Knowledge Management as a Driving Force Underpinning the Connect To Success (C2S) Corporate Mentoring Programme

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Abstract: The Connect to Success (C2S) Corporate Mentoring programme[1] is dedicated to advancing gender equality and strengthening Northern Ireland's economy by empowering women-owned businesses (WOBs) through structured, high-impact mentorship from some of the world's most successful companies. The programme enables WOBs to step back from day-to-day operations and focus on strategic growth, supported by subject-matter experts who guide participants in developing and implementing scale-up strategies. A core pillar of the programme is knowledge management and sharing. Drawing on established literature, C2S recognises that organisational growth depends not only on acquiring new knowledge but on effectively converting individual expertise into collective capability. Concepts from Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model (socialisation, externalisation, combination, and internalisation) are reflected in the programme's design. Mentor–mentee sessions create space for tacit knowledge exchange through dialogue and reflection, while structured activities help participants articulate insights, codify learning, and integrate new practices into their businesses. This approach aligns with research showing that knowledge-rich interactions accelerate innovation, improve decision-making and strengthen organisational resilience. Throughout 2025, mentoring teams met monthly for two-hour sessions, in person or virtually, complemented by ongoing communication via digital platforms. These interactions fostered a continuous knowledge-sharing environment, supporting what Davenport and Prusak describe as the "flow of experience, values, and contextual information" essential for effective knowledge management. Participants were encouraged to build internal systems for capturing and reusing knowledge within their teams, reinforcing long-term capability beyond the programme itself. The programme's objective was to identify each business's strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats, and to craft implementable strategies that address challenges and capitalise on opportunities. Through collaborative analysis, reflective practice, and guided experimentation, participants gained critical insights to strengthen and accelerate the growth of their enterprises. The integration of mentoring with evidence-based knowledge-management principles ensured that learning was acquired and embedded, supporting sustainable growth, enhanced leadership confidence and a stronger ecosystem for women-led businesses in Northern Ireland.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Knowledge sharing, Female entrepreneurship, Corporate mentoring

1. Introduction

Knowledge is a strategically significant resource in the modern economy. As noted by Nonaka and Takeuchi, (1995) knowledge is not merely an asset but a dynamic process shaped through continuous social interaction, making knowledge management (KM) an essential organisational capability. In particular, knowledge sharing and the voluntary dissemination of information, insights and expertise, is central to innovation, organisational learning and entrepreneurial growth. In their seminal text, Davenport and Prusak, (1998) emphasise that although firms invest heavily in KM systems, knowledge sharing ultimately depends on people.

The global rise in female entrepreneurship is a critical driver of inclusive economic development. Female entrepreneurship has the potential to reduce gender inequality, stimulate innovation and increase employment generation (Henry et al., 2016). Yet, despite strong evidence of women's entrepreneurial competence, research consistently identifies persistent and systemic barriers that constrain gender specific entrepreneurial activity including restricted access to finance, gendered perceptions of credibility, weaker professional networks and lower access to strategic knowledge resources (Orser and Elliott, 2015). As a result, knowledge sharing and mentoring relationships have become vital for supporting the development and growth trajectories of women-owned businesses (WOBs).

Corporate mentoring represents a high-value mechanism for enabling knowledge flows between large corporations and smaller entrepreneurial firms. Mentoring in entrepreneurship has been shown to strengthen strategic decision-making, enhance entrepreneurial confidence and accelerate firm-level growth (St-Jean and

[1]https://www.ulster.ac.uk/connect-to-success

Audet, 2012). In the context of female entrepreneurship, mentoring also plays a critical role in overcoming gendered institutional barriers, providing access to expertise, networks and legitimacy (Harrison et al., 2019). Corporate mentoring programmes uniquely leverage cross-organisational knowledge transfer, pairing the structured, resource-rich environment of corporations with the agility and innovation of entrepreneurial ventures.

