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# **GIFTS AND COSTS OF MENTORSHIP**

EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF MENTORS OF  
AT-RISK YOUTHS

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To date, a little is understood about the experiences of mentors of at-risk youths. The present study sought to enrich this understanding by connecting with mentors from Flamman, a youths-prevention organization in Malmö, Sweden, inquiring about benefits and negative consequences they experienced as mentors, and what aspects contributed to the development of those outcomes. The study adopted mixed methods design but only one part of data collection was successful, resulting in four in-depth interviews with mentors from Flamman. The results showed numerous benefits deriving from a role of a mentor in terms of positive changes in personality and attitudes, development of skills, and practical gains. Some negative consequences were revealed as well, specifically negative changes in personality and attitudes, and practical risks, although those were perceived as less important than the reported benefits. The nature of the experienced outcomes resulted from the interaction of the three actors of mentoring: the mentors, the mentee, and the organization. The positive experience was generally characterized by the ability to make a difference, experience success, and nurture positive relationships with mentees and colleagues, while negative experience tended to result from lack of success, difficult relationships, and barriers placed by outer influences. Overall, the mentors perceived the experience of mentoring in Flamman as positive and beneficial.

*Keywords:* At-risk youth, crime prevention, mentoring, mentors' experience, outcomes for mentors

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# INTRODUCTION

Youth criminality and involvement in gangs is a persisting problem that tends to cumulate especially in poor and disadvantaged areas (Bauldry & Hatmann 2004). One such area is Kroksbäck in Malmö, Sweden, where Flamman, a youth recreation center, is situated. Flamman, which is run by people who themselves grew up and some of them still reside in the area, aims to make the neighborhood better and safer place, improve lives of young people, and offer them with opportunities they might not find elsewhere, no matter if it is simply spending time, meeting friends, or searching for advice and talk to someone trusted. On top of that, Flamman fights drug problems and criminality of youths by promoting an alternative positive lifestyle and offering support and guidance along the way towards education, employment, and crime-free life. With this intention in mind, Flamman became offering a mentoring program for youths in need.

Mentoring is “a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee,” (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership 2003, p. 8). Previous research and evaluations of mentoring programs proved that mentoring is a promising tool for crime prevention among delinquent and at-risk youths (DuBois et al. 2002) and Flamman, which claims that in 5 years of running the mentoring program, around 170 out of 250 clients were able to leave criminal lifestyle behind, confirms that.

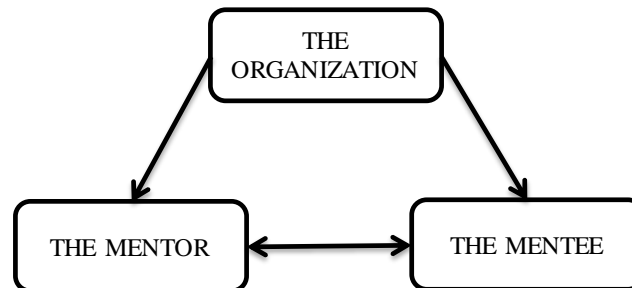
How mentoring impact on the mentees and what are the outcomes they experience is a phenomenon that is well studied (e.g., DuBois et al. 2002; Rhodes 2005; Rogers & Taylor 1997; Simon & Eby 2003). However, what is often left out of attention is the other side of the spectrum. How does mentoring impact on the mentors and what are their experiences?

Drawing on the assumptions of Helpers’ Therapy Principle (Reissman 1965), which claims that it is not only the person receiving help who benefits from the interaction but also the person that provides help, present study focus on the figure of the mentor. With a purpose to broaden the knowledge generated by previous research, I connected with mentors from Flamman and seek to understand what are the benefits and negative consequences they have experienced throughout their commitment as mentors, and what are the predictors that have contributed to the development of those outcomes. In order to establish mentoring programs that will benefit everyone involved, this is the topic that should not be ignored.

The present essay is divided into three main sections. The first section reviews literature and research of mentoring from the mentee’s perspective and the second from the perspective of the mentor. Both sections search for patterns in previous knowledge and research. What are the most often reported outcomes for the mentees and for the mentors? What are the most often reported predictors of these outcomes? A special attention is paid to highlighting similarities and connection between the experiences of the two.

Even though the main focus of this essay is on the figure of the mentor, inclusion of the part that focuses on mentoring from mentees’ perspective felt necessary because the mentee is an inseparable part of the relationship. The relationship is a central concept of mentoring (Rhodes 2005) and naturally contains at least two

sides which are, when exploring the relationship, impossible to separate. Furthermore, in formal mentoring, one more actor comes to play, and that is the organization that provides structure to their relationship. Both mentor and the mentee are actively engaged in the mentoring relationship and the organization, and they influence each other, as is illustrated in *Figure 1*. As will become obvious later in the text, apart from sharing time and space, they share numerous psychological aspects of mentoring as well. Their outcomes, benefits or negative consequences of mentoring, are tightly connected, as well as the predictors that contribute to the development of these outcomes.



**Figure 1.** The actors of mentoring

The third section is central to this essay and it departs from own data collection. This section focuses only on the mentors but gradually leans towards the conclusion that the experience of the mentors equals the experience of the mentees. In search for the outcomes for the mentors, benefits and negative consequences, and predictors of those outcomes, the analysis of the data builds on and widens current knowledge rather than develops a brand new model. For that reason, connection with previous theory and research are made where relevant but also broadened (or narrowed) where new or different topics emerged.

## **BACKGROUND**

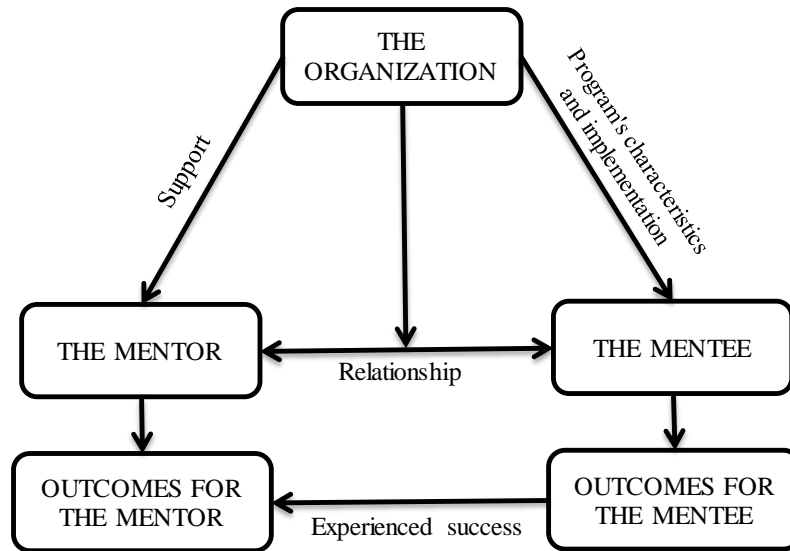
This chapter reviews previous literature on the topic of mentoring and is divided into two main sections.

The first section reviews basic concepts of mentoring of at-risk youth. It introduces what mentoring is and why it is considered a promising tool for prevention. It discusses what its functions are, and briefly presents previous research on the outcomes of mentoring for mentees, and predictors that contribute to the development of those outcomes.

The main focus of the present essay is on mentors and is introduced in the second section of this chapter. The section begins by introducing several theories that help us understand how can a role of a mentor, or a role of a ‘helper’ in general, have an impact on the individual. It is followed by a brief review of research on outcomes of mentoring for mentors and describes the most often reported benefits and negative consequences of mentoring as well as predictors that contribute to the development of those outcomes.

Based on the literature review, I have created a preliminary model that illustrates the connection between the individual actors, the mentee, the mentor, and the

organization, and how they contribute to the development of each other's outcomes. The model is presented below in *Figure 2* and its individual parts and their influence on one another are a subject of this chapter.



**Figure 2.** Preliminary model of the development of the outcomes of mentoring for the mentees and the mentors

### **Mentoring and at-risk youths**

Youth criminality is a persisting problem in our society and many theorists and practitioners are in constant search for ways that would redirect at-risk youths on a path of convenient, positive lifestyle. Understanding that youth delinquency often results from weak or broken bonds to society, mentoring programs, which intends to create new and positive social bonds, are a promising direction of youth prevention.

#### *Social bonds and delinquency*

The term ‘at-risk youth’ is generally used to describe youth who come from dysfunctional families, show signs of emotional or behavioral problems, lack the support to navigate developmental tasks successfully (Keating et al. 2002), have weak attachment to school, and no close social bonds with teachers or other staff (Smink 1990). Smink (1990) posits that being ‘at-risk’ is a direct outcome of poor social bonds, lack of social support, and absence of a caring adult. By many, having positive relationships with a caring adult that can pose as a role model is considered critical in youth development (Bauldry & Hartmann 2004; Graham and Bowling 1995; Rhodes 2005; Rogers & Taylor 1997).

The connection between weak or broken social bonds and delinquency is well established in criminology. Hawkins and Weis (1985) integrated social control theory (Hirschi 1969) and social learning theory (Bandura 1977) into *Social Development Model*. They demonstrate that strong social bond to conventional society is developed through opportunities to involvement in conventional institutions, activities, and interactions with conventional others. Consequently, behavior is learned from social environment to which one is bonded. Whether youths learn conforming or criminal behavior depends on their differential involvement with people who reinforce that kind of behavior. If the process of developing a social bond to conforming others was interrupted by, for example,

uncaring or inconsistent parents, youths are more free to engage in delinquent behavior and come under the influence of peers who are in the same situation. Such youths may then provide each other with the social and psychological supports that are not forthcoming in more conventional contexts, and further reinforce each other's involvement in delinquent behavior (Hawkins & Weis 1985).

The occurrence of youth criminality is more common in poor and disadvantaged areas, such as Kroksbäck in Malmö, where Flamman is situated, as opportunities for social support and availability of positive role models are somewhat limited. The schools tend to be overcrowded, the school attendance poor, there is a lack of constructive free time activities or the families cannot afford to pay for them, and the community cohesion is rather poor (Bauldry & Hatmann 2004). Consequently, many youths are left without strong social support and adult guidance and may lean towards delinquent peers or gangs that 'bloom' in the disadvantaged areas.

### *The outcomes of mentoring for mentees*

Creating conventional social bonds and finding positive figures may reverse one's trajectory, prevent crime, and motivate positive lifestyle (Smink 1990). With such intentions, formal mentoring programs that provide mentors to at-risk youths were established.

"Mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee," (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership 2003, p. 8). Such relationship may serve as a corrective experience for at-risk youths who have not experienced positive relationships with adults previously (Rhodes 2005, Bauldry & Hartmann 2004; Graham and Bowling 1995; Rogers & Taylor 1997).

Research shows that mentoring deliver many benefits for mentees. The most often reported benefits are *reduction of problematic and high-risk behavior* (DuBois et al. 2002), *emotional and social development* (DuBois et al. 2002; Rhodes 2005, Simon & Eby 2003), *cognitive and identity development* (Rhodes 2005, Rogers & Taylor 1997), and *professional and academic development* (DuBois et al. 2002; Simon & Eby 2003). Through psychosocial support offered by mentor (Simon & Eby 2003) mentee may develop *relational skills* and ability to maintain healthy, positive, and trusting relationships in future (Rhodes 2005), as well as *increased self-esteem* (Rogers & Taylor 1997). Generally, in the critical stage of adolescence, the mentor may help to buffer the inevitable stresses that accompany this period of life (Rhodes 2005).

The frequent use of words 'may' and 'can' in the text is not random as existing evidence shows that mentoring do not always lead to mentees' improvement. DuBois and his colleagues (2002) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of 55 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs. After comparing outcomes as emotional and behavioral functioning, academic achievement, and employment and career development, the authors noted that the effects vary substantially in relation to program characteristics and quality of the implementation. Overall, their findings provide evidence of modest or small benefits of program participation for mentees.

