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## Strategic Management Papers

### Sustaining the Momentum: Mentoring for the RNZAF

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Chief of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (CAF, RNZAF) is committed to developing his workforce. In the foreword to his Strategic Plan he remarks that, 'our people are the key to success and underpin everything we do—we need to continue growing our people, allow them to learn, and encourage leadership and innovation at all levels.'<sup>1</sup> One of the RNZAF's primary learning and growth strategies is for leaders to 'continuously improve support to our people' by encouraging their long-term professional development.<sup>2</sup>

2. One of the most exciting attributes of what social demographers call Generation Y— those born between 1978 and 1994 and now making up 50% of the RNZAF's workforce—is that they are keen to learn and respond very well to mentoring.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, mentoring was reserved for senior leaders but it is now often available to all levels of an organisation to enhance talent, or improve performance or behaviour.

3. This paper will provide a rationale for mentoring in the RNZAF. It will describe mentoring, including the subtle differences between coaching and mentoring, and make some broad suggestions for a mentoring programme for the RNZAF.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Lintott, 'Foreword.' *NZAP 701, Royal New Zealand Air Force Strategic Plan, Amendment 1*, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> G. Lintott, *NZAP 701*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Sheahan, *Generation Y: Thriving and Surviving with Generation Y at Work*, Hardie Grant Books, Melbourne Victoria, 2005, p. 45. In addition to Sheahan's analysis, the NZDF's On-going Attitude Survey (OAtS) shows that a desire for feedback and coaching is very important to young members of the RNZAF.

## AIM

4. The aim of this paper is to examine a mentoring system for the RNZAF.

## DEVELOPING TALENT

5. The RNZAF is an organisation whose success relies on motivating young men and women in sufficient numbers to do uniquely challenging and demanding work.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, 50% of the RNZAF's personnel are under the age of 30 years, making it a young organisation compared to New Zealand's working demography.<sup>5</sup> Conventional training courses as part of the RNZAF's career development program provide only some of the outcomes toward producing a succession of motivated people for leadership positions. Moreover, leaving career management up to supervisors can also be unsuccessful. A busy commander may be reluctant to lose potential high flyers by counselling him or her to move on to new opportunities within the RNZAF. Additionally, supervisors who are uncommitted or dislike particular subordinates can effectively block the development of talented people, preventing them from reaching their full potential.<sup>6</sup>

6. A formal mentoring programme to recognise and develop talent in the RNZAF is a viable alternative, or addition, to both of the approaches outlined above. 'Companies with formal, longstanding mentoring programmes claim tangible increases in productivity and efficiency', both of which are attributes sought by the RNZAF in its strategic plan.<sup>7</sup> Drake International cites

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<sup>4</sup> UK MOD DCDC 2007, *Project 31: UK Society and Future Armed Forces*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Data provided to the author by J. Trenberth, Personnel Branch, Royal New Zealand Air Force, 27 Aug 2008.

<sup>6</sup> D. Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor: Fostering Talent in Your Organisation*, (4<sup>th</sup> edition), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London, 2004, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> D. Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor: Fostering Talent in Your Organisation*, (4<sup>th</sup> edition), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London, 2004, p. 31.

‘employing and developing leaders’ as the third most important factor in business success, behind ‘recruiting and retaining’ skilled employees. Career development opportunities are one of the most motivating factors for employee retention and therefore organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

7. IBM found mentoring to be most effective when employees identify a discrepancy between their current level of performance and where they would like to be.<sup>8</sup> The following is a list of benefits that IBM receives from a formal coaching and mentoring programme are also relevant to the RNZAF’s learning and growth initiatives. IBM found that coaching and mentoring:

- a. assists in the advancement of talented people, even if it means losing them to another part of the organisation;
- b. expresses positive and realistic expectations to employees about their performance potential, and motivates others to reach their highest potential;
- c. demonstrates behaviours that foster a climate where learning is valued;
- d. aligns what employees do in their jobs with the organisation’s goals;
- e. provides feedback to foster employee development, including helping people identify their strengths and weaknesses;
- f. encourages people to establish long-range development goals, both personal and professional;

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<sup>8</sup> *Role of the Manager@IBM: Leading High Performance for IBM Through People*, International Business Machines Corporation, USA, 2002.

g. assists employees and managers in reaching agreement on their respective roles in the employee's development.

