

## **MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES AND MILITARY PERFORMANCE AMONG THE KENYA DEFENCE FORCES**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents an attempt to understand the relationship between mentorship programmes and military performance among the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF). In today's realm of strategic studies, mentorship is the foundation of any nation's military professionalism and is usually the fabric of organization culture and leadership. This paper interrogates the contribution of mentorship programmes to military performance among the KDF. This is achieved through the analysis of the efficacy of mentorship programme for leadership development in the Kenya Defence Forces with the aim of proffering strategies for enhancing leadership development. The article is anchored on the Servant Leadership Theory. A literature review was conducted, questionnaires, and Key Informant Interviews were held. The study established that in KDF the mentorship programmes have not been effective. The concept is unstructured and unknown to many members of KDF. The findings however, indicate that a well-structured program leads to improved performance, efficiency, and effectiveness. Equally, mentorship programs in KDF foster commitment and retention in service. The study concludes dedicated mentorship programmes can be executed in smaller group units and sub-branches. There is a need to institutionalize the program through a policy as currently, only informal mentorship frameworks exist. KDF needs to deliberately initiate strategies to ground this concept amid the financial commitment that comes with it.

## **Introduction**

In the study of International Relations, it has been extensively argued that the military is the last instrument of resort in statecraft and as such, the men and women must maintain a high standard of professionalism in their actions. In the aforementioned discipline of study, it is widely argued that the environment that nation states operate continue to be vulnerable, uncertain, complex and sometimes ambiguous. These two sets of arguments therefore suggest that, as a military, retaining a competitive edge in the areas of innovation, transformation and the retention of high standards of leadership are key in guaranteeing state survival. Military leadership is significantly unique; it requires extremely high levels of competence and dedication to deliver on the national objectives irrespective of the sacrifice. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has experienced quite a disruption on how we do things in the military, presenting a paradigm shift in our engagement internally to deliver on external promises.

Globally, militaries have a long tradition of mentorship. Mentoring continues to be advocated as a tool for equipping people to develop critical skills. Teaching, coaching, and mentoring is a core competency within this leader development model, yet many soldiers are dissatisfied with the mentorship that they receive. Furthermore, cultural values of the younger generation and the changing demographics continue to challenge the military's leadership development strategies. Most militaries lack an effective formal mentorship program in order to improve leader development, leverage the power of millennials, and increase potential in all categories of people. One way of transforming and developing a military officer to premier leadership ethics and culture is through mentorship. Mentorship has been identified as an effective means of developing leaders. Scholars such as Gleiman, Ashley & Gleiman (2020) have identified mentorship in civilian organizations as an effective means of developing current and future leadership empowerment. Additionally, Crisp and Kelly (2018) have recommended that mentorship relationships be included as part of the practice of developing leaders. This demonstrates the need for military organizations to design, implement, and modify formal mentoring programs to meet military exigencies.

The fiber of any nation's organizational culture and leadership, as well as the cornerstone of its military professionalism, is often mentorship (Gleiman, Ashley & Gleiman, 2020). Redaja (2019) asserts that modern military organizations recognize and encourage the incorporation of mentoring in the programs of development of leaders. One of the most essential elements of a military officer's transition and advancement to senior roles is participation in mentoring programs. Cojocar, & Ana (2014) note that in the United States of America for example, military officers are professionally encouraged to participate in mentorship opportunities where they acquire mentorship through specialized curriculum within the

organization and externally through select approved institutions. This is not only on professional expertise but also on maturity, critical team-building skills and other life aspects. In Kenya, KDF is undergoing a rapid transformation accelerated by the changing environment from the well-defined and predictable security to the current unpredictable and irregular threats accelerated by climate change, underdevelopment and poverty.