The authors also found that some programs can actually have an adverse effect on youths (DuBois et al. 2002). Perhaps the best-known ‘failure’ in the history of mentoring is the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study, a delinquency prevention experiment of 506 boys that began in 1939 and was evaluated by Joan McCord (1978). The participants of the study were children and youth who received 5-years long treatment that included tutoring, medical assistance, and a friendly mentor. Despite the great intentions, wide implementations, and longitudinal design, the comparison between the treatment and control groups indicated that the treatment group had negative side effects as measured by criminal behavior, addiction, death, disease, occupational status, and job satisfaction. McCord tested what might have caused the adverse effects and concluded with two possible explanations. First, the program seems to have raised the life expectations of the mentees without also providing means to their achievement, which lead to disillusionment. And second, delinquent peers, who were brought together during several occasions within the program, reinforced antisocial behavior and emotions among each other and provided motivation for future deviant behavior (Zane et al. 2016).

### *Predictors of the outcomes for mentees*

DuBois and his colleagues (2002) identified that the strongest predictors of greater reported positive effects of mentoring programs were first, the relationship between the mentor and his mentee, and second the conditions set by the organization. This process was illustrated in the preliminary model in *Figure 2*.

The model shows how the mentor and the organization influence the development of the outcomes for mentees. The relationship between the mentor and the mentee is the main tool of mentoring and thus, its quality and strength predict what kind of outcomes will mentees experience (ibid.). The organization predicts the outcomes for the mentees in terms of support and offered activities, quality of program implementation, and program characteristics. The organization also influences the outcomes indirectly through training and supervision provided to the mentor (DuBois et al. 2002).

**Relationship.** Numerous researchers found a connection between relationship quality and feelings of closeness to key outcomes. For instance, Cavell and Hughes (2010) found a larger decrease in aggressive behaviors in youths who experienced closer and more intensive relationship with their mentors. Similarly, Parra and his colleagues (2002) found that feelings of closeness between mentors and youth were directly linked to greater experienced benefits, though the authors do not provide an explanation what exactly these benefits were.

Rhodes (2005), in his comprehensive model of youth mentoring, suggests that close mentoring relationship is characterized by mutuality, trust, and empathy. This indicates a need for commitment from both sides. The mentee must be willing to share his or hers feeling and be actively engaged in the relationship (ibid.), while mentor should possess a good range of skills, confidence, and knowledge (Parra et al. 2002). Parra and his colleagues (2002) found that those qualities, i.e. mentors’ perceived efficacy, confidence, and knowledge, mediated the quality and closeness of the mentoring relationship. Such mentors tended to have greater success overcoming various difficulties in their relationships with youth, thus developing close and affective ties. Those qualities and skills can be reinforced via training and supervision provided by the organization

The close mentoring relationship is more likely to develop if the relationship is consistent, lasts long enough, and importantly, do not end prematurely (DuBois et al. 2002). Karcher (2005) found that changes in young mentees' self-esteem, social skills, and behavioral competence were highly related to mentors' attendance, while mentors' inconsistent attendance was connected to decline of the same, suggesting that absent mentors may do more harm than good. Grossman and Rhodes (2002) suggest that one year should be a minimal length of the mentoring relationship with the support of data that showed that adolescents in mentoring relationships that lasted a year or longer reported the largest number of improvements in academic, psychosocial, and behavioral outcomes, while adolescent whose relationships ended earlier showed progressively fewer effects. Furthermore, adolescents who were in relationships that terminated within a very short period of time (three months) reported drops in self-worth and perceived scholastic competence.

**Organization.** Overall program implementation and characteristics may influence the outcomes for mentees, as was a case in previously mentioned Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study which, despite strong, positive, and lasting mentoring relationships, failed to deliver benefits for the mentees (McCord 1978).

Since mentor is the individual who has a personal contact with the mentees, the largest influence of the organization on the mentees' benefits is through the figure of the mentor by providing adequate support and structure for the mentoring relationships. The most important aspect is ongoing training and supervision (DuBois et al. 2002). Parra and colleagues (2002) found that mentors' perceived efficacy and consequent success were predicted by a perceived quality of training and supervision offered by the organization.

Furthermore, DuBois and his colleagues (2002) found that organizations that set expectations for frequency of contact delivered more benefits for mentees, which corresponds with the findings that consistent and lasting mentoring relationships are the most successful ones (Karcher 2005). Other mechanisms that were proved supportive are an offer of structured activities for the dyad, support and involvement of parents, and monitoring of overall program implementation (DuBois et al. 2002).

### **Mentoring and mentors**

Although the topic of mentors' experiences of mentoring has been far less explored than the mentees' experiences, available knowledge and evidence show that the mentors are influenced by their work, the mentee, the relationship the two create, and the overarching organization into the same or similar extent as the mentee is. The mentors can experience benefits as well as negative consequences and sometimes, those may even outweigh the outcomes of the mentee. Furthermore, the way the mentor experience the mentoring may largely influence the outcomes of the mentee, through the direct influence the mentor has on him or her.

In order to boost the benefits of the mentee as well as the mentor, and to assure that none of the participating sides comes out of the relationship harmed, it is important to study not only outcomes of mentoring for mentees, but also

outcomes of mentoring for the mentors and what predictors contribute to the development of those outcomes.

### *Theoretical framework*

Several theories help us explain why and how a person in a helping position, as a mentor is, may benefit from the role and the experience. Those are Helper's Therapy Principle, Relational-Cultural Theory, and Calamity Theory of Growth.

**Helper's Therapy Principle.** Helper's Therapy Principle was first described by Frank Reissman in 1965 and concerns mainly helpers (mentors, therapists) who face, or used to face, same or similar problems as their clients in need. He suggests that it is still uncertain that people *receiving* help are always benefited, though it is quite certain that people *giving* help profit from their role, becoming more efficient, better motivated, and improving their helping skills. Reissman (1965) names three mechanisms that lead to the development of benefits for helpers. First, doing something as meaningful as helping others lead to improved self-image. Second, by "self-persuasion through persuading others" (p. 31) the author explains that one becomes committed to a position through advocating it. He provides an example of Alcoholics Anonymous where, by motivating someone else not to drink, the individual motivates himself or herself to do the same. Finally, the author claims that the time-consuming helping role may serve as a distraction from own problems and general self-concern.

Reissman (1965) even suggests finding ways to transform recipients of help into dispensers of help, thus reversing their roles and achieving desired healing effect. Some successful schemes as Alcoholic Anonymous and psychotherapy groups stand on these principles (*ibid.*), but they have been successfully applied even in individual schemes. For instance, 'The Peer Advisor Project' (previously 'The One') run by the charity St Gils Trust in England employs ex-offenders as mentors for prison leavers (St Giles Trust, 2017). This is beneficial not only for the clients through receiving the support of peer mentors that are regarded as trusted and credible role models to individuals that are hard-to-reach and usually do not engage with statutory support and services (*ibid.*) but also for mentors themselves. Kavanagh and Borrill's research (2013) showed numerous benefits for ex-offenders mentors engaged in The Peer Advisor Project, desistance among others. Therefore, 'being a helper' was viewed as a way of preventing recidivism.

**Relational-Cultural Theory.** Relational-Cultural Theory (Miller 1976) is a contemporary psychodynamic framework that understands human development based on the assumption that individuals' happiness and well-being are a product of participation in growth-fostering, mutually emphatic relationships (Jordan 2010). Participation in such relationships is meant to have five relational outcomes: 'a sense of zest'; a better understanding of self, other, and the relationship; a sense of worth; enhanced capacity to act or to be productive; and an increased desire for more connection (*ibid.*). Those assumptions were broadly used in relational-cultural therapy, that focus on healing through creating a relationship between the client and the therapist, and has numerous similarities with mentoring, which also acknowledges the development of strong positive relationship as a central mechanism of change. The phenomenon was explored from the view of both participating individuals and it is believed that growth-fostering relationships have a positive effect on both actors, i.e. the therapists and the clients (Jordan 2000), in our case, both mentors and the mentees.

The ‘cultural’ part of the theory places an emphasis on the diversity within relationships. In mentoring, two very different people are brought together. Likely, they would not meet in natural settings, as they often come from a different generation, background, neighborhood, or social class. People usually surround themselves with people similar to them and therefore, forming a relationship with someone different may be a new and especially enriching experience. McGill and her colleagues (2015) state that in mentoring relationship culturally different people are pushed to understand each other and thus may experience more personal growth due to differing perspectives.

**Calamity Theory of Growth.** Being a mentor might be stressful (McGill et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2014) and frustrating (Kavanagh & Borill 2013; Rosen et al. 1996; Weiler et al. 2014). According to Calamity Theory of Growth, stressful life events can be linked to positive growth and changes in identity over time (Anthis 2002). Even though Calamity Theory of Growth is mostly concerned with much more critical life events, it is possible that stressful experience of mentoring itself may lead to identity modifications and positive outcomes as a result (McGill et al. 2015). Although mentors do not experience their mentees’ critical life events and difficult circumstances on their own skin, through witnessing the adverse reality, they may experience them vicariously. Perhaps, even vicarious experience of trauma leads to identity transformation and growth and, as Farson (1974) puts it: “improves us as human beings,” (p. 31).

Vicarious posttraumatic growth has been described in psychotherapy, which has many similarities with mentoring. Arnold and her colleagues (2005) interviewed a number of psychotherapists who worked with trauma survivors, looking for both positive and negative consequences of their work. Each of 21 participating psychotherapists described positive outcomes that were strikingly similar to reports of growth following directly experienced trauma but also, important to note, some negative outcomes. Those findings indicate that in direct work with clients with adverse lives, the witnessing person, in our case, mentor, may experience the obstacles in a similar manner as the main actor.

#### *The benefits of being a mentor*

A number of studies explored mentors’ experiences and described benefits and negative consequences of mentoring for mentors. The most commonly reported outcomes are summarized in *Figure 3*. On the side of benefits, the reported outcomes may be grouped into three categories: positive changes in personality and attitudes, development of skills, and practical gains.

	BENEFITS	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES
PERSONALITY AND ATTITUDES	Personal satisfaction	Devaluing of self
	Feeling good about oneself	Decrease in self-efficacy
	Sense of purpose and fulfillment	Decrease in openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness
	Improvement in self-esteem	Decrease in self-esteem
	Reflection and deeper appreciation of one's own life and opportunities	Stress and frustration
	Self-understanding and self-acceptance	Disappointment and unmet expectations
	Changes in moral judgments and tolerance	Risk of burnout
SKILLS	Advanced social and communication skills	
	Leadership skills	
	Management of stress and challenge	
	Problem solving skills	
PRACTICAL	Creating relations and friends	Time commitment
	Career advancement	Security threat

**Figure 3.** The outcomes of mentoring for mentors reported by previous research

**Personality and Attitudes.** As seen in the first section of *Figure 3*, the previous research identified the strong impact of mentoring personality and attitudes. Mentors of any age from youth (e.g., McGill et al. 2015) to seniors (e.g., Garcia et al. 1997) may experience significant changes in their personalities and lives, reconsidering their view of the self, the world, and their attitudes. Often, researchers and mentors refer to mentoring as a ‘life-changing experience’.

