

*The Impact of Mentoring on Professional Development of Young Working Adults:
The MentorsHub Case Study*

Kenneth Tan, Octave Institute, Singapore

The Asian Conference on Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The impact of mentoring on professional development is unequivocal and has been long documented in academia (Zheng, Zhao & Yuan, 2020). First, mentors provide information and skills to mentees regarding future career trajectories, options, and pathways. Second, mentors provide access into their social networks that are not otherwise formally available which further provides the mentee with opportunities for information and skills acquisition and also potential career opportunities. Third, mentors, according to Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), model behaviors for mentees to follow in the workplace setting them up for further success. Hence all of these processes should result in more efficacious career-related outcomes such as compensation and job satisfaction. This study, using the MentorsHub case study (a Singapore non-profit organisation), seeks to confirm the theory of change and accompanying hypotheses by first presenting the relevant literature, before turning to the quantitative data analysis, and further following up with qualitative data analysis from Focus Group Discussions conducted. The impact of mentoring is tested using through Hypothesis 1: MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the personal and professional development of participants and Hypothesis 2: MentorsHub has aligned the professional and life goals of participants to be consistent with their inherent talents and strengths. Given evidence from the literature review, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis, the hypotheses are correct that MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the professional and personal development of mentees and aligns their internal values and strengths with their personal and career goals through mentoring, coaching and workshops.

Keywords: Mentoring, Professional Development, Personal Development, Coaching and Career

iafor

The International Academic Forum

www.iafor.org

Introduction

MentorsHub Ltd has a team of over 50 PMET Mentors that provide voluntary mentoring programs to undergraduates and young working adults from the ages of 21 to 26. Priorities are given to Singaporeans and PRs from low-to-mid income or single parent families, the underserved and the minority groups. Besides a one-year long mentoring cycle where each mentor meets the mentee for at least 6 mentoring sessions, MentorsHub also provides at least 5 workshops per year to each mentee in areas of uncovering their life purpose, building their strengths, preparing their CV, elevating their first 100 days on the job, developing and enhancing their personal brand and also, engaging them in networking opportunities.

Objective

This report seeks to confirm the theory of change and accompanying hypotheses by first presenting the relevant literature, before turning to the quantitative data analysis, and further following up with qualitative data analysis from Focus Group Discussions conducted.

Hypothesis 1: MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the personal and professional development of participants

Hypothesis 2: MentorsHub has aligned the professional and life goals of participants to be consistent with their inherent values and strengths

Professional Development

The impact of mentoring on professional development is unequivocal and has been long documented in academia (Hunt and Michael 1983). There are a variety of ways in which mentoring supports professional development. First, mentors provide information and skills to mentees regarding future career trajectories, options, and pathways. Second, mentors provide access into their social networks that are not otherwise formally available which further provides the mentee with further opportunities for information and skills acquisition but also potential career opportunities. Third, mentors, according to social learning theory, model behaviors for mentees to follow in the workplace setting them up for further success. Hence all of these processes should thus result in more efficacious career-related outcomes such as compensation and job satisfaction.

A keystone study published by Allen et. al in 2004 provides significant evidence for the positive effect of mentoring on professional development. First studying the impact of mentoring on mentees' reported outcomes, performing a meta-analysis on studies comparing mentored and non-mentored groups, they found that in terms of objective outcomes such as compensation and numbers of promotions, mentored individuals were likely to have higher compensation and more promotions compared to non-mentored individuals. On subjective-related outcomes, mentored individuals were more satisfied with their career, more likely to believe that they would advance in their career, and more likely to be committed to their career compared to their non-mentored counterparts.

Second, studying the relationship between career mentoring and outcomes, they find similar evidence that more career mentoring is related to greater compensation, salary growth, and more promotions. For subjective outcomes, there was greater career satisfaction and job satisfaction. Third, analyzing studies that focused on the linkages between role-modeling and career outcomes, they found that role-modeling led to greater compensation, promotions, career and job satisfaction (Allen et al. 2004). To provide a taste of the extent to which how mentoring improves objective outcomes, a study compiled by the HR department of Sun Microsystems focusing on 1,000 employees over a 5-year period found that both

mentors and mentees were approximately 20% more likely to get a raise than people who did not participate and mentees were promoted five times more likely to be promoted than the non-mentored (Quast 2011). Thus, it is likely that MentorsHub did have a positive impact on the professional development of mentees.

Personal Development

There are very little studies focusing on the relationship between personal development and mentoring. This could be partially attributable to the generally untestable nature of such a relationship, however, there are a spate of studies from a literature review by Jennifer Dizickowski that, through mostly anecdotal evidence, uncovered benefits such as: 1) improved self-esteem, 2) increased insight, 3) reduced stress and anxiety and 4) greater awareness of different approaches (Dzickowski 2013). Hence, it would seem that mentoring should have a positive impact on personal growth.

Theory of Change

A theory of change seeks to explain the impact an organization has had by breaking down the elements into inputs, outputs, outcomes, and the assumptions/hypotheses by which the inputs achieves such outcomes. Below, in Figure 1, the theory of change for MentorsHub for this report following the National Youth Council’s Programme Logic Model (National Youth Council Singapore, n.d.).

Inputs/ resources	Activities	Assumptions & Hypotheses	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Intermediate outcomes	Long-term outcomes
Mentorship Trainers/Speakers Funding Coaches	Career workshops a. Achieving personal effectiveness in the workplace b. Navigating office politics c. Establishing meaningful connection d. Developing leadership qualities Networking opportunities (ACCELERATE) 1. Mentoring Retreat – discovering and unleashing your potential 2. Mentorships 3. Strengths and life coaching 4. Personal branding 5. Acing the interview/Growth mindset 6. Supercharge your first 100 days at work	1. MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the personal and professional development of participants 2. MentorsHub has aligned the professional and life goals of participants to be consistent with their talents and strengths	Youth participants who have a clearer and positive outlook on life and are prepped to succeed professionally	1. Better understanding of your skills and qualities, and how to leverage them, Ability to better align your personal and professional goals, more confidence in pursuing your goals with a practical gameplan (Key ASPIRE Outcomes) 2. Higher level of professional and practical skills for the workplace, widening of your network and opportunities, more confidence in handling unexpected or unknown scenarios at work (Key Accelerate outcomes)	1. Tenacity, Confidence (Driven) 2. Proactiveness, Growth Mindset (Resilient) 3. Career Preparedness (Competitive) 4. Greater realization of internal strengths and weaknesses and aligning professional and life goals with candidate characteristics	1. Driven & resilient 2. Competent & Collaborative 3. Candidates face greater life fulfilment due to personal alignment of internal strengths

Figure 1: Theory of Change

Results and Findings

1. Mentoring Retreat Data

From the data, insights, as listed below, can be analyzed:

- a. Workshop rating
- b. To recommend to friends
- c. Knowledge application
- d. Process indicators
- e. Sentiment analysis
- f. Year-by-year comparison

2. Mentees' Progress Evaluation (MPE) Report

The MPE is an evaluation of every mentee conducted by the management at the end of every mentoring cycle to understand 1) where and how the mentorship has helped the mentee and 2) what could be further improved on. The mentorship cycle is then officially closed, except for those who request to extend.