8. Queensland's University of Technology's structured analysis of research literature concluded that mentoring, albeit in business settings, is generally associated with positive outcomes for organisations, mentors, and mentees.<sup>9</sup> Outcomes for the organisations included improved productivity, attracting and retaining talented staff, and developing team spirit.<sup>10</sup> Mentees perceived career satisfaction, increased motivation and that possible promotion would follow from their involvement in mentoring programmes.<sup>11</sup>

## MENTORING

### Helping to Learn

9. Mentoring has several definitions as befits a complex phenomena, however the following definition is useful because it emphasises the notion of independence from the RNZAF's command structure to attain benefits. 'Mentoring is a process in which one person is responsible for overseeing the career and development of another person outside of the normal manager/subordinate relationship'.<sup>12</sup>

10. Mentoring is based on four basic styles of learning. These four styles are placed within a grid of a second set of relationship dimensions and are outlined in Figure 1.

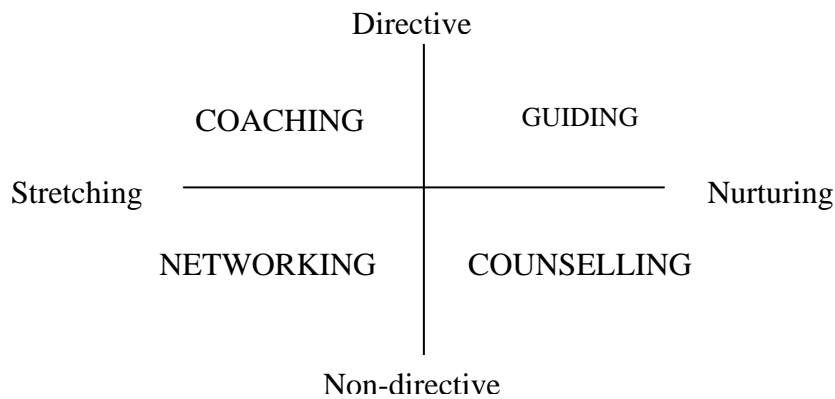
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<sup>9</sup> B. Hansford et. al. 'Does Mentoring Deserve Another Look?' in R. Wiesner & B. Millett, *Human Resource Management: Challenges and Future Directions*, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, Queensland, 2003, p. 219.

<sup>10</sup> B. Hansford et. al. 'Does Mentoring Deserve Another Look?' p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> B. Hansford et. al. 'Does Mentoring Deserve Another Look?' p. 222.

<sup>12</sup> D. Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor: Fostering Talent in Your Organisation*, (4<sup>th</sup> edition), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London, 2004, p. 11.



**Figure 1: Four Styles of Helping Overlaid onto the Two Dimensions of Helping<sup>13</sup>**

11. The two dimensions of helping are characterised by the mentor either managing the relationship proactively (directive), or letting the mentee set the agenda and come to their own conclusions about the way forward (non-directive). The second dimension reflects the mentee's needs for being challenged and stretched (stretching) or about being supported and encouraged (nurturing). Effective mentoring will move along both dimensions in response to the mentee's needs at the time.<sup>14</sup>

12. In terms of the helping styles, while networking, guiding, and counselling all have their roles in increasing performance, coaching is the most relevant style of learning for mentoring because it is the most aligned with the RNZAF's organisational culture. Networking is more appropriate in non-hierarchical organisations such as marketing or sales; guiding can undermine the command relationship in militaries because at an extreme it promotes patronage; and counselling is a very passive role, often characterised as a sounding board for the mentee. Nevertheless, effective

<sup>13</sup> D. Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor*, p.17.

<sup>14</sup> D. Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor*, p.17.

mentoring will use a combination of all four styles of learning, depending on the programme's objectives.

### **Coaching versus Mentoring**

13. Coaching and mentoring are often confused; therefore, close analysis of the differences is important. Coaching is 'a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve.'<sup>15</sup> It is a relatively direct means of helping someone develop competence.

14. Although coaching and mentoring share similar approaches, coaching is focussed on task performance and emphasises development of skills typically addressing a short term need. For example, mechanics may need coaching to develop their skills as technicians. Mentoring on the other hand is focussed on long term goals and on capability and potential. Discussions are likely to be about behaviours and involve reflection by the mentee. Mentoring would be useful as the technician becomes a supervisor, or when an officer assumes command responsibilities. In this context both coaching and mentoring are used to develop talent further, however they can also be used to rectify deficiencies in organisational fit.

