



PROVEN, IMPACTFUL, SCALABLE

The Measurable Impact of
Serendis Structured
Mentoring Programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an era where leadership fatigue, disconnection, and aspiration gaps threaten organisational resilience, structured mentoring—long valued but often overlooked—has re-emerged as a highly relevant approach. When designed and delivered with rigour, it offers a compelling, strategic pathway for developing talent and fostering leadership capability, creating an impact at two levels in the organisation.

This white paper presents key findings from Serendis' recent impact study of its fully facilitated mentoring programs, revealing statistically significant improvements in mentee confidence, career clarity and progression, and mentor capability.

The challenge of leading people has intensified as workplace dynamics evolve and employee expectations shift at an unprecedented pace. Amid declining middle-manager well-being, limited interest in leadership among younger employees (Deloitte, 2025; Gallup, 2025), and a widening empathy gap between senior leaders and frontline staff (McKinsey, 2023), mentoring offers not only development, but a driver of constructive and lasting cultural shifts.

About Serendis Research

This research was led by Dr Abby Jandro, Principal Consultant at Serendis. With deep experience across coaching, facilitation, and consulting, Dr Jandro combines evidence-based rigour with strategic insight.

Dr Jandro led a cross-functional team in designing and delivering the impact study cited within this white paper. The team's work reflects Serendis' commitment to embedding measurable outcomes into mentoring programs, ensuring they drive genuine behavioural change and cultural transformation across organisations.

We also wish to acknowledge Professor Theo Niyonsenga and Misganaw Worku from the University of Canberra for their consultation and statistical analysis.

Meet our team



LEADERSHIP AT A CROSSROADS

In response to a myriad of converging pressures, today's leadership challenge has become less about authority and more about adaptability, empathy and human connection. These conditions intensify the need for leadership approaches that are relational and future-focused. There is an increasing need for leaders to connect across generations, foster trust in times of uncertainty, and support diverse, distributed teams with authenticity and clarity.

Organisations are confronting a multifaceted leadership dilemma:

- Leadership aversion: Younger professionals are increasingly opting out of traditional leadership pathways, with only 6% of Gen Zs aspiring to leadership roles, driven by concerns about workplace stress and a misalignment with their personal values of meaning, growth, and well-being (Deloitte, 2025).
- Middle-manager burnout: Gallup (2025) reports that managers experienced the most significant decline in engagement across all workforce levels, with the steepest drops observed among younger and female managers. This group also reported a substantial decline in overall wellbeing, highlighting the compounding pressures they face.
- Sentiment shift: There has been a steady decline in employees' perceptions of leadership, with trust, confidence, and motivation all trending downward toward pre-pandemic levels. Confidence in leaders and the belief that they care about employees' contributions are decreasing. Trust and aspiration have eroded across many workplaces globally (Edelman, 2025).
- Disconnect at the top: Senior leaders consistently report far more positive workplace experiences than people managers and individual contributors. Satisfaction with culture and confidence in leadership decline steadily down the hierarchy, suggesting that executives may be increasingly insulated from the day-to-day realities of their teams. This sentiment gap reinforces a growing empathy divide that risks undermining trust, engagement, and cultural cohesion across organisations (Culture Amp, 2025; McKinsey, 2023).

Participant Insights: External Pressures Shaping Leadership

- Cost of living and economic volatility
- Post-COVID hybrid work and cohesion challenges
- Mental health, burnout, and change fatigue
- Generational expectations and diversity in values
- Digital disruption, cybersecurity and AI readiness
- ESG, compliance and sustainability regulations

Mentoring has stood the test of time as a humanising intervention that re-engages leaders, builds trust, and models inclusive leadership. It allows organisations to develop future leaders incrementally, embedding psychological safety, empathy, and real-world support into the learning journey (Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006; Kram, 1985; Palsa & Rosser, 2017; Moore & Wang, 2017).

Increasingly, employees expect their organisations to invest in both their professional and personal growth, not just through performance management but through meaningful, future-focused development opportunities (Culture Amp, 2025; Gallup, 2025). However, people managers often face competing demands and are not always equipped to provide tailored development pathways, especially amid growing pressure to drive short-term team performance.

Mentors can bridge this gap, offering aspirational guidance, role-modelling, and the safe space necessary to explore goals beyond the immediate scope of work. This bridging role is increasingly critical, as career development and growth opportunities are among the most effective levers for talent attraction and retention in a rapidly evolving job market (World Economic Forum, 2025).



RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The Serendis Program Impact Study assessed outcomes from fully facilitated, structured mentoring programs delivered by Serendis and supported by MentorKey across multiple organisations and industries between 2023 and 2024, using pre- and post-program data from mentees and mentors.

The intention behind this research was to move beyond anecdotal evidence and satisfaction data to rigorously test whether structured mentoring interventions actually shift behaviour, an area where evidence across the broader industry has remained surprisingly thin. While many mentoring programs are associated with positive feedback, few have demonstrated statistically significant improvements in the psychological, behavioural, and career-related outcomes that matter most for leadership pipelines and culture transformation.