Most of the data provided from 2016 to 2021 is presented in comments form. Thematic analysis can be applied from 2018 to 2020, only summary-level data is presented. 2022 contains key variables that can test the hypotheses.

Mentoring Retreat Data Analysis

The Mentoring Retreat is a pre-mentoring preparation program conducted for the mentees by MentorsHub. It provides participants with a safe, shared space to discover new insights about themselves. Through the Soul-Strength-Soar workshops, mentees are led through a process to personal vision casting and career goals setting.

Data where candidates were asked to rate their agreeableness on a scale of 1 to 5 with the following statements: (1) "The knowledge I gained from this workshop is applicable to my personal development", and (2) "I know how to apply what I have learned to help me meet my goals", is analyzed in this section.

Data From 2019 Cohort

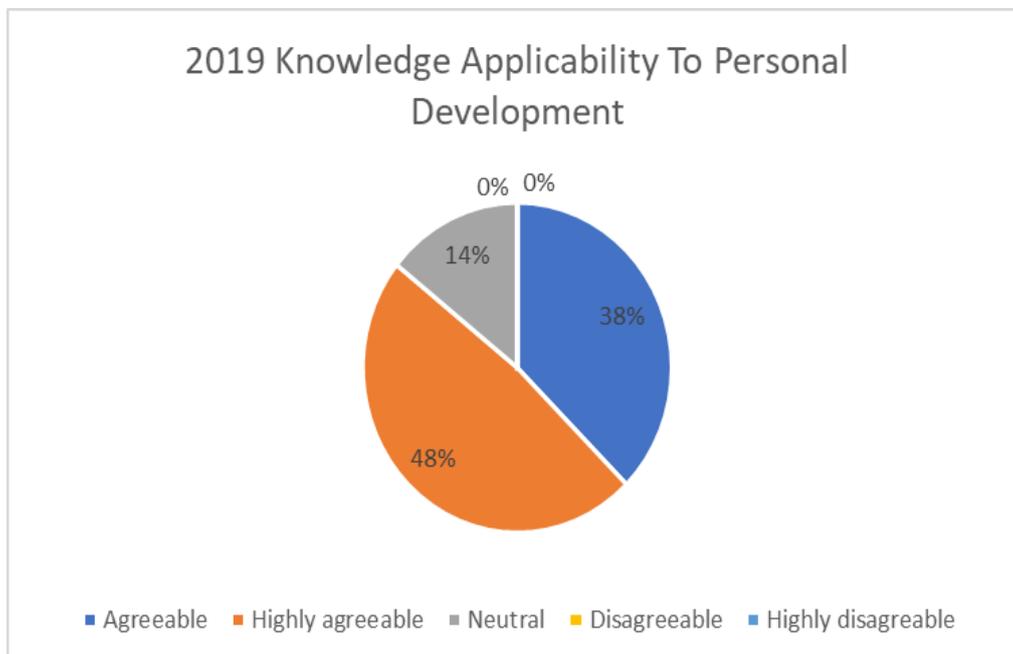


Figure 2: Applicability of knowledge to personal goals (2019)

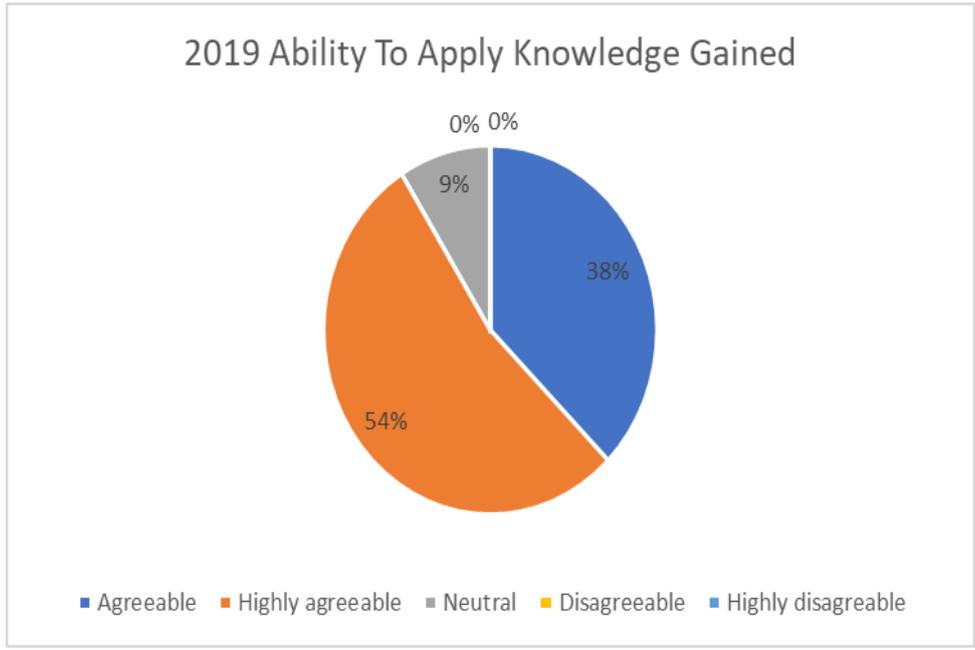


Figure 3: Ability to apply knowledge gained (2019)

92% reported ability to apply the knowledge gained, and 86% agreed that they were able to apply the knowledge gained to their personal lives.