The outcome that is reported by the most of the mentors across different studies is the experience of *personal satisfaction* in terms of joy and feeling good emotionally (e.g., Kavanagh & Borrill 2013; McGill et al. 2015). Some studies reported that feelings of personal satisfaction resulted from seeing the mentee develop and succeed (Edlind & Haensly 1985; Weiler et al. 2014), which reflects the success of mentor’s work and his or hers ‘helping abilities’ (Kavanagh & Borrill 2013). Many mentors reported *feeling good about themselves* for doing something good and meaningful for the society (Evans 2005; Kavanagh & Borrill 2013), and some even stated the greater *sense of fulfillment and life purpose* (Haddock et al. 2013).

Experienced success and feelings of ‘being good at something’ tend to lead to increase in *self-esteem* (Kavanagh & Borrill 2013; McGill et al. 2015) and consequently confidence to try new things in life (Evans 2005).

As was previously mentioned in line with Calamity Theory of Growth, mentors may learn a lot from adverse realities of their clients, even though they face them only vicariously. Research indicates that being a mentor may serve as an important tool for *reflection and recognition of privilege and opportunities*, enabling mentors to make sense of their own past experiences and gain insight

into the realities of other people's lives and to learn from these for themselves (Philip & Hendry 2000). Recognizing own privilege and opportunities that might be rare in different contexts, can lead to increasingly positive perception of one's life (Haddock et al. 2013) and reevaluating priorities (Hughes et al. 2010), which may consequently result in mentor's greater happiness and life satisfaction.

Reflection is often evoked by supervision and other types of monitoring, given by the schema curriculum that requires intentional self-reflection. Self-reflection enhances *self-understanding* of mentors, awareness of their own strengths and shortcomings, and general insight into their own personalities (Haddock et al. 2013). Self-understanding is only one step away from *self-acceptance*. The increase in self-acceptance for mentors was reported by Holzberg and his colleagues (1964), who found that the participants' ratings of 'actual-self' became closer to 'ideal-self' following participation in the mentoring program.

The acceptance does not only stay within the bodily boundaries but extend to the outside world as well. Holzberg and his colleagues (1964) further proved that mentors working with mentally ill patients have changed their *moral judgments* and became more tolerant towards certain kinds of behavior, especially sexual and aggressive. The close contact with the mentee allows for deeper insight into their problems and leads to recognition and understanding of their causes. According to McGill and her colleagues (2015), the diversity the mentors saw in their mentees resulted in new heightened sensitivity to others' differing experiences and increased sympathy and compassion. Such experience may generalize into other relationships, helping mentors to enter new relationships with open mind and realization that the actions of other people do not necessarily reflect on oneself (Haddock et al. 2013).

**Skills.** Being in the mentoring relationship with at-risk youth requires a whole new set of relational skills. Numerous mentors across different schemes and studies reported *advancement of social and communication skills* as one of the most important outcomes. As mentors have to adjust their communication and language to individuals of different age and background, they become more adaptive and flexible in social life in general (Evans 2005). Important are especially active listening skills, patience (Haddock et al. 2013; McGill et al. 2015), persistence, and perseverance in the relationships (McGill et al. 2015). Some mentors reported that new skills and experience made them feel more prepared for an establishment of future relationships, including informal, formal, mentoring relationships (ibid.), as well as parenting (Weiler et al. 2014).

For individuals who have not previously experienced being in a leading role, mentoring may contribute to the development of *leadership skills* and make them more confident in the role of a leader (Haddock et al. 2013).

Being in the mentoring relationship with youth with a number of problems may bring stressful and challenging situations. That provides an opportunity for mentors to learn effective *stress management* and how to respond to challenges and *solve problems*. Some mentors indicated increased confidence in their ability to handle difficult events that also stretched beyond mentoring relationship (Haddock et al. 2013).

**Practical Gains.** Besides psychological changes affecting personality, attitudes, and skills, being a mentor can also bring real things into one's life. Obviously, it *creates new close relationships*, and as every relationship goes two ways, it is likely to be pleasant and enjoyable for both mentee and the mentor. Some mentors even reported that they have found a new friend in their mentees (Edlind & Heansly 1985; Hughes et al. 2010).

If one pursue a career in a social sector, the mentoring experience is a good item on one's CV and may lead directly to *career advancement* (Evans 2005) or various skills that enhance professional development (Hughes et al. 2010).

#### *The negative consequences of being a mentor*

Working with at-risk youth is not only pleasure and joy. Alongside benefits, previous research has discovered a number of negative aspects, which were summarized in *Figure 3* and grouped into two categories: negative changes in personality and attitudes, and practical risks.

**Personality and attitudes.** As much as mentoring may influence personality and attitudes of the mentor positively, some negative impact was reported as well.

Rosen and her colleagues (1996) have conducted an interesting experiment in which they tested how a rejection of help feels like to the person that is offering help. They found that rejection was a stressful and *self-devaluating experience* that, if repeated, can threaten self-image and well-being of those whose lives are dedicated to caregiving.

Faith and her colleagues (2011) tested whether these changes occur in mentoring relationships and indeed, they found statistically significant decrease over time in mentors' rating of *self-efficacy, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness*. The risk was present not only if the offer of help is rejected, but also if the mentee failed to improve, dropped out from the program, or worse, reverted back to criminal activity and drugs.

Mentors from Kavanagh and Borrill's study (2013) described mentees' failures as a negative experience which made them feel deflated and negatively reflected on their *self-esteem*. The authors explained that it might be due to internalizing mentees' failure as a reflection of their own abilities.

In a study of Weiler and her colleagues (2014), personal involvement in the relationship and worries about the mentee led to *stress and frustration* for mentors. Some mentors felt *disappointed* if their expectations were not met (McGill et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2014).

There is a little of evidence connecting *burnout* to mentoring but as in every other helping profession, the risk is present. In the previously mentioned experiment of Rosen and colleagues (1996), perceived spurning was positively associated with a low sense of personal accomplishment and with depersonalization, which are, together with emotional exhaustion, typical characteristics of burnout (Allen & Mueller 2013).

**Practical risks.** Similarly as on the side of benefits, there are also some practical risks connected with mentoring. Mentors participating in Kavanagh and Borrill's

study (2013) provided examples of some potentially dangerous events that happened to them, including threats of killing. The authors posit that working with people involved in criminality and drugs may involve risk of a *security threat* because such clients tend to have erratic lifestyles and in some cases, mental health problems. Similarly, some mentors reported a fear of neighborhoods where their mentees lived (Rogers & Taylor 1997).

In a study of McGill and colleagues (2015), *time commitment* was discussed as one of the key challenges. In order to reach good outcomes for the mentee, a significant and long-term time commitment is needed (Grossman & Rhodes 2002; Karcher 2005). However, especially in the case of volunteers who have a different main occupation, this requires a sacrifice of one's free time. Finding this free time in the schedule and balancing it out with free time of the mentee was also discussed as complicated (McGill et al. 2015).

### *Predictors of the outcomes for mentors*

After reading the previous text, it might have become obvious that some of the benefits and negative consequences are in obvious contrast, as for example an improvement in self-esteem versus a decrease in self-esteem. The reasons for the discrepancy may be several. The predictors that were found and discussed in the previous literature are presented in this section.

Research exploring what are the predictors of outcomes for mentors highlighted the same aspects as research exploring what are the predictors of outcomes for mentees. That brings us back to the initial model (*Figure 1*) which indicates the inseparable connectedness between the individual actors of mentoring.

Preliminary model (*Figure 2*) that developed the idea of inseparable connection showed that the outcomes for the mentee are predicted first, by the relationship with the mentor, and second, by the structure of the program and support of the organization. Previous research found that the same is true in the development of the outcomes for the mentor, and that is also illustrated in *Figure 2*. Additionally, the experience of success, i.e. the improvement of the mentee, seems to predict the quality of the experienced outcomes for mentor to a large extent.

**Success.** Although none of the previous research directly names success as a predictor of the outcomes for mentors, by a close look at the benefits as well as negative outcomes, we can see that experienced success, i.e., *mentee's improvement or failure to improve*, is very important factor in the development of the outcomes for mentors.

For instance, personal satisfaction is directly linked to experienced success (Edlind & Heansly 1985; Kavanagh & Borrill 2013). Similarly, increased self-confidence results from feelings of 'being good at something' (Kavanagh & Borrill 2013; McGill et al. 2015). On the contrary, mentee's failure to improve and lack of success may lead to negative consequences such as stress, frustration (Weiler et al. 2014), self-devaluation (Rosen et al. 1996), and it can reflect negatively on one's self-esteem (Kavanagh and Borrill 2013) and self-image (Kavanagh and Borrill 2013; Rosen et al. 1996).

**Relationship.** Previous research shows that mentors who discussed the most gains reported less challenging and more satisfying relationships with their mentees (Faith et al. 2011; McGill et al. 2015).

Satisfying relationships may not be easy to establish, especially with difficult youth with negative experience from previous relationships with adults. McGill and her colleagues (2015) found that lack of depth in the mentoring relationship and the difficulties to connect to mentees were reported as the biggest challenges in reaching the mentoring goals and they represented a source of frustration. In some cases, *characteristics of the mentee, challenging attitudes, and differences within the pair* were described as the barriers in developing a good relationship.

Quite naturally, *time investment* (McGill et al. 2015), a *length of the relationship*, and *consistency* (Frels & Onwuegbuzie 2012) stood by the side of relationship quality in explaining outcomes for mentors. Without time invested and sufficient duration, development of satisfying and healing relationship is unlikely. Probably the most damaging experience for both sides is when the relationship terminates early. This can be a painful experience especially for the abandoned side (Spencer 2007) and it should be avoided by all possible means.

**Organization.** Work and the outcomes for the mentors are largely affected by the organization that runs the mentoring program. Several aspects that might be the most helpful and supportive for mentors in coping with their work and related challenges were reported in previous research.

First, *relationships in the workplace* with both fellow mentors and staff were described as encouraging and supportive and some participants even enjoyed pleasant sense of belonging to the ‘Mentors Family’ and creating new friends among colleagues (Weiler et al. 2014). McGill and her colleagues (2015) also found that support from others in the program influenced the relationship between challenges, emotions, and outcomes for mentors.

Second, *training and supervision* and overall, supportive hierarchy, were perceived as extremely important as some of the mentors did not have previous experience with work with at-risk youth and appreciated careful preparation for the task (Weiler et al. 2014). Some studies have found that already the training itself was a beneficial experience that provided an opportunity to learn new concepts and interact with others (Evans 2005, Garcia et al. 1997). For instance, seniors participating in a study of Garcia and his colleagues (1997) reported an increased sense of self-worth and confidence on the basis that they have been chosen for the program and considered capable of helping others.

Training is very important not only in preparing mentor practically for the task but also for *managing expectations*. Realistic expectations are crucial in avoiding disappointment (Evans 2005) that was often reported as a reason for quitting (Spencer 2007), or general feelings of disappointment and other negative outcomes (Holzberg et al. 1964; McGill et al. 2015; Spencer 2007).

Ongoing supervision provides an opportunity for self-reflection (Haddock et al. 2013) as well as direct reflection and feedback provided by the supervisor (Evans 2005). Reflection enables mentor to make sense of their experience, and realize

their strengths and weaknesses and work with those accordingly (Haddock et al. 2013).

On the third place, some mentors discussed *expectations and constraints* given by the organization. Some found structure of the program, which included routines, expected activities, and structured time frame, limiting, yet others reported it as an important component that has helped them in achieving mentoring goals (Weiler et al. 2014).

Overall, co-workers, as well as supervisors, have a crucial role in protecting the mentor from the feelings of failure (Holzberg et al. 1964) and the evidence suggests that a well-functioning organization that successfully integrates its employees and volunteers may prevent burnout (Allen & Mueller 2013; Moreno-Jimenez et al. 2010).