The case study presented in this paper outlines the Connect To Success Corporate (C2S) Mentoring Programme in Northern Ireland (NI), a collaborative venture between C2S and Ulster University. This case provides an exemplary model of knowledge sharing and corporate-entrepreneurial collaboration specifically targeted at supporting women-owned businesses. The programme empowered WOBs through year-long mentoring relationships with senior executives from global corporations, creating a powerful conduit for transferring knowledge, strengthening entrepreneurial capacity and building cross-community networks.

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the intersection between knowledge sharing, female entrepreneurship and corporate mentoring. By bridging academic theory with real-world practice, this paper highlights how knowledge-based collaboration between corporations and entrepreneurs can contribute to inclusive economic development, the empowerment of women and the strengthening of regional entrepreneurial ecosystems. The C2S case study demonstrates how place-based mentoring programmes can unify corporate expertise, academic institutions and women-led innovation to create long-term, sustainable societal and economic impact.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Knowledge Management: Foundations and Theoretical Perspectives

Knowledge management (KM) emerged as a strategic organisational and academic discipline during the 1990s, recognising knowledge as a critical source of competitive advantage. Seminal work by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) positions knowledge management as a dynamic, continuous organisational process rooted in the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge. Their influential SECI model (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, Internalisation) conceptualises knowledge as a spiralling process in which tacit knowledge is shared, articulated into explicit forms, recombined, and re-embedded into organisational practice.

Tacit knowledge, deeply personal, experiential and difficult to formalise, extract and codify, plays a particularly prominent role in Nonaka and Takeuchi's framework. Unlike easily codified, explicit knowledge (held in hard copy and electronic format) tacit knowledge is conveyed through personal interaction, mentorship and shared experience. The emphasis on tacit knowledge highlights the social dimension of learning and the importance of interactive spaces where knowledge workers can exchange practical insights. Nonaka and Takeuchi, (1995) argued that Japanese firms' competitive strength lay in their superior capability to foster interactive, tacit-rich knowledge environments to enable continuous innovation and organisational renewal.

Contemporary studies have extended SECI's relevance beyond large corporations to entrepreneurial contexts. Bandera et al., (2017), for example, demonstrate that the knowledge-creation cycle applies to startups, where entrepreneurs frequently rely on tacit insight, improvisation and iterative learning. Their research reveals that entrepreneurial activities, such as engaging with early customers, rapid prototyping and refining business models and value propositions, correspond closely with SECI processes, particularly socialisation and externalisation. This suggests that KM frameworks traditionally associated with mature organisations can be highly relevant to entrepreneurial ventures striving for innovation and long-term survival (Farnese et al., 2019).

The essence of KM is to get "the right information to the right people at the right time" (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Moffett et al., (2003) flip this by placing 'people' at the heart of KM, outlining that having the right people is crucial, as they will find the right information at the right time. Hence KM is not merely a technical system but a deeply social and behavioural process. Effective KM is underpinned by culture and trust. Knowledge sharing via facilitated interactive structures such as mentoring, communities of practice and cross-functional collaboration provide a bridge to understanding how KM can support entrepreneurial ecosystems.

2.2 Knowledge Sharing: Behavioural, Cultural and Structural Dynamics

At the core of KM lies the process of knowledge sharing defined as "a social interaction in which employees exchange their experiences, skills and knowledge across the firm" (Yeboah, 2023) influenced by motivation, organisational culture, relational ties and trust. Within the SECI model, socialisation and combination are clear manifestations of knowledge-sharing practices, highlighting both tacit and explicit dimensions. Socialisation is achieved through shared experiences, mentoring, and interpersonal dialogue while combination involves integrating explicit knowledge from various sources into new systemic understandings.

Tacit knowledge sharing is particularly dependent on high-trust relationships, shared identity and emotionally supportive environments; conditions that are often cultivated through mentoring relationships led by knowledge activists. Knowledge sharing is shaped by cognitive effort, psychological safety and mentoring support, requiring opportunities for practice and application that can be facilitated through workplace learning, peer collaboration and experiential entrepreneurial training. Through behaviour stimuli, shared knowledge can be embedded as tacit knowledge, becoming part of the cultural 'how it is done here' approach.

