invest in a formal programme, an informal or a hybrid would still provide results. As for the form to select, they all have pros and cons about which the air logistics community would require discussions and experimenting to see the results.

EVALUATION OF THE MENTORING PROGRAMME

The implementation of a mentoring programme is considered expansive because it requires a significant investment of time, effort from the people involved in the

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

programme, and the training of the personnel who will participate in it.²⁸ It would be normal for an organization to keep track of the investments made and assess the effectiveness of its mentoring programme to justify the return on investment.²⁹

The evaluation of a mentoring programme is not an easy task. It is considered to be more difficult than the evaluation of a training programme because of the diversity of outcomes from the mentoring programme compared to the set expectations from a training programme. In addition, the individual approach from the mentor with mentee influences the performance of the programme.³⁰ Depending on the backgrounds, training and styles, the approach should not be considered as a homogenous intervention and will provide various results.³¹ Finally, the confidentiality required in such relationship influences the measurement of effectiveness because of the information shared with the evaluator.³² In order to initiate the assessment, Grant suggests to start with: ‘who is interested in evaluation – and why’.³³ From an air logistics community’s perspective, it could be the mentor, the mentee, or the people supported.

There exists a myriad of methods to measure effectiveness of a mentoring programme. Bachkirova, Arthur and Reading proposed an approach that measures the evolution of the employee engagement and the self-esteem prior and after the employee’s participation in the mentoring programme.³⁴ According to the authors, employee engagement is described as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is

²⁸T. Bachkirova, Arthur, L. and Reading, E., “Evaluating a coaching and mentoring programme: Challenges and solutions,” *International coaching psychology review*, 10, no. 2 (2015): 176.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 175.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 176.

³¹*Ibid.*, 177.

³²*Ibid.*, 176.

³³A. Grant, *The efficacy of coaching*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 15.

³⁴Bachkirova, Arthur and Reading, *Evaluating a coaching and mentoring programme...*, 179

characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption.”³⁵ According to research, it is important to measure employee engagement as it “is negatively related to burnout”³⁶ and has a direct correlation to “low turnover, high organisational commitment, and customer-rated employee performance.”³⁷ The second measurement is self-esteem which is comprised of self-compassion and self-efficacy. Self-compassion represents “the ability to cope effectively with adversity and good mental health”³⁸ and self-efficacy is described by Bandura as the “belief in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.”³⁹ A large amount of research demonstrates a relationship between self-efficacy and performance.⁴⁰ These criteria are interesting to measure because research studies “have consistently linked self-compassion to reduced fear of failure, enhanced perceived competence and emotionally-focused coping strategies.”⁴¹

The air logistics community will want to assess the effectiveness of its mentoring programme and the proposed method presented by Bachkirova, Arthur and Reading is one of many that can be used. However, this method is to be considered because of the criteria measured and their meaning.

COUNTER EFFECTS OF A MENTORING PROGRAMME

The implementation of a mentoring programme provides a myriad of positive outcomes but it is important to keep in mind the negative side of the programme to

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*, 180.

³⁹A. Bandura, *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, (New York: Freeman, 1997), 3

⁴⁰Bachkirova, Arthur and Reading, *Evaluating a coaching and mentoring programme...*, 179

⁴¹*Ibid.*

counter the effects if required. Col. Jim Thomas and Lt. Col. Ted Thomas present two arguments for managers to consider in their article “*Mentoring, Coaching and Counseling: Toward A Common Understanding*.”⁴² They explained that an exclusive mentoring relationship “could easily foster a perception of favoritism or cronyism among those in the command with whom the mentor does not share as close a relationship.”⁴³ The moral of the troops should always be in the mind of the leaders. If a perception of favoritism develops amongst the organization over a mentor-mentee relationship, it will create negativism in the team. A negative atmosphere can create internal conflicts. The mentee could even become isolated from others which will translate in a decrease of the mentee’s performance and reflect in the organization’s performance after.

Another argument presented by the authors resides in the power of a mentor towards the mentee. “Negative organizational ramifications can develop when a conflict occurs and a formally assigned mentor engages in a bullying or a revenge-seeking behavior with a mentee.”⁴⁴ Depending on how the relationship evolves over time, the mentee should become more comfortable and open about the information shared with the mentor. That creates a situation where the mentor is in a powerful situation and it would be important that it does not constitute a leverage that could be used against the mentee later.

The air logistics community is relatively small and its senior officers are linked directly or indirectly to the succession plan and the discussions surrounding promotions. The mentoring programme aims to increase performance and has a myriad of other

⁴²T. Thomas, Thomas, J. and Firestone, H., 2015, “Mentoring, coaching, and counseling: Toward a common understanding,” *Military Review*, 95 no. 4 (2015): 52.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

benefits. The relationship of mentor-mentee must remain confidential and should consider the perception effect in the organization to maintain the esprit-de-corps.

CONCLUSION

The air logistics community has succeeded in developing its officers through its training programme currently in place. There are no indicators at this moment that urge this military organization to change its way of functioning. However, it is realistic to anticipate that future recruitment and retention problems could be imminent following the general tendency of the CAF. The implementation of a mentoring programme appears to be a solution that would attack the retention issues on top of enhancing the performance of its members.

The mentoring programme appears to be a desirable approach because it can have success with all air logistics officers contrary to programmes like coaching or counselling that are effective with a smaller audience. The mentoring programme brings a multitude of benefits for the mentor, the mentee and the organization; everyone is a winner! The discussion that the air logistics community requires to have is surrounding the decision about the implementation of a formal or informal programme. Regardless of the answer to this, it will have a positive effect on the members. The help and advice provided in an informal relationship will produce a positive outcome and benefit to the organization. The formal programme is exploiting the full potential of the mentoring relationship and provides a maximum of dividends to the participants and the organization. Finally, the air logistics community will need to assess the results of its efforts and contain the negative effects by training its participants.

The air logistics community must consider that the investment in its members is a sure payoff for the organization. With members more knowledgeable and motivated, it will have influence on their performance and productivity. It is realistic to believe that it will translate into a better support to the CAF operations.

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