## **THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **Aim and research questions**

The aim of the present study is to investigate experiences of mentors working in Flamman, a youth organization in Malmö, Sweden, and explore potential benefits and negative consequences of mentoring for mentors, as well as the predictors that contribute to the development of those outcomes. The overall purpose is to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of experiences, outcomes, and predictors of these outcomes for mentors of at-risk youths.

Hence, the present study aims to answer following questions:

- (1) What are the reported benefits of mentoring for mentors of at-risk youths?
- (2) What are the reported negative consequences of mentoring for mentors of at-risk youths?
- (3) What predictors contribute to the development of the outcomes for mentors of at-risk youths?

### **Settings: Flamman**

The present study was conducted in cooperation with Flamman Ungdomarnas hus. Flamman is a youth recreation center situated in Kroksbäck, one of the neighborhoods with the highest level of criminality in Malmö, Sweden.

Flamman was established in 1997 and apart from offering space where youth can spend their free time, it has been running projects aimed at youth crime prevention, gang disengagement, and violent extremism for the last 15 years. For their work, Flamman has won several awards. Some of them were Integration Award of the City of Malmö, The Respect Foundation Award, and the award of Olof Palmes Memorial Fund.

**Jump off Now.** 5 years ago, in 2012, project ‘Hoppa av nu’ (in English: Jump off Now) has been officially established based on Flamman’s long experience with preventative work and theoretical and empirical knowledge. The program is aimed at young people who are involved in crime, gangs, or various violent movements, and at youths who are considered to be at risk of the same. With a

variety of activities such as workshops, lectures, and mentoring, the program attempts to promote an alternative and positive lifestyle. The main objective is to improve and strengthen young people's lives and futures to break exclusion and alienation.

Jump off Now takes a holistic view of the problematic and intend to affect all aspects of individual's life: personality and attitudes, environment, family, social groups, free time and activities, education, economic situation and employment, and addictions. This happens during three stages.

*The first stage* involves getting to know the person via conversations, positive coaching, and developing an action plan.

Although it is not a rule, *the second stage*, the mentorship, usually comes into play after 3 to 5 months after accepting the client into the program. At that stage, Flamman has a good knowledge of the youth and his or hers problems and therefore, creating a match with a mentor is easier.

*The third stage* involves wider work with the mentee and his or hers environment, such as family, school, and employment. Flamman provides assistance in employment search, dealing with financial situation and debts, and developing interests and conventional free time activities.

Youths are recruited actively based on recommendations of schools, social services, criminal justice system, informal network, or by simply showing up in the youth center. Their age usually ranges from 17 to 25 but is not limited. Up to date, the program involves about 20 youths. Within the past three years, the program has been completed by around 250 individual from whom around 170 succeeded in leaving criminal lifestyle behind.

**The mentors.** Most of the mentors Flamman employs in Jump off Now program come from the similar background and areas as their mentees. Those mentors are handpicked to ensure that they pose as strong positive role models and inspirational figures, and also possess a range of skills needed for work with at-risk youths.

At the moment, Flamman has 30 mentors. Approximately half of the mentors get paid, and some are employed in Flamman full-time. New mentors in Flamman go through an education program that takes about two months and focuses mostly on social skills as communication and relationship development, problem-solving skills, and specific challenges of work with criminal youth. Throughout their entire commitment in Flamman, they are provided with help and support by senior mentors. Senior mentors are employees of Flamman with relevant education and long experience in mentoring.

The mentors are free to set the frequency of the meetings and structure of the activities with their mentees individually, depending on personal needs, requirements, interests, and communication between the two. With the most of the clients, Flamman does not set any specific rules, although it is recommended to meet at least once a week. The desire is that the relationship lasts for at least one year.

## METHOD

The present study has not adopted any particular philosophical stance. Instead, it followed a pragmatic approach, which is an approach to qualitative research that draws upon the most sensible and practical methods available in order to answer research questions (Savin-Baden & Major 2013). Smith and her colleagues (2011), who prefer to call this approach a generic qualitative approach, posit that “adopting a generic qualitative research approach can help to ensure data collection methods and analytical strategies best suit the research question posed rather than trying to fit the question to a particular philosophical stance,” (Smith et al. 2011, p. 44). Pragmatic qualitative research provides a descriptive account from an interpretative perspective, which generates information that aims to inform professional practices (Savid-Baden & Major 2013).

The research design and various options were discussed and agreed upon with representatives of Flamman prior the beginning of the study. The study was conducted during spring 2017.

### Data collection

#### *Mixed methods design*

For practical reasons, the present study has adopted mixed methods design and combined two methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews and a survey. Only one part of the data collection was successful: the interviews. The survey was not completed and this limitation will be explained later. In this section, I present what my intentions were.

As Denscombe (2010) suggest, I intended to combine the interviews and the survey in order to compensate strengths and weakness of each method.

**The interviews.** The interviews were conducted to strengthen the study by providing deep understanding and explanation of the phenomenon by letting the participants to speak about experienced benefits (research question 1) and negative consequences (research question 2) widely, which allowed to detect and discuss what aspects predicted development of the particular outcomes (research question 3). The questions intentionally targeted predictors known from previous research (success, relationship, organization) in order to explore their role in present sample and confirm, disprove, or develop previous findings, but also provided space for any new themes to emerge.

**The survey.** The questionnaires were designed with the intention to reach a larger number of participants and detect general patterns of the findings, which the limited number of conducted interviews allows only to a small extent. The questionnaires inquired benefits (research question 1), and negative consequences (research question 2) to be listed, though with only limited number of answer options. The intention was to generate a comprehensive list of the outcomes reported by mentors and to quantify them. The questionnaires further searched for connections between the known predictors (research question 3), but due to the limitation of the method, it did not allow for discovery of different predictors than the predictors suggested by the preliminary model.

### The tools

The interview guide (*Appendix 1*) and the questionnaire (*Appendix 2*) were constructed based on the same structure that derived from relevant empirical work, i.e. previously reported benefits and negative consequences of mentoring for mentors (*Figure 3*), and predictors that contribute to the development of these outcomes (*Figure 2*). Both consisted of following question areas: benefits, challenges, personal impact, motivation, future prospects, effects on mentees, relationship, and organization.

The question areas are listed in *Figure 4* and it is shown how they relate to the preliminary model and the research questions.

Research questions	Proposed model	Question areas
1. What are the reported benefits of mentoring for mentors?	Personality and attitudes	Benefits
	Skills	Motivation
	Practical gains	Future prospects
2. What are the reported negative consequences of mentoring for mentors?	Personality and attitudes	Personal impact
	Practical consequences	Challenges
3. What predictors contribute to the development of outcomes for mentors?	Success	Effects on mentees
	Relationship	Relationship
	Organization	Organization

**Figure 4.** Question areas and their relevance to the preliminary model and the research questions

**The interview.** The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. This format is recommended when it is desirable to gain insight into individual's opinions, feelings, and experiences (Denscombe 2010). It was chosen because it is flexible and is considered appropriate for discussing sensitive topics and feelings (Denscombe 2010; Fylan 2005).

**The Survey.** The questionnaire contains 23 questions of which 9 are introductory, 9 are open-ended questions, 2 are scales, and 3 are yes or no questions. Open-ended questions were used to reflect the full richness and complexity of views and feelings held by the respondent (Denscombe 2010) and most of them asked for three answers viewed as the most important in the connection of presented topic. The rest of the questions were used for quantitative purposes, detecting frequencies and connections between the answers.

### Participants

**The interviews.** Four mentors from Flamman Ungdomarnas hus in Malmö were interviewed. They were chosen and recruited by the main program coordinator based on their ability to speak English and willingness to participate. They are all

males in age from 28 to 51 (M = 36). Three of them are employed full time in Flamman, one is an external mentor.

**The survey.** The questionnaire was expected to be completed by around 20 mentors from Flamman aged from 20 to 51.

## **Procedure**

**The interviews.** The main program coordinator introduced the study to the participants and invited them to participate. Upon agreement, interviews were held in the place of choice by the participant (three participants chose Flamman, one invited me into his office) and took from 40 minutes to one hour. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed about the study, they obtained information letter and signed an informed consent that addressed ethical consideration and confirmed willingness to participate in the study. With interviewee's consent, the interviews were recorded.

Interview guide gave structure to the interviews but mostly, the respondents were allowed to speak freely in order to develop ideas and raise issues they themselves considered important, which caused that the areas were discussed in a different order depending on when they emerged in the conversation.

**The survey.** After an agreement with the main program coordinator, the survey was placed online. An online questionnaire has several advantages. First, it is easily accessible and simple to fill, second, it assures complete anonymity, and third, it increases the speed of analysis and minimizes processing errors (Denscombe 2010). The online survey could only be accessed via specific link that was passed on the main program coordinator in order to be distributed further. However, due to numerous complications on the side of Flamman, the survey was not distributed and no responses were delivered.

## **Analysis**

**The interviews.** Interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the method of *thematic analysis*. Thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative information. This requires a search for themes and codes, i.e. patterns in the information that describe and organize observations and interpret aspects of the phenomenon (Boyatzis 1998). This method is one of the most flexible qualitative methods. It is not tight to any theoretical or philosophical stance and thus is well suited for pragmatic qualitative research. It is useful in summarizing key features of a large body of data while offering a thick description of the data set. Finally, it can highlight similarities and differences across the data set, and generate unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke 2006).

The themes and codes were developed in line with the preliminary model in three categories: benefits, negative consequences, and predictors of the outcomes. Some of the themes were based directly on the preliminary model and previous research (*apriori codes*), but new and alternative themes were developed based on own data where needed (*inductive codes*). The hybrid approach to code development that combines apriori and inductive codes was selected in order to be able to compare and interpret present findings in line with previous knowledge, yet to stay open to newly emerging topics and perspectives (see Boyatzis 1998; Savin-Baden & Major 2003).

The central themes and their connection to research questions and preliminary model are stated in *Figure 5*. The distinction is marked between apriori codes and inductive codes.

Each meaningful segment of the interview transcripts was assigned appropriate code. After, similar codes were gathered under the themes, and at the final step, the linkages between themes were searched in order to obtain a complex perspective of the topic (see Rapley 2011).

A presence of each theme was noted for individuals but due to small sample size, it was not quantified. Rather, data were interpreted descriptively and searched for alignment with previous research and theories. According to Boyatzis (1998), this is a desirable way of interpretation when the sample size is small.

**The survey.** Open-ended answers of the survey would be subjected to the same techniques of thematic analysis as the interviews' transcripts, with each answer being assigned under appropriate codes and themes. In the search for frequencies of the outcomes of mentoring (research question 1 and 2), the presence of each code would be noted for individual participants and quantified.

The answers of the scales would be analyzed quantitatively in search for a connection between individual predictors and the outcomes. The scales that asked for a rating of the closeness in the relationship, level of improvement of individual mentees, and questions about satisfaction with the support provided to mentors by Flamman, was to establish a connection between 'relationship', 'success', 'organization', and the reported outcomes.

### **Ethical considerations**

All participants were informed about the study's content and purpose. It was stressed that the participation in the study is voluntary and they have a right to withdraw or decline to answer any questions, at any time. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Interview participants were informed verbally and were given space for questions. Each of them obtained information letter with the same information and signed informed consent. For survey participants, the same information was placed on the first page of the questionnaire and it was noted that by filling up the questionnaire, they agree to participate in the study. Email address to the author was provided in case of additional questions.

The ethical application was not conducted. The research did not handle ethically sensitive material or personal information, nor did it place participants at any risk.

The disclosed information were treated as confidential and were not shared elsewhere than in this essay. They were handled anonymously and any information that could reveal the identity of the participants were discarded from the analysis. No one apart from the author of the study had an access to the original data. The data were stored in a secured folder of my personal computer and will be deleted after the examination and final publication of this study.