In entrepreneurial environments, knowledge sharing becomes even more critical. Startups and small firms typically face resource constraints, making external knowledge acquisition essential for innovation and survival. KM is relevant as a foundational capability for entrepreneurial success where structured knowledge-sharing mechanisms can significantly strengthen new venture creation, development and expansion. In this paper, KM is promoted within female entrepreneurship.

2.3 Female Entrepreneurship: Barriers, Gaps and Support Mechanisms

Female entrepreneurship has gained substantial academic and policy attention as a driver of inclusive economic development. Whilst WoBs have a major impact on the global business world, women continue to face systemic barriers that limit entrepreneurial participation and success. These barriers include restricted access to finance, gendered norms within business ecosystems, limited access to networks and the underrepresentation of women in growth-oriented entrepreneurial sectors. Research has shown that women entrepreneurs often experience gaps in strategic knowledge, financial literacy, market intelligence and scaling expertise. These deficits are not attributed to capability but to structural and institutional inequities that shape women's access to high-value knowledge sources.

Women entrepreneurs especially benefit from hands-on learning, exposure to experienced mentors and access to informal knowledge networks that are often male-dominated in traditional business ecosystems. Interactive, experiential knowledge processes align directly with the needs of women founders seeking to strengthen strategic decision-making, confidence and opportunity recognition. Whilst women founders may lack access to established entrepreneurial networks, structured mentoring programmes can replicate these knowledge-rich environments, offering psychologically safe spaces for dialogue, reflection and collaborative problem-solving to overcome systemic knowledge barriers and foster sustainable business growth.

2.4 Corporate Mentoring as a Mechanism for Knowledge Transfer

Corporate mentoring constitutes a powerful conduit for knowledge transfer, bridging the resource-rich environment of large organisations and the agility and creativity of entrepreneurial ventures. Mentoring facilitates all four SECI processes:

- **Socialisation** through direct interpersonal interaction and shared problem-solving. Socialisation occurs through monthly meetings, informal check-ins, and collaborative discussions with senior executives, enabling mentees to absorb tacit knowledge through observation, dialogue, and role-modeling. Nonaka and Takeuchi emphasise socialisation as the key mechanism for tacit knowledge transfer, explicitly mirroring the mentoring dynamic
- **Externalisation** through mentor-led articulation of insights, strategies, and feedback. Externalisation happens when mentees articulate their challenges, formulate growth strategies and pitch new ideas to mentors. Mentors aid this process by helping entrepreneurs verbalise intuitive insights and convert experiential learning into clearer frameworks
- **Combination** via exposure to corporate processes, frameworks, and industry intelligence. Combination takes place when mentors share corporate tools, frameworks or best practices, which mentees integrate with their existing knowledge
- **Internalisation** through the mentee's application of new knowledge in their venture activities. Internalisation is supported as mentees apply new knowledge to real business decisions. The iterative cycle of receiving guidance, experimenting, and reflecting aligns with the practical learning loop emphasised in SECI theory.

Farnese et al., (2019) found that KM practices enhance organisational performance and underscore the potential impact of structured mentoring interventions for entrepreneurial firms seeking to scale. This aligns with the emerging literature on corporate–entrepreneur partnerships, which emphasises mentoring as a mutually beneficial relationship: entrepreneurs gain access to expertise and legitimacy, while corporations gain exposure to innovative ideas, diverse perspectives, and understanding of the start-up/scale-up demands.

For women entrepreneurs, corporate mentoring offers additional value by addressing gender-based structural barriers, including limited access to strategic networks, biases in investment communities and socio-cultural constraints on credibility. Through exposure to senior corporate leaders, many of whom are influential within broader supply chains, government and industry ecosystems, women founders can enhance both human and social capital, strengthening their ability to overcome systemic barriers. Corporate mentoring programmes can replicate knowledge-intensive environments as seen in high-performing organisations, facilitating the transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge through ongoing, trust-based relationships. Corporate mentoring becomes not only a developmental tool but a structural intervention to address inequality.

The literature provides strong theoretical grounding for the C2S Corporate Mentoring Programme examined in this paper. The programme's design aligns closely with SECI knowledge-creation processes and addresses well-documented knowledge gaps faced by women entrepreneurs.

