



## Intercultural Relationship and Mentoring: Case Study of Italian Air Force in Afghanistan

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### Abstract

*Mentoring is a developmental and learning support methodology, aimed at promoting individual potential, which takes place in an exchange relationship (formal or informal) between a Mentor - agent of socialization, natural facilitator, "older friend", passe par tout for the adult world, continual source of reference - and a Mentee, a less experienced person, a student or a learner.*

*Mentoring was born as a natural and spontaneous relationship, in which the experience and wisdom of the mentor are able to activate the processes of self-learning and learning on a mentee, an more over the development of values, a sense of belonging and motivation that inside the rapport are shared and socialized .*

*Mentoring is therefore based on a significant relationship, for which Mentor and Mentee have an experience of growth, typically mutual learning and bi unique. One of the characteristics of mentoring, compared to other forms of help on personal development, lies in the exchange, giving and receiving the gift of wisdom and knowledge.*

*The mentor is a positive role model, a guide at certain times of transition in the mentee, that inspires a change that leads to new forms of participation in various and significant activities within a community. In the modern sense, the mentoring relationship is looming as a process of guided learning in formal and facilitated, designed, managed and organized schemes. Mentoring is a method widely used in the English-speaking world and in particular in the United States. In Italy we started to study and theorize and experience since 2000 (CAMEO project [1], MAITRE [2]), and the areas within which this particular methodology is applied are various, ranging from school to work, from vocational guidance to entrepreneurship, from sports to prisons, from military schools to army. (M. Perchiazzi 2009) [3]*

*The content of mentoring relationship, that on which the relationship develops, it is never the same, and relates strongly to the context in which the relationship takes place and it's closely linked to the needs of the mentee in a given context. If we talk about the Mentoring as a situational method, it refers precisely to this aspect.*

*It's necessary that mentoring to develop in environments that are aware of such changes and change shape. Projects formalized intervention on the dynamics of personal and professional development and learning are seeking to create an enabling environment to facilitate informal and natural processes. Mentoring relationship that develops within projects remains a formal report to be treated by both parties involved, through awareness of the behaviours adopted. Especially on the part of the mentor that is the one who has to drive, to give feedback, to adapt to the development of the relationship, to motivate and stimulate, therefore to have control over the process. In doing this, in any case, the Mentor (or the community of Mentors) in a specific context, is assisted by figures of project staff. So the Mentor, once trained, volunteers know hoe, skills and shares in the form of teaching and transmission of experience, to foster personal and professional growth of the Mentee.*

The Italian School of Mentoring (SIM) of Florence is unique in Italy. It was founded in 2010 but its foundation is the fruit of a ten years of research, consulting, training and exchange of best practices on the topic of mentoring by its founder and creator Matteo Perchiazzi, since 2000 engaged in projects of national and international relevance with the collaboration of numerous Italian and European partners. The activity of the school is based on four main areas: consulting, research, training and certification of certified bodies SIM, with the aim to aggregate in communities of practice and professional bodies around the methodology of Mentoring. The core business of the school is the structuring of formal paths of Mentoring and training of key project management for formal mentoring certificated SIM. [4] The Italian School Mentoring has supported the Italian Air Force (AM) using the methodology of mentoring as part of NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan, which began in July 2010 and still in progress, whose aim is to facilitate the process of transition to full Afghan independence of military



force. The mission will end in 2014. For this aim, SIM and CEFODIMA - ISMA (Institute of Military Sciences and Aviation) trained about 110 "Mentor / Advisor", engaged in helping staff belonging Afghan military airport of Shindand, the future centre of excellence and training the entire Afghan Air Force. [5] Italian Mentors were chosen as outstanding figures in all the professionals of a military airport: from the organization of the food to the figures of fire fighting, from professionals involved in refuelling, to the helicopter pilots. It is to be noted that the last six months NATO has changed its name to the Mission 'Mentoring' into 'Advising', but for this article here the question is irrelevant.