Data From 2020 Cohort

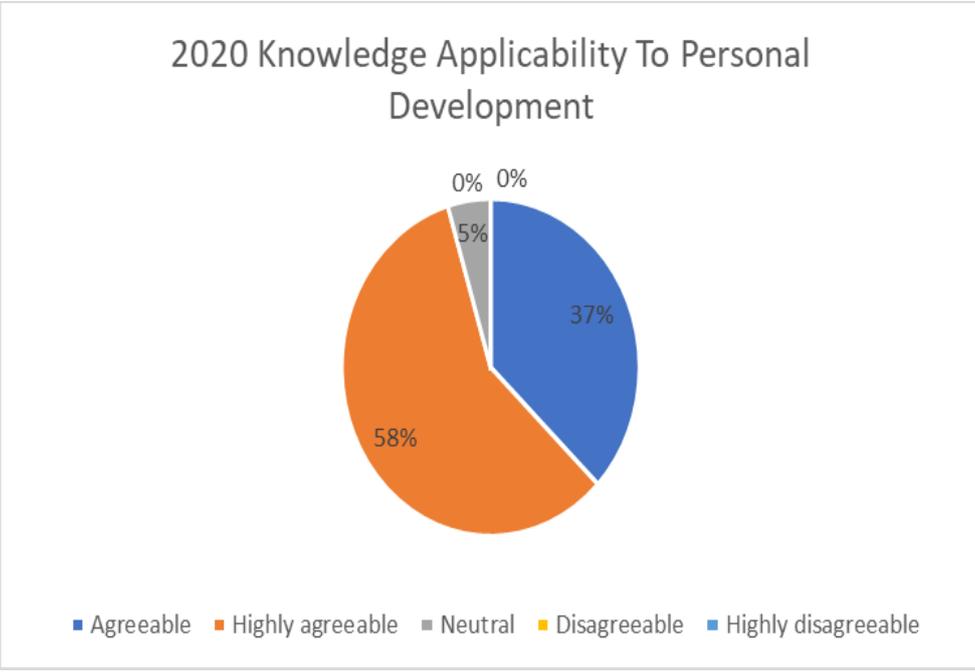


Figure 4: Applicability of knowledge to personal goals (2020)

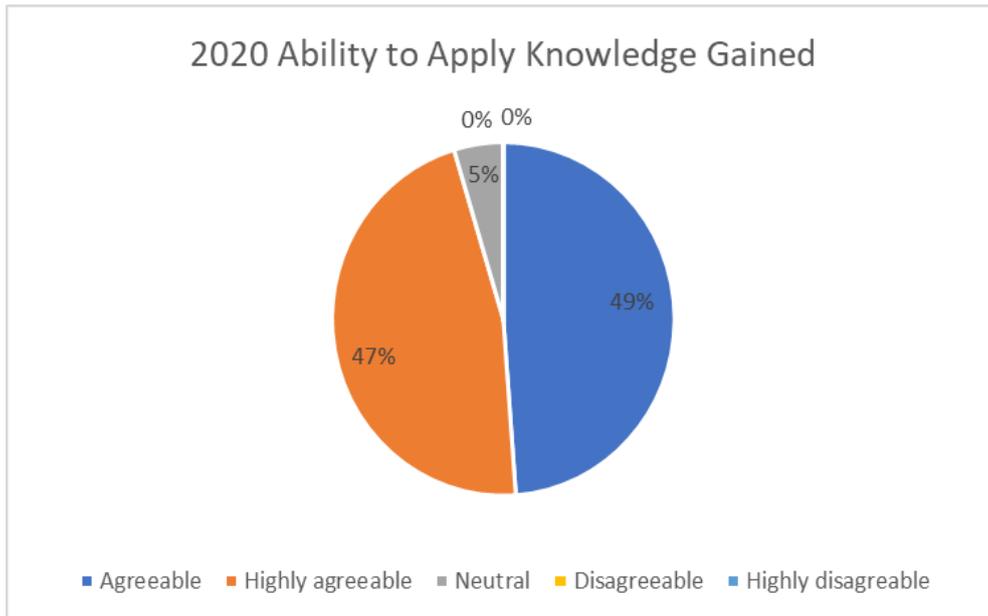


Figure 5: Ability to apply knowledge gained (2020)

Compared to 2019, 4% more participants reported ability in applying the knowledge gained, and 9% more reported greater applicability of knowledge to their personal lives.

Data From 2021 Cohort

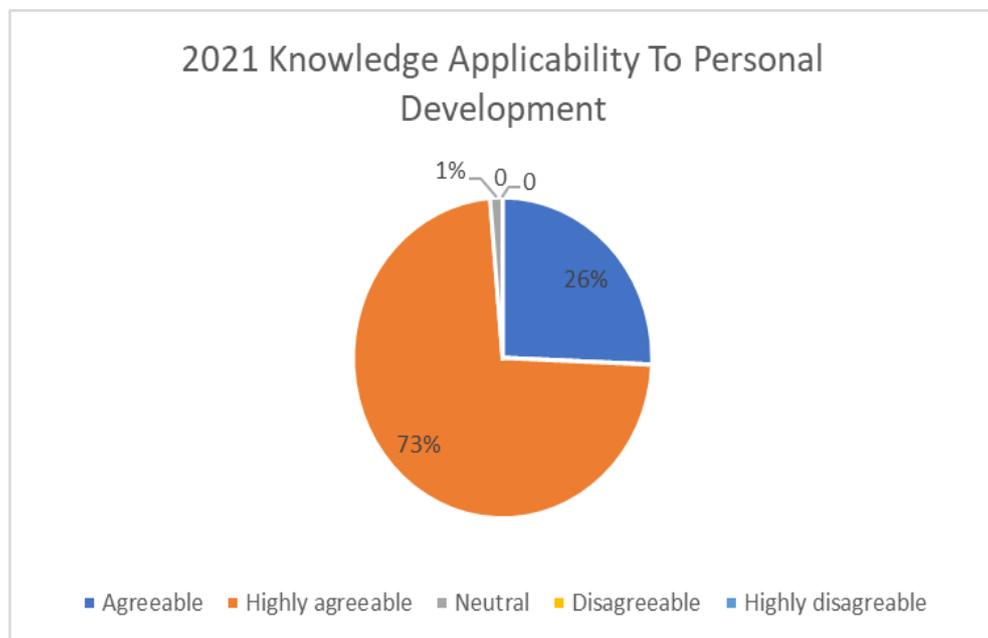


Figure 6: Applicability of knowledge to personal goals (2021)

