



Building a **Sexual Harassment-Free Workplace** in Electricity

Safe Space Mentoring Tool



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada

About **Electricity Human Resources Canada** (EHRC)

Electricity Human Resources Canada (EHRC) embarked on a key initiative to address sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. Funded by the Department of Justice Canada, the resulting program will equip employers with clear policies, procedures and practices to build a respectful and safe work environment for all employees.

It builds on EHRC's years of work tackling gender discrimination in the electricity sector through the Leadership Accord on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Our vision is to build a world-class electricity workforce. We will achieve this by growing our Canadian electricity labour force to be safety-focused, innovative and inclusive.

Our mandate is to:

- **Deliver critical business intelligence to inform labour market decision-making.**
- **Forge partnerships that enable the industry to adapt, upskill and innovate.**
- **Lead the industry in creating and sustaining a skilled and inclusive workforce.**
- **Inspire our future workforce to build a low carbon economy.**

Further information on EHRC is available at ehrc.ca.

Ce rapport est également disponible en français sous le titre: Ébauche de l'outil de mentorat pour un espace sécuritaire.
This report is also available in French.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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Introduction

The Safe Space Mentoring Tool offers resources and materials to support respectful, safe, and beneficial mentoring of employees, interns and students, regardless of sexual orientation.

Transfer of knowledge and skills based on experience is a powerful way to supplement or reinforce formal learning experiences. The mentor's role is to help the mentee acquire the knowledge, networks, work habits, and skills required to grow and develop within a particular industry or job area.

Mentorship has been viewed as a key solution in combatting gender inequality in the workplace, particularly in sectors like electricity where women are under-represented. However, cross-gender mentoring—most often with male senior leaders mentoring more junior women—has become less appealing to both men and women due to the heightened awareness around sexual harassment. As an unintended consequence of the publicity surrounding prominent men who have been “outed” for sexual harassment and the ensuing #MeToo Movement, both men and women have become increasingly uncomfortable and wary of interacting with colleagues of the opposite gender in the workplace, avoiding working alone or socializing in work-related environments for fear of being accused of or experiencing sexual harassment.¹

Gender-based harassment and violence (GBHV) is any form of harassment, discrimination, or violence directed at a person because of their gender identity or gender expression (male, female, trans, gender-nonconforming) or sexual orientation. While GBHV can affect anyone, it disproportionately affects women. In the workplace, GBHV poses a range of risks, including low employee morale and productivity, litigation, loss of profits, and reputational damage.

Recognizing that in traditionally male-dominated sectors like electricity, without access to mentors, women (and arguably people of other gender identities and sexual orientations) will be less likely to achieve their career goals, EHRC is creating practical resources to encourage and support safe and respectful mentorships.

EHRC currently offers Mentor Junction, a free online platform that pairs mentees with mentors (industry professionals in the electricity sector). The Safe Space Mentoring Tool enhances and aligns with Mentor Junction, as well as other EHRC initiatives such as Connected Women, and other peer supports.

¹ <https://leanin.org/sexual-harassment-backlash-survey-results>

Who Can Use this Tool:

Supervisors/managers or employees assuming a mentorship, coaching role, or ally role; educators; and trainers.

Objectives

The aim of this tool is to support mentors and others in the electricity sector to:

- Be aware of how gender identity combines with other marginalized identities (race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) to affect an individual's workplace experience and ability to act and speak up on their own behalf.
- Understand their role, responsibilities, and boundaries within the context of safe and respectful mentoring relationships.
- Be aware of the benefits of mentorship, and factors that support the creation of constructive, safe, and trusting cross-gender mentor-mentee relationships.
- Recognize challenges that may arise in cross-gender mentoring relationships and explore various types of mentoring approaches that may be beneficial for creating safety in mentorship relationships.
- Model appropriate behaviour and communication in the workplace.
- Be aware of legislation, policies, and practices that protect employees from harassment and violence on the grounds of gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and other protected identities.

Establishing Safe and Respectful Mentoring Relationships

Creating a Mutually Safe and Trusting Mentoring Relationship

Productive and transformative mentor relationships happen when both parties recognize the relationship as mutually beneficial, feel connected, and are free to share openly and be heard, unconstrained by fear, intimidation, conflict, or status. Resources in this section provide guidance to organizations and mentors in creating safe and supportive spaces for cross-gender/identity mentoring.