3. Conceptual Integration: Linking Knowledge Management and Corporate Mentoring

By integrating KM theory and examining the interrelationships between knowledge-sharing, gendered entrepreneurial dynamics and corporate mentoring, a framework emerges that explains how knowledge-driven interventions, such as corporate mentoring programmes, can help address systemic inequalities faced by women entrepreneurs to enable regional economic development. Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) seminal model provides a foundational lens for interpreting entrepreneurial knowledge needs. Their SECI model asserts that organisations create knowledge through a dynamic, spiralling process of tacit–explicit knowledge conversion, fuelled by social interaction, trust and continuous learning.

Entrepreneurship is inherently knowledge intensive. Entrepreneurs must continually interpret market signals, experiment, pivot and develop operational systems. Bandera et al., (2017) demonstrate that these activities inherently map onto SECI processes. Entrepreneurial growth is deeply dependent on environments that facilitate iterative knowledge creation and implementation. Yet, many entrepreneurs, particularly women, lack access to such environments. Structural barriers such as limited access to high-level networks, gendered bias in investment ecosystems and unequal access to experienced advisors restrict the flow of tacit and strategic knowledge essential for effective opportunity recognition, innovation and scaling.

For women entrepreneurs, knowledge sharing is particularly valuable due to persistent gender-based barriers. Women often have fewer opportunities to join strategic networks where tacit business intelligence is exchanged, tending to spend their time focused 'in the business' rather than 'on it', adopting a more strategic, high-level position. Women need to get off the dance floor and onto the balcony, to adopt a helicopter view of their business position, encouraging them to consider their access to market insights, scaling strategies and confidence-building social capital, all of which are critical for venture growth. Knowledge sharing through mentoring relationships thus becomes a gender-equity mechanism: it creates alternate pathways to strategic knowledge for women who may otherwise be excluded from informal or male-dominated knowledge networks.

This gap creates a strong conceptual foundation for targeted interventions that expand entrepreneurs' access to high-quality knowledge resources. Corporate mentoring serves precisely this function by creating structured cross-organisational spaces where knowledge creation processes can occur intensively and intentionally. Corporate mentoring does not simply transfer knowledge; it alters the entrepreneur's knowledge landscape broadening their strategic horizon and increasing their legitimacy within complex business ecosystems.

3.1 Implications for Corporate Mentoring Programme Design

The conceptual integration highlights several design principles for effective corporate mentoring interventions:

- Prioritise tacit knowledge transfer: As tacit knowledge underpins entrepreneurial innovation, mentoring activities should emphasise live interaction, shadowing, scenario analysis and reflective dialogue
- Embed socialisation opportunities: Informal, relational interactions are as important as formal mentoring sessions for knowledge creation
- Support externalisation activities: Encourage Entrepreneurs to articulate insights, draft strategy documents and pitch new concepts, supported by mentors who help clarify and structure ideas

- Facilitate explicit knowledge sharing: Access to corporate frameworks, analytics tools, industry reports and processes
- Encourage iterative application: Mentors should support action learning, ensuring mentees internalise knowledge through experimentation and implementation.

These principles align closely with the structure and approach of the Connect To Success (C2S) Corporate Mentoring Programme.

4. Case Study: Connect To Success (C2S) Corporate Mentoring Programme

4.1 Introduction to the Case Study

The Connect to Success (C2S) Corporate Mentoring Programme represents a comprehensive, knowledge-driven intervention designed to empower women entrepreneurs NI by linking them with senior executives from leading global corporations. Established through a partnership involving Ulster University, industry partners and government stakeholders, the programme aims to simultaneously address gender inequality, regional economic development and cross-community cohesion.

The programme was officially launched on 2 October 2024 at Ulster University, with significant political and institutional support, including contributions from the US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland, Joseph P. Kennedy III, the First and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland and senior Ulster University leadership. This level of visibility positions C2S not only as a business-support initiative, but as a strategic socio-economic intervention aligned with broader regional development priorities. The case study examines C2S through the lens of knowledge management (KM) theory, particularly the SECI model, demonstrating how the programme operationalises knowledge creation, transfer and embedding processes for the benefit of WOBs.