The military-wide initiative is anticipated to stimulate and support a continuity of local mentorship programs at subordinate commands, across multiple branches, and at educational institutions, which the KDF lacks. Mentorship programmes has not been properly embraced in the militaries as a valuable strategy for growing human capital despite possessing the above-mentioned combination of factors for leadership development. In order to make recommendations for improving the leadership development of the KDF, this article evaluates the effectiveness of the mentorship program for that purpose. This study investigates the idea of mentoring and how it affects the growth of leadership in the KDF. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the existing mentorship programmes for leadership development in the Kenya Defense Forces and to assess the efficacy of the existing mentorship programmes for Leadership Development in the Kenya Defense Forces.

### **Theoretical Basis**

This paper is located within the Servant Leadership theory by Greenleaf in 1970 (Norris, Sitton, & Baker, 2017). This is an emergent leadership theory that postulates that leaders must serve first. Wilkin (2020) argues that various characteristics are consistently identified as associated with servant leaders. Significantly, the first list comprises what is stated as functional attributes since they are prominently repetitive in nature. The functional attributes are the characteristics and distinctive features belonging to servant leaders and are viewed through specific leader behaviours in the organization. They include vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others and empowerment. The other characteristics are identified as accompanying attributes of servant leadership. They include communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, delegation, influence, encouragement, listening and teaching (Norris, Sitton, & Baker, 2017). The accompanying characteristics are not secondary or subordinate in nature but rather complementary and prerequisite to effective servant leadership. Ryckman (2017) observes that a leader is not necessarily the person with the most distinguishable title, pay or longest tenure, but the individual acting as role model, risk taker, servant and promoter of others.

According to Harber & McMaster (2018), one characteristic that is given prominence in servant leadership is empowerment. Empowerment is viewed as the provision of permission to individuals to showcase their skills, talents, resources, and experiences, and to make their own decisions in the completion of the work assigned. In terms of application in the military circle, this means that junior officers are mentored through

delegation of authority and the capacity to make decisions that previously were the domain of senior officers. This involves senior officers entrusting the juniors with authority and responsibility based on mentored mutual agreements.

According to Sloan (2009), servant leadership fosters follower autonomy, growth, and learning, all fostered via empowerment and mentoring. This demonstrates how servant leadership is used in the military when senior officers appreciate the skills of the juniors through mentoring programs that provide them with the tools, instil a sense of shared power, and enable them to operate at their highest level. Since the servant leadership theory encourages the use of mentoring as a strategy for empowering and sharing decision-making between senior and junior officers, it is pertinent to this study.

### **Methodology**

The study is conducted to establish if there exists a relationship between mentorship and leadership development in KDF. Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are used in the study. In order to create the research through the examination of secondary data, substantial library research is conducted, during which relevant studies and published works from national and international repositories are consulted and examined. Both quantitative and qualitative data are used in the research to uncover associations that need to be further examined with various categories of respondents within the study population. The study samples the desired population from the Kenya Defense Forces using both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. KDF leadership comprises three categories; strategic, operational and tactical level leaders. The study specifically targets these categories to bring out the true reflection in the institution in understanding the concept of mentorship and its influence on leadership. The study seeks to understand the nature of mentorship programmes for leadership development in KDF and their efficacy in KDF leadership development.

A sample of 132 general officers, senior officers, and officers drawn from the strategic, operational and tactical levels were given questionnaires and interview schedules to complete; the results were then collected for study. The respondents' quantitative data is gathered using the questionnaires. Using a purposive sample of senior military leaders at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, the interview schedules were utilized to collect qualitative data. Secondary information is gathered from studies and publications found in national and international repositories that are relevant to the study topic.

## **Analysis of the Findings**

### **The Efficacy of the Existing Mentorship Programs for Leadership Development**

Today's world is more globalized and complex, and leadership development has changed from a traditional perspective to one that takes into account contemporary initiatives like mentoring. This is also a result of the knowledge that the contextual and intricate nature of leadership development aims to instil contemporary ideals like social awareness, interpersonal competency, and social skills. Leadership development has the ability to help new leaders flourish, particularly after taking up the succession baton from departing and retiring leaders in the field of rising multinational organizations. The armed services have made an effort to promote the advantages and positive features of mentorship (leadership and professional growth) while discouraging its disadvantages, such as nepotism and fraternization. There is also a growing trend in actualization of formal mentorship programs and education by the military services and especially since the year 2000 (Wilkin, 2020). The growth of mentorship programs in the private sector is mostly to blame for this. This shows that, in an effort to better its workforce, the military absorbs social science concepts like mentoring in the same way it incorporates new technologies into its fighting programs.

