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Introduction of mentoring as a multiplying factor for female leadership in the Spanish Armed Forces: Lessons learned from the US model and views of female members of the Spanish armed forces on a possible voluntary programme

Abstract

Mentoring is a relationship between two people, in which one person with more experience and knowledge teaches and models another one who wishes to progress both personally and professionally. This study carries out an extensive bibliographic review of how this technique has been used by some organizations and armed forces to enhance the professional career and the exercise of leadership among their personnel, especially the female minority.

A first part of the study is aimed to the study of the characteristics and aptitudes of leadership and the possible gap between genders. The conclusions allow us to rule out any qualitative justification for the absence of women in relevant positions in the Spanish armed forces, so tools must be sought that reduce the gender gap and allow women to develop professionally and reach leadership positions.

One of these tools would be mentoring, taking the experience in the US armed forces as a model and adapting it to the particular Spanish case. The study contrasts the theoretical findings with the opinion of a group of Spanish military women, resulting in a mostly positive opi-

nion regarding the potential benefits of this technique and the possible success of its implementation. As a conclusion, the research proposes the adoption of an informal and voluntary programme that favours professional development and to achieve the most relevant positions for Spanish military women.

Keywords

Mentoring, mentor, woman, gender, leadership, armed forces, defence, security, military career, professional development.

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Introduction and hypothesis

It is now 30 years since women became a part of the Spanish Armed Forces, and female participation in our military institutions has stabilised and become normalised to the extent that there are now two women generals. Although the percentage of women is slightly higher than the average in our neighbouring countries¹, these women are heterogeneously distributed among the different corps and ranks, with the balance leaning towards rank and file soldiers and sailors and, within the command corps, towards the Common Corps, of which they account for one third². This inequity means that women are clearly a minority group of officers in the general corps and the marines, from which the commanders of the most characteristic units of our armed forces³ are promoted and where there is most potential for promotion to leadership at all operational levels⁴.

After the first Spanish military woman was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in 2019, the editorial of a major national newspaper⁵ lamented the low percentage of women in the world's armies and called for “*a greater incorporation of women and changes in the promotion system to make representation at the top fairer*” as outstanding issues for our armed forces. This statement should be viewed with caution. While the presence of more women would be desirable, it should be remembered that the opportunity for promotion to general only comes after some 32 years of service, and there is therefore no fast track to producing “female candidates for general” who would provide a “*fairer representation at the top*”. After three decades of female presence and extensive policy adaptation to ensure effective equal opportunities for both sexes, it seems unlikely that “*a change in the promotion system*” would result in a higher percentage of female military personnel in senior positions. Indeed (CARREIRAS 2018) hypothesises that the shift towards greater equality within the military forces will not occur automatically as a consequence of time or an increase in the number of women, but of specific policies that must be applied cautiously so as not to produce the opposite effect, as could be the case of “positive discrimination” policies. This view is shared by (MAIDA and WEBER 2019), who concluded in their study that although it is desirable to increase female representation in management positions to increase the perception of equality, establishing a quota system alone would be ineffective in

1 It is around 13%, compared to an average of 11% in NATO countries. Source: Spain is the ninth NATO country with the most women in the armed forces. (March 2019). Europa Press.

2 Annual report of the Military Observatory for Equality.-12-2020.

3 On 1 October 2021, it was significant that there were only seven female officers and 15 female NCOs in the Marine Corps. This represents less than 2% of the command cadres, while in the rank and file the percentage rises to 8.3%.

4 Neither of the female military officers who have been promoted to the rank of general officer belong to command corps: the first is a member of the polytechnic engineering corps and the second is serves in the military legal corps.

5 El País. (13/7/2019). General: women in the army.

reducing the gender gap in the rest of the organisation, especially in countries with a traditionally male-dominated culture. In the opinion of a US military officer, widely reported on social media, ⁶ *“racial, gender, (...) quotas are counterproductive to genuine integration into the organisation, because as a racial minority women, quotas stipulate that since I am incapable of earning a specific position on my own merits, I need the organisation to increase my chances of success because of my gender or race”*.