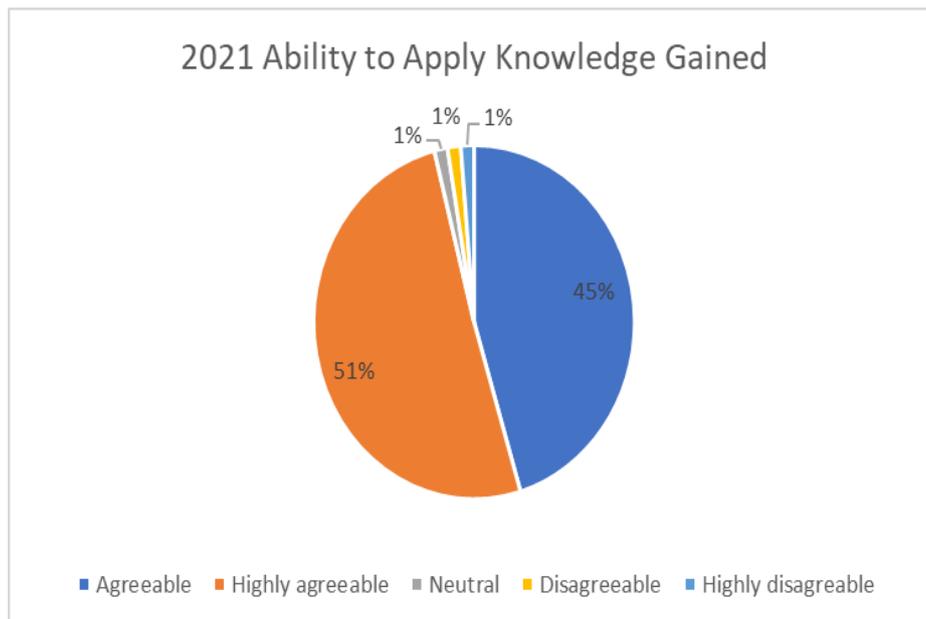


Figure 7: Ability to apply knowledge gained (2021)

2021 saw an equally strong response with 96% of the participants reporting ability to apply knowledge gained, and an almost perfect knowledge applicability to their personal development.

Overall, MentorsHub has improved the relevance of the knowledge provided to mentees. The percentage of mentees reporting perfect applicability of knowledge to their personal development increased from 54% in 2019 to 73% in 2021. Mentees scoring ‘4’ decreased from 38% to 26%, furthermore mentees scoring ‘3’ decreased from 9% to 1% from 2021 to 2019.

The applicability of such knowledge to mentees’ personal lives also saw improvement. The percentage of mentees reporting perfect scores increased from 48% to 52% from 2019 to 2021. Percentage of mentees reporting ‘4’ increased from 38% to 47% while those reporting ‘3’ decreased from 14% to 1%. Though MentorsHub has improved the overall applicability of such knowledge as the percentage of mentees reporting ‘3’ decreased and ‘5’ increased, however the percentage reporting ‘4’ increased as well. All in all, MentorsHub has succeeded in not just providing increasingly relevant content, but has also enabled mentees to utilize such knowledge effectively.

Mentees Progress Evaluation (MPE)

The MPE is an evaluation conducted by the management of every mentee at the end of every mentoring cycle to understand 1) where and how the mentorship has helped the mentee and 2) what could be further improved on. The mentorship cycle is then officially closed, except for those who request to extend.

Data From 2022 Cohort

To further understand how MentorsHub has impacted the mentees on their professional and personal fronts, additional questions were asked to the 2022 cohort. Here are the findings:

1. Professional Development

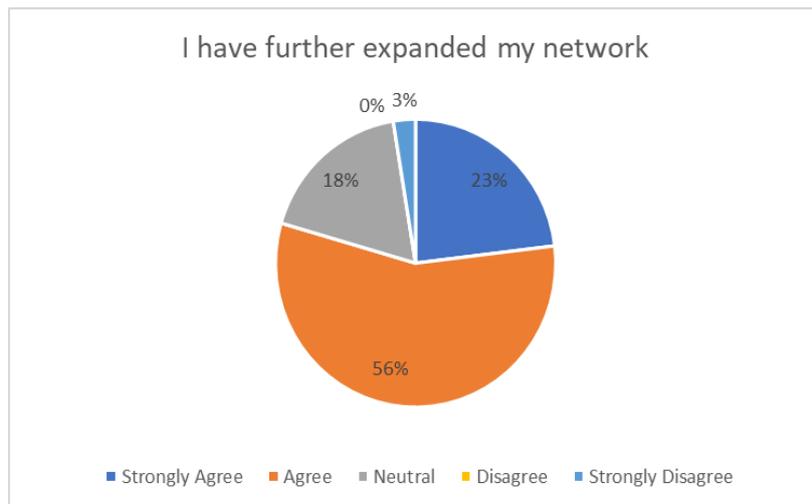


Figure 8: Networking impact (2022)

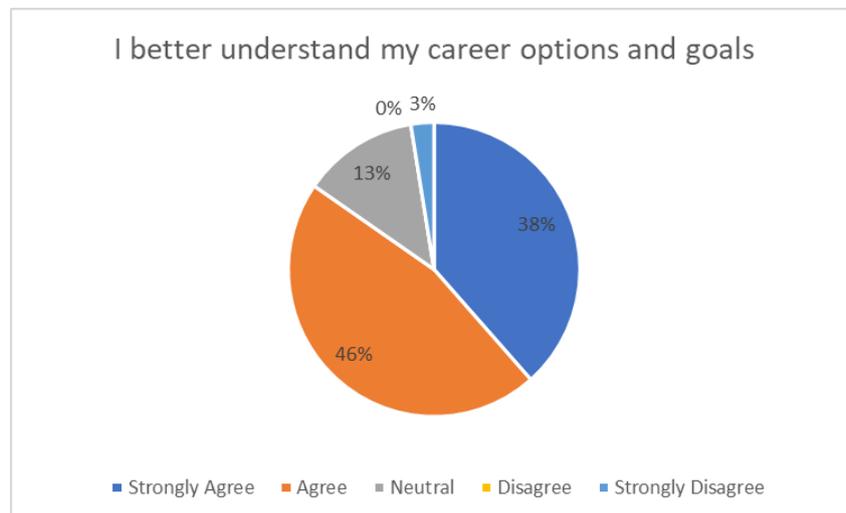


Figure 9: Career landscaping (2022)