15. Coaching and mentoring can also be useful when there are differences between an individual's level of performance and where the RNZAF would like them to be. Figure 2 on the following page describes this outcome in terms of cultural fit and competence.<sup>16</sup> Those people that fit into the top right of the grid are both high performers and aligned with the RNZAF's organisational culture: they are 'star performers'. On the bottom left, this

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<sup>15</sup> E. Parsloe in 'The Coaching and Mentoring Network', 1999, available at: <<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/ResourceCentre/WhatAreCoachingAndMentoring.html>>, accessed 5 September 2008.

group of people neither fit with the organisation nor do they have the competence to develop further. It is likely that they will leave the organisation early.

16. Those personnel characterised as ‘developers’ in the top left and bottom right quadrants are both valuable to the RNZAF however they benefit from either coaching or mentoring respectively to become ‘star performers’. The people high on cultural fit but low on competency need coaching to develop extra skills, and the people low on cultural fit but have high skills need to be mentored to align their behaviour with the RNZAF’s expectations.

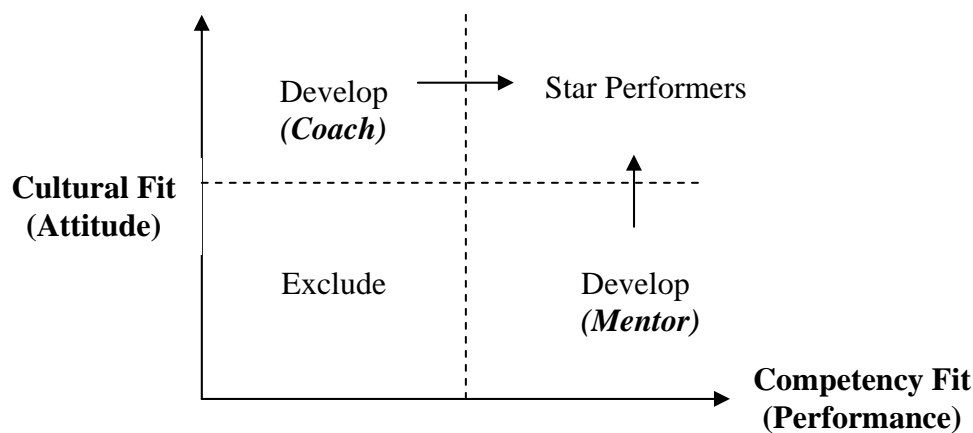


Figure 2: Cultural Fit Versus Competency Fit

17. While coaching and mentoring are different processes that enable individuals to achieve their full potential, the common thread is that both activities are a vehicle for analysis, reflection and action that enable recipients to achieve success both in their careers and personal lives.

### Changed Context

18. Traditionally, the mentor is the expert and the mentee is the learner, although mentors can receive important benefits as well, such as increased

self-esteem and satisfaction.<sup>17</sup> However, the RNZAF has moved on from a stable and homogenous organisation to one of increasing turbulence and an increasingly diverse workforce. Restructuring, rapid introduction of new technologies, and a greater cultural and gender diversity has combined to transform the traditional nature of mentoring. In this new context, mentors will be co-learners because they may also be novices dealing with new career strategies, new rules, and new technologies. Moreover, the mentors will have opportunities to learn about the values, needs and perspectives of a younger generation. Of itself, this is a good reason to resist outsourcing mentoring to an external organisation. In addition to counselling, guiding and coaching, senior mentors will have to be willing to ask questions, listen, and be open about what they do not know and what they could learn.<sup>18</sup>

## **A MENTORING PROGRAMME FOR THE RNZAF**

### **Formal versus Informal Mentoring Programmes**

19. Formal mentoring is a structured programme in which mentoring relationships are established and supported by the RNZAF. Compared to informal programmes they are controlled processes designed to work to the advantage of the RNZAF and the majority of its people. Furthermore, it provides meaning and direction for the relationships, and necessary support, including training and ongoing review of processes.

20. Mentoring left to its own devices (informal mentoring) generally has stronger elements of friendship and empathy than formal programmes.

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<sup>17</sup> K. Kram and D. Hall, 'Mentoring in a Context of Diversity and Turbulence', in E. Kossek and S. Lobel (eds.) *Managing Diversity: Human Resource Strategies for Transforming the Workplace*, Blackwell Publishers, Massachusetts, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> K. Kram and D. Hall, 'Mentoring in a Context of Diversity and Turbulence.'

However, they may exclude a number of people because dominant and/or ambitious people may drain a scarce pool of mentors. The individuals in these informal pairings are likely to have similar attributes, 'but diversity in a mentoring relationship stimulates the examination of issues from different perspectives.'<sup>19</sup>

21. Successful mentoring in the RNZAF that values teamwork, professionalism and integrity is likely to include elements of informal

mentoring within a formal programme. For example, once roles and objectives have been formally identified and established, the relationships could operate informally. Successful formal relationships may develop into informal ones once the programme is underway with a critical mass of relationships established and a culture of mentoring created.