These opinions support the idea that positive discrimination towards women would not increase the percentage of women in our armed forces - or the number of women in positions of responsibility - as it would not solve the main cause, which is not only due to factors intrinsic to the military, such as military norms and traditions, but mainly to cultural, social and economic factors that are difficult to change in the short or medium term.

For all the above reasons, tools are needed to facilitate an immediate, efficient and fair way to leverage the talent of female personnel already in our Armed Forces and to increase their progression towards positions of greater responsibility and visibility.

To this end, this study proposes the inclusion of mentoring in the Spanish Armed Forces' career guidance systems, taking the lessons learned after several decades of applying this technique in the US Navy and the US Marine Corps as an example. It is hypothesised that providing personalised mentoring to female military personnel by more senior or employed women (or ultimately men) through the voluntary exchange of knowledge and experiences related to professional, family or personal life, could enhance their career development and leadership, thus increasing their chances of accessing relevant positions.

Importance of the study. The state of play

This is a completely new subject for the Spanish armed forces. Mentoring programmes have only been introduced in the Spanish business world in the last decade, and there is still not enough data or a solid track record to allow a quantitative or qualitative study of the impact on the participating staff. Another aspect that corroborates the novelty of this study is the scarcity of bibliographical references beyond those written in English and aimed at the study of mentoring programmes carried out in the USA.

The only study by the Spanish military was (NUÑEZ 2017), which served as the basis for a pilot programme for mentoring officers in the Spanish Marines. This study pointed to the possible incorporation of mentoring to combat lack of motivation related to *“(...) lack of career expectations, pay issues, results of selection or assessment processes, geographical mobility, retention in certain jobs and difficulty with the work-life*

⁶ Diversity: At What Cost? A Minority Female Leader's Perspective. (7/12/2016). The Pendulum (online).

balance and reintegration into civilian life". Although this is an interesting study, its structure and length recommend a more in-depth and systematic approach to the subject, which I wanted to address specifically to the female sector of our Armed Forces.

For all the above reasons, I believe that a study conducted both in Spanish and aimed at women in our country of a specific group of military women is innovative and opens up a field of study that could be followed up by other researchers.

Methodology

This work follows a primarily qualitative methodology. The research begins with a bibliographic study of databases of the scientific community, aimed at finding the possible most recent sources on the subject, relating to military personnel and Spanish, if possible. At the national level, the Ministry of Defence/CESEDEN database was consulted. Internationally, the online repositories of Researchgate.com, Academia.edu, ProQuest and EBSCOHost, among others, have been used.

This is followed by an analysis from the general to the specific; in this case, starting from the study of leadership, the influence of gender and its possible future evolution. An analysis of mentoring as a professional development tool and its specific application towards or among women and/or in the military was then conducted. Where this was not possible, civil service or technical or public sector employees were considered.

To reinforce the partial conclusions regarding the hypotheses, an opinion survey was conducted among 163 military women, from which their perceptions of the possibilities put forward and their possible adaptation to the Spanish Armed Forces are extracted.

Finally, conclusions were drawn with the intention of opening the door to utilising this technique in our Armed Forces and allow other researchers to begin various ramifications derived from this study.

Leadership and gender

One of the first considerations to take into account to establish how best to facilitate the career path and support leadership among women in the military is to understand how gender affects both the military's performance of military command duties and how it is perceived by men. To do this, the following questions must be answered. What qualities are traditionally been associated with military leadership? What is the likely evolution, considering the current missions, the context in which they are carried out and the means available? Is there a female leadership style? If so, is it less effective than the masculine version?

Firstly, it is necessary to consider what is meant by gender, beyond the mere sexual distinction between males and females. (DCAF 2016) defines “gender” as “*the social attributes associated with being male and female that are learned through socialisation and that determine a person’s position and value in a given context*”. One of the attributes generally associated with men is that of leadership. It already appears in (SHIELDS 1985) and has been maintained over time. Research by (SCHEIN 2001) shows that, in general, people perceive the existence of certain characteristics of leadership positions that are only possessed by men (“*think of a leader = think of a man*”). This concept of leadership was corroborated by (DEPAULA 2005), whose study shows that rejection of female leaders is even more acute in the military environment. This stereotype seems to be one of the main stumbling blocks for female leaders.

