



Mentoring as part of creating an enabling environment

IN SUPPORT OF
the Enabling Environment Guidelines
for the United Nations System





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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
WHAT IS MENTORING?	6
ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN ACTION	8
Mentoring Programmes as Talent Management	8
Key Recommendations from the Supplementary Guidance	8
MENTORING PROGRAMME BUSINESS CASE	10
TYPES OF PROGRAMMES	12
Structure	12
Target Groups	13
Focus	13
MENTORING CYCLE – KEY COMPONENTS	14
PRINCIPLES OF MENTORING	15
CONCLUSION	16
BEST PRACTICES FROM THE UN AND BEYOND	17
ENDNOTES	22

INTRODUCTION


With the launch of the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) and its [Supplementary Guidance](#) in 2019 in support of the Secretary General's [System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#), UN Women aims to support all UN entities to achieve an equal, inclusive and diverse work environment. The talent management section of the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#)¹ explores ways in which an organization can support personnel at all levels in professional and personal growth, such as through inclusive leadership programmes and mentoring initiatives.

Developing and implementing a mentoring programme is one of the recommendations of the Secretary General's [System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#) and can complement training that benefits all employees. Supporting personnel in developing personal and technical competencies and preparing them for higher-level responsibilities is a reason to stay in the Organization and should be considered an organizational investment, yielding gains in competence and job satisfaction.

Professional connections and networks can play a significant role in career progression. Research has shown that generally, men tend to build broader networks that offer them a wider range of opportunities for gaining knowledge and professional advancement, while women tend to focus on deeper connections through a smaller social circle.ⁱ

Furthermore, research suggests that unconscious bias leads people to favour those most like themselves, which often means that marginalized groups are left out of social and work-related networks. Informal networks, including support groups and mentoring programmes, tend to connect through horizontal engagement across vertical silos to enhance collaboration and support of one another. McKinsey, for instance, found that informal networks contain more information than formal hierarchies

¹ For full information and references in this section, as well as the complete recommendations and examples of good practice related to mentoring and networks, please refer to pages 48–50 of the [Supplementary Guidance on the Enabling Environment Guidelines for the UN System](#) in support of the Secretary General's [System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#): <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/02/supplementary-guidance-on-the-enabling-environment-guidelines-for-the-united-nations-system>.



and matrix structures.ⁱⁱ These networks can be leveraged to mobilize talent, provide support and spread knowledge in a cost-efficient way.

This guidance intends to provide guidance to UN Gender Focal Points and their HR colleagues to help initiate and implement a mentoring programme. By institutionalizing and providing the necessary infrastructure for mentorship and support networks, organizations can build on informal networks to transform organizational culture. The Secretary General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity notes that mentoring can have a significant impact on retention, progression and building networks – and therefore, mentoring can also have a considerable impact on gender parity.



WHAT IS MENTORING?

The term 'mentoring' does not have a single, fixed definition. However, many definitions point out common themes such as **support, knowledge-sharing, guidance, and growth**. Here are a few examples of what mentoring can encompass:

- "Mentoring is a system of **semi-structured guidance** whereby one person shares their knowledge, skills and experience to assist others to progress in their own lives and careers."ⁱⁱⁱ
- "Mentoring is a reciprocal and collaborative at-will relationship that most often occurs between a senior and junior employee for the purpose of the mentee's **growth, learning, and career development**. Often the mentor and mentee are internal to an organization, and there is an emphasis on organizational goals, culture, and advice on **professional development**. Mentors often act as role models for their mentee and provide guidance to help them reach their goals."^{iv}
- "Mentoring is about enhancing an individual staff member's **career development** through a collaborative, knowledge-sharing relationship with another staff member who serves as their mentor. Mentoring provides **career support** and facilitates the **transfer of knowledge** and organizational culture."^v

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MENTORING AND COACHING?

- Mentoring often focuses on an individual's overall career goals and aspirations and mutually benefits the mentor and mentee. While the formal mentoring period may be finite, the relationship may continue.
- Coaching tends to focus on assessing and improving an individual's performance in a particular area; benefits the coachee more than the coach; and often has a time-bound relationship defined to meet specific goals.

It is important to engage in dialogue with key stakeholders to define mentoring in each organization, ensuring the definition is clearly communicated so that participants approach the programme with a shared set of expectations.