### **Setting up a Mentoring Programme**

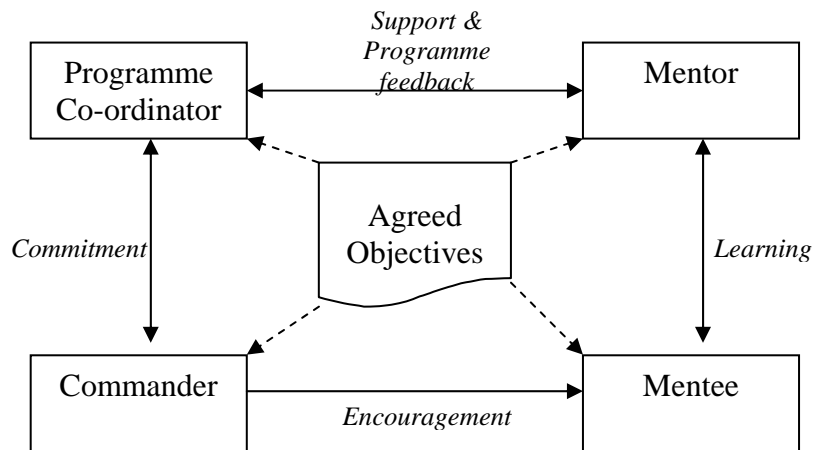
22. An RNZAF mentoring programme would need to conform to the 'centralised control, decentralised execution' concept of command. That is, Directorate of Personnel (DPERS) should provide the broad objectives, training, support, and overall programme management, while the actual mentoring format—the preferred method is face-to-face—should be left to individuals to decide upon. A Programme Co-ordinator established within DPERS would monitor the relationships and coordinate any training of mentors that may be required.

23. Four people will be directly involved in a mentoring programme: mentor, mentee, mentee's commander, and the programme co-ordinator. Their roles are independent of the chain of command and their discussions

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<sup>19</sup> D. Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor*, p. 27.

are strictly confidential. Their relationships are described diagrammatically in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Mentoring Programme Relationships**

24. The critical input to a mentoring programme will be ensuring all four people have a clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve and the effort required. For example, typical objectives for a programme for young aircrew officers might include:

- a. preparing junior officers for subordinate command positions;
- b. developing advanced professional competencies in critical areas (for example, test and evaluation capabilities);
- c. fostering a culture of learning beyond aviation-related topics.

25. Decisive leadership needs to be applied to the mentoring programme to ensure its success. New Zealand's Chief of Air Force and his leadership team must demonstrate to the RNZAF that mentoring is a legitimate and effective method of developing and improving people's performance.

Importantly, it should not be seen as a system limited to those people destined for senior leadership roles. The programme should be part of the RNZAF's wider learning culture and available to as many people as possible, noting that it is only one dimension of career development.

## CONCLUSION

26. Mentoring would build capacity for the RNZAF's future success and should become part of its workforce strategy to sustain the momentum of career development. Research has shown that mentoring is likely to deliver positive outcomes for the RNZAF, mentees and mentors. Mentoring could be a valuable organisational asset as part of the RNZAF's workforce development toolbox to foster a culture of continuous improvement, motivate young men and women to establish and meet long term professional and personal objectives, develop talent, and retain personnel.

27. Mentoring can serve two broad development purposes: to enhance talent, or change behaviours either in terms of skill or attitude. Mentoring styles will depend on the relationship and objectives of the mentor and mentee, and may be directive or non-directive along with a focus on either stretching or nurturing the mentee.

28. A formal mentoring programme is recommended for the RNZAF, noting that as the programme progresses once a rapport is established the co-ordination of it is likely to become less intrusive. Clarity regarding objectives and what participants want to get from the programme is critical to its success as is senior leadership's commitment and encouragement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

29. It is recommended that CAF:

- a. **note** that a mentoring system is consistent with the RNZAF's strategic objective to 'build the people and tools to take the RNZAF into the future';
- b. **note** that a mentoring system would positively add to a culture of continuous improvement, motivate RNZAF personnel to establish and meet long term professional and personal objectives, develop talent, and aid in the retention of personnel;
- c. **agree** that a mentoring system should become part of the RNZAF's workforce development strategy; and
- d. **direct** Assistant Chief of Personnel to develop a formal mentoring programme for the RNZAF by 30 June 2009.