In the military world, women perceive themselves as inferior to men. (BALRAJ 2017) conducted an opinion poll among female reserve officers in their country, the majority of whom said they felt undervalued by their male peers (92%), did not have the same opportunities as men to exercise leadership (77%) but who at the same time thought that a woman could be a good military leader (77%).

In the civilian realm, possible differences between male and female leadership styles have been studied in depth, often in an attempt to differentiate between a “feminine” leadership style that is less effective and satisfactory than that of men, and thus to justify the limited presence of female personnel in management positions (CUADRADO et al 2003). However, most studies have concluded that, albeit with minor nuances, there are no statistically significant differences between male and female leadership (PULIDO 2014).

(EAGLY and JOHNSON 1990) point out that the belief that men and women exercise leadership identically and theories based on gender stereotyping needs to be revisited. Their theoretical review suggests that there are gender differences in many aspects of social behaviour that could affect the way leadership is exercised. Similarly, (CUADRADO et al 2003) found that, although men and women do not perceive that they exercise leadership differently, different relationships are sometimes found between leadership styles depending on the sex of the leaders. In this regard, (MANKE 2018) argues that, more than gender, it is people’s experiences, such as their parental role models, education and their professional and personal experiences that define their leadership style.

What seems clear is that there is no such thing as a “female leadership” that is less effective than male leadership, which makes it possible to rule out that there is an objective cause for the absence of women in leadership positions.

As regards the characteristics of military leadership for the future, (LOUGHLIN and ARNOLD 2007) point out that, although the traditional definition of military leadership is linked to physical strength and combat readiness, the changing nature of conflicts (e.g. peacekeeping operations) and the environment in which they take place (especially technological and information development) mean that today’s leaders must have other skills such as negotiation, mediation and the controlled use of force, which women can perform as well as, or better than, men. That is why, they argue, it is necessary to redefine the nature of leadership in the current context, discarding

gender stereotypes that condition the perception of leadership of men and women even though their objective performance is the same.

Similarly, (FALLESEN 2011) analysed the influence of the variety of contexts in which current operations are conducted and the technological and intellectual challenges posed by new systems and information management on the US military's definitions of leadership. The list of skills to be possessed by the new leader - which makes no mention of the person's gender - includes resilience, adaptability, critical thinking, multicultural skills, mentoring skills and self-development tools. Women are perfectly capable of displaying them all.

(GALLARDO 2015) was a pioneering research project by the Spanish Armed Forces to determine whether the leadership style exercised by Spanish Army personnel was compatible with the theoretical leadership established through its specific doctrine. The work revealed that the three dimensions of leadership most frequently used by military women (consideration, structure initiation and inspirational motivation) are also those that best characterise ET military leadership and are the most effective in international operations.⁷

All the above leads to three conclusions: that “female leadership” is just as effective as “male leadership”; that Spanish military women exercise leadership satisfactorily in relation to the doctrinal model; and that the exercise of leadership in future military operations will require competencies that have nothing to do with the physical strength and combat skills traditionally associated with male military leaders. These findings eliminate any qualitative justification for the absence of women in significant positions in the Spanish armed forces.

Mentoring processes

Mentoring is a relationship established between an experienced person (the mentor) and a person who wishes to be guided towards acquiring their experience or wisdom (the mentee). The “Professional Charter for Mentoring and Coaching”⁸ defines this technique as *“a development process that may involve a transfer of skills or knowledge from a more experienced person to a less experienced person through dialogue for learning and role modelling, and may also be collaborative learning between peers”*.

⁹The origin of the term “mentor” comes straight out of Greek mythology, Homer's Odyssey, to be precise. Mentor was the friend whom Ulysses asked, to take care and educate his son Telemachus before leaving for the Trojan War. Mentor and Telemachus forged a bond halfway between a parent/child relationship and a teacher/student relationship, which thrived on the trust and respect they forged in advising the child.