4.2 Programme Vision, Mission and Strategic Rationale

The C2S programme is grounded in a mission to combat gender inequality, support women entrepreneurs, bridge religious and community divides and strengthen the NI economy through knowledge-centred development support. The C2S programme specifically seeks to empower WOBs by giving them structured access to subject matter experts from some of the largest and most successful corporations in the world. These experts enable WOBs to work 'on' their businesses rather than being consumed by day-to-day operations, providing strategic insight and developmental capacity.

C2S is also intentionally aligned with global policy frameworks. The programme directly supports all five dimensions of the UN Vision 2030 (people, prosperity, planet, partnership and peace) making it not only a regional initiative but an internationally aligned model of inclusive development. From a KM perspective, this strategic rationale highlights a purposeful effort to address gendered knowledge gaps and structural barriers faced by female entrepreneurs. By facilitating access to corporate knowledge systems, networks and tacit expertise, C2S directly targets the systemic forms of exclusion described in KM and gender literature.

4.3 Duration, Format and Engagement Model

The C2S Corporate Mentoring Programme spans 12 months, running from January to December 2025. Each participating WOB is paired with a corporate mentoring team composed of 3–5 executives or managers with complementary areas of expertise. Mentoring teams meet monthly with their assigned WOB for structured two-hour sessions**,** supplemented by ongoing informal communication throughout each month.

Meetings take place either in person or virtually, enabling flexibility while maintaining continuity of engagement. The programme encourages mentors to serve not only as advisors but as trusted thought partners, providing challenge, accountability, advocacy and a psychologically safe space for creativity and problem-solving. This role is explicitly aligned with many of the SECI processes described earlier, particularly socialisation (tacit transfer), externalisation (clarifying business challenges) and internalisation (support applying new ideas).

4.4 Eligibility and Selection Criteria

To be eligible, businesses must be at least 50% women-owned**,** located in NI, and either:

- have reached £200,000 revenue in a previous fiscal year;
- be on track to reach this revenue in the current year; or
- demonstrate strong potential for growth and sustainability (with specific criteria such as customer acquisition rates, scalability, partnership development, and financial health).

These eligibility thresholds ensure that participating firms are positioned for scale, an important aspect of achieving impact through knowledge-led mentoring.

4.5 4.5 Mentee and Mentor Organisations

The mentees who participated in the 2025 NI programme, selected following an intensive review and evaluation process with a panel of business experts, are:

Table 1: C2S Mentees

Belfast Skin Clinic	http://belfastskinclinic.com
BellaMoon	https://bellamoon.co
Born and Bred	https://wearebornandbred.com
Encom Energy	https://encomenergy.co.uk
The Grand Scale	https://thegrandscale.com
Inclutech	https://inclutech.co
Insula Wellbeing	https://www.insulawellbeing.co.uk
Itus Secure Technologies Ltd	https://itusprotect.io
LMD Beauty	https://www.lmdbeauty.com
Needi Ltd	https://needigifts.com
Refresh Debt	https://refreshdebt.co.uk
Right Revenue	https://www.rightrevenue.co.uk
Seedling Education	https://seedlinglearning.com

The 2025 mentoring cohort includes some of the world's leading corporations, namely, AFLAC, AIG, Coca-Cola, EY, Goldman Sachs, Google, Irish Life, Kainos, KPMG, PwC, Seagate and Stripe.

These firms bring extensive tacit and explicit knowledge from global operations, advanced supply chain ecosystems, corporate governance, finance, digital innovation, and customer experience design. Their participation represents a unique opportunity for WOBs to access cross-organizational knowledge traditionally unavailable to small firms. The programme's integrative governance structure, involving an academic institution, corporate partners, angel investor networks and government stakeholders, exemplifies a triple-helix model (academia–industry–government) supportive of entrepreneurial ecosystem development.