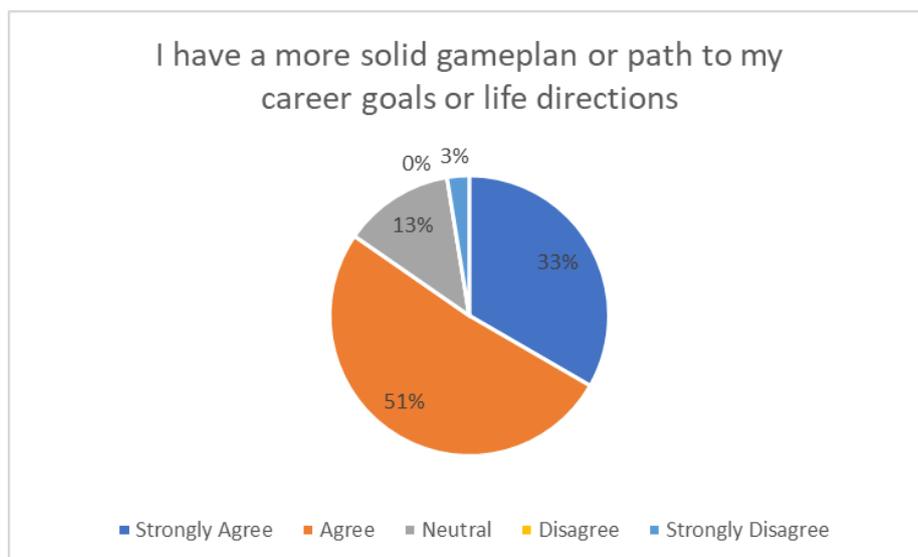


Figure 10: Career planning (2022)

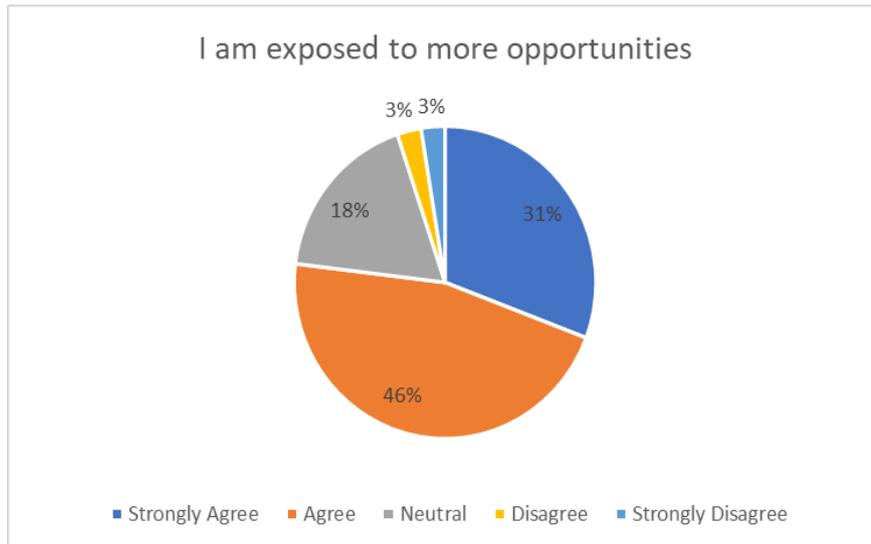


Figure 11: Opportunity exposure (2022)

Within the professional development section, under networking, career optionality, career trajectory, and opportunities, more than 75% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that MentorsHub had impacted their lives positively in these areas. While 18% were neutral and about 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed. By and large, this confirms the hypotheses that MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the mentees' professional development.

2. Personal Development

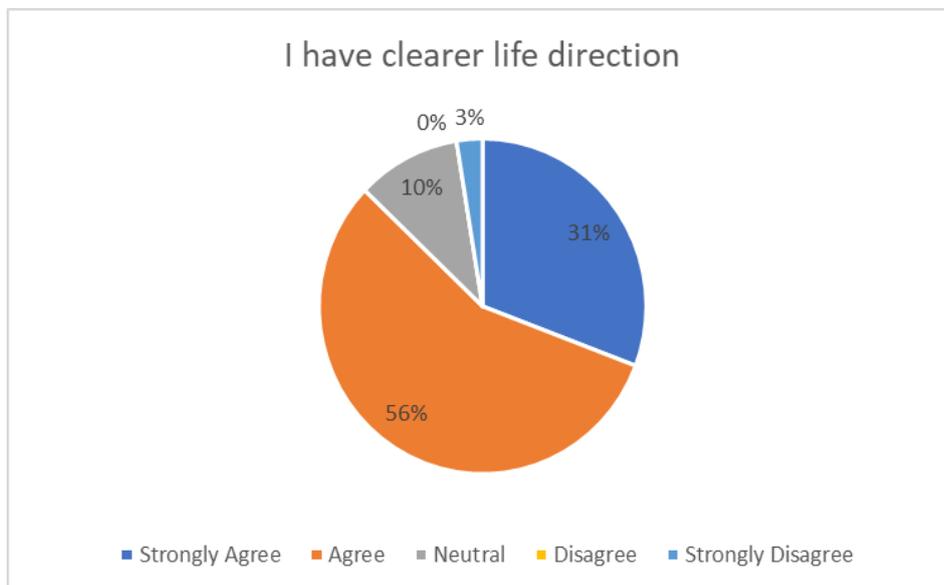


Figure 12: Life clarity (2022)