⁷ (MADOC-DIDOM 2014).

⁸ (EMCC 2011)

⁹ This Greek word is an amalgamation of “Men” which means “he who thinks” and “tor” which is the masculine suffix. Mentor therefore means “the man who thinks”.

There is a need to clear up the confusion that sometimes arises between mentoring and other terms such as “tutoring” and “coaching”. The relationship between a mentor and mentee can be legal (guardianship) or academic (responsible for private tuition), while a mentor’s ties with his or her mentee are more personal than formal and focus on guidance or advice to the less experienced. Coaching, on the other hand, is a process whereby an individual or group is helped to develop or refine skills through instruction or training, in which the short or medium term objectives are set within a specific field; mentoring processes, on the other hand, are long-term and usually focus on professional or personal development as a whole¹⁰.

Mentoring in the US Marine Corps

In the military, channelling the positive influence that a superior exerts on a subordinate is often unconscious, and few armed forces have done it consciously and procedurally. In 2006, after several decades of informal mentoring, the US Marine Corps (USMC) introduced a programme to keep morale high and foster leadership and a sense of belonging to the Corps between deployments or operations. The plan¹¹ replaced the existing counselling programme on a mandatory, hierarchical and regular basis. On the one hand, it was intended to enable the superior to understand the concerns and desires of the subordinate and to practice leadership; on the other, for the subordinate to be positively influenced by his mentor to boost his performance, integration and motivation to serve. The idea was to achieve an overall improvement of the organisation, the only cost being the time invested by both.

Despite good intentions, it did not take long for criticism to start, which was subsequently confirmed by academic studies calling the programme’s effectiveness into question. In 2010, a Naval War College study¹² analysed the usefulness of military mentoring programmes and concluded that, while it obviously useful, mandatory, formal programmes were less effective than voluntary, informal ones, where the level of involvement was greater, were sustained for longer, had a greater impact on the protégé’s career and fostered mentees’ willingness to become a mentor themselves. Beyond that, it was questionable which members of the armed forces were qualified to be mentors and whether everyone serves in the military (and not just those high achievers) could really benefit from a mentoring programme.

¹⁰ (García de Paredes, 2020).

¹¹ Marine Corps mentoring programme (MCMP) 2006.

¹² (Johnson and Anderson, 2010).

Subsequent investigations¹³ studied mentors' and mentees' perceptions of effectiveness against the programme's objectives to pinpoint failures and make recommendations, and found much evidence to cast doubt on the programme's efficacy.

In short, the USMC had established a tool that had become an end in itself. The organisation ran the programme in an inflexible and bureaucratic manner, but its participants did not seem to appreciate or understand it or even realise that they were a part of it, so it was eventually decided to scrap the programme. According to (GARCIA DE PAREDES 2020), the factors that may have had an impact on this failure can be summarised as follows:

- The mandatory nature of the tool, for both, for mentor and mentee. This clashes with definitions that define mentoring as a voluntary process¹⁴.
- The automatic designation of the organic head as the mentor. On the one hand, it hinders having the same mentor involved for a sufficiently long period of time; and on the other, far from harnessing the bonds of trust and confidentiality, it could provoke suspicion on the part of the subordinate. Let's not forget that the organic command exercises disciplinary and administrative authority over the mentee.
- Compliance with strict deadlines. Given that this is a long-standing relationship, it would seem unwise to impose precise deadlines, let alone as frequent as monthly.
- Mandatory, tedious and excessive formats. This diminishes the flexibility and spontaneity of the mentors, who should be able to shape the monitoring according to their own criteria and procedures, without having to report on the basis of standardised documents.

Despite the above, the USMC has not completely given up on this technique and still considers it essential for leaders to pass on their experience to their subordinates, so it still has informal mentoring as one of its four training tools¹⁵: Teaching, Coaching, Counselling and Mentoring, the latter concept having been defined as:

“(...) a voluntary relationship between two individuals and should not be forced or directed. One individual has experience and knowledge and wishes to pass it on to another, in whose development they are invested. The other individual seeks to learn, gain experience and shape their development according to the person guiding them”¹⁶.