4.6 Knowledge Transfer Mechanisms Embedded in C2S

The C2S programme incorporates multiple knowledge-creation and knowledge-sharing mechanisms aligned with KM theory (see Table 2):

Table 2: C2S to KM alignment

SECI model construct	C2S application	KM implementation
Socialisation: Building Tacit Knowledge Through Interaction	monthly mentoring meetings informal communications relationship-building events, such as the launch reception and orientation training cross-community networking events bringing mentors, mentees, and stakeholders together	Critical tacit knowledge flow - fostering trust, shared experiences and unstructured dialogue
Externalisation: Turning Intuition into Strategy	Mentoring sessions encourage WOBs to articulate problems, clarify goals, and convert tacit insights into explicit business strategies or frameworks	Tacit insight is codified into business plans, capability roadmaps and performance metrics. Mentors guide this translation, helping entrepreneurs articulate and refine their thinking
Combination: Integrating Corporate Tools and Best Practices	Corporate partners share processes, analytical frameworks, governance tools and documentation formats that enable WOBs to integrate explicit knowledge into their operations	Explicit knowledge is recombined to create greater insight. Integration is strongly associated with improvements in organisational

SECI model construct	C2S application	KM implementation
		performance and innovativeness (Farnese et al., (2019)
Internalisation: Applying Learning to Real Business Challenges	By applying new knowledge directly within their businesses over the programme's 12-month period, mentees internalise learning, reinforcing new competencies and embedding knowledge into daily practice	Explicit knowledge becomes part of the entrepreneur's experiential base and decision-making routines, embedded in routine, processes and culture

4.7 Cross-community and Societal Impact

A distinctive dimension of C2S is its aim to bridge NI's religious divide by fostering collaboration across different community backgrounds. WOBs from diverse religious backgrounds can connect around shared goals, challenging stereotypes and building mutual understanding. Through networking and collaboration, C2S supports cross-community cohesion and peacebuilding goals, aligning entrepreneurship development with broader societal objectives in NI. This aspect expands C2S beyond being a knowledge-transfer programme but a socio-economic peacebuilding mechanism, an innovative intersection of KM, entrepreneurship and community development.

An all-Ireland perspective was evident in the closing event, held at Stripe, Dublin. All participants, and a number of VIP guest, attending a fabulous award ceremony in December 2025 to make the success completion of the programme.

4.8 Programme Evaluation

Every three months a formal evaluation was undertaken with all mentors/mentees via an online survey to support formative ad-hoc and conversational feedback. Evaluation criteria for the C2S programme included:

- Mentee satisfaction scores
- Mentor satisfaction scores
- Improvements in business skills and strategy capability
- Business performance indicators, including revenue growth, profitability, customer base expansion, and milestone achievements
- Strategic connections formed, including customers, partners, and investors
- Long-term mentor–mentee relationships
- Programme retention rates
- Documented success stories
- Future commitment from mentors.

These metrics reflect a blended KM–entrepreneurship evaluation framework that assesses both knowledge transfer outcomes (e.g., skills, strategy development) and business performance results.

Qualitative comments were positive and inspiring, see Table 3:

Table 3: Qualitative Feedback

Pre-participation
"This program is such an incredible opportunity to gain hands-on guidance from leaders who understand the challenges of scaling a business in a rapidly changing sector. I'm particularly excited to learn how to strengthen our strategic planning and operational processes as we grow. I believe this experience will be invaluable in positioning [company name] as a leader in renewable energy, helping us drive even greater impact for communities across both NI and the Republic of Ireland, making sustainable living more accessible for all."
"We are thrilled to have been selected for the Connect to Success Corporate Mentoring Programme. This opportunity comes at a pivotal time for [company name], as we seek to expand our strategic partnerships, build a scalable infrastructure, and optimise our operations to meet rising demand. Through the mentorship and insights of seasoned corporate experts, we aim to refine our growth strategy, enter new markets, and strengthen our team for business success. We believe this programme will empower us to capture high-value opportunities and extend our impact, ultimately helping thousands of early-stage ventures succeed on a global scale."
"After 4 years of sustained organic growth, this programme will provide an excellent opportunity for us to put the accelerator on that growth and allow us to claim a larger market share in the luxury [company] market, with a particular emphasis on growth within Europe. Women are still underrepresented in business in the UK, particularly in NI, which had the lowest percentage of newly incorporated female-led companies in the UK, at 17%, and just 26% of NI entrepreneurs are female. I see the C2S Corporate Mentoring Programme as an opportunity to work with market leaders to strengthen both my position and that of my fellow cohort in the business market."