Resource 1: Qualities of a Good Cross-Gender/Identity Mentor^{2 3 4}

While everyone can benefit from a mentor, not everyone can be an effective mentor. Mentors who are able to establish beneficial and safe mentoring spaces with mentees of a different gender or other social identity possess some important qualities, experience, and expertise.

For additional resources on mentoring, refer to: Mentor Junction—A Guide for Mentors

Table 1: Qualities of a Good Cross-Gender/Identity Mentor

Is enthusiastic about their role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is sincere in their desire to help• Recognizes the time commitment required to be an effective mentor, particularly in the face of potential challenges• Displays an appropriate interest in mentee’s life without being intrusive or causing discomfort• Is able to create a collegial relationship that recognizes the possible challenges that can arise in cross-gender mentoring relationships• Maintains professional boundaries• Can refer mentee to available resources whenever this would be helpful
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2 <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/important-qualities-to-look-for-in-a-mentor>

3 <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/qualities-of-a-good-mentor-1986663>

4 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341056065_Challenges_of_cross_gender_Mentoring_relationships_When_it_comes_to_mentoring_does_gender_matter

Table 1: Qualities of a Good Cross-Gender/Identity Mentor

<p>Values lifelong learning and development for themselves and others</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invests in the development of others, especially those whose career development may be hampered by discrimination in the workplace • Is dedicated to equity of access to opportunities to improve and learn, for all employees irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation • Shares their knowledge and receives the knowledge of others with humility • Reflects thoughtfully on mentee’s <u>goals</u> and accomplishments to offer constructive advice • Prioritizes goals and develops action plans to improve themselves, including improving capacity and competence to work with and support others of identities different from their own • Is committed to contributing to their field/industry beyond their own career
<p>Has established networks and strong connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciates the value of relationship building and connecting with colleagues and others • Understands that professional connections are a combination of personal and business • Understands the need for mentees to connect with networks that reflect their identities and experiences • Fosters relationships with colleagues of various identities and perspectives
<p>Supports and encourages risk taking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies a mentee’s comfort zone and develops steps, activities, goals and opportunities to step out onto the “skinny branches,” and build confidence • Has confidence in own abilities, and knows how to motivate others • Understands how discrimination may impact an individual’s self-esteem and is able to assist them in identifying and overcoming internal and external obstacles • Can identify the need for, and actively share/engage in discussions of vulnerability to encourage trust and growth

Table 1: Qualities of a Good Cross-Gender/Identity Mentor

<p>Understands influences on their own and other’s worldview</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is self-reflective and self-aware ● Is open to learning from mentee ● Is aware of own biases, assumptions, preferences, and fears, and works to mitigate their influence on the mentor-mentee relationship ● Creates a strategy that fits the needs, talents, skills, and desires of mentee, and pushes mentee toward their own self-improvement—not towards a clone of themselves ● Sensitive to cross-identity issues including gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability status, etc., which affect the advising relationship, and is open to discussing these
<p>Able to provide critical, specific, non-judgmental feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reinforces mentee successes while helping them to improve in other areas ● Honest and tactful in providing advice without demeaning others or the mentee
<p>Demonstrates industry knowledge and experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understands what skills, experience, and connections are of value to mentee’s professional development ● Is able to apply their advanced knowledge to help mentee advancement in areas they wish to pursue ● Possesses experience and expertise in the same or related field or industry ● Understands the challenges mentees may experience in the industry
<p>Is humble</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is willing to ask questions and learn from mentee and others ● Assesses own challenges and develops strategies for overcoming them ● Acknowledges that while they have expertise, they cannot possibly know everything ● Is attentive to the importance of good communication in building a strong working relationship ● Seeks out and accepts feedback from mentee
<p>Values and champions diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Values, seeks out and accepts diverse perspectives ● Is open to developing a mutual understanding and appreciation of the different experiences and identities of the mentor and mentee (e.g., gender, generation, sexual orientation, discrimination) ● Understands that mentee may have valuable experiences and solutions that the mentor does not ● Collaborates with various stakeholders and understands the importance of collective wisdom in properly supporting and mentoring mentees of identities different than their own

Resource 2: Benefits and Challenges of Same-Gender and Cross-Gender Mentoring Relationships

Lack of support for professional development and career advancement, gender discrimination, and harassment remain significant barriers for gender equity in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) industries. The benefit of mentor support to employee groups typically excluded and historically underrepresented in an industry is well documented.^{5,6} However, in order to create a safe space for both mentor and mentee, organizations and mentors engaging in cross-gender/identity mentoring should understand the dynamics of such relationships, the opportunities that exist for both the mentor and mentee, and the potential challenges that may arise.