¹³ (Rauschelbach, 2013)

¹⁴ Among others, those provided by the National Council For Voluntary Associations (UK) and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (Switzerland).

¹⁵ Marine Corps Order 1500.61. (27 July 2017).

¹⁶ Ibidem. Translated from English by the author.

Mentoring and minority Groups: the case of women

Several authors point to the particularly beneficial impact of mentoring on staff belonging to minority groups¹⁷, whether on the basis of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. Moreover, this benefit is multiplied in case of members of the “millennial generation”, intimately connected to social networks as a source of power and as a way of finding references to guide them¹⁸. In addition, studies show that millennials appreciate mentoring and job satisfaction more than previous generations¹⁹ and that they prefer to work in a collaborative environment²⁰. This is particularly relevant, as a quarter of the Spanish Armed Forces’ commanding officers already belong to this generation²¹.

Mentoring can support the professional development of minorities through motivation and perceived equal opportunities. In this type of mentoring, not only the generic case of helping to integrate staff who might encounter implicit or explicit problems of adaptation or discrimination on ethnic, sexual, religious or other ground, but also the specific case of staff selected for their high potential, who in the medium term could become a reference and guide for others can be considered.

Within these specific groups, the largest group is female staff. Mentoring among women is considered a tool for female empowerment towards effective equality of opportunities in professional development^{22,23}; for its implementation in the Armed Forces, in addition to how mentoring has been applied in other Armed Forces, it would be appropriate to take programmes that have been successfully implemented in the Spanish business environment into account²⁴. In the ideal case, where both the mentor and the mentee are women, the female mentor can provide valuable insights into how to address some of the gender-specific challenges that women face during their years of service of which their male colleagues are unlikely to be aware. In the case of the Spanish Armed Forces, given that the most female commanders are concentrated in the lower ranks of each scale²⁵, it is important that women in the

17 (Crapanzano, 2017).

18 www.insala.com

19 (Meister and Willyerd, 2010)

20 (Baird, 2015).

21 Data extracted from SIPERDEF (May 2021).

22 <https://mujeresycia.com/mentoring-y-empoderamiento-femenino/>

23 <http://consultoria-consultores.es/articulos/articulo-consultoria-mentoring-para-la-igualdad-de-g-nero/>

24 There are numerous initiatives that promote mentoring among women in business, such as those set up by Faconauto Woman, by the Association of Women Entrepreneurs and Executives of Navarre, and the “Yo, Jefa” programme. Others, such as the “Women in Engineering” programme, promote the participation of women in STEM careers to close the so-called “gender gap”.

25 As of 1 September 2021, women account for barely 1% of jobs from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general, according to the Military Observatory for Equality.

lower ranks have access to senior male mentors to increase their career development prospects until, in a few years' time, they can become mentors to their subordinates. In the meantime, peer-to-peer mentoring should be used, which would facilitate the exchange of experiences²⁶.

The benefits of female mentoring

There is extensive literature on the benefits of mentoring female staff in male-dominated organisations. The advantages of this tool apply both to the mentor, the mentee and the organisation itself.

In the (MCPHAUL 2009) study of the aerospace sector, mentors indicated the four major benefits of mentoring women in the organisation: improving communication and networking among women, building effective relationships, improving women's skills and abilities, and helping to retain female talent. (CHAUHAN and MISHRA 2021) come to similar conclusions but add an important nuance: at a certain point in a woman's career, failure to provide mentoring may mean that her career will come to a halt because she does not know how to solve problems as they arise. In the medical field, (VASQUEZ 2020) states that successful mentoring results in personal and professional development, increased productivity and job satisfaction. In addition to reiterating that male mentors should be used when there are no women in senior positions, it envisages the possibility of using several mentors to meet different needs or concerns.

Also in the medical field, (VARKEY 2012) argues that, in the absence of female mentors, peer mentoring is highly beneficial for female staff. Within military medicine, (TAWNEY and NGUYEN 2019) note that mentoring female personnel promotes professional development, creates a culture that supports the importance of personal (including family) life, combats gender bias and promotes inclusion.