Research questions		Preliminary model		Central themes	
1.	What are the reported benefits of mentoring for mentors?	Personality and attitudes	Personal satisfaction, feeling good about oneself, sense of purpose and fulfillment, giving back, personal development, new perspectives, vicarious	Communication skills, professional development	
		Skills			
		Practical gains	Relationships development, workplace*		
2.	What are the reported negative consequences of mentoring for mentors?	Personality and attitudes	Inability to switch off*, frustration, individual barriers to success*, environmental barriers to success*, feelings of responsibility*, bitterness*	Time commitment, working hours*, private life interference*, personal security	
		Practical consequences			
		Success	Perceived effectiveness, experience of success, experience of failure		
3.	What predictors contribute to the development of the outcomes for mentors?	Relationship	Mutual trust and empathy, similarity*, duration and consistency	Training and supervision, relationships at the workplace	
		Organization			

\*inductive codes that derived from the own data. The unmarked themes are a priori codes based upon prior research.

**Figure 5.** Central themes and their relevance to the preliminary model and the research questions

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The intention of the study was to present results from four interviews and approximately twenty questionnaires. The four interviews were conducted successfully and are analyzed in this chapter. The questionnaires were not completed due to difficulties with distribution on side of Flamman, therefore, that part of the study is not considered in further text.

During the interviews, it became apparent that the participants do not make a big difference between mentoring relationships developed formally within the Jump off Now project, and mentoring relationships developed informally within the everyday operation of the youth center. In describing their experiences, the mentors related to relationships with various clients in and out of official mentoring relationships, clients from Flamman and clients from different organizations, and they recalled memories to their present as well as past mentees. Therefore, it is important to note that some of the findings might not reflect exclusively on Jump off Now program neither on Flamman, as was originally intended, but provide a more general picture of the mentoring experience.

The results are divided into three main categories given by the research questions: the benefits of mentoring for mentors, the negative consequences of mentoring for mentors, and the predictors that contribute to the development of those outcomes. The individual themes that were identified under each category (*Figure 5*) are described and analyzed in this chapter.

	BENEFITS	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES
PERSONALITY AND ATTITUDES	Personal satisfaction	Frustration
	Feeling good about oneself	Feelings of responsibility*
	Sense of purpose and fulfillment	Bitterness*
	Giving back	Inability to switch off*
	Personal development	
	New perspectives	
	Vicarious learning*	
SKILLS	Communication skills	
	Professional development	
PRACTICAL	Relationship development	Time commitment
	Workplace*	Private life interference* Personal security risk

\*Exclusive findings of the present study as compared to previous research

**Figure 6.** The outcomes of mentoring for mentors reported in present study

## **The benefits of being a mentor**

In the above figure (*Figure 6*), we can see the outcomes of mentoring that were reported by mentors in the present study. These outcomes correspond with the findings of previous studies, which were summarized in the literature review by *Figure 3* into a large extent. They can similarly be grouped into three categories: positive changes in personality and attitudes, development of skills, and practical gains. Some of the reported outcomes in these categories are the very same or similar. Additionally, the analysis discovered several new outcomes that are marked by a star in the table.

### *Personality and attitudes*

**Personal satisfaction.** The most often reported benefits in previous studies were feeling of personal satisfaction, and so was the case in the present study. All of the participants expressed feelings of personal satisfaction in terms of joy and feeling good emotionally. One of them referred to mentorships as something that brings him “enjoyment in the heart” (interview 1).

Similarly as in previous research (e.g., Edlind & Heansly 1985), the feelings of satisfaction were directly linked to experienced success. After seeing a change in someone, making someone happy, and making a difference, mentors reported feelings of joy, satisfaction, and feeling good about themselves.

**Feeling good about oneself.** The individual acts of helping someone are only small episodes that, if cumulated, put one in a role of ‘the giver’, as one of the respondents named it. In line with Helper’s Therapy Principle (Reissman 1965), the results indicate that the role of a helper, or a giver, and the meaningful task of helping someone lead the individual to feel good about oneself and potentially improve his or her self-image.

*“Seeing other people that are in these kind of situations and need, and you can actually do something for them... Being a giver. If I’m a giver then... being a giver is so rewarding in all the ways in life.”*

(Interview 1)

Apart from supporting an individual mentee, being a mentor means supporting and improving a society. The participants believed that by helping the individual actors, the whole society may be gradually and cumulatively improved

*“If you could help one individual, who helps another individual... perhaps maybe one day (laughs), society can function as it should be.”*

(Interview 3)

Kavanagh and Borrill (2013) and Evans (2005) posit that it is the role in the society, being an important actor in the society who contributes to its development, which is the main source of good feelings about oneself and improved self-image.

**Sense of purpose and fulfillment.** The role may become so central to one’s identity, that it gives a rise to a greater sense of life purpose and fulfillment (Haddock et al. 2013). Especially one of the mentors expressed strong feelings of what his position means to him.

*“I have a life philosophy that if I was buried in a couple of years... what would be the greatest thing that I have done? Would it be selling something for some companies, money... or would it be actually helping people?”*

(Interview 1)

**Giving back.** Three of the participating mentors reported growing up in disadvantaged areas of Malmö and highlighted that the fact that they had support and help in their childhood help them to ‘turn out good’. They highlighted the role of supportive family, older siblings, mentors, and even Flamman, which two of them attended in their childhood years. Apart from this being one of the main motivational factors to begin mentoring, ‘being on the other side of the spectrum’ and being able to ‘give back’ was discussed as a source of satisfaction and good image of self.

*“I grew up with 4 older brothers. So I always had that inspiration and guidance... and seeing what impact that had on me. And how it helped me in my life. And taking that back and give it back to these youngsters... it's very positive and rewarding.”*

(Interview 3)

The process of ascribing new meaning in life - past and present - through being supportive was discussed by Melkman and colleagues (2015) on a sample of care leavers who were helping children presently in care. The authors posit that “by caring for youth in acute risk situations, the care leavers grasp how far they have developed and how much they have achieved in their lives. Thus, their exposure to the adversities of others seems to convey a message that things could have turned out a lot worse,” (Melkman et al. 2015, p. 45). Being in care, as participants from Melkman’s sample, or growing up in a disadvantaged area as the mentors of Flamman, does not bring many advantages in life. However, when it comes to helping people in similar situation, people with similar experience are more qualified than people who lack the first-hand acquaintance with the client’s circumstances (Kavanagh & Borrill 2013; Melkman et al. 2015). The opportunity to take a bad life experience and turn it into something good is simply rewarding.

**Personal development.** The mentors discussed how mentoring led them to develop personally in many aspects of their lives.

*“It made me complete as a person, I feel. Because my values are better today, my thinking is better today, my patience is better... In every way, I'm better.”*

(Interview 1)

*“I've developed myself being a mentor. I see myself as who I want to be. Who would I want to project myself being to this kid... to this youth. And you kind of become that person. I have to be this person. Because if I'm not this person, not only me is gonna be the person that's suffering... He's gonna suffer as well because he is in this very vulnerable situation and he's looking for somebody to look up to, and then you can't be that person...[...]. You have to develop yourself to the best version of yourself all the time. And being a mentor is a tool of being the best version of yourself.”*

(Interview 2)

The explanation provided by the second mentor is similar to a mechanism of development described by Reissman (1965) as ‘self-persuasion through persuading others’, and is one of the central concepts of Helper’s Therapy Principle. According to Reissman (1965), one can become more committed to a position through the process of advocating it. This is well proved in various forms of group therapy, for instance, Alcoholics Anonymous (ibid.), but also as a way to promote desistance when prison leavers are employed to help other offenders (Kavanagh & Borrill 2013). Present discussion with the mentors shows that being a helper not only provide a motivation to deal with various problems as addiction and offending but may serve as a tool of development for everyone.

**New perspectives.** Both directly and indirectly, the mentors expressed understanding of the situations of at-risk youth, and understanding of the problematic behavior and its causes.

*“You could have a person who is very aggressive and screaming and shouting. And once you hear the person’s story, it kind of makes sense.”*

(Interview 3)

Also, previous research reported that mentors who worked with difficult clients gradually changed their moral judgment, became more tolerant (Holzberg et al. 1964), more sympathetic and empathic (McGill et al. 2015). Mentors in present study described how they became tolerant, learned not to judge anyone fast based on superficial knowledge, acquired new perspectives of life, and became more open-minded.

*“You become aware of the fact that there is always more than one story. That a single story is dangerous. And that listening to the people that you are listening to, you get a story of the society you are living in from different perspective. And that’s what it does. It kind of reaches you that way. And it changes you that way.”*

(Interview 4)

Such experience can easily generalize (Haddock et al. 2013). Understanding of one person seems to be easily transmitted to other people and therefore, being more understanding and tolerant of other people’s behaviors, knowing that everything has its cause.

**Vicarious learning.** One benefit of mentoring that was not reported in previous research but was discussed by participants in this study is an experience of vicarious learning. Mentors from Flamman described how they learned indirectly from mentees and their lives. This could be learning about different cultures and religions, ways of thinking, domestic situations, and other situations people are at.

Learning about and from people who are culturally or otherwise different when being brought into close relationships is the main assumption of growth suggested by Relational-Cultural Theory (Comstock et al. 2008; Jordan 2000). Insight into other people’s lives not only widen individual view and knowledge of the world and society but can lead to a direct lesson, as one of the mentors described:

*“You learn a lot from people. You know, getting insight into other’s people lives. I guess also... mistakes that people have made. As they tell you their stories, you’re taking those stories and you learn from them. Like ‘ok, this person did this, and I*

*know it's wrong, maybe that's what I shouldn't do!' So you get to learn that. For free. I think that's a huge benefit."*

(Interview 4)

### *Skills*

The participants did not discuss a development of skills among benefits of mentoring as far as often as previous research did (e.g., Evans 2005; Haddock et al. 2013; Hughes et al. 2010; etc.). They mentioned briefly advancement in communication skills, active listening, and patience. One of the mentors discussed that mentoring helps him to reach knowledge important for other parts of his work such as educating and supporting his fellow mentors.

### *Practical gains*

**Relationship development.** The mentors enjoyed a development of relationships with their mentees. In previous research concerning similar mentoring schemes, many mentors reported gaining friends as one of the main benefits (Edlind & Heansly 1985; Hughes et al. 2010). This was not a case in Flamman, probably because the age gap is larger than in different programs that engage peers or people of close age (e.g., Campus Corps). In Flamman, despite the relationships being close, the roles are defined more clearly, with mentor being the authority, or 'the guide', as one of the mentors called it. Anyway, the participants described the relationships with mentees as enriching and enjoyable. One of the mentors explained why the work with relations is beneficial to him:

*"The only thing we are born into lives are relations. And the only things we are dying from are our relations with people around us. And during that life, I think, happiness is lying in relationships. And that's why I think this is the best job in the world, actually. That's why I don't feel like I'm working, even though I work 24/7. It's like my life."*

(Interview 1)

**Workplace.** Another benefit that was mentioned by mentors in the present study but was not reported by previous research was the workplace, its atmosphere, and relationship among employees and volunteers that were described as pleasant and beneficial. One mentor referred to Flamman as "a good place to be" (interview 2), and the other one claimed that he feels like he fit in better than anywhere else (interview 3).

### **The negative consequences of being a mentor**

The mentors initially hesitated in naming any negative consequences and could not recall many. However, as the conversation developed, several negative aspects and challenges of mentoring emerged from the interviews. Those are listed in *Figure 6*. In line with previous research, the negative consequences could be grouped into two categories: personality and attitudes, and practical risks, although the most of the individually reported outcomes differed slightly in present findings.

### *Personality and attitudes*

**Frustration.** Feelings of frustration were brought up during several occasions in all of the interviews. The frustration was usually resulting from lack of success and lack of improvement of the mentee.