Xu & Anna (2022) argue that globally, organizations have credited mentorship for successful development of employees through inculcating motivation, inspiration and skills enhancement. Such organizations view mentorship as an innovative management strategy that significantly contributes to the rejuvenation, regeneration and survival from within. A more knowledgeable or experienced person acting as a mentor, role model, instructor, or even a supporter of a less knowledgeable or experienced person is seen in such organizations as a personalized relationship. The mentor is the person with more knowledge and experience, and the mentee is the person with less knowledge and experience. Both the mentor and the mentee gain from the mentoring connection. The advantages for the mentors are that they serve as role models for the next generation in fields where they are most interested and concerned, and they typically make sure that the mentee adopts the best practices (Melanson, 2007).

The mentor also benefits from mentoring since they have more time for more professional tasks, get organization recognition and rewards, and perform better at work because they are exposed to

fresh ideas. For the mentee, the advantages are evidence that they are prepared to go on to the next stage of their career growth and are determined to get the additional support they need to make that advancement. Compared to non-mentees, they also benefit from promotions, greater incomes and pay, less stressful work and career experiences, and fewer plans to leave organizations (Melanson, 2009). As such mentorship is a powerful tool for leadership development in every organization.

According to Rath, & Barry (2008) the importance of mentorship in leadership development is underlined in the wisdom of Strength-Based Leadership theory, developed by Martin Seligman in 2003, on the need to maximize the effectiveness, productivity, and success of companies. This is implemented through continuous development of the strengths of organizational resources such as people. As such mentorship has a significant role in development of leaders in organizations. For many organizations, mentorship is a cornerstone of professional development and career satisfaction. Mentorship not only improves job satisfaction but also enhances productivity, personal growth and rejuvenates passion for superior performance of individuals (Melanson, 2007).

The respondents of this study were presented with selected statements to assist in evaluating the efficacy of mentorship programmes in the Kenya Defence Forces. In this regard, the respondents were presented with the statement: “Efficacy of Mentorship and Leadership Development.” The findings are presented in **Table 1** in percentage (%).

**Table 1: Effectiveness of the Existing Programmes on Mentorship in KDF**

<b>Efficacy of Mentorship and Leadership Development</b>	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Mentorship is a critical tool for KDF today and in the future	2	3	10	15	70
Mentorship is a driver to effective KDF leadership.	3	5	12	15	65
Mentoring programmes builds leadership, knowledge, skills and experience.	1	1	3	20	75
Mentoring leads to improved performance, efficiency and effectiveness.	2	3	5	10	80
Mentorship programmes have been incorporated as a critical tool for leadership transfer in KDF	1	2	5	55	37
Mentorship programmes in KDF foster commitment and retention.	1	4	5	40	50
KDF military officers who participate in mentorship programmes have a higher promotions ratio than the others who never participate.	2	3	5	55	35
The strength of KDF military leadership is through strategic level mentorship engagement	5	10	60	10	15

This study established that mentorship not only supports and guides the mentee but helps mentees achieve their own goals and those of the institution. The respondents strongly agreed (70%) that mentorship is a critical tool for KDF today and in the future. This was a key finding and suggests that KDF should focus on mentorship programmes in order to explore the full potential of