SAME-GENDER MENTORING

Evidence suggests that same gender mentorships benefit from a greater degree of interpersonal comfort due to shared experiences. Mentees with same gender identity, race, sexual orientation mentors report receiving more psychosocial mentoring, experiencing stronger relationship quality, and feeling that their mentors served a role-modelling function. That role-modelling function may be a very important aspect of the mentoring relationship. For example, observing mentors of the same gender, mentees may vicariously learn strategies for coping with gender-related barriers to advancement. This may be particularly beneficial for women who, to date, are less likely to have seen many other women in senior roles in the sector.

In the electricity sector, there is an underrepresentation of women and other minority gender identities and sexual orientations in executive and senior roles. Research conducted by EHRC found that, for electricity partners for whom

information was available, 12% had no women on their boards of directors, and 25% had no female representation in executive teams.⁷ Consequently, waiting on an identity match limits the pool and may also burn out the few individuals in a position to offer mentorship. While there is much to be gained from same-gender mentoring, the numbers suggest that the industry does not yet have the capacity to offer such pairings on a wide scale. Additionally same gender mentoring does limit opportunities for sharing of diverse insights and perspectives.

CROSS-GENDER MENTORING

Cross-gender mentoring encourages people of different identities to support each other professionally and developmentally. It offers an opportunity for both mentor and mentee to gain a more balanced approach, work together, and rethink preconceived notions and assumptions. Cross-gender/identity mentoring allows each one to see the value of genders and generations other than their own.

When mentoring relationships occur across identity differences, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, a number of issues arise which may be less likely in same-identity mentoring relationships.

PRIVILEGE, POWER, AND ROLE STEREOTYPING

Men have traditionally held more power than women in many organizations, and male mentors may be perceived as having more ability to provide career-development support and therefore be more effective mentors. Moreover, existing research suggests that even when women and mentors of other gender identities

5 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2019/09/26/the-key-to-diversity-and-inclusion-is-mentorship/>

6 <https://imdiversity.com/diversity-news/mentoring-matters-especially-for-women-and-minorities/>

7 EHRC.(2020) Leadership: Pathways to Gender Equity

are in equivalent positions of power, sex-role expectations may lead mentees to perceive them as having less power.⁸ Assumptions and biases about gender roles may also result in mentees perceiving female mentors as offering more nurturing and social support than male mentors.

Gender-role stereotypes can consciously or unconsciously shape assumptions made by male mentors about female mentees. Aspects such as career commitment, work-life balance challenges, success due to luck vs. competency, preferred managerial style, level of confidence, etc. can all be subject to unconscious biases that can affect the mentoring relationship. Male mentors may also take an overprotective and paternalistic approach with female mentees.

INTERPERSONAL COMFORT

Gender-role stereotypes, gender-identity assumptions, social norms, and practices may also prevent mentors and mentees of different gender identities from developing a trusting relationship. Cross-gender mentoring relationships may be misconstrued or subject to public scrutiny and suspicion, resulting in less social interaction.⁹ Sexual innuendo and rumours can constrain the level of comfort between

cross-gender mentoring pairs and may result in loss of respect and credibility, negatively impacting the growth and development of both parties. The mere hint of personal involvement can damage the credibility of the relationship and, ultimately, the careers of the mentee and/or the mentor.¹⁰

EXCLUSION FROM SOCIAL EVENTS

Exclusion of other genders from informal networks in the organization like clubs, sports, and after-work activities, whether it be deliberate or implied, limits the opportunity to interact with potential mentors who are part of such informal social settings. The extent to which after-work social activities play a role in the organization may result in increased challenges for cross-gender mentees to develop a relationship with their mentor.

RESTRICTIONS OF IDENTIFICATION

Mentees may view cross-gender mentors as unable to empathize, offer acceptance, or provide effective counselling. For example, male mentors may be seen as unable to fully understand work-family conflicts faced by female mentees.