Although mentors in the present study commented on the experienced lack of success only in terms of frustration, previous research shows that mentors whose mentees failed to improve, dropped out of the program, or worse, reverted back to criminality, may experience more damaging impact on their personalities and relational skills. Faith and her colleagues (2011) found a significant decrease in mentors' rating of self-efficacy, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. Such experience may be very stressful, self-devaluating, and potentially threatening to one's self-image (Rosen et al. 1996) and self-esteem (Kavanagh & Borrill 2013).

Mentors discussed numerous *barriers to success*, both *individual* and *environmental* that they viewed as frustrating and difficult to overcome.

**Individual barriers to success.** The mentors expressed disappointment if the mentees did not express willingness to accept opportunities for change. They felt like during their career, they spend an enormous amount of time and effort on creating opportunities and offering help to people who simply refused to take it. The most frustrating experience was seeing someone to relapse completely.

*"It could be very frustrating when you see a relapse or a back crash. When you have given somebody a lot of time, and a lot of efforts, and a lot of energy, and you kinda invest yourself emotionally as well... And I mean... when they fall off the wagon."*

(Interview 2)

Certain individual characteristics and attitudes were seen as barriers that are difficult to overcome as well. Those were, for instance, lack of responsibility, inability to realize the potential of an action or the benefits of long terms rewards.

**Environmental barriers to success.** Apart from individual resistance towards change, mentors discussed numerous outer barriers that prevent them from success and caused frustration. Those were mainly barriers placed by mentee's natural environment and by a system and the society in general.

Some mentors found it challenging to influence someone who is still exposed to the negative influence of non-functional environment in family, school, and friends that naturally has a larger impact than a single figure of the mentor who is physically present only during limited periods of time. For that reasons, Flamman encourages not only individual work but focus on family relations as well. One of the mentors described how the work with family works:

*"I focus on the one-to-one stuff a lot, one-to-one, and then developing family relationships. That the family relationships works well. I think for me that's like the basis of everything, the moment when the young kid has the good family foundation, they feel secure with their family, they have, you know, good communication with their family. They feel good about themselves... all the other things becomes, you know, very very easy. You know. You can get them to go to fantastic things outside but if the core, which is the family, is not well done, the rest is bullshit."*

(Interview 4)

The barriers placed by the system were discussed in terms of finance and political support. For the three mentors who are employed at Flamman full time, this represented a big issue, because they felt like they have to spend too much time on gathering resources, applying for funding, and developing projects, while it would be more valuable to spend this time on direct work with people.

Lack of political support was also recognized as a source of frustration, as people in Flamman do not feel acknowledged for the work they do. Mentors expressed a wish to extend their services, which is, however, impossible without obtaining much-needed space and money.

Barriers created directly or indirectly by mentees and their environments were described as frustrating, but understandable. In essence, those are the target of preventative work and are expected. However, barriers and lack of interest of the municipality leaders seem to be more difficult to overcome. When I asked the mentors if they ever thought of quitting, the mentors who are also differently engaged in Flamman stated that without a change in the system, the future of Flamman is not very bright. Personal aspects, however, were not viewed as so serious that they would become a reason to quit.

*“This project life, it can’t go on forever. Project after project. I need sustainability. And long-term commitment from the municipality of Malmö. And that’s a big thing. If that wouldn’t come, I don’t know if I would do this for so much more.”*

(Interview 1)

**Feelings of responsibility.** During the interviews, it became obvious that mentors place big demands on themselves, they felt responsible for the things that happened to their mentees and even experienced feelings of failure if something bad happened.

*“When my mentee got shot. Because that was my mentee. So it was like a personal failure for me. And I still think about him. And I’m blaming myself for whatever happens to him from now on. Because I had him here and how could I be so blind and not to see what was coming... “*

(Interview 1)

*“It’s not all my fault obviously... I mean that’s... you never know. You can never know. If you could do something more. Could you do this, could you do that, did we do something that... you know... you never know! So always ask yourself these questions, there’s always this self-doubt. Did I do these things that I did... right? Or did it lead to him becoming like this?”*

(Interview 2)

**Bitterness.** When the mentors discussed bad experiences and shared ‘unsuccessful’ stories, their mood changed visibly. One of the mentors even noted:

*“It’s very overwhelming. When I talk about it I just want to lie down here somewhere (laughs). I’m becoming really tired of this just when I’m talking about it.”*

(Interview 1)

All of the mentors described having bad moods sometimes and would describe themselves as ‘bitter’ on some occasions, mainly as a result of the kind of topics and problems they deal with on a daily basis.

*“You can kind of get down on the conversations that you have, and the stories you hear, obviously. Because it takes... at the end of the day, these things take energy from you. And you have a limit on amount of cognitive capacity and listening ability and tolerance and all that. Every single time you have a meeting or have a talk with them, you know, they suck a little bit of energy from you. So you just have to be able, you know, to get the energy back from somewhere, or sometimes, you know, it gets you a little bit down, it does.”*

(Interview 2)

### **Practical risks**

The mentors reported that being a mentor brings certain practical risk and limits not only to their work but also outside of work.

**Time commitment.** When asked about negative aspects of being a mentor, respondents directly mentioned the demanding time commitment. This is in line with findings of McGill and colleagues (2015) whose mentors reported time commitment and problems with scheduling as one of the main challenges.

However, the sacrifice of the personal time did not seem to be a serious concern as long as the work showed its results: in such case, rewards balanced out the costs. But, if the work did not show any results, mentors talked about ‘wasted time’, and such may become a source of *frustration*.

**Working hours.** Mentors of Flamman discussed differing working hours as very unusual and time-consuming. When I tried to find out how many hours they spend by mentoring, the answers were not particularly clear. As they do not differ greatly between official and unofficial mentoring relationship, or between mentoring and other aspects of their work with youth, it is difficult to conclude differently than by stating that mentoring is very time-consuming. One of the mentors jokingly replied:

*“Hours? I sleep here, I eat here, I will die here (laughs).”*

(Interview 1)

The mentors described how full-time job with at-risk youth does not, and in essence, must not follow regular working hours, because the problems of the clients are also not grouped into certain times of a day. Everyone have to sacrifice their time to some extent to ‘get the job done’ and deliver the results.

*“It’s not like ‘It’s 5 o’clock, I need to go home’. I mean, if you have to stay, you have to stay.”*

(Interview 3)

*“Sometimes the meeting times are very very unusual. Because you want to make it possible for the other person and so, you know, going to places late. In your private time. Odd hours. Those are the risks that you sometimes take. Like who wants to... It’s not fun to, let’s say, on a Friday evening at 8 o’clock, I’m gonna*

*go meet a kid somewhere. I rather wanna be at home and, you know, watching my favorite soccer game on TV and having a beer or something. ”*

(Interview 4)

Even though the time consumption is a big disadvantage for mentors, at the same time it points at the dedication and large time commitment, which are essential for the success of mentoring programs (Grossman & Rhodes 2002; Karcher 2005). Furthermore, as will be shown later, experienced success is one of the main predictors of positive outcomes for mentors and therefore, if one wants to be a good mentor, sacrificing some time is inevitable. The sacrifice that would be too big, however, can lead to emotional exhaustion and consequently, burnout (Allen & Mueller 2013; Roset et al. 1996). Search for balance between work done, time invested, and rest seems to be crucial in achieving best outcomes for all.

**Private life interference.** The unusual working hours were limiting a free time of all participants, though they had a different perception of how their work interfere and possibly limit their private life. Some claimed they feel successful in separating their private and work lives, but some expressed they sometimes feel unable to switch off and they ‘work even in their sleep’.

Two of the mentors found this very important and attempted to find a balance between work life and private life and consciously limit their working capacity by drawing a line between the two both in thinking and not letting their ‘work-life’ enter their personal lives by, for instance, having different phones or avoiding talking about their work at home.

*“I think it’s very essential to separate work from personal life. Very very important. If you don’t do that, you probably won’t be in this business for too long. Because it can be very depressing at some times. ”*

(Interview 2)

*“When you come home you become processing it [the work] in your head, like ‘what am I going to do’... So I just think that everything has its time and place. So when you are at work, you gonna give it hundred percent, when you are at home, you’re not gonna think about ‘did I do this, did I do that’. You gotta think that you did the best. So work with yourself in this kind of ways. ”*

(Interview 3)

**Inability to switch off.** Problematic of crime and gang violence among youth in Malmö is very large. Without consciously ‘holding oneself back’, the feeling that something can be done may lead the mentors to extend their limits. Two remaining mentors expressed an inability to switch off. Although they admitted that their work is limiting their personal lives, they viewed it as a necessary sacrifice of the mission and the lifestyle they have chosen. They find it important to be available anytime and help as many people as much as possible.

*“That’s the thing of people that have a drive and that can’t relax until everything is done. And you want the control but you never get it. [...] Sometimes I just get up in the middle of the night and I do this [thinking about work]. Even in my sleep, I solve problems! I think a lot about this so I don’t think I’m ‘free’ even when I’m home. ”*

(Interview 1)

*“You want to work all the time because there is so much to be done. So you know, so you keep working all the time. That’s one of the stuff about it because you keep thinking you have to do more, do more, do more, this is how it needs to be.”*

(Interview 4)

*“My bar of expectations has raised. I now expect to do more. I have high demands on myself. Sometimes I now feel: ‘Am I doing enough? Can I do more? Is this work good enough?’”*

(Interview 1)

**Personal security.** Similarly as in the study of Kavanagh and Borrill (2013), also mentors from Flamman shared stories of situations that may have been potentially unsafe or threatening, and one of them expressed feeling a bit unsafe when visiting the neighborhoods where his mentees live. The mentors stressed that despite all the respect and understanding they have for people in every kind of situation, it is important to protect oneself and one’s privacy.

*“Some people you shouldn't even let (laughs), let them know your last name. So... you just have to be careful with these things. You can't always say ‘Aw, look at the pictures of my family, here's my facebook, here's my real number’... you know, I wouldn't give out my real number to somebody, you know, I'm not sure, that this person, is not gonna do anything, you never know! Even if they don't have the intention, somebody might see him and try to get him, or her, and see us as a probable target. So you never know.”*

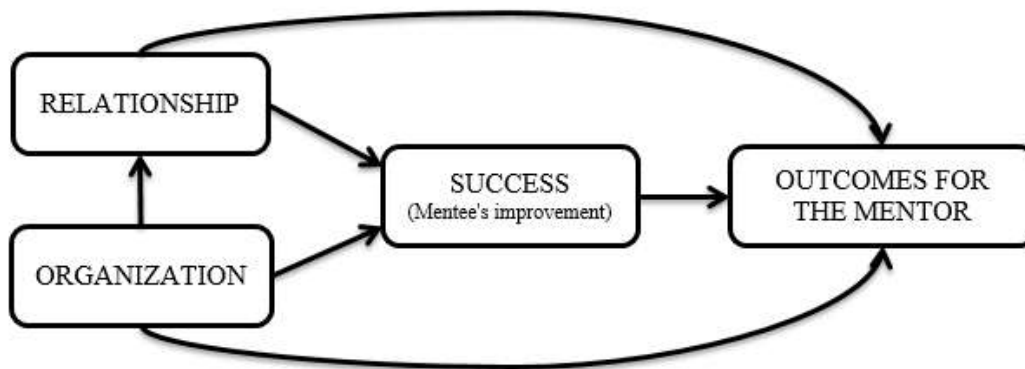
(Interview 2)

### **Predictors of the outcomes for mentors**

The mentors discussed several topics that have an impact on their work and predict the outcomes they experience. Those topics were not significantly different from previous research and may be summarized into three categories: Success, relationship, and organization. How the individual predictors contribute to the development of the outcomes for mentors is shown in *Figure 7* below.