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN ACTION

MENTORING PROGRAMMES AS TALENT MANAGEMENT

Mentoring programmes are most likely to succeed when they are viewed not as a series of activities to be administered, but as a valued part of a talent management

strategy. This anchor – sometimes referred to as the ‘business case’ – is important because it will ensure that whatever mentoring structure is set up will be responsive to the needs of the organization.

TALENT MANAGEMENT



Develop and deliver comprehensive onboarding for all new employees.



Harness mentoring networks and informal support systems to foster a sense of inclusion.



Provide consistent career development opportunities as well as training and learning programmes for all personnel.



Develop and deliver inclusive leadership programmes and trainings for staff at all levels.



Formalize succession planning to include mandatory exit interviews and handover notes for staff prior to separation.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE

1. Support mentoring programmes that crosscut organizational hierarchy by having senior staff learn from newer employees and vice versa. Encourage horizontal networking across vertical structures through peer-to-peer exchanges on matters such as work-life balance.
2. Build an inter-agency network that allows mentorship across UN entities. This will expand the pool of diverse leaders and increase support for career advancement of marginalised groups. Include mentoring guidance in Management and Leadership Programmes to empower managers and leaders to consistently integrate these into their daily practice and foster a culture of inclusion. Additionally, consider including mentoring responsibilities in manager performance appraisals.

MENTORING PROGRAMME BUSINESS CASE^{VI}

Organizational Issue	As a Result of Our Mentoring Solution Outcomes, We Will
Attrition of top talent	Retain top talent
Ineffective onboarding	Effectively onboard new talent
Long time to success in critical roles	Decrease learning curves in critical roles
Lack of leadership pipeline	Contribute to building a substantial leadership pipeline
Disengaged employees	Increase employee engagement
Job performance and skill gaps	Grow job performance and close skills gaps
Limited internal networks	Build networking and sponsorship

Organizational issues may be identified through staff surveys, exit interviews, onboarding processes, ad hoc feedback from staff and other avenues. As a mentoring programme may be unable to address all the issues that should be defined, it is important to discuss priority areas with key stakeholders and communicate desired outcomes.

In terms of embedding this into the organization's learning culture, it is important to understand that even when structured mentoring programmes are in place, there are other processes in talent management strategy that can be used to advance mentoring objectives.



FOR EXAMPLE:

Orientation or onboarding processes and training

provide a space to communicate the value of cross-departmental, cross-level exchange where new staff are invited to think about the areas in which they could benefit from mentoring and those in which they could mentor others.

Performance discussions,

both through the formal performance management system and through informal regular conversations, provide a space for supervisors to offer support and guidance central to any mentoring programme. It is also an opportunity for managers to reflect on the technical and personal skill set of the staff they manage, as well as identify and encourage potential mentors to seek out opportunities to give support and guidance to others.

Management and leadership training

often focus on the manager as a coach. This space can be used to promote the spirit of mentoring and help management understand how mentoring relates to talent management, reflect on how mentors have impacted their own personal and professional lives, consider if and how they currently mentor staff inside or outside their team, and how as managers they can promote mentoring in the day-to-day professional experience of staff.

TYPES OF PROGRAMMES

STRUCTURE

Mentoring programmes can be structured in different ways and typically fall under the categories as listed below.^{vii} Organizations do not need to limit themselves to just one structure. A programme can incorporate different layers in order to meet different talent management needs.

STRUCTURE TYPE

DESCRIPTION

Traditional or One-on-One	A single learner is matched with a single mentor. The match is based on criteria aligned to programme goals. The mentor acts as a guide, sponsor and coach for the learner.
Reverse Mentoring	Specialised mentors are matched with more senior employee learners to support and address specific content topics, such as technology or diversity and inclusion.
Mentor-Led (Group Mentoring)	A single mentor is matched with a cohort of learners who are usually working on the same competency, skill or goal.
Peer-Led (Mentoring Circles)	A single mentor is matched with a cohort of learners who are usually working on the same competency, skill or goal.

TARGET GROUPS

Traditional mentoring programmes have paired a more senior professional with someone more junior, but target groups may vary depending on the purpose and intended impact. In addition to targeting groups based on their level or experience (i.e. aspiring leaders, new hires), organizations may also target certain groups to advance their diversity goals.