In mentoring projects is known from the project EMPIRE - Empowerment through Mentoring (2007-2009) [6] - good practices at European level, which has established guidelines for the design of formal mentoring - that to be effective in their action Mentors must have some tools and must be supported by learning and self - learning tools. Mentoring in the performance of the Italian Air Force in Afghanistan has been used in this regard the instrument of the "diary" of Mentor, from the perspective of *Knowledge Management System*.

This *ongoing* monitoring tool was the key instrument for the collecting activity of empirical data and information about the performance of the relationship, the results it has produced, identify any problems and the strategies put in place and remedies. The diary has been crucial to identify strategies / elements / teaching techniques / devices that have been successful and which failed from the point of view of the relationship, what were the contents of the report (on for instance the career scope, professional rather than cultural?), what were any difficulties encountered in the report and what the methods of solution finally adopted and what the strengthens of the report: in particular the way of building the relationship and the values showed during his effective implementation. Finally, to assess the degree of autonomy and the acquisition of awareness of the professional military roles manifested in the various roles of mentoring Afghan troops.

The diaries were sent to the research team on a monthly basis and were analyzed through content analysis methodology that has helped it grow from a pure reading activity to the qualitative material identification of the key themes that tended to recur with some frequency (and to differentiate between them). From there, the identification of key concepts-labels has led to the subsequent identification and counting through the use of SPSS software - statistical package for social science.

Empirical evidence emerging from qualitative and quantitative analysis of approximately 170 diaries, allow us to see how the mentoring plays as a helper functions in daily life and work, improving communication mechanisms, providing a sense of belonging, and tools for professional enrichment and organizational, promoting the development and exchange between professional and cultural diversity. The innovative methodology of mentoring is related to its ability to convey the role and skills of cultural values, through the centrality of the relationship that is built on a ground of trust, empathy and equal interchange, from which you can then define, pursue and achieve professional goals.

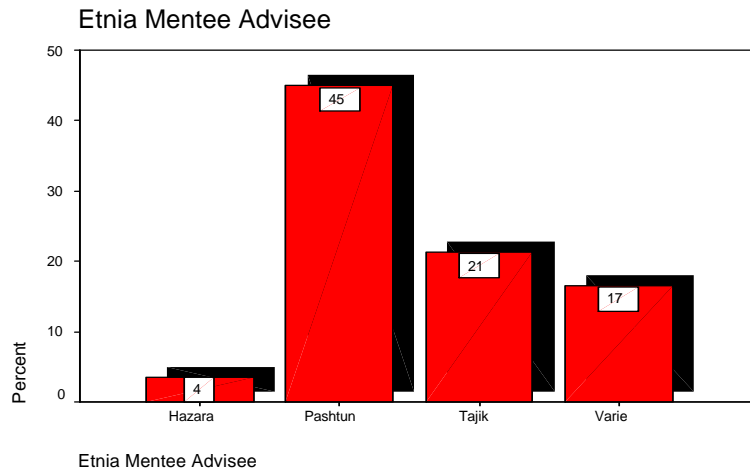
The analysis made clear that the strength of the relationship has allowed during the '*helping to learn*' process to establish an effective intercultural communication, especially through the exchange of values, traditions, customs, perception of time, work and life. The results in this extreme setting so far support the view that mentoring can be successfully applied in any context (social, business, school, etc.) in which we can meet different cultures. We see the results below.

From the sample of diaries - 170 during the period November 2010 / November 2012 – it's clear shows that the mentoring of the Italian military was operated with Afghan belonging to different ethnic groups, but particularly Pashtun (45%), Tajik (21%), other (17%) and 5% Hazara. This means that the information in this article reporting this special and interesting experience, you can also extend to different types of tribes and ethnic groups (see Figure 1).

The typical aims of Mentoring – Advising helping to learn method are about the transmitting of the specific job role experience: it means that it's typical of this methods to make understand the learner (mentee) to better exercise the being in charge in a specific organizational role.