mentorship. The respondents again strongly agreed (65%) that mentorship is a driver to effective KDF leadership. By fostering a more inclusive and diverse leadership pipeline, mentorship programmes can help to ensure that the military and its leaders are better equipped to address the complex challenges of modern warfare. The respondents were also asked to state whether mentoring programmes build leadership, knowledge, skills and experience. Seventy five percent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. This suggests that mentorship promotes a culture of learning and continuous improvement, and creates a strong sense of institutional knowledge and culture. The other statement that was tested was that mentoring leads to improved performance, efficiency and effectiveness. Eighty percent of the respondents strongly agreed that mentorship programmes help in improving performance in the military. By fostering a culture of mentorship, military leaders can have better clarity of goals and enhance accountability. On the statement that mentorship programmes in KDF foster commitment and retention, 50% of the respondents strongly agreed that mentorship can contribute to increased job commitment and retention by providing officers with the support, guidance, and career development opportunities they need to succeed in their roles. By fostering a culture of mentorship, the military can ensure that its leaders are invested in the organization and committed to its mission.

Other statements that the respondents were asked to comment upon included whether mentorship programmes have been incorporated as a critical tool for leadership transfer in KDF. Fifty five percent of the respondents agreed that mentorship can play a crucial role in leadership transfer in the military. This is attained by facilitating knowledge transfer, succession planning, cultural continuity, and improved adaptability. By investing in mentorship programmes, the military can ensure that it has a strong pipeline of leaders equipped with the skills and knowledge required to meet the complex challenges of modern warfare. On the statement on whether military officers who participate in mentorship programmes have a higher promotion ratio than others who never participate, 55% of the respondents agreed that officers who participate in mentorship programmes may have a higher promotion ratio than those who do not participate. The deduction here is that these programmes can provide officers with visibility, networking opportunities, and the support they need to succeed in their roles and advance their careers within the military. Notably, the majority of the respondents were neutral on the statement that the strength of KDF military leadership is through strategic level mentorship engagement. Sixty percent of the respondents were neutral.

## **Challenges to Mentorship Programmes in Kenya Defence Forces**

Mentorship programmes have positive effects on development of leaders in all organizational setups. Success of leadership development is hinged on strengthening of the mentoring process to attain the needs of the protégé (Garcia, et. al., 2017). Empirical studies have been conducted on causes of mentorship failures and its influence on leadership development. For instance, Muir (2014) studied the influence of formal mentoring programme on leadership development in British Army. This is a qualitative case-study that employed in-depth semi-structured interviews from participants and mentors. There were three main themes that emerged from data analysis; mentor partnership-leader identity discovery, leader identity development through critical learning environment and leader identity development under self-knowledge. The findings showed that the principles of adult learning were instrumental components of leadership development process. There was a general belief that lack of formal mentoring was detrimental to the success of the mentoring relationship in the military.

A different study by Randolph Jr and Burl researched on the mentoring and success of African American Army officers in the US Army. The study employed qualitative explanatory case study design to explain the relationship between mentoring and African American Army Captain success levels. The findings show that the causes of the failure in mentorship were directly related to the lost mentoring time for junior officers.

Changya Hu, Jung-Chuen Wang, Min-Hwa Sun, and Hsin-Hung Chen (2008) investigated the connection between official mentoring roles and mentee outcomes in military academies in South Korea. The sample size comprised of 424 freshmen participants and 659 senior cadets from different military academies. Data is analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression analysis and the results show that there is a positive relationship between career mentoring and mentor satisfaction and provision of career mentoring. However, career mentoring has a negative relationship with commitment of freshmen to military career. Lack of career mentoring tended to contribute to failure of mentoring relationship between the freshmen and mentors.

As already discussed, mentorship has the potential for contributing to leadership development in organizations. However, it is notable that in some instances, the mentorship process may face

failures. There are many variables that may lead to failure of the mentoring process between the mentor and protégé. This discussion is presented below.

The respondents were presented with selected statements to assist in evaluating the challenges of mentorship programmes in Kenya Defence Forces. In this regard, the respondents were presented with the statement: “Challenges to Mentorship Programmes in Kenya Defence Forces.” The findings are presented in Table 2 in percentage (%).