When considering 'women only' mentoring programmes, it is important to be conscious not to strengthen the gendered status quo by reinforcing male positional power or

framing women as ill-prepared for leadership roles. In fact, mentoring can help women to overcome individual challenges with the existing organizational hierarchy and power dynamics. Until mentors also target the workplace status quo, however, biases and stereotypes will continue to reinforce gender inequities. Promoting a mentoring culture in which talented men and women engage in reciprocal developmental connections may create change agents and allies capable of truly moving the dial on gender inclusion.^{viii}



FOCUS

Just as the method of mentoring can vary, so can the focus. It is important to define the focus of your mentoring programme so that both mentors and mentees have clear expectations on what the relationship is intended to accomplish.

Mentoring programmes typically focus on one or more of the following areas of talent management:

- **Induction of new staff:** Mentoring can help new staff understand and thrive in the organizational culture by providing a touch point for conversations and questions and an introduction to office culture and workplace expectations.
- **Skills-building:** Mentoring can prepare personnel for higher-level responsibilities, develop leadership and problem-solving skills and assist to navigate some of the political and cultural aspects of the organisation.
- **Job exposure:** Mentoring can help staff gain exposure to different jobs including at a higher level or to a skill set needed to advance to a more senior role. Here, mentors share information and knowledge about their day-to-day work and give staff insights to consider whether such a job would be a good fit for them.
- **Career guidance:** While the role of a mentor is not to get a mentee a job, they can set the stage for career conversations and, by asking the right questions and providing helpful tips, help staff clarify and pursue their career goals.
- **Transition guidance:** Life is full of transitions – some of these are joyous occasions to be celebrated, and some are profoundly challenging. Transitions may be including inter alia moving to a new level of responsibility, combining work responsibilities with a new role as a parent, or returning to work after an extended absence.
- **Networking:** Sometimes the focus of a mentoring programme is not around a specific skill set or career advancement to a specific job. It can also be about building your network and inter-personal relationships in the workplace in order to create a system of support.

MENTORING CYCLE – KEY COMPONENTS

The following components are suggested to be essential for most structured mentoring programmes.

PREPARATION

Mentors and mentees prepare individually and for the relationship through establishing expectations and building trust through

- Identifying their expectations for the mentoring relationship
- Listening to and clarifying expectations and goals including mentees' values and motivations
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities

ESTABLISH AGREEMENTS AND CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

Mentors and mentees complete a mentorship agreement that includes:

- Parameters of how mentor and mentee will work together
- Discussion of mentee's strengths and challenges
- Discussion of the mentee goals and action items for the programme

ENABLE GROWTH AND LEARNING

- Arrange regular meeting to foster learning and development in line with goals
- Review progress on action items through two-way feedback and assumption checking and revise the action plan
- Ensure mentees are challenged and stretched while maintaining a safe, supportive environment

CLOSURE: REFLECT ON EXPERIENCE AND DETERMINE NEXT STEPS

- Acknowledge the relationship and what you have accomplished together
- Discuss next steps: challenges ahead and the relationship moving forward

PRINCIPLES OF MENTORING

SELF-REFLECTION

Some important traits of a mentor include empathy, curiosity, authenticity and the ability to connect and impart trust. Research shows that these are more important than the professional skills a mentor may have. Mentees need to be authentic, open and honest to enable mentors to get to know them and to take advantage of real learning opportunities.

BUILDING TRUST

Trust is a cornerstone of effective mentoring relationships. Some of us trust people quickly and others take longer, withholding trust until the other person has proven trustworthy. Actions that build trust in a mentoring relationship include:

- Ensuring meetings go ahead as planned – not cancelling for other priorities
- Following through on planned actions and communicating regularly
- Listening and asking questions
- Being prepared for each meeting
- Confidentiality

Personal and professional information divulged during a mentoring relationship may be confidential. It is expected that parties do not disclose such information to anyone else unless both mentor and mentee agree otherwise.



CONCLUSION

Mentoring can have a powerful impact on the growth, motivation and networks of staff and personnel, and their retention and development within UN organisations and across the UN system as a whole. The identification and development of appropriate mentoring programmes to help address specific challenges and as part of talent management strategies is recommended by *the Secretary General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity*.