8 <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/08/180809144524.html>

9 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341056065_Challenges_of_cross_gender_Mentoring_relationships_When_it_comes_to_mentoring_does_gender_matter

10 Abbot, I. (2014) Sponsoring Women What Men Need to Know

AVOIDING PITFALLS

To avoid potential problems arising from cross-gender mentoring relationships:

- Provide access to training and other professional development opportunities and tools to build the capacity of mentors and mentees to foster safe spaces that allow mentoring relationships to flourish.
- Establish clear mentoring goals and expectations and effectively communicate them to all persons involved.
- Clearly state that participation in the program is voluntary and that either party can withdraw from the program at any time.
- Communicate the rationale for the existence of the mentor/mentee relationship to peers, supervisors, and managers.
- Sponsor various social events where cross-gender mentoring pairs can interact socially in a sanctioned environment.
- Support the development of same-gender mentoring relationships and group mentoring models.
- Conduct ongoing assessments and gather input from mentoring pairs to support the continuous evolution of “safe space” mentoring.

References

- 1 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341056065_Challenges_of_cross_gender_Mentoring_relationships_When_it_comes_to_mentoring_does_gender_matter
- 2 <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/3-benefits-of-cross-gender-mentoring/>

Tool 1: Assessing Unconscious Gender Bias

Research has demonstrated that biases remain in the unconscious in most humans, even if they believe they have exorcised or extinguished them.¹¹ People can be consciously committed to equity and deliberately work to behave in ways that are not prejudiced yet continue to possess hidden negative attitudes and stereotypes. Willingness to examine one's own biases is important in understanding the roots of stereotypes and prejudice.

Unconscious bias on the part of either mentor or mentee can be harmful in mentoring and impede the creation of a safe space. Individuals who belong to groups that are commonly

stereotyped are more apt to think that the stereotype might be applied to them. Performance pressure of worrying about being stereotyped can create enough stress and negative feelings to affect the individual's ability to perform a task,¹² or hear feedback objectively.

A bias-free environment or at least one where mentors and mentees are committed to identifying and mitigating the impact of their biases is critical to creating safe spaces. A self-reflection exercise can help unearth hidden biases so they can be monitored and addressed before they are expressed through behaviour.

EARLY EXPERIENCES:

Who raised you? How were you raised? What were your early childhood influences?

CURRENT SOCIAL GROUP:

Is your peer group largely homogeneous? Are your friends, professional acquaintances, and networks similar to you in race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, etc.?

11 <https://psych.wustl.edu/news/understanding-your-biases>

12 <https://pollinate.net/unconscious-bias-in-the-workplace-managing-differences-through-mentoring/#:~:text=Unconscious%20Bias%20and%20Mentoring%20Knowing%20and%20reducing%20our,mentoring%20due%20to%20a%20phenomenon%20called%20%E2%80%9Cstereotype%20threat.%E2%80%9D>

USE OF LANGUAGE:

How do you describe those of different races, ethnicities, gender identities, or religions when they are not present? Do you use language that might be offensive or discriminatory?

Several tools have attempted to measure attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to recognize in themselves. Below are two such assessments.

Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT)

Psychologists at Harvard, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington created “Project Implicit” to develop Hidden Bias Tests—called Implicit Association Tests, or IATs, to measure unconscious bias.

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias>

Bias Outside the Box

The Bias Outside the Box (BOB) tool helps people be honest with themselves and begin a mindful journey to think outside the box when it comes to unconscious bias.

<https://leadwithdiversity.com/answers/>

Tip 1: Tips for Managing Biases

An individual's conscious mind, values, and beliefs may all suggest that they carry no biases. Nonetheless, everyone has biases and makes judgements based on those biases. Making an intentional and conscious effort to see people as individuals is one way of reprogramming the brain. It contributes to the creation of a judgement-free, safe mentoring space.

Be intentional in taking these approaches:

- ✓ recognize and observe own biases
- ✓ form connections and relationships with people who are different
- ✓ make decisions objectively using rational, conscious processes
- ✓ interrupt own automatic responses
- ✓ work to fight the return of own biases

Resource 3: Elements of Safe Spaces for Mentors and Mentees

Health and safety in the workplace go beyond the physical; they include the psychological safety of all employees. A psychologically safe environment begins with a feeling of belonging,¹³ in which people are comfortable being and expressing themselves. There is the ability to show oneself without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status, or career.¹⁴ It is a key component of organizations that value diversity and equity, and it is necessary for safe-space mentoring to happen.

COMPONENTS OF A SAFE SPACE

Within the context of mentoring relationships, a safe space is one where individuals can:

- present their authentic selves;
- engage in the learning process by asking questions;
- give and receive feedback;
- experiment; and
- take risks and acknowledge vulnerabilities and mistakes without fear of being demeaned, embarrassed, rejected, or penalized.

An interplay of diverse opinions, experiences, and knowledge can occur if mentors and mentees feel comfortable speaking up and are accustomed to considering alternate viewpoints.