**Table 2: Challenges to Mentorship Programmes in KDF**

<b>Challenges of mentorship programmes</b>	<b>SD (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>SA (%)</b>
KDF does not support mentorship programmes	10	60	15	10	5
There is inadequacy in role models to support the mentorship programme in KDF.	5	65	15	10	5
KDF top leadership discourage mentorship programmes	5	70	10	15	5
KDF mentorship programmes are about being talked to by the mentor rather than engagement/exchange in reflective dialogue	0	5	30	60	5
Ethical issues among KDF Chain of Command negatively affect mentorship programmes	0	5	15	70	10
KDF does not allocate enough time and thought on mentorship programmes	5	5	5	75	10
There is insufficient budgetary allocation for mentorship programmes in KDF	10	5	10	65	10
Mentorship in KDF is viewed as a programme for the psychologically weak individuals	15	70	10	5	0
KDF does not accord enough mentorship programmes for junior officers.	0	5	5	75	15

A set of statements are presented to the respondents in order to establish the challenges that KDF is facing or likely to encounter in operationalizing mentorship agenda. In synthesizing the challenges to mentorship programmes in KDF, 60% of the respondents disagree with the statement that KDF does not support mentorship programmes. This statement rephrased suggests that leadership support is essential for the success of mentorship programmes in the military. Some ways in which leadership can provide support include: establishing a culture of mentorship, providing training, allocating resources, encouraging participation, monitoring progress, recognizing success and providing feedback.

In asking whether there is an inadequacy of role models to support mentorship programmes in KDF, 65% of the respondents disagree with 5% strongly disagreeing with the statement. This strongly suggests that KDF has enough pool of mentors that can help to create a more robust and effective mentorship programme, providing benefits to both mentors and mentees. The other statement that is tested is whether KDF leadership discourages mentorship programme. In this statement, 70% of the respondents disagree with the statement, with 5% strongly disagreeing. This suggests that KDF leadership has created a conducive environment that encourages mentorship programmes. Conducive environment for mentorship spans across aspects of training, morale and welfare.

The respondents were equally presented with the statement whether mentorship in KDF is viewed as a programme for the psychologically weak individuals. Seventy percent of respondents disagree with the statement, with 15% strongly disagreeing. Mentorship programmes in the military can be beneficial for all service members, including those who may be struggling with emotional challenges. Mentorship programmes can provide emotional support, guidance, and encouragement to mentees, but they are not designed to provide clinical interventions for mental health issues. If a service member is struggling with emotional challenges, they should seek appropriate mental health support from a qualified mental health professional.

The other statement that is tested is whether KDF mentorship programmes are about conversational engagement by the mentor rather than exchange in reflective dialogue. Sixty percent of the respondents agree with the statement. This is a concern as it reveals a flaw in the execution of mentorship programmes. Mentorship programmes are not just about being talked to

by the mentor but also about engaging in reflective dialogue and exchanging ideas. Effective mentorship involves a two-way conversation between the mentor and mentee, where the mentee can ask questions, share their experiences, and receive feedback and guidance from the mentor. The mentor should also actively listen to the mentee's concerns and provide support and encouragement. The goal of mentorship is to facilitate the mentee's growth and development, which requires a collaborative and interactive approach rather than a one-sided lecture.

The other statement presented to the respondents is the extent to which ethical issues among KDF chain of command negatively affect mentorship programmes. 70% of the respondents agree that ethical issues among KDF chain of command negatively affect mentorship programmes. Mentorship programmes rely on trust, respect, and open communication between mentors and mentees. When ethical issues arise, such as instances of unethical behavior or abuse of power by those in positions of authority, it can damage trust and undermine the effectiveness of the mentorship programme. Mentors who engage in unethical behavior may not be able to provide positive guidance and support to their mentees, and mentees may be reluctant to seek advice or guidance from mentors who they do not trust. Additionally, ethical issues can create a toxic work environment that may discourage individuals from participating in the mentorship programme altogether.