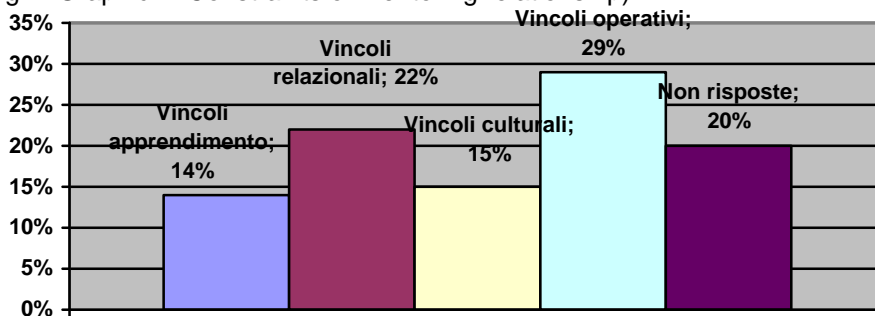


(Fig.1. Graphic 1. Type of Afghan Army Ethnicity Mentee).



Analysis by SIM, and, as previously mentioned, the first interesting and necessary issue to understand was what are the main constraints vital to the mentoring relationship and thus classify them into 4 types: learning constraints, relational constraints, cultural constraints and operating – logistic constraints (see Fig 2).

(Fig.2. Graphic 2. Constraints of Mentoring relationship)

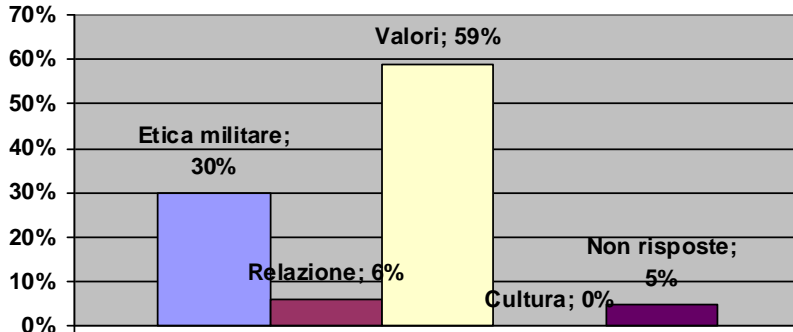


'Learning constraint comes from the professional starting point and basic and *commitment* in which the mentee is involved or not. The constraints derived from relational communication that takes place, while the cultural ones arise from possible cultural differences, while operating instead depend on the organization of Mentoring in the daily military base activities. As can be seen from Figure 2, the cultural constraints are only 15% of the constraints that exist for the success of Mentoring, and, together with those relational, which depend in part also by the language and culture, are of only 35% the overall problems of the relationship. The constraints subsisting in the report are clearly caused by the fact that the relationship is mediated by an interpreter that translates from Italian to English and English to Farsi Dhari, the main language in Afghanistan.

To overcome these constraints, Mentor on the mission were asked to explain what were the strategies who enable to establish a helping effective learning relationship, indicating their strengthens. In a so critical environment of Afghanistan, the surprising data were that for a Mentoring relationship critical strengthens were identified just the values with a 59% of the occurrences and military ethics with a 30% (Fig 3). By the findings in the diaries were classified 4 types of strengthens, 'the culture', 'the values' transmitted and identified in the relationship, 'the military ethic' (i.e. all the values that can be traced back to the mentality of a military organization) and the relationship itself.