Compared to the preliminary model I suggested based on previous literature (*Figure 2*), the present model is somewhat simplified. It does not contain the perspective of the mentee, outcomes for the mentee and their predictors, as those were not a focus of the own data collection.

In addition to the preliminary model, present model develops how the individual predictors affect one another. In the present study, the ‘success’ appeared to be the most important predictor and thus is placed closest to the ‘outcomes for the mentor’ in the model. The remaining predictors also have a direct influence on the outcomes for the mentor, but predominantly, their influence is mediated by the effect of ‘success’.



**Figure 7.** Development of the outcomes for mentors

**Success.** In the model presented in *Figure 7*, we can see that ‘success’ stands closest to the ‘outcomes for the mentor’ and seems to be the most important predictor for mentors in the present study. The mentors discussed experienced success, or on the other hand, lack of success, in direct connection to how they feel, i.e. what outcomes they experienced. The experience of success reportedly delivered many beneficial feelings and changes, as a personal satisfaction, increased self-esteem, and sense of purpose. On the other hand, lack of success, in many cases, lead to negative outcomes as feelings of failure, frustration, and other negative emotions.

**Relationship.** The model shows a direct influence of the ‘relationship’ to ‘outcomes for the mentor’ as the relationship itself and generally, work with the relationships, was named among the benefits.

Apart from the direct influence of the ‘relationship’ to ‘outcomes for the mentor’, the model shows that ‘relationship’ may affect ‘outcomes for the mentor’ indirectly through the influence of ‘success’. Relationship is considered to be the main tool of mentoring and the simple equation that was confirmed in present study stands as following: strong relationship predicts improvement for the mentee (i.e. success), weak relationship predicts the lack of improvement for the mentee (i.e. lack of success), and experienced success or unsuccess directly predicts outcomes for the mentor, as was shown above.

**Organization.** The model also shows that ‘organization’ has a direct influence on ‘outcomes for mentors’ as some of the mentors reported the pleasant workplace as one of the benefits of their work, and they claimed that supportive hierarchy protected them from negative consequences.

Furthermore, ‘organization’ has an influence on ‘relationship’. The mentors discussed how the formal and informal support in Flamman helps them to overcome various difficulties and form close and healing relationships with their mentees. Also, the good reputation of Flamman, the fact that Flamman is ‘trusted’ and ‘respected’, makes the development of trust and mutual respect between the mentors as representatives of Flamman and their mentees easier from the start.

Similarly, the model illustrates that ‘organization’ has an influence on ‘success’. In present sample, especially the supportive relationships and the informal, familiar atmosphere of Flamman, were viewed as one of the pathways to success

## *Success*

The experience of success was directly connected to positive outcomes for mentors and it was also mentioned among the most important motivational factors that lead the participants to become, and remain, mentors. After discussing the experience of success and causing positive change in someone's life, mentors expressed positive feelings and emotions and shared some of their successful stories with pride. Edlind and Heansly (1985) compared such experience to a parenting one in which parents take great pride in the success of their own children and experience feelings of personal satisfaction.

On the other hand, lack of success or even failure were linked to negative consequences, as mentors described feeling frustrated or 'down' when their work did not show any results or something bad happened to their mentee. Kavanagh and Borrill (2013), whose respondents reported the same feelings, explain that this may be due to a fear of failure in which mentors tend to internalize their mentee's failures as a reflection of their own abilities. In that sense, feelings of frustration may reach mentor's deeper personality traits and negatively affect one's self-esteem (ibid.) or self-image (Rosen et al. 1996).

One of the mentors shared a story about a client of Flamman who avoided taking a positive opportunity that was open for him and admitted feelings of disappointment:

*"All the feelings with that... Frustration, sadness, anger... All of these, obviously. But most strong is like... Common. You could have at least done this. You know, I trusted you, you know, I thought that you could do these good things, and I put my effort into you, and... just because.. maybe because of laziness, maybe because they are afraid... They didn't come."*

(Interview 2)

Additionally, in light of success, certain negative outcomes were viewed as less important and easier to overcome. For example, the time commitment and demanding working hours were perceived as bearable, if the sacrificed time delivered results. If not, the time spent was perceived as 'wasted'.

Given the average rate of successful outcomes of Jump off Now program (reportedly 68%), it is no surprise that the positive outcomes for mentor outweighed negative outcomes, and when asked if they ever thought of quitting, all of the participants neglected that the costs of being a mentor would be as high that they would lead them to think of quitting.

## *Relationship*

According to Relational-Cultural Theory, strong and mutually empathic relationships contribute to the growth of all participating individuals (Comstock et al. 2008) and individuals' happiness and well-being are a product of those relationships (Jordan 2010). Studies concerned with mediators of the outcomes for mentors showed that good and close relationships likely lead to positive outcomes for mentors (Faith et al. 2011; McGill et al. 2015).

Whether the quality of the mentoring relationship predicted negative consequences for mentors in the present sample was difficult to establish. The

mentors described all of their mentoring relationship in a positive light and referred to them as beneficial.

We already know that mentoring relationship is considered to be the main tool of mentoring and its strength and quality determine what the outcomes for mentees will be like (DuBois et al. 2002; Rhodes 2005; Rhodes & DuBois 2008). Even mentors in the present study believed that the relationship is a pathway to success or a tool of delivering results and making a difference. In the previous section, I discussed that success is the main predictor of outcomes for mentors. Therefore, mentoring relationship, as a tool of success, certainly influences outcomes for mentors indirectly.

### **Aspects of a positive relationship**

The mentors in the present study discussed three aspects of close mentoring relationships that are essential for achieving mentoring goals: mutual trust and empathy, similarity, and duration and consistency. As all of these aspects contribute to the development of the successful mentoring relationship and reaching positive outcomes for mentees, they indirectly contribute to the quality of the outcomes for mentors as well.

**Mutual trust and empathy.** Trust and empathy were acknowledged as a core of healing relationships by Relational-Cultural Theory (Jordan 2010), and Rhodes (2005) considers their development central in effective mentoring relationships. In regards to positive outcomes for both sides of the therapeutic or mentoring relationship, the trust and empathy need to be mutual (Jordan 2010; Rhodes 2005). Mutual feelings of trust and empathy motivate both sides to be authentically present and thus vulnerable towards positive transformation (Comstock et al. 2008).

*“The biggest task you face is to gain their trust. And if you gain their trust you can do all of these things. You can be the motivator. Because if they don’t trust you they don’t see anything in you. They are not gonna.”*

(Interview 3)

*“I would definitely not say that it [gaining the trust] is easy. Because they initially, they project the same image to you that they do to their friends. You know, happy and everything, and cool and fun. And it takes a while to dig through these layers. And kind of crack down the wall. And when you start to crack that all, you know, that’s where you can see the real person shining through.”*

(Interview 2)

One of the mentors highlighted the need to be empathetic, understanding, and non-judging. Without that, the mentee will not open, will not show the real self, and the mentor will not have a chance to reach and affect the core of the mentee’s personality.

*“Understanding all that [the problematic behavior] and yet not being critical. Yet not being critical. Just to sit here and this is the person in front of me, and that’s who the person is. Just accepting them for who they are and just dealing with it. For me, that’s what the relationship is all about. It’s trust.”*

(Interview 4)

**Similarity.** Development of previously mentioned trust and empathy is, according to the participants, eased because of a certain level of similarity of mentor and the mentee. The participants suggested that the mentor can pose as a good role model and inspiration only to the extent that he or she is someone who the youth wants to identify with, and importantly, someone who the youth *can* identify with.

Flamman employs mentors who come from the same or similar background and situation, some of them even from the very same area. In such person, the youth can see someone who was in the same kind of difficult situation as he or she is but made something good out of it. It sends the message that the change is possible and that the alternative, non-criminal, path is available for everyone.

*“If somebody didn't come from the same area as us, they [the mentees] probably wouldn't have same amount of trust if they didn't have somebody they could see themselves in and reflect like: ‘this could be me, in the future maybe, this guy has been in my situation and he's changed it and he did something else with it’. If they can't see this... That's where Flamman has the advantage. That we have these positive role models that come from the same background.”*

(Interview 2)

Similarly, the mentors expressed they feel more empathetic and understanding of the youth's situation as they have good or even personal knowledge of the environment and its circumstances.

Employing mentors from a similar background is not common in other mentoring schemes, perhaps because it is not easy either. One of the schemes that have intentionally employed mentors with the same background as the mentees, specifically ex-offenders who provided support to prison leavers, is ‘The Peer Advisor Project’ that I have described previously (p. 11). Ex-offenders mentors also viewed their similarities with their mentees as the main success factor and the authors claimed that first, “mentees feel at ease and can relate to the mentor because they have experienced similar lifestyles,” and second, “the mentees see how far the mentors have come and realize there may be future opportunities for themselves too,” (Kavanagh and Borrill 2013, p. 407).

**Duration and consistency.** In order to be able to develop a strong mentoring relationship, it is important that it lasts long enough and the meetings of the dyad are relatively frequent and consistent (Grossman & Rhodes 2002). Flamman encourages that the mentoring relationship lasts for at least one year, as it is recommended (ibid.), but in their personal dedication, the interviewed mentor seems to go further than that as formal termination of the program does not mean termination of the real relationship at all. The mentors acknowledged the need for long-term commitment and consistent work in developing a mentoring relationship and they suggested that such connection should last “perhaps forever” (Interview 3). One of the mentors with very long career talked about how he still keeps in touch with several of his mentees from the past, and he commented following:

*“And that's the way it goes. Because you become part of their lives and they become part of your life.”*

(Interview 4)

Some of the mentors compared mentoring relationship to long-term friendship or family: “I mean, you don’t have a family for five years and then you stop,” (Interview 3). As they saw their role as someone who supplements or fully replace family that is dysfunctional or missing completely, they felt that their commitment should be similarly stable as the commitment of the real family. Such long-term or even life-long dedications seem to be unique when compared to other mentoring programs, and mentors themselves named it as a major strength of Flamman.

### *Organization*

A number of previous research posited that the both formal and informal structure of the organization predicts the quality of the outcomes for mentors (e.g. Weiler et al. 2014). The main topics were training and supervision, which prepare and support the mentor throughout the task, and informal structure constructed by relationships and general atmosphere of the workplace.

Although training and supervision did not play a big role in the present sample, relationships in the workplace and informal structure of Flamman were discussed as supportive and beneficial.

**Training and supervision.** Training and supervision provided by the organization are considered very important for maximizing benefits for mentors (e.g., Evans 2005; Garcia et al. 1997; Weiler et al. 2014), mainly as a supportive components that may ease development of satisfying mentoring relationship and reinforce mentees’ improvement (i.e. success) (Parra et al. 2002).

However, among the present sample, the guiding role of the organization in terms of training and supervision did not play an important role. Likely, this finding would be different if the sample included more mentors from Flamman, especially those who are new or less experienced, and are obliged to complete intensive training and attend supervision meetings. The interviewed mentors were senior mentors of Flamman and only one of them completed the training offered by Flamman, but the rest, based on their long-term experience and education, did not. Similarly, due to being ‘at the end of the chain’, none of the mentors have any supervision or official support. Nevertheless, they have enjoyed numerous benefits of informal support, as described below.

**Relationships in the workplace.** Previous research reported informal support and relationships in the workplace to be equally important as the formal support, training, and supervision (McGill et al. 2015; Weiler et al. 2014). Mentors in the present study discussed the informal structure as supportive in reaching the outcomes of mentoring while not feeling overwhelmed or frustrated in the case of difficulties. Some of them reported the whole atmosphere of Flamman as one of the benefits of their work, and some stated that Flamman, as a great place to be and work at, is one of the main motivations for them to work as a mentor.