This study sought to challenge that norm, offering not just stories but measurable, replicable outcomes. By applying a matched pre- and post-design and leveraging quantitative and qualitative data, Serendis aimed to demonstrate that when mentoring is done well (i.e. fully facilitated, intentionally structured, and embedded in culture) it drives real, meaningful change. We encourage HR and OD leaders to question surface-level satisfaction metrics and ask: does your mentoring program actually move the needle?



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STRUCTURED MENTORING PROGRAM

SUCCESS FACTORS

Mentoring success and impact can vary widely across programs and organisations. Often, mentoring can equate to a series of 'casual catch-ups' that are well received by participants but not actually delivering the expected value on talent growth and retention. What sets Serendis programs apart is our structured approach, led by experienced consultants who engage participants to go 'beyond coffee catch-ups'. This sets a culture of mentoring where:

- Mentees set explicit goals for their mentoring partnerships
- Mentees drive the agenda and are intentional about what they want to achieve from each mentoring meeting
- Mentees take accountability for taking action between each session with their mentor
- The pairs understand the critical need to invest in developing trust as an enabler for real, vulnerable and deep conversations
- Mentors refine their mentoring skills to elicit insights and 'a-ha moments' for their mentees, by asking more questions than providing answers
- Mentors use practical frameworks relevant to their mentee's key areas of development to enable their mentee's reflections and discovery, creating more meaningful conversations.

Serendis designs and delivers two distinct but equally high-impact formats: cross-industry and internal programs. Each format is tailored to its context, while maintaining a consistent methodology grounded in structure, reflection, and behavioural outcomes.

Cross-industry programs are typically delivered in partnership with member-based industry organisations. These bodies invite nominations from participating member organisations, creating a rich and diverse pool of professionals from across the sector. This structure allows mentees and mentors to build relationships beyond their own organisations, fostering cross-sectoral insight, broader networks, and opportunities to challenge assumptions within a relationship based on trust and strict confidentiality.

Internal programs, by contrast, are often initiated when organisations attempt to launch mentoring on their own but encounter limitations. Many realise, through early experiences or pilot attempts, that they lack the internal resources, time, or expertise to create an impactful, scalable program. Serendis consultants are often brought in at this point to design a program that delivers real impact on mentees' professional development. The focus is on bringing structure and content relevant to the audience to ensure the mentoring program has clear, strategic alignment with the organisation's objectives.

Across both cross-industry and internal programs, Serendis' structured mentoring approach consistently includes several critical elements that underpin program success:

- Rigorous matching between mentors and mentees
- Clearly defined program objectives that are individual, aspirational and career focused
- Program launch events with senior leader sponsorship
- Mid-program touchpoints and resources to deepen engagement
- On-demand access to practical frameworks via MentorKey - a self-serve platform containing 'Keys' (self-guided reflections), built to enrich the quality of conversations throughout the duration of their mentoring partnership
- Final reflection and celebration to consolidate outcomes and celebrate growth
- Typical program duration of 5–6 months, allowing sufficient time for trust-building, progress tracking, and meaningful development outcomes

These common elements have been validated across contexts and industries, forming the foundation of Serendis' impact-oriented methodology.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Sample Size:

- Mentees: Career Progression (n=200), Confidence (n=157)
- Mentors: Mentoring Capability (n=107)

Design:

- Matched pre/post survey design
- Paired t-tests used to assess mean differences
- Normality confirmed through Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for key variables (where applicable)

Variables and Measures:

The following participant-reported variables were measured using Likert-scale items, with composite scores created for each category:

- Mentee Confidence (n=157):
 - I feel confident in my current role
 - I feel confident in my leadership skills
 - I feel confident in my ability to network effectively
- Mentee Career Clarity (n=200):
 - I have clear goals I am focused on achieving
 - When thinking about my career progression, I am clear on my next steps
- Mentor Capability (n=107):
 - I feel confident having mentoring conversations
 - I understand the needs of up-and-coming professionals in my field
 - I have reflected on my personal leadership approach



KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS



The findings presented in this section are reflective of the structured and facilitated design of Serendis mentoring programs. By integrating multiple touch points, guided reflection, targeted goal-setting, and expert facilitation, the programs create the conditions necessary for measurable shifts in confidence, clarity, and leadership capability.

A. Mentees – Confidence and Career Clarity

- Confidence scores rose from 10.28 to 12.21 on a 15-point scale (19% improvement from baseline, $p < 0.001$)
- Career clarity scores increased from 6.79 to 8.51 on a 10-point scale (25% improvement from baseline, $p < 0.001$)

These shifts are significant. Self-confidence has been shown to directly influence performance by enhancing motivation, persistence, and decision-making under pressure. Leaders with higher confidence are more likely to set ambitious goals, maintain resilience in the face of uncertainty, and take calculated risks that foster development and career advancement (Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004).