When examining how mentoring could be used within or across your organisation (s) or teams, consider the following:

- Clearly define what 'mentoring' means in your Organization and how it resonates with your organizational culture.
- Include mentoring as part of a broader talent management strategy, if possible, and articulate the business case for it, remembering like other initiatives requires some resources, time and investment to be successful and sustainable.
- Understand and tackle specific challenges in the Organization that could be addressed through a mentoring programme
- Identify key stakeholders and resources that you can learn from and can help in developing an appropriate programme from conceptualization through implementation to evaluation



BEST PRACTICES FROM THE UN AND BEYOND

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)

ESAR Female Talent Initiative

The Female Talent Initiative (FTI) in UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Africa Region is aimed at promoting female talent with the objective of achieving higher levels of female representation in senior positions. The 2018 FTI paired 30 high-potential female leaders with 30 male and female mentors from ESAR and other parts of the organization. Mentees were female colleagues in fixed term, continuing, or permanent contracts and NOB, NOC, NOD, P3 and P4 levels with solid or outstanding performance. After the first cohort, eight out of those 30 female colleagues were promoted, one of them to a P-5 position. The FTI is a very formal programme that involves individualized assessments, mentoring, professional coaching, peer-to-peer support and face-to-face classroom programmes.

a pairing process between mentors and mentees (from a number of different UN organisations and networks) based on identified preferences. Participants are supported by a project team throughout the registration process and the mentoring relationships with online resources and tools. The purpose of the programme is to provide UN staff with an opportunity to reflect on their career direction, connect with someone new in the Organization and gain insight and new perspectives. Specific guidance for mentors and mentees can be found at <https://hr.un.org/together-resources>.

THE UN SECRETARIAT

The Together programme is a new innovative UN mentoring Programme (by the UN Secretariat **DMSPC and ESCAP**) being piloted September-December 2020 that uses an online platform to facilitate

UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SOUTH SUDAN (UNMISS)

Keita Club

The Keita Club at UNMISS was formed in 2018 as an informal mentoring initiative that caters to the realities of the field. The club, which consists of female personnel of all levels, meets monthly to share information and opportunities for training, job vacancies that encourage female applicants, and materials related to leadership development. The Club further organized a leadership training for all members and provides mentoring opportunities for national female staff and national stakeholders to develop substantive communications skills as

well as mentoring opportunities for more junior female staff. The Club, which started as an organic gathering is now a substantial part of life at the compound for female personnel, providing access to formal support and resources as well as the opportunity to socialize and get to know other female colleagues.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE (ITC)

The Women's Mentoring Programme

At ITC, mentors can be at any stage of their career path, acknowledging that every person has skills to share, and knowledge transfer is not only top down, but originates from all organizational levels.

Using the UN Women's overarching Enabling Environment Guidelines in support of interagency collaboration, the mentoring programme aims to contribute to the professional growth and development of women and has the following objectives:

- Support women at all stages of their careers;
- Equip participants with the tools necessary to perform to their highest capability within their current roles and beyond;
- Reinforce core organizational competencies;
- Strengthen technical competencies and/or programmatic knowledge;
- Create opportunities to meet and collaborate with others from different

organizations, with different roles or experiences;

- Support a mutually beneficial mentoring exchange and create a win-win scenario for the pair and the organization.

Since the programme was launched in 2015, female professional-level staff at ITC rose from 39 to 47% between 2015 and 2019 and the use of Work-Life Balance arrangements has doubled in the last seven years (from 66 in 2013 to 133 in 2019), reflecting a ITC's goals with regards to gender equality and the creation of an enabling environment for diversity and inclusion.

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION (WIPO)

WIPO has implemented a career development programme since 2015. The year-long programme includes a variety of complementary components, such as mentorship, career counselling, coaching, training, external studies and individualized support, which participants can access according to their needs. The programme currently targets women at the P4 and P5 levels, and men at the G6 and G7 levels, i.e. where they are underrepresented.

WIPO is evaluating its mentoring career development programme through its Internal Oversight Division. In addition to satisfaction surveys, evaluations provide a critical assessment of the programme beyond perceptions and cast a light on behavioural changes. Most importantly, by focusing on the opportunities and

risks related to the design and delivery of the career development programme, evaluations shift the focus from the individual level to the organizational one. The comprehensive data generated by evaluations examine relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the programme for the organization at large. The data is used to inform internal communication and advocacy efforts, including the career development programme itself.