Post-participation
"The [mentor name] team have been instrumental in helping me position [company name] for scale and growth. Our goal is to ensure that we have foundations in place that will help us scale (short-term and mid-term goal) and then ensure that we are in a position to be attractive for acquisition in 2-5 years. The progress we have made has been phenomenal and I couldn't have got to this place without them. I am working with 6 'C' Level team members and all of them individually have had a massive, positive impact on not only my business plan but my way of thinking. As individuals they have gone above and beyond and I feel incredibly privileged to have had this opportunity - thank you"
"I did not expect this level of engagement or commitment from a business and more importantly, individuals who do so much with so little to gain. The support has been beyond my expectations"
"This is the one and only mentor programme that actually feels like it is driving us forward and not just about talking."

4.9 Success Factors and Value Proposition

C2S outlines several proven success factors, such as:

- strengthened entrepreneurial ecosystems
- enhanced collaboration among women founders
- increased strategic capability and innovation
- development of formal and informal support networks
- recognition by international bodies for diversity and inclusion leadership.

This evidence positions C2S as a validated, scalable model for knowledge-driven female entrepreneurship support. The C2S programme exemplifies applied KM in action. Each component (mentor selection, structured engagements, tacit interactions, explicit knowledge sharing, action learning, and reflective evaluation) mirrors the SECI knowledge-creation cycle. Additionally, the programme addresses gender-specific structural barriers by facilitating access to high-value knowledge sources and creating equitable knowledge environments previously inaccessible to many WOBs. Through its integrated design, C2S supports not only business growth but also generational empowerment, economic inclusion and societal transformation in NI.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the intersection of KM**,** knowledge sharing**,** female entrepreneurship and corporate mentoring, demonstrating how structured knowledge-transfer interventions can help overcome systemic barriers that restrict women's entrepreneurial growth. The SECI model provides a robust conceptual foundation for understanding how knowledge is created, shared and embedded within entrepreneurial development processes. The emphasis on tacit knowledge creation and transfer and social interaction aligns with the factors underpinning effective mentoring relationships. The theoretical foundation provided by Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model highlights the centrality of tacit knowledge, interpersonal interaction and iterative learning in entrepreneurial capability building. Tacit knowledge transfer, achieved through mentoring, collaboration and shared experience, is essential for entrepreneurial decision-making, market insight generation and innovation.

The entrepreneurial landscape is not equally accessible. Women continue to face exclusion from business networks, mentoring relationships and institutional spaces where high-value tacit knowledge circulates. These gendered knowledge asymmetries directly impact their ability to scale ventures, secure investment and potentially navigate strategic complexity. As WOBs rely heavily on social interaction, articulation and experiential learning, without access to such knowledge processes women face systemic disadvantage in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

It is within this context that the C2S Corporate Mentoring Programme emerges as an innovative and highly relevant knowledge-based intervention. Designed explicitly to empower women entrepreneurs in NI, the programme provides structured, year-long relationships with senior executives from leading global corporations, offering access to expertise, strategic thinking, corporate tools and professional networks that would otherwise remain out of reach. The programme's operational design (monthly two-hour mentoring sessions supplemented by informal engagement) mirrors the SECI knowledge-creation cycle, supporting socialisation, externalisation, combination, and internalisation processes fundamental to knowledge-driven growth.

The programme also addresses broader socio-economic and political objectives. C2S contributes to gender equality, regional economic development and cross-community relationship building, representing a novel application of KM theory to peacebuilding and social cohesion. C2S benefits from the support of globally recognised corporations such as Google, Stripe, Goldman Sachs and AIG, whose participation enhances the programme's credibility and ensures access to world-class knowledge resources. Corporate mentors bring not only technical insight but deeply embedded tacit knowledge around leadership, supply chains, risk management and strategic planning, creating a high-value learning