When participants articulate clear goals and next steps, they do more than plot a path, they shape a professional identity aligned with their values and aspirations. Greco and Kraimer (2019) note that such clarity directs energy toward meaningful progress, improving goal quality and work engagement. Defined career goals act as a motivational anchor, guiding informed decisions and sustained development. In this way, clarity drives self-directed growth, strengthening both individual confidence and an organisation's ability to retain and mobilise purpose driven talent.

Qualitative insights from mentees included:

- Mentees described gaining a deeper sense of self-awareness, confidence, and resilience; empowering them to better navigate challenges.
- Structured goal-setting helped mentees clarify their career aspirations and make impactful decisions.
- Many reported expanding their networks and exposure to new perspectives, fostering greater collaboration and adaptability.
- Several participants shared that they felt more prepared to take on stretch roles and leadership opportunities following the program.

B. Mentors – Leadership Through Mentoring

- Mentoring capability scores improved from 12.35 to 13.14 (6% improvement from baseline, $p < 0.001$)

Engaging senior leaders as mentors builds coaching capacity and contributes meaningfully to role modelling and psychosocial support. These two mentoring functions have been shown to enhance trust, guidance, and career development. According to Allen, Eby, and Lentz (2006), high-quality mentoring relationships within formal programs are strongly associated with these outcomes.

These relationships support not only the mentee's growth but also promote self-reflection and interpersonal awareness in the mentor, traits that are foundational to effective and empathetic leadership.

Qualitative feedback from mentors revealed:

- Mentors experienced enhanced communication and coaching skills, reinforcing their leadership toolkit.
- Many found the experience personally rewarding, citing fulfilment from contributing to others' development.
- Exposure to mentees' fresh ideas and challenges helped mentors reflect on and refine their own approaches.
- Several noted stronger cross-functional connections and a renewed sense of purpose in their leadership roles.



STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this research go far beyond individual development metrics. By evidencing statistically significant shifts in confidence, clarity, and capability, the study substantiates mentoring as a high-impact lever for strategic priorities from leadership development and engagement to succession and culture.

Where many mentoring programs rely on anecdotal or satisfaction-based feedback, Serendis' data provides something rare: evidence of meaningful developmental shifts as a result of mentoring. This distinction highlights the potential of mentoring to drive authentic behavioural change, moving beyond satisfaction metrics and into measurable impact. It offers HR and OD leaders an opportunity to reflect more critically on the quality and rigour of the mentoring programs they engage in, and to raise the bar for what success looks like in leadership development.

This broader perspective on impact helps contextualise the following benefits observed in mentees and mentors alike, illustrating where structured mentoring environments become enablers of leadership growth, capability building, and long-term organisational value:

Leadership Development

Structured mentoring creates safe, personalised development environments where both mentees and mentors learn through real-world dialogue. Mentees build confidence, resilience, and self-awareness, while mentors enhance their ability to coach, communicate, and model leadership effectively.

Culture & Engagement

The programs cultivate strong cross-functional relationships and a culture of feedback, inclusion, and collaboration. Mentees report feeling more connected and empowered, while mentors describe increased fulfilment and insight from contributing to others' growth.

Succession Planning

With leadership aspiration in decline, Serendis mentoring programs equip emerging talent with the clarity and confidence to take on future roles. Mentors also refine their leadership through reflection, reinforcing organisational continuity and leadership capability.

Executive Impact

Senior leaders gain proximity to emerging talent and insight into contemporary leadership challenges. Mentoring supports reflective practice, empathy, and the ability to lead in adaptive, inclusive ways which are critical in environments marked by change and complexity.

Organisational Outcomes

Serendis mentoring programs contribute to retention, engagement, and leadership pipeline strength. Meta-analyses show that both mentees and mentors experience improved outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and reduced turnover through formal mentoring (Eby et al., 2008; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). Serendis offers HR and OD leaders a structured, scalable framework for talent development that is both practical and strategically aligned.

CONCLUSION

In a time marked by leadership fatigue, shifting workforce expectations, and a deep need for human connection, structured mentoring programs offer more than just support, they deliver transformation. Our research at Serendis confirms what experience has long suggested: that mentoring, when done with intention and structure, drives measurable outcomes that impact the individual, team, and organisational level.

Serendis' evidence-based mentoring programs create a rare convergence of personal development, cultural cohesion, and strategic capability-building. They offer a practical yet powerful way to unlock potential, deepen engagement, and build the kind of leaders organisations need to thrive in complexity.

We invite organisations to consider mentoring not as a 'nice to have', but as a core lever for future-proofing leadership and culture.

Specifically, we encourage you to:

- Position structured mentoring as a cornerstone of your leadership and talent strategy.
- Leverage our tools, including MentorKey, Inclusion360 and Leader360, to scale, support, and track the impact of mentoring at every level.
- Partner with Serendis to co-design mentoring programs that build adaptive leadership capability, strengthen culture, and ensure succession readiness in a changing world.

Together, we can shape the kind of leadership that meets the moment and prepares for what's next. For more information on our programs, please refer to our website: serendis.com.au

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