DEPARTMENTS OF POLITICAL AND PEACEBUILDING AFFAIRS AND PEACE OPERATIONS (DPPA-DPO)

Coffee Mentoring Programme

DPPA-DPO has organized “coffee mentoring” since 2018 with a view to expanding career support and advice opportunities for staff, particularly focusing on women. This informal mentoring programme is especially relevant in the remote working context, as it has become more difficult for staff to expand their professional networks and engage in informal conversations with senior colleagues.

Senior managers at the D-1, D-2, and ASG level volunteer to be mentors for a one-time session. Mentees have access to the list of mentors and can contact them at any time and arrange a meeting based on their availability. Typically, mentees ask questions about the mentor’s career path, and/or seek advice on specific career-related issues or dilemmas. The programme has been very popular among staff members. Moreover, given

its informal and flexible nature, this programme has contributed to breaking down hierarchy barriers, therefore helping to build a more horizontal and open work culture.

DEPARTMENT FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND CONFERENCE MANAGEMENT (DGACM) OF THE UN SECRETARIAT

The Department has started a series of informal mentoring sessions, “*Women in leadership*”. In this framework, panellists such as senior DGACM staff, Permanent Representatives or Special Representatives have shared the challenges and obstacles they had faced in their professional lives as well as the strategies they have found most effective to assert their leadership and exercise influence. The great diversity of approaches and personal experiences of the panellists has helped to gain different perspectives and learn new strategies.

The Department has held a mentoring event at the New York headquarters entitled “*Turning the tables on gender inequality – a conversation with inspiring female colleagues from the United Nations system*,” attended by more than 40 female staff members of the Department. At the event, staff had the opportunity to engage in 30-minute informal conversations with a guest moderator from the United Nations System on various topics such as “Using your non-United Nations experience to thrive at the United Nations” or “From competing to collaborating with female colleagues.”



UNAIDS

The mentoring programme, which was launched in 2014, has provided opportunities to over 102 women staff members to benefit from the programme. The UNAIDS Gender Action Plan (2018-23) opened the UNAIDS mentoring programme to all staff. This enhanced participation and motivation of a broader audience disregarding gender, grades, roles and functions, culture as well as learning for all. The mentoring programme has facilitated both ad hoc knowledge sharing, and long-term capacity building and organizational learning.

The programme is mentee-centred, focusing on the professional and personal development of the mentor and mentee, guided by a mentoring handbook that lays out the framework, the respective roles, and responsibilities. The emphasis of the relationship is on enabling and empowering the mentee through open and authentic communication to take charge of their development and environment. UNAIDS has benefitted as an organization by using mentoring as a learning tool to strengthen a culture of engagement. The impact of the mentoring programme is reviewed in a mid-term and final review every cycle.



BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP

Pride@BCG

Pride@BCG offers extensive formal career development support, as well as mentorship and networking opportunities

to connect with and learn from fellow LGBTQ+ professionals. In addition to this, members often develop strong informal mentoring relationships with senior members of the group. At the local level, there are a variety of activities, from affiliation events such as happy hours to career coaching, education, and community service.

Pride@BCG alumni are a valuable resource, providing professional guidance to current members and maintaining an ongoing relationship with the group. Alumni are invited to attend different events within their region and receive regular updates. Further networks at the Boston Consulting Group exist, such as *Women@BCG* and *Black+Latinx@BCG*.



DELOITTE

Women's Leadership Programmes

Deloitte hosts several intensive programmes to help prepare high-talent professionals for the next phase of their careers. Customized by level (manager, senior manager, and P/P/MD), the programmes include external coaching, sponsorship, 360-degree feedback and focus on areas of leadership, business development, executive presence, negotiation, individual strengths, and career management. The programmes have made such a positive impact that many of the participants have taken it upon themselves to “pay it forward” by sharing what they have learned with more junior colleagues.



ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO- OPERATION IN EUROPE

The aim of the OSCE-wide mentoring programme for women is to encourage professional development and increased access to more senior professional networks for women. Mentoring is part of the measures undertaken by the OSCE within the framework of the overall Gender Parity Strategy of the Organization, with the aim to reach gender parity at all levels by 2026. The previous round of the programme saw a record enrolment of 59 mentoring pairs with participants from 15 OSCE executive structures, and the overall satisfaction with the usefulness and quality of the programme was equally high among mentors and mentees. As of 2020, the mentoring programme has been available online.

ENDNOTES

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