Mentors discussed that in Flamman, they enjoy that people help each other and in the case of difficulties, one can talk to anyone and get support. They described that the environment is very informal and there is pretty much no hierarchy.

*“If you need support, we support each other. Just ask. So it's good. It's a good place to be. That's another reason why I am here. Doing this. Instead of something else.”*

(Interview 2)

*“You set your own rules, you set your own time, you set your own, you know, premises, or you... you create your own situation. So... if I wanna change something, I'll change it. It's, again, informal. So... every individual is trusted to make their own judgments and make the changes accordingly. And that's what we do.”*

(Interview 2)

*“Here it's like a family.”*

(Interview 1)

## **SUMMARY**

In the first section of this paper, I have used available previous research on the topic of experiences of mentors to develop a preliminary model of the outcomes of mentoring for mentors and their predictors. I did not test this model, instead, I used its assumptions as a guide to develop the research tools: the interview guide and the questionnaire, and as a framework for the data analysis and interpretation.

None of the findings of the present study were in contrast to previous research. Instead, present findings confirmed, complemented, and developed current knowledge of the experiences of mentors of at-risk youths, while answering all three research questions.

### **Research question 1**

#### **What are the reported benefits of mentoring for mentors of at-risk youth?**

Based on the literature review, I have grouped benefits that were reported in previous research into three categories: positive changes in personality and attitudes, development of skills, and practical outcomes.

The benefits reported in this study were found in the same categories. Some of the benefits reported by previous research were found, yet some were not, which is understandable regarding the small scope of the current study. Additionally, present findings added a couple of previously unknown benefits.

The overall benefits reported in this study are: personal satisfaction, feeling good about oneself, sense of purpose and fulfillment, giving back, personal development, new perspectives, vicarious learning, communication skills, professional development, relationship development, and workplace.

### **Research question 2.**

**What are the reported negative consequences of mentoring for mentors of at-risk youth?** Similarly, as in the case of benefits, negative consequences reported in the present study were able to confirm patterns suggested by previous research and divided the individual outcomes into two categories: negative changes in personality and attitudes, and practical risks.

However, the present study was not able to find many of the previously reported negative consequences. Instead, a number of new themes has emerged and

altogether created a brief list: frustration, feelings of responsibility, bitterness, inability to switch off, time commitment, private life interference, and personal security risk.

### **Research question 3**

**What predictors contribute to the development of the outcomes for mentors of at-risk youth?** The predictors discovered in this study were in line with previous research and confirmed the important role of the relationship with the mentee, the organization, and the experienced success (i.e. mentees' improvement).

Unlike previous research, the present study was able to establish the major importance of the success that not only predicted the outcomes directly but also mediated the effect of remaining predictors. The experience of success was directly beneficial and besides, in light of success, many of the negative consequences seemed to lose their importance for the mentors.

The relationship with the mentee and the organization also lead directly towards many benefits and negative consequences although predominantly, their effects were mediated by the effect of the success. Specifically, the quality of the mentoring relationship and the quality of support from the organization determined the extent of the mentees' improvement, and thus lead to experienced success.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

The research findings of the present study highlight some of the significant experiences of mentors working in Flamman, a youth organization in Malmö, Sweden. They indicate that mentoring of at-risk youth impact significantly on the mentors and may result in number of both positive and negative changes in individuals' personality and attitudes, it may help them to attain new skills, or bring practical gains to life, or, on the other hand, exhibit the individuals to some practical risks. Generally, mentoring was perceived as a very positive and beneficial experience by mentors of Flamman. Although some negative consequences were described, those were not regarded as very important and did not overweigh the benefits and positive feeling the mentors had about their work in Flamman.

The findings showed that positive experience was generally the one were mentors were enabled to make a difference, and maintain positive relationships with both mentees and colleagues. The participants considered Flamman as a place that fosters all those qualities, and the reasons of difficulties and negative experiences were described behind the reach of Flamman, such as individual characteristics of the mentee and his environment, bureaucratic system, and a matter of funding.

Therefore, the implications of this study for Flamman are limited. Their work was rated highly. Due to small sample size and methodological limitations, the findings are difficult to generalize to other mentoring programs and proposing implication to them would be difficult. The findings only stress the need to set

realistic goals and expectations for new mentors during recruitment and training, and to support them warmly throughout their work.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of the present study was the data collection itself and the fact that a notable part of the data collection, the survey, has not been completed.

The interviews were successful and strengthened the study by providing deep understanding and explanation of the phenomenon, but they were unable to include more than four participants due to a language gap between the researcher and the target sample. Therefore, the intention was that the survey, which was translated to Swedish, would reach more participants and, with results being quantified, it would allow to detect general patterns of the findings.

With 20 additional respondents, the study would not have allowed for wide generalizations, but it would have given a good overview of the phenomenon particularly in Flamman, which could inform operations of Flamman itself and eventually generalize to similar mentoring programs.

In addition, including more diverse sample would be desirable. The participants of the interview were all strongly dedicated individuals, employed full-time in 'helping people', three directly in Flamman and one in a different organization. Likely, as representatives of Flamman on different levels, those individuals may be motivated to present the mentoring Flamman offers in the most positive light. To confirm or to disprove that, it would be valuable to include volunteer mentors and former mentors, who would possibly provide a better insight into negative consequences of mentoring and reasons of quitting. This was not possible as all the contact with mentors was mediated by one of the program coordinators.

Besides, combining data from the two methods would allow the findings to be compared, corroborated or questioned in relation to the method of the data collection (Denscombe 2010). For example, during the interviews, the mentors hesitated when asked to name any negative consequences of their role and they could not recall many. Instead, those emerged spontaneously on different occasions during the interview. It is likely that if the mentors were not let to speak widely and were limited to three lines of the questionnaire, they might not mention as many negative consequences as when the chance for elaborating was given.

Although I did not find out what exactly had caused the difficulties with distribution of the survey, based upon interviews and gained knowledge about Flamman as a whole, I may assume that the enormous amount of work that is placed on every individual in Flamman resulted into student's research being moved at the bottom of the list of priorities, especially considering that a new large project of Flamman and Malmö city 'Safe Space Malmö' was introduced in the same time frame. Unsuccess of this study only reflects difficult life and an overwhelming amount of work that people who really are trying to make a difference, such as people of Flamman, have. As was discussed previously, time consumption was mentioned as a big limitation of mentoring work on a first place by most of the participants, and the difficulties I had with scheduling an interview time and reaching the mentors and other representatives of Flamman also proved that.

### **Future research**

The majority of the studies concerning mentoring outcomes are qualitative. Many of them adopted grounded theory approach and without paying much attention to previous knowledge, they develop new models and theoretical assumptions. Therefore, there are numerous separate models of mentoring experience that only tell us about the particular study, but not as much about the phenomenon in general. The field would benefit from studies that would draw on knowledge of one another, especially quantitative studies that would test the results of qualitative studies on a larger sample and statistically established connections between benefits, negative consequences, and their predictors. Since the present study draws on and develops knowledge accumulated by previous research, it might be a good place to start.

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# **APPENDIX 1**

Interview guide

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*“Tell me about your history in Flamman”*

How long have you been a mentor?

How did you learn about Flamman and the mentoring program?

Why did you decide to join Flamman and become a mentor?

Is this the first time you have done volunteer work?

Do you currently volunteer with any other organizations?

What is your main occupation?

How many mentees do you have and how long have you been a match?

How many hours per month do you spend by mentoring?

How would you rate the problems your clients deal with?

Can you describe the work you do as a mentor? Activities, methods...

## **2. EFFECTS ON CLIENTS (perceived self-efficacy)**

*“From your point of view, what does mentoring do?”*

Can you describe how do you see your role as a mentor? What is your “function”?

Does your work make a difference? What is the impact of your work on your mentee?

Where would your mentee be right now if it wasn't for you?

## **3. MOTIVATION**

*“Why to be a mentor?”*

Why do you keep working as a mentor?

#### **4. RELATIONSHIP**

“What are the relationships with your mentees like?”

Can you describe what the relationship between you and your mentee is like?

#### **5. BENEFITS**

Do you enjoy being a mentor? Why?

What are the benefits of your role? What do you personally get from it?

How does it make you feel?

#### **6. CHALLENGES**

What are the challenges of mentoring? Does it affect you in some negative way?

Have you experienced some particular challenges in your work as a mentor? How did you cope with them?

How do you feel when facing difficult circumstances of mentee's lives? (Posttraumatic growth)

Have you ever thought of quitting? Why? Why not?

#### **7. PERSONAL IMPACT**

Has mentoring changed you somehow?

Does mentoring interfere into your personal life?

Have you learned something from your mentee?

#### **8. ORGANIZATION**

Have you obtained training prior your direct work with clients? How well did it prepare you for the work?

Does Flamman support you? Do you see or talk with a supervisor or other staff members about how things are going with your work?

What changes, if any, could be made to make your job easier?

#### **9. FUTURE PROSPECTS**

How do you see your future as a mentor?

## APPENDIX 2

The questionnaire

### INTRODUCTION

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex:  Man  Woman
3. Main occupation (job): \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your occupation in Flamman?
  - Paid employment
  - Volunteer
  - No longer work as a mentor (*If you no longer work as a mentor, answer following questions as if they were written in past tense, thus related to your former experience*)
5. How long have you been a mentor in Flamman? (number of years and months)  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Is this your first time to work as a mentor?
  - Yes  No
7. Is this your first time to do volunteer work?
  - Yes  No
8. How many hours per months do you spend mentoring?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How many mentees have you had?
  - At the moment: \_\_\_\_\_
  - In total: \_\_\_\_\_

**MOTIVATION**

**10. State 3 most important reasons why you became a mentor in the first place.**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**11. State 3 most important reasons why you keep working as a mentor.**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**EFFECTIVENESS OF MENTORING**

**12. On scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the impact of your work on the mentees?**  
(1 – does not make any difference, 5 – makes a huge difference)

Mentee 1	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 2	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 3	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 4	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 5	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 6	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 7	1	2	3	4	5

## RELATIONSHIP – MENTEE

### 13. On a scale from 1 to 5, how close do you feel to your mentee?

Rate for each mentee separately (1 – very distant, 5 – very close)

Mentee 1	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 2	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 3	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 4	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 5	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 6	1	2	3	4	5
Mentee 7	1	2	3	4	5

## BENEFITS

### 14. Does mentoring affect you in a positive way?

Yes  No

If yes, state 3 most important benefits that you personally get from your work as a mentor.

1.

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2.

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3.

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## CHALLENGES

### 15. Does mentoring affect you in a negative way?

Yes  No

If yes, state 3 most important challenges you experience as a mentor.

1.

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2.

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3.

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**16. Have you ever thought of quitting?**

Yes  No

If yes, state the most important reason:

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**PERSONAL IMPACT**

**17. Have you learned something as a mentor?**

Yes  No

If yes, state 3 most important things that you have learned:

1.

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2.

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3.

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**18. Has mentoring changed you somehow?**

Yes  No

If yes, state 3 most important changes you have experienced:

1.

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2.

---

3.

---

**19. Does mentoring limit your personal life?**

Yes  No

If yes, state 3 most important reasons how:

1.

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2.

---

3.

---

**ORGANIZATION**

**20. Had you been trained by Flamman before you started mentoring?**

Yes  No

If yes, how long (number of days and hours) was this training?

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**21. Do you think that the training prepared you well for your role as a mentor?**

Yes  No

**22. Does Flamman support you continuously in your work as a mentor?**

Yes  No

If yes, in what way?

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**23. Is there something Flamman could do to make your work easier and more effective?**

Yes  No

If yes, explain how:

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