The respondents are presented with the statement that KDF does not allocate enough time and thought on mentorship programmes. 75% respondents agree that KDF does not allocate enough time and thought on mentorship programmes. This feedback supports the earlier concern of the efficacy of mentorship programmes in KDF. Allocating time to mentorship programmes is essential for the development of individuals. Although KDF leadership has conceptually accepted that mentorship is a useful tool for leadership development, the tool has remained a concept at most levels of command than operational. The other statement presented to the respondents is whether there is insufficient budgetary allocation for mentorship programmes in KDF. 65% respondents agree that there is insufficient budgetary allocation for mentorship programmes in KDF. The deduction on this statement is that budgetary consideration in support of the programme is likely to be of a lesser priority among other programmes in KDF. Without adequate funding, it may be difficult to provide mentorship opportunities to all members of the military.

The respondents are asked whether the KDF does offer enough mentorship programs for young officers in the interim. The KDF does not offer adequate mentorship programs for junior officers, according to 75% of respondents. Lack of mentoring in the military can result in diminished readiness, less resilience, greater risk of mental health problems, and lower retention rates, especially in today's context. Organizations must offer mentoring programs that foster the professional growth of junior officers and guarantee that they have the tools and resources they need to be successful in their positions.

### **Conclusion**

This study assesses the efficacy of KDF mentorship programmes as a means for developing effective leaders. The study first confirms that there was a need to build a culture of effective mentorship in KDF. The effectiveness of the existing mentorship programmes in KDF is evaluated in terms of their ability to offer meaningful guidance and support to the mentee for personal and professional growth. The study determines that existing mentorship programmes offer benefits of career growth and opportunities for networking. Although KDF leadership supports mentorship, there are several factors that act as impediments to their effectiveness. The first challenge identified is that mentorship in KDF is a conversational engagement instead of a reflective dialogue between the mentor and mentee. Other challenges identified included ethical issues such as abuse of power, which affects the trust between mentor and mentee, failure to allocate adequate time for mentorship programmes, and insufficient budgetary allocation.

Although there are still gaps in the mentorship literature especially in Kenya, this experimental study in KDF provides preliminary evidence that a semiformal mentorship program can serve as an institutional mechanism that enhances leader efficacy development. The article specifically demonstrates that mentorship increases leader efficacy. Mentorship modules for strategic, operational, and tactical levels can help to improve mentorship programs. Institutionalizing the concept and allowing proper implementation strategies to include formal mentoring programmes orchestrated through training, seminars and other forms of engagements, while allowing for periodical assessment and feedback will go a long way in grounding the benefits of the program.

## **Recommendations**

The study makes the following recommendations:

There is need to institutionalize the programme through a policy since only an informal mentorship framework exists currently.

There is need to reinvigorate social events within military units as they foster social cohesion, which is a key ingredient for mentorship.

Define clear goals and expectations: Before launching a mentorship program, KDF should define the goals of the programme and communicate these to both mentors and mentees. Clear expectations should be established for both parties in terms of time commitment, communication frequency, and the specific skills or areas of development the mentorship will focus on.

Select mentors carefully: KDF should select mentors who have relevant experience, are skilled communicators, and are committed to the success of their mentees. Ideally, mentors should be individuals who have a track record of successful mentoring relationships and are able to provide guidance, support, and constructive feedback.

Train mentors: KDF should provide mentors with training on effective mentoring practices, including active listening, setting goals, providing feedback, and managing expectations. Mentors should also be trained on how to handle difficult situations and how to maintain a positive and productive relationship with their mentees.

Match mentors and mentees thoughtfully: KDF should consider factors such as personality, experience, and career goals when matching mentors and mentees. It is important to ensure that the mentor and mentee have a good rapport and that their communication styles are compatible.

Provide ongoing support: KDF should provide ongoing support to both mentors and mentees throughout the mentorship program. This could include regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and resources for both parties to help them achieve their goals.

Measure success: KDF should establish metrics for success and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the mentorship program. This could include measuring improvements in specific skills or knowledge areas, or tracking the progress of mentees towards their career goals

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