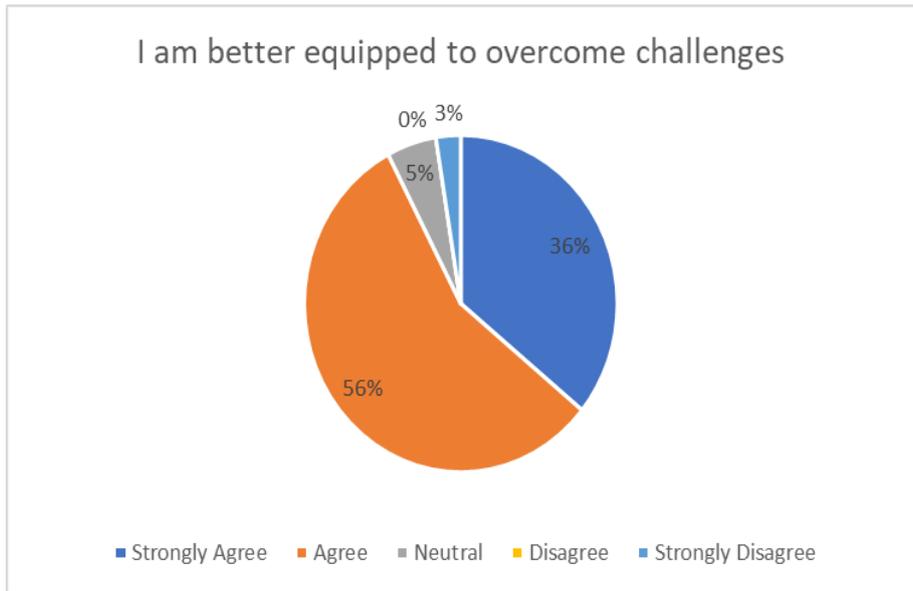


Figure 13: Resilience (2022)

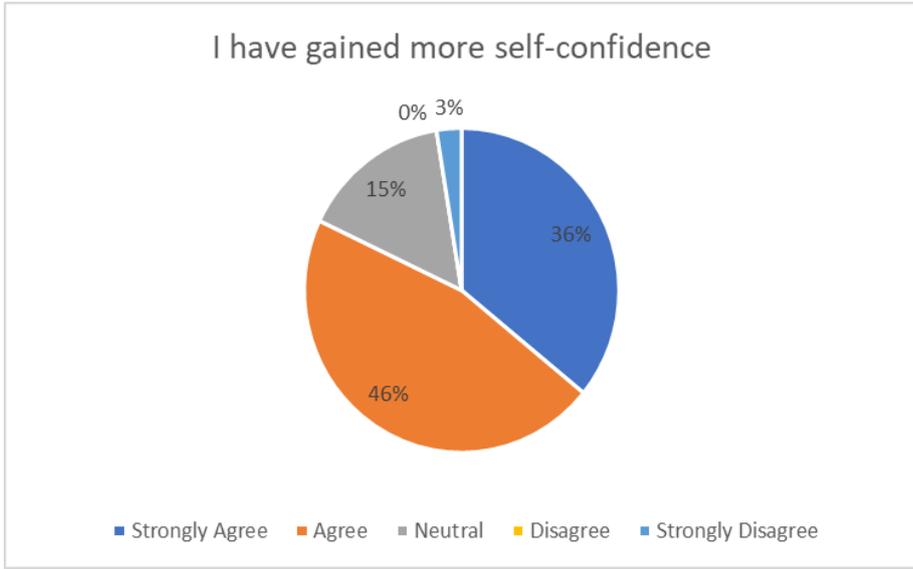


Figure 14: Self-confidence (2022)

Along areas of greater life clarity, confidence, and resilience, between 80% - 90% agreed that MentorsHub has positively impacted their professional development. A significant portion between 30% - 40% strongly agreed on the impact MentorsHub has on such areas while about 5% to 15% remained neutral, and 3% disagreed on any impact. By and large, such results confirmed the hypothesis that MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the personal development of the mentees.

MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the personal development of mentees, with 80-90% of mentees agreeing that it has helped them to achieve greater life clarity, confidence, and resilience. A significant portion of mentees (30-40%) strongly agreed with this sentiment, while only 5-15% remained neutral, and 3% disagreed. These results provide strong evidence to support the hypothesis that MentorsHub is an effective program for personal development.

Qualitative Analysis and Results

Professional Growth

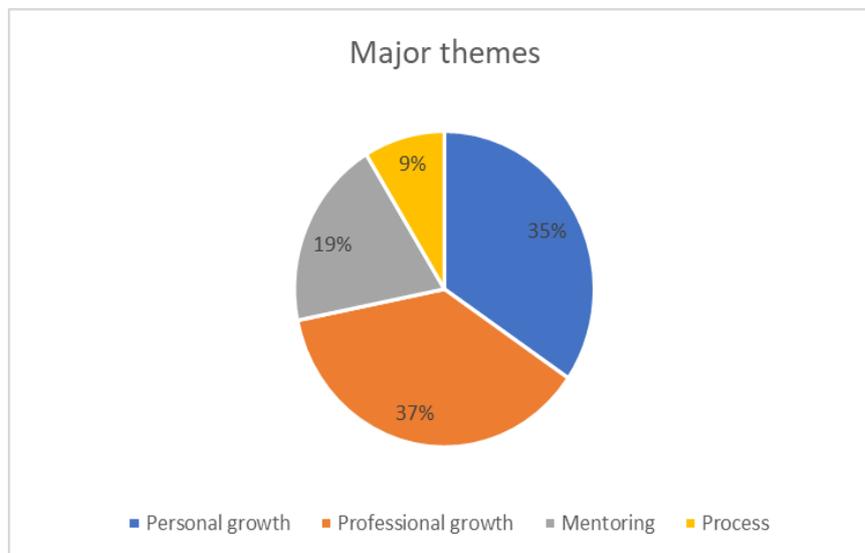


Figure 15: Theme breakdown

The largest theme identified, as in Figure 15, was professional growth at 94, with the second largest being personal growth at 87. Such results are a direct confirmation of the hypotheses as participants spoke to how the mentoring programs directly affected their professional and personal lives and how MentorsHub aligned their professional and life goals to be consistent with their inherent values and strengths.