The case of women mentoring other women is referred to by (BLOCK and TIE-TIEN 2016) as "*women sending the lift down so that other women can go up*". They argue that institutions need women who will stay with them in the long run, to serve as role models for others, and that embedding mentoring within the organisational culture will be key to supporting women's aspirations to achieve leadership positions, as well as facilitating their family life. These processes must be recognised and facilitated by the organisation itself. As a counterpoint to this idea, (FEENEY 2006) argues that what really matters is that women have a mentor, regardless of gender, and that satisfaction with this technique is higher when it is informal and not forced, an argument also reached by COBLE 2018 in its study of mentoring career female officers in the armed forces.

When such relationships in the military domain are analysed, the results are just as satisfactory as in the civilian world.

²⁶ (DCAF, 2016).

In one of the first works directed at the military, (ADAMS 1997) argues that mentoring can be used in both military and civilian worlds as an effective strategy to strengthen career development and organisational success, providing job satisfaction, improved career progression and the possibility of leadership positions. He argues that, since it is impossible to mentor all military personnel, disadvantaged minority groups can be targeted. (MCATEER 2016) points out that opening up fields traditionally closed to women must bring about organisational change in which it is not only worth welcoming the appointment of women to new senior positions, but also development tools, such as mentoring, that provide a culture of gender inclusiveness that will lead to appropriate leadership development for women and men, resulting in a “healthy organisational culture”.

In addition to this, (JOHNSON 2012) states that many military women prefer to have a mentor of the opposite sex, which would lead us to conclude that it is important for women to engage in non-directed mentoring, which also includes a free choice of mentor.

Career guidance in the military domain

When considering the application of mentoring within the military, it is necessary to analyse current tools and ask how they might fit in. The Military Career Law and the regulations that develop it establish that the Army and Navy Personnel Headquarters will implement a system that facilitates the individualised professional guidance of all career military personnel in their respective fields. This process of information and specialised, technical, individual and systematic counselling is aimed at “*supporting career decisions, career paths and career opportunities*”. There are tools common to both the army and the navy, such as annual personal evaluation reports (IPEC) or personal evaluation reports (IPEV), which are issued after the evaluation for promotion. Other tools, such as the Individual Career Profile (ICP) or the Personalised Orientation Report (POR) provide a comparison of the data available in the personnel file, without offering guidance related to career planning or talent management.

In general, it is observed that much numerical data is provided automatically, but little individualised attention or human interaction. There is no advice on issues such as the impact of work-life balance measures, second-career specialisations and the possibility of being kept in certain jobs. These circumstances exacerbate the need to provide new commanders with a mentoring system to advise them on their professional development from their first jobs.

To compare the usefulness of mentoring with other career guidance tools, we can assess the answers that thousands of US military commanders gave on the impact of 15 aspects of their military life on their development as leaders²⁷: “*mentoring*”, “*learning*

27 (Rilet, 2014).

from a peer” and *“learning from a superior”* were ranked 4, 5 and 6 respectively, while *“coaching from organic command”* and *“360° reporting”* were ranked 13 and 14.

Therefore, mentoring should be viewed as a possible addition to the career guidance system, which would not only have a positive impact on the user level, but also on the organisation, for all that it could contribute to the future “talent management” system (particularly female talent).

The opinion of the Spanish military

Since most academic references consulted originate from the US military or labour sphere, a survey was carried out among Spanish military personnel to ratify or discard the main conclusions drawn from the bibliographical analysis. It was a voluntary, anonymous, online initiative, in which 160 responses were received from military personnel of all ranks. The survey consisted of seven questions, plus an additional three sociodemographic questions (corps, scale and seniority) to allow for a more in-depth analysis.