Mentors and mentees must also feel assured that they will be able to engage in cross-gender relationships that are free from innuendo or behaviours and actions that fall within the definition of gender-based harassment or violence.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SAFE-SPACE MENTORING

The creation of a safe space between mentor and mentee generally hinges on several factors. However, the feeling of safety is subjective, and each individual may need something different in order to feel safe. To further explore the specific or additional needs of a particular mentoring relationship, use these approaches to guide discussions between mentor and mentee:

- Establish a formal **structure**.
- Work to cultivate a respectful and genuine connection between mentor and mentee.
- Create opportunity for honest discussions and negotiations between mentor and mentee regarding expectations, comfort

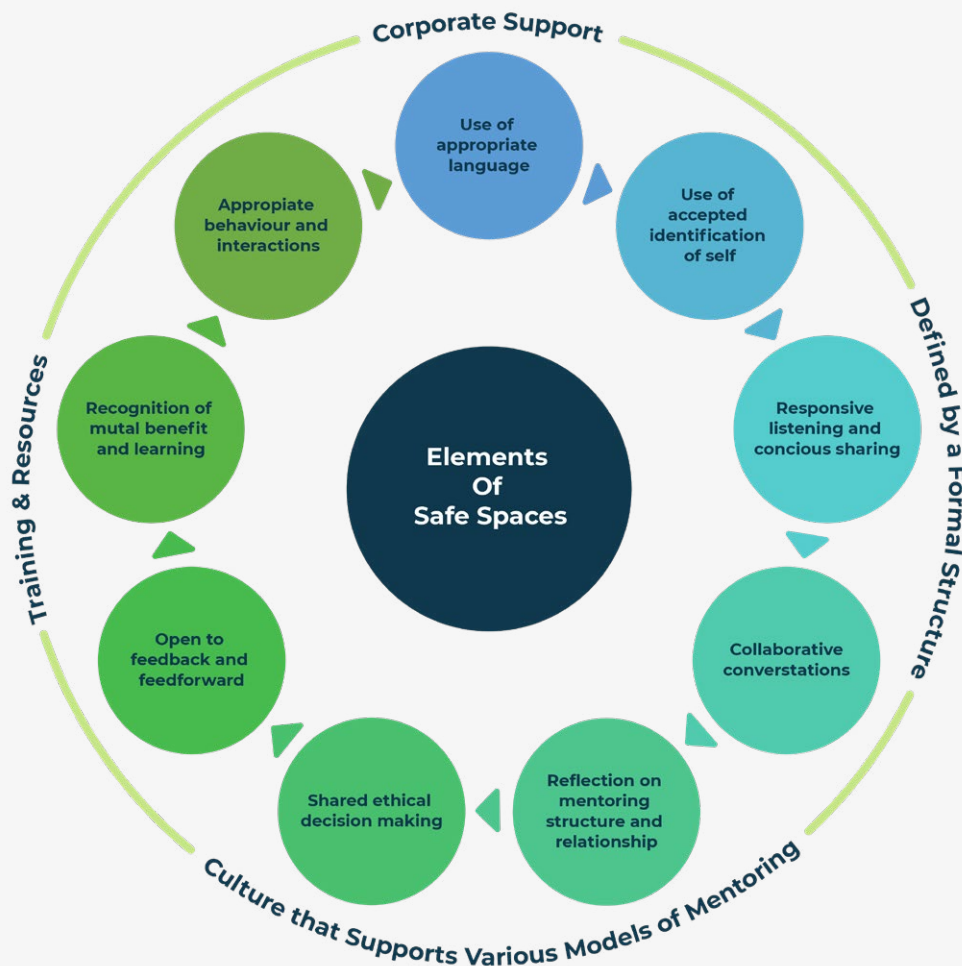
13 Edmondson, A. The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth

14 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2021/05/06/psychological-safety-at-work-why-it-matters-and-how-to-create-it/?sh=52173a857b85>

around place and time of meetings, personal boundaries, etc., to ensure the physical and psychological safety of both **parties**.

- Consider potential concerns and conflicts that may arise and be prepared to address them.
- Encourage open discussion about each other’s challenges, needs, and lived experience (professional/workplace/personal), and any potential triggers.
- Hold regular check-ins to mutually assess how the relationship is working, whether it is achieving objectives, and if there are changing needs or goals.
- Support engagement in difficult and/or sensitive conversations.
- Explicitly acknowledge among the mentor, mentee, and workplace that there is trust to experiment without judgment.
- Establish a feeling of safety, so that one can fail without fear of being labelled as a failure.
- Recognize the value of learning from each other.
- Provide feedback and feedforward (giving information to forward or take someone to the next level). Feedforward is the process of replacing positive or negative feedback with future-oriented solutions.