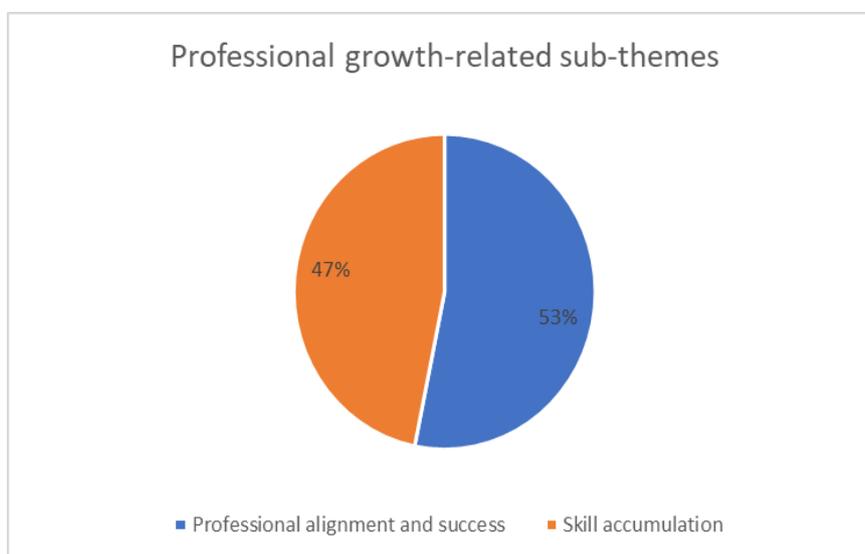


Figure 16: Professional sub-themes

In confirmation of hypothesis 2, the largest sub-theme identified within professional growth, as in Figure 16, was professional alignment and success. The sub-theme tracks mostly ideas related to greater career alignments such as career switches, career identification, career satisfaction, and having a clearer professional outlook. The best examples of such professional alignments would be career switches, of which many participants spoke to either regarding their own experience or their mentees' experience.

One such example includes one mentee moving from finance to human resources (HR): “So I came into MentorsHub with skepticism, I initially doubted myself as to whether I could really learn more. And of course I did. I think what really helped was my mentor, she managed to question some of my thoughts in a way that really broadened my perspective, intentionally and unintentionally, and that is what made me pivot from being in the finance industry to HR.”

A lot of participants also spoke to their experiences regarding identifying careers that resonated with them. One participant, Firdaus, shared their experiences how the Gallup Strengths workshop resulted in them knowing what career he wanted to pursue - “So from when I did the test from the five strengths, it seemed like sales was something I wanted to explore, it seems like a good fit, and I went in, I even had some part-time experiences doing sales as well.”

And this all resulted in not just greater career satisfaction but success as well. With regards to career satisfaction, Firdaus, who wanted to do sales, eventually realized that he did not want to do sales due to the transactional nature of the work, however after pivoting into project management, he shared - “afterwards I realized this is a better fit for me. The relationship part was really more intimate, you really get to build bonds and you get to know each individual in the team better as you work with them....” Both the increased career satisfaction and success are consistent with findings in academia as they find mentoring lead to greater success with career and are more likely to be committed to their career compared to their non-mentored counterparts (Hunt and Michael 1983).

Another shared how she experienced greater success by shifting her mindset from one of fear to one of growth resulting in “taking a role whereby I’m in the central role and I’m coordinating various departments and I have to host a meeting with the senior leaders.”

An important mechanism that resulted in such career success was both the accumulation of skills and also mindset changes. Participants shared a greater focus on soft skills, with one working in finance sharing how her mentor coached her on her presentation skills -”And so I did my homework and after presenting it to her, the mentor shared ‘ok how you should have used a different phrase because if you use high-level finance jargons, your clients may not understand you’ and so I think that really helped.”

Participants also shared the mindset changes they underwent as well. When asked how she thought her character changed, a participant who shall be called Jasmine shared “I think for me in my experience as a mentee is because my mentor does way more, her character and my character is really very different. I’m more reserved and she’s more bold, extroverted, and I think how she has helped is more of like encouraging me to step out of my comfort zone, reaching out to more people and talking to them.” Beyond extraversion, participants also mentioned gains in other areas such as leadership and within the personal sphere as well which shall be explored in the following section.

Personal Growth

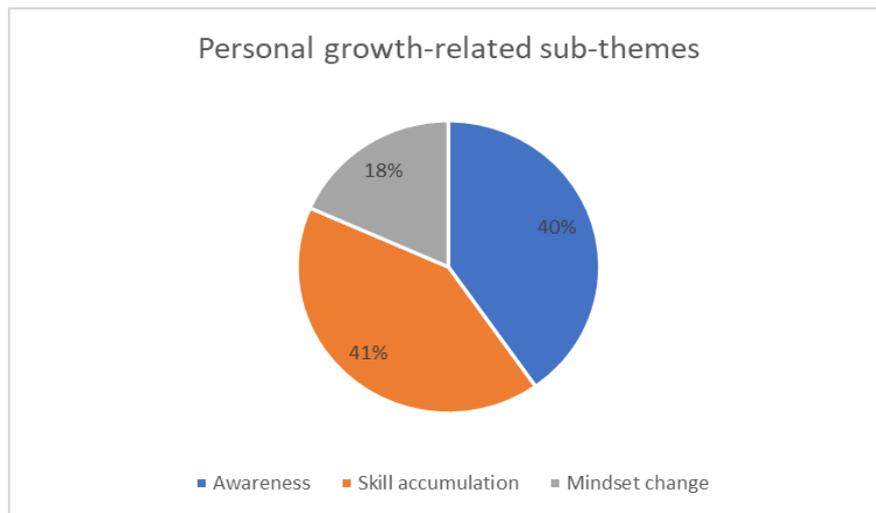


Figure 17: Personal sub-themes

The most significant area, as in Figure 18, is the tools that they learned from MentorsHub. One of the highest rated ideas were related to interpersonal communication with one candidate sharing that in addition to become more reflective, he also “became more assertive, so the first few sessions with the mentor, she asked me to be more vocal because I had a lot of thoughts on my head but I didn’t dare or feel the need to say, she would say ‘hey those are great thoughts, please share it out.’” Such confidence is also consistent with the literature as studies find that mentees reduce their stress and anxiety (Dziczkowski 2013).

A good sign of whether participants continue to carry their learnings is through checking their content and skill retention. A good indicator that former mentees and mentors brought up was how they and their mentees respectively continued to revise and relearn what they learned as marked under the robustness code. One such mentor shared that a mentee from her earliest batches would often touch base again and ask the mentor for advice on what courses to take. “And so, in terms of upskilling, it’s been heartening to help them learn over their career”, the mentor concluded.

Participants shared that the second most significant area where they improved the most personally was awareness of their general being. Be it being more aware of one’s emotions or self or even social environment, participants shared how such awareness provided greater clarity in life. One former mentee who we shall call John and is currently working in Finance shared that - “again in the corporate world if you’re in a team or want to develop soft skills in the corporate ladder, you need them in addition to the hard skill, so one of the things [I learned] at MentorsHub is being able to know different people, after a few sessions you know who they are, whether they are extroverted or introverted, and being able to know how they recharge enables you to recognize how to build relationships with them.” Such a result is in line with the literature with one paper identifying greater self-insight as a result of mentoring (Dziczkowski 2013).