- Asked whether the implementation of mentoring in the Spanish Armed Forces would be beneficial for the personal and career progression and leadership of military women, 71% said yes, 17% said no, and 13% were unsure.
- A total of 81% responded affirmatively as to whether, during their military career, they were aware of having mentored other military women or men, either as a mentor or as a mentee.
- Regarding the possibility of participating in a future mentoring programme, 96% of the respondents indicated their willingness to participate, although 55% of the total indicated that they would prefer a voluntary programme to a compulsory one.
- Regarding the hierarchical relationship with the mentor, 61% stated that they would prefer it to be someone outside their chain of command.
- If a voluntary, non-chain-of-command programme were to be implemented, 6% of the volunteers said they intended to participate only as a mentor, 9% only as a mentee and 85% in both roles.
- Regarding the gender of the mentor, 85% responded that they had no preference for a male or female mentor, compared to 14% who would prefer a female and 1% who would prefer a male.
- In the absence of a senior female, 53% stated that they would prefer another female in the same job and more seniority as a mentor, compared to 27% who would prefer a senior male and 21% who would prefer a male in the same job and more seniority.

It is important to note that perceptions of mentoring are influenced by seniority. Female military personnel with 20 or more years of service have a higher opinion of mentoring, report having participated more (which is logical given that they have had more opportunity to do so) and would commit to a future programme in a higher percentage. Of those who have been using the technique for five years or less, only half think it is as effective, the same percentage say they have used it, they have a greater preference for a female mentor of the same sex (33%) and would refuse to participate in a greater extent.

In short, the idea that a mentoring programme for Spanish military personnel should be non-hierarchical, voluntary for both participants and enjoy the free choice of the mentor's gender is ratified.

On the other hand, many military personnel consulted in particular have expressed concern about the implementation of a programme aimed solely at female personnel, since it could have a negative impact on the perception of equality by focusing on the fact that "programmes are designed exclusively for female personnel". Although mentoring programmes are particularly useful for minorities and most male staff are unlikely to have issues with integration or career progression, participation should also be open to male staff to avoid this negative perception.

A similar discussion is taking place in the British Air Force (RAF) as to whether minority groups should be included in an overall programme or have a specific mentoring programme (DOHERTY 2019).

Conclusions and proposals

To increase the number of female leaders in our armed forces, the existing quantitative gap must be closed with tools that facilitate a qualitative improvement in the career projection of Spanish women in the military and enhance the exercise of leadership, introducing the subjective, affective and non-automated element provided by mentoring. Building on the experience of other military and civilian institutions, which have been exploiting the benefits of mentoring for years, there is no doubt that we can learn from their successes and shortcomings to introduce this tool successfully and make it a multiplier for the female personnel's professional development, a group from which leaders at the highest level are already beginning to emerge. It is up to us to seize this opportunity.

The following is an outline of what a mentoring programme for the Spanish military might look like, with generic guidelines that seek to benefit the organisation by increasing the mentor's leadership and the performance, integration and motivation of the mentored soldier.

- It would be a voluntary, non-organic, flexible and informal tool.

- Depending on circumstances and/or availability, there could be three modalities: peer-to-peer, female mentor to female mentee or male mentor to female mentee.
- It would be supported by training and development sessions for mentors, outside of the further education system.
- It would rely on the massive use of social media and internal communication channels.
- It would prioritise cases of high potential staff, as well as those belonging to ethnic, religious or sexual minorities with integration problems.

Constraints of the study and foresight

The main limitation lies in the absence of national studies on female military personnel vis-a-vis leadership and mentoring, except the one cited by GALLARDO. The vast majority refer to the US Armed Forces and society, where the integration of women in the Armed Forces is decades ahead of our country.

With regard to the limitations of the survey, it was limited to Navy personnel, as neither contact data nor the electronic ranks of other armies were available.

In relation to possible lines of research in the future, it would be interesting to update the GALLARDO study, to refer not only to the ET military but also to the Navy, the Air Force and the Common Corps.

Another aspect worth studying in depth would be the appropriateness of a programme aimed only at female staff and the possible negative perceptions that this could have, comparing those obtained between male and female staff. This would require an opinion poll targeting a significant size group.

Following this, the general outlines of a mentoring programme could be defined, either on a general basis for all the armed forces or on a specific basis for each army/navy. Points such as the selection of mentors and their training could be covered.

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