Figure 1: Reflection: What would make me feel safe in a mentor-mentee relationship?



Exploring Developmental Networks

Resource 4: Beyond the One-to-One — Developmental Networks and Mentoring Circles as an Option for Creating Safe Mentorship Environments

In a traditional mentoring relationship, mentees typically choose or are assigned a single person who can assist in the mentee’s professional development. Developmental networks and mentoring circles reduce the potential challenges that may arise in one-to-one cross-gender mentoring relationships and expand opportunities to establish multiple connections. A wider network of mentors and mentees may be more advantageous for creating safer mentoring spaces.

Mentoring Circles are peer-to-peer group mentoring programs that help employees find colleagues within an organization, profession, or industry who share common interests or learning objectives, and enable them to develop together. Circle members choose a topic or issue for group discussion; the discussion can be either personal or professional. Members of the group take turns leading the group, giving members a chance to build confidence, improve

leadership skills, and engage in career development through active facilitation.

Developmental Networks move from relying on didactic (single mentor-mentee) or hierarchical (mentor as senior to mentee) relationships, to emphasizing relationships with a network of people who help advance one’s career, and/or provide personal support. The composition of developmental networks depends on where an individual is in their career and what they are looking for. For a new employee, a boss or assigned mentor might be helpful. As individuals move further along in their careers, needs may become more complex and difficult to address by just one person. Developmental networks may include traditional mentors, advisors, peer mentors, e-mentors, colleagues, juniors, mentees, family, and friends who provide access to knowledge, opportunities, and resources across industries and sectors.

Beyond One-to-One

How the group model compares to the traditional role

Mentor	Traditional Individual	Network Group
Role of Mentor(s)	Expert passing on knowledge	Co-learners and peers sharing knowledge and support
Relationship(s)	Hierarchical Stable Within the organization	Hierarchical and peer evolving inside and outside the organization increases psychological safety in cross-gender relationships

Beyond One-to-One

How the group model compares to the traditional role

Mentor	Traditional Individual	Network Group
Individual Outcomes	Enhanced performance, career accomplishment and satisfaction, career advancement	Enhanced performance, learning, self-awareness, social skills, and leadership capability
Organizational Outcomes	Enhanced performance and retention and succession planning	Enhanced performance, retention, or-organizational learning, innovation, leadership capacity, knowledge transfer and succession planning

Source: Kathy E. Kram and Monica C. Higgins (2009) *A New Approach to Mentoring*¹⁵

Tool 2: Mapping a Network — A Tool for Mentees¹⁶

Whether or not an organization has mentor or developmental networks, an individual can create their own developmental relationships based on existing connections. Mapping networks can assist in identifying influential and experienced people already in an individual's sphere of connection. This method of establishing mentoring relationships offers the mentee a level of control and choice and can ultimately lead to a more trusting and safe mentorship space.