Participants also discussed the mindset changes that accompanied their mentorships. One of the largest mindset changes were those related to gaining broader perspectives. One former mentee shared that though “I was expecting just guidance on my professional career, but I gained far more in self-clarity.”

Longitudinal Impact

The impact of MentorsHub exists far beyond the short-term. For instance, in the quantitative data, many participants agreed with the statement ‘I am better equipped to overcome challenges’. The ethos of such a statement was brought up during the FGDs when one participant shared that in sessions with her mentor, her mentor had urged her to focus on what could go right rather than what could go wrong and to treat every moment that does go wrong as a learning point. Many years onwards, when she was given the task to lead a core project interacting with senior management, she still carried the same intuition on focusing on what could go right rather than wrong.

Another statement which many participants agreed with in the surveys was ‘I have further expanded my network’. To illustrate the impact further in the FGDs, one heartwarming story was how a past mentee who had been laid off during the height of Covid-19, at his mentors’ encouragement, reached out to the broader mentor network for support to tide not only himself but also his family during hard times and was able to successfully find a new role.

Another theme touched upon in the surveys was ‘I have a more solid game plan or path to my career goals or life directions’. Such a theme was fleshed out more thoroughly in the FGDs. One participant who discovered that communication was one of his strengths through the Gallup’s Strengths test had thought that he would be interested in sales. A few years later he realized that sales was not for him. After redoing his test and realizing that planning was also another one of his strengths, he decided to try out for a project management role at a health-tech consulting firm. He has been satisfied with his career ever since. Given such stories of candidates being able to successfully apply what they had learned and revisited the material taught time and time again to achieve success, the longitudinal impact of MentorsHub is unequivocally positive.

Mentoring

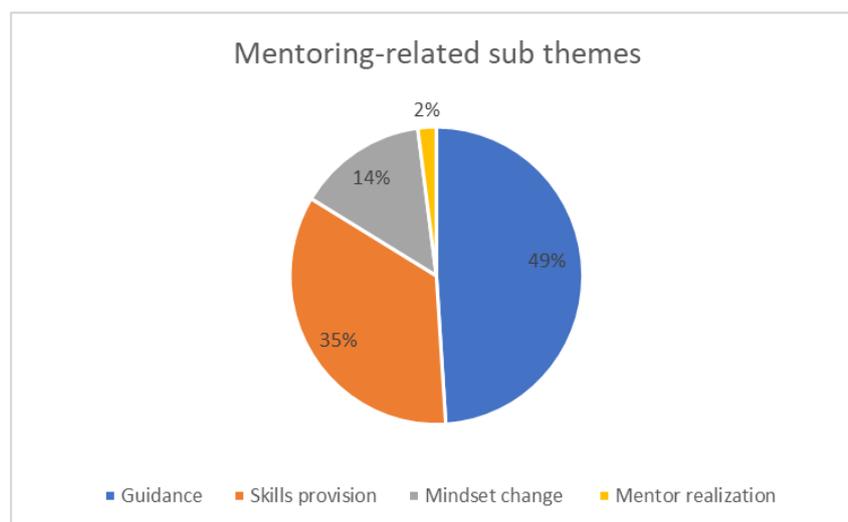


Figure 18: Mentoring sub-themes

A lot of participants discussed, either as mentees, the high-quality mentoring they received or, as mentors, the way in which they guided their mentees as in Figure 18. Guidance was the largest sub-theme and one of the ways mentors did this was through encouragement. One mentee who was retrenched due to Covid-19 shared how his mentor helped him through his

rough time: “he asked me to be more daring in asking for more help if you need anything and that’s when I reached out to [other] mentors and also my school to ask for support in how to recover from this.”

Skills provision was the second most identified theme with long-term planning being the most useful skill rated. One mentor shared the way she saw her mentees grow was in the way they approached life: “For me, it’s clarity, most mentees will come in being not so sure about where they want to go. So, they end the journey knowing where they are heading and what actions they want to take.”

Mindset changes within the mentees was also strongly picked-up, with a lot of participants sharing how either as mentees or mentors encouraged more proactive approaches. One participant in finance shared how her mentor encouraged her to adopt such an approach: “So previously when I mentioned earlier in the meetings I wasn’t as participative, I was always caught up with busy work and I would always be in a catch-up mindset rather than thinking ahead. So, my mentor’s advice was to work outside of your current work so that you think strategically a few steps ahead and so I was able to apply that to my current work and I was given the chance to mentor the newer employees in the current company and also to take on the central roles in certain projects.”

Conclusion and Implications

Given evidence from the literature review, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis, the hypotheses are correct that MentorsHub has had a positive impact on the professional and personal development of mentees and aligns their internal values and strengths with their personal and career goals through mentoring, coaching and workshops.

It is also important to note that such impact is not just temporary but likely to be permanent. As per the longitudinal impact analysis, past mentees found themselves reverting to the principles and skills taught during their mentorships even after they had been working for more than 3 years, indicating the long-term impact of MentorsHub programs.

There is, however, much work to be done. Participants of the FGDs suggested two innovative approaches. The first was alumni-mentee pairing to tackle the issue of the at-times large age-gaps between mentors and mentees. The second was to have group sessions so that mentees can have a shared, safe space to reflect on their journeys so far.

References

- Allen, Tammy D., Mark L. Poteet, Lizzette Lima, Lillian T. Eby, and Elizabeth Lentz. (2004). "Career Benefits Associated With Mentoring for Prote'ge's: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89 (1): 127-136.
- Dziczkowski, Jennifer. (2013). "Mentoring and Leadership Development." *The Educational Forum* 77, no. 3 (June): 351-360. <https://www-tandfonline-com.libproxy1.nus.edu.sg/doi/full/10.1080/00131725.2013.792896>
- Hunt, David, and Carol Michael. (1983). "Mentorship: A Career Training and Development Tool." *The Academy of Management Review* 8 (3): 475-485. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/257836>
- National Youth Council Singapore. n.d. "Developing a Programme Logic Model."
- National Youth Council Singapore. n.d. "Impact Assessment Toolkit," A guide to measuring youth developmental outcomes for projects funded by the National Youth Fund.
- Quast, Lisa. (2011). "How Becoming A Mentor Can Boost Your Career." *Forbes*, October 2011, 2011. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2011/10/31/how-becoming-a-mentor-can-boost-your-career/?sh=777e8ab55f57>