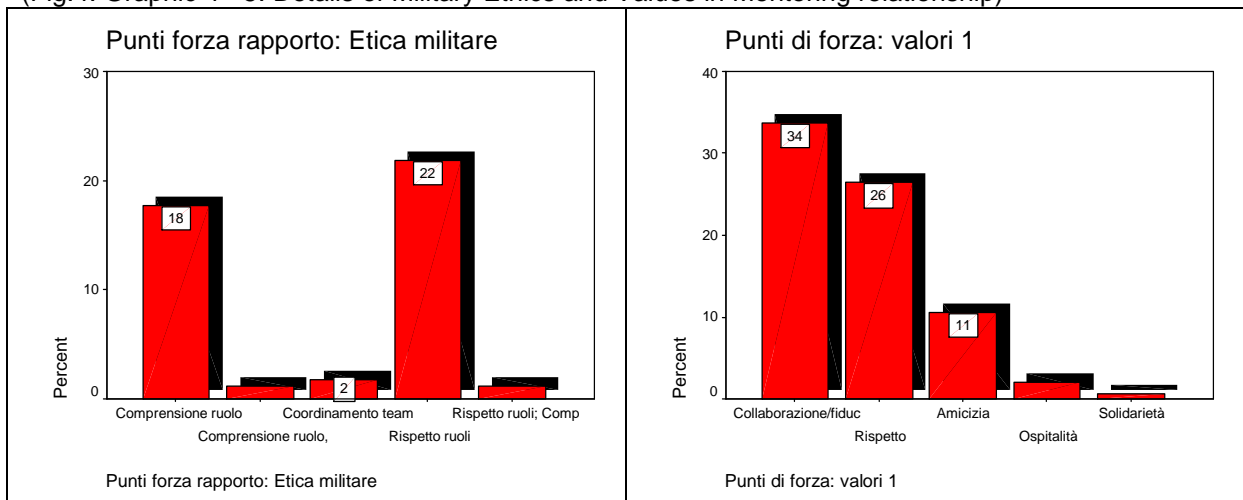


(Fig.3. Graphic 3. Strengthens of Mentoring relationship)



Exploring the value categories of military ethics emerge as important strengthens 'understanding of the role' with 18% and the 'respect for the roles' with 22% (Fig 4. Graph 4). But even more surprising given the results from Figure 4 graphic 5, in which we detailed categories of values that have helped to establish an effective mentoring relationship. It can be found as many important for the 34% 'trust and cooperation', while 25% 'respect', 'friendship' 11%, and the 'hospitality' of 1% as 'solidarity'.

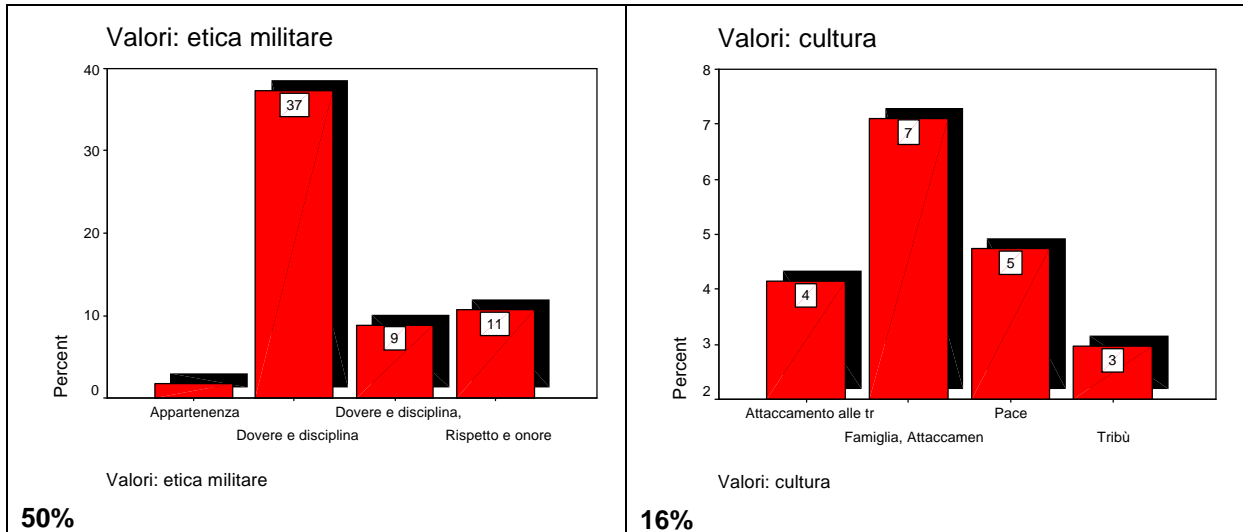
(Fig.4. Graphic 4 - 5. Details of Military Ethics and Values in Mentoring relationship)



In other data, that we don't report here, are spelled out the percentages of the above categories only within the category 'values' of Figure 4: Within that category, still occur the military ethics as important for 50%, the relationship for 23%, 16% as culture, religion very little, the remaining percentage are 'missed'. As can be seen from Figure 5 Figure 6 - 7, very important link values for a really effective mentoring relationship in the context of military ethics as the 'duty and discipline', 'respect and honour' and 'sense of belonging'. Within the category of values 'culture', have emerged 'attachment to traditions', 'family', 'peace' and only last for the 'tribe'.