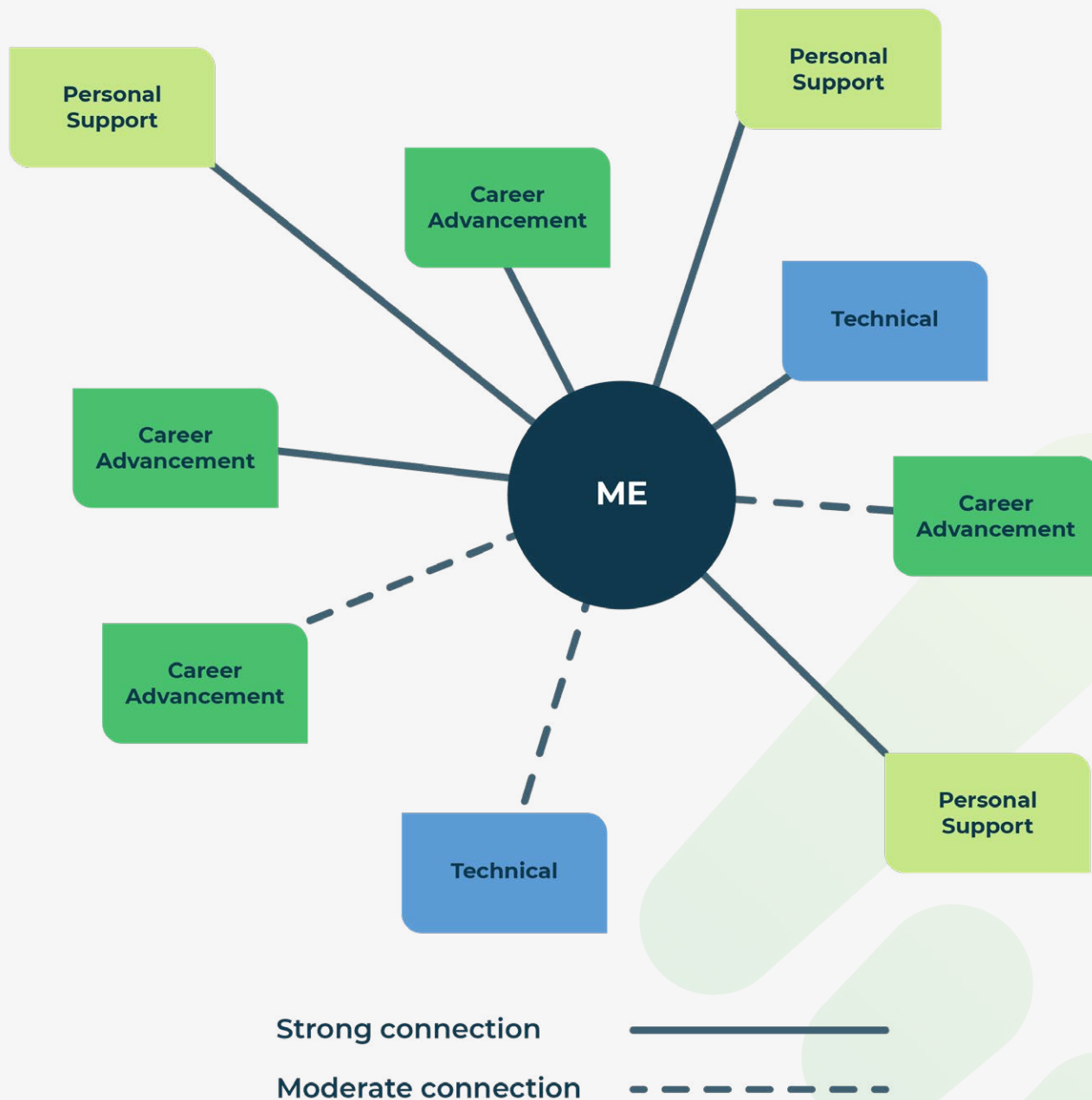
Identify the people within a network who meet various needs:

- ✓ **Technical:** People who help improve knowledge and skills required to advance.
- ✓ **Career Advancement:** People who can provide career guidance and direction.
- ✓ **Personal Support:** People who can offer emotional well-being and psychosocial support. They may share identity or life experiences. For example, a group for indigenous women engineers or trans human resource professionals.

¹⁵ https://www.bumc.bu.edu/facdev-medicine/files/2009/12/Kram-Higgins_A-New-Mindset-on-Mentoring.pdf

¹⁶ References Emas, S.J. et al (2016) The Developmental Network Exercise; Witkop, L. How to Map Networks

Figure 2: Network assessment



Once a network is mapped, assess how well it meets current goals and needs. This will aid in identifying additional connections that may be beneficial.

Communicating Across Genders

Individuals of different gender identities may have different reasons for accessing mentorship, different expectations of what mentorship is, and may respond differently to mentoring. Uncovering and understanding these differences through honest and ongoing dialogue can help establish meaningful mentor-mentee relationships and avoid pitfalls in communication that may occur.

Tool 3: Don't Shy Away from Conversations about Gender Difference

Acknowledging a person's experience and creating safe spaces for conversation goes a long way toward cultivating a workplace culture where people feel they can bring their full selves to work. Ignoring a person's gender and how it influences their workplace experience may interfere with the mentor-mentee connection. Events that happen in the workplace or society, or the company's diversity & inclusion efforts and initiatives, can be catalysts for conversations about gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, etc. Conversations may also emerge organically based on something someone has said or experienced. Being able to engage in such conversations signals to the individual that you are interested in who they are and in better understanding their needs.

Here are several examples of opportunities that can be used to begin or extend conversations around difference:

- The implementation of new workplace policies that support gender equity;
- Issues that receive extensive attention (public, industry or workplace related); and
- Days of commemoration or remembrance:
 - **International Women's Day** (March 8)
 - **Pride Month** (June)
 - **Woman Abuse Prevention Month** (November)
 - **Transgender Day of Remembrance** (November 20)
 - **The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women** (December 6)

While these conversations are never easy, they are important. The issues are on the minds of employees, whether they are discussed or not. Being proactive and creating space for sharing demonstrates the mentor's value for equity and respect for all people. and respects for all people.

Tool 4: Checklist — Having Conversations About Gender

CREATE SAFE AND DELIBERATE SPACES TO RAISE AND DISCUSS ISSUES

Acknowledge that these conversations are difficult and sensitive.

Take the lead from the other person about how deep they wish the conversation to be. i.e. social and visual cues – body language, posture, expression etc.

Explain how such a conversation may benefit the mentoring relationship.

Be comfortable allowing moments of silence, knowing they will happen.

Be prepared to share thoughts authentically and show vulnerability.

See the individual's approach and assess their willingness to engage in the conversation at that time or identify a more appropriate time.

Support the individual to pivot from a potentially intense and triggering discussion back to regular workplace duties.

- Check in with the individual to see how they felt about the conversation
- If necessary reassure the individual that the conversation is confidential

- Suggest the person take a break before going back to their workspace (take a walk, have lunch etc.)
- Quick meditation or breathing exercise

ENGAGE IN CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Seek out resources that may help to better understand issues.

Reflect on the mentoring relationship and discussions. For example:

- What was the intention behind the conversation and did it meet expectations?
- What did you learn/gain?
- Would you do anything differently next time?

BE PREPARED TO FOSTER SAFETY

Know how to support mentees (or mentors) experiencing gender-based harassment and violence

- Refer to *Support Strategies and Framework* for additional information: **Being an Ally—Detect, Interrupt, Support**

Resource 5: Legal Supports and Remedies

This resource: [Support Strategy and Framework: Resource 19: Legal Supports and Remedies](#) provides a summary list of Provincial Human Rights and Worker's Compensation Boards.

In addition to workplace policies and processes, there is a comprehensive legal context that addresses sexual harassment/gender-based

violence and discrimination in the workplace. Most notably, Human Rights legislation and Worker's Compensation Boards include protections against gender-based violence for employees. Mentors' awareness of this information is useful in both creating safe spaces for mentorship and bringing awareness to mentees of their workplace rights and responsibilities.

Additional Resources

Art of Mentoring Spotlight: Cross-Gender Relations in the Post #MeTooWorld

<https://artofmentoring.net/cross-gender-report/>

Challenges of Cross-Gender Mentoring Relationships: When it Comes to Mentoring, Does Gender Matter?

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341358006_Challenges_of_cross-gender_Mentoring_relationships_When_it_comes_to_mentoring_does_gender_matter

Mentoring Across Differences: A Guide to Cross-Gender and Cross-Race Mentoring

<https://idaabbott.com/books/mentoring-across-differences-a-guide-to-cross-gender-and-cross-race-mentoring/>

Annex for Discussion:

Integrating the Safe Space Mentoring Tool into EHRC Resources

The method for integrating the Safe Space Mentoring Tool with EHRC's Mentorship Junction platform will determine what linkages are required (and where), which concepts need to be introduced and described (and where), and who the primary audience would be.

For example, discrete elements of the Safe Space Mentoring Tool can be positioned within Mentorship Junction, or as a separate section on the dashboard with links to:

- Other resources within the platform
- GBHV Tools and Resources
- [Connected Women](#)

A preliminary list of connections and linkages includes:

Mentor Junction Component—Find a mentor

- Consider including more self-identifying aspects in the profile. For example: Gender identity (optional): masculine identified, feminine identified, non-binary, trans, gender non-conforming

DEI Professional Development and Training

- Gender Equity
- Gender-Based Harassment and Violence
- Bystander Training

GBHV Component: Safe Space Mentoring Tool

- [Mentor Junction](#)

Resource: Qualities of a Good Mentor

- [Finding a Mentor](#)
- Reference to Goals in Quality of a Good Mentor—[Learning Goals](#)
- For additional resources on mentoring—[A Guide for Mentors](#)

Resource: Elements of Safe Spaces for Mentors and Mentees

- [Policy Statement & Commitment Agreement](#)
- [Guiding Principles for Mentors; Guiding Principles for Mentees](#)

Tool: Don't Shy Away from Conversations about Gender Difference

- [Suggested Activities and Discussion Topics](#)