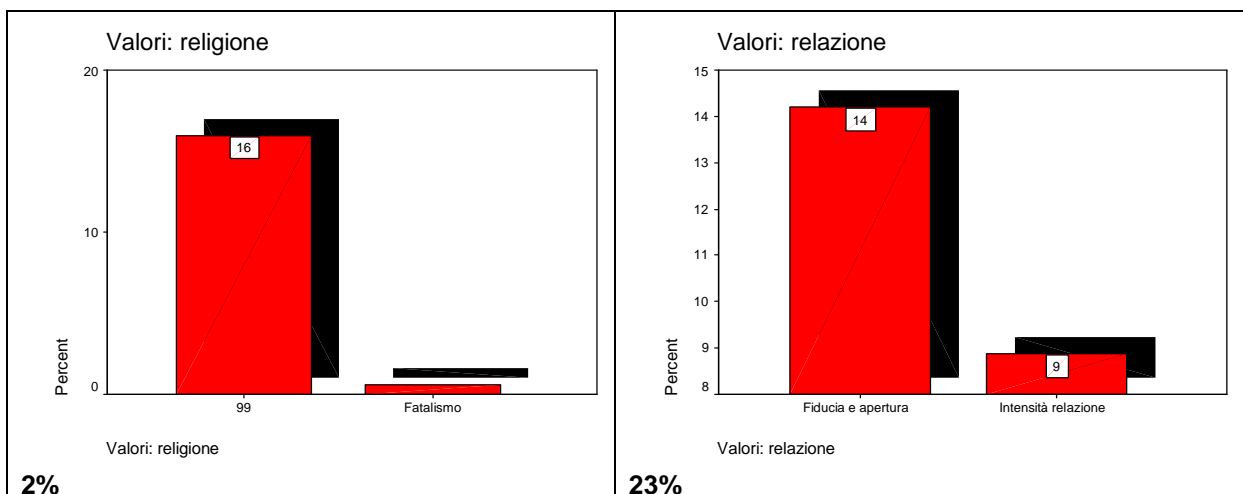


(Fig.5. Graphic 6 – 7. Details of Values showed in Mentoring relationship inside the categories 'Religion', 'Relationship')



Another extremely interesting issue, is that resulting from the other categories emerged in attitudes towards the value-Mentor, as 'religion' and 'relationship' (fig. 6, graphs 8-9). Apart from the 'fatalism', the values of the religion is not clearly relevant within the mentoring relationship. Another important category regarded as other values is just 'the relationship' (23%), from which emerge the values of 'trust and openness' (14%) and 'intensity of the relationship' (9%).

Fig.6. Graphic 8 – 9. Details of Values showed in Mentoring relationship inside the categories 'Religion', 'Relationship')



The simple data and their classifications emerged in this article indicate clearly that it is possible to have a communication and a relationship - not only of mentoring - with very different cultures and religions. How? Focusing on building relationships that have universal value-concepts, or meta values as:

- Collaboration and trust;
- Respect;
- Friendship;
- Devotion to family;



- *Attachment to the traditions;*
- *Peace.*

A sub level of communication is the category 'universe and military ethics' which, however, for a Mentoring rapport is clearly effective in sharing your professional and belonging to the same ' professional community '. In particular, dimensions as:

- *The mutual understanding of the roles;*
- *Respect for the role;*
- *The duty and discipline;*
- *Respect and honour.*

In this so extreme setting and environment, the results support three thesis closely related to each other:

- It is possible to establish an intercultural communication using universal values and meta values;
- Mentoring promotes the transmission of also professional experience through the main building a relationship based on trust, listening and shared values;
- Mentoring promotes intercultural communication and can be successfully applied in any context (social, business, school, etc.), in which you can meet different cultures and in different cultures also different ethnic groups.

## References

- [1] ISFOL, Cameo, 2004.
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- [5] <http://www.aeronautica.difesa.it>
- [6] Progetto EMPIRE <http://www.filprato.it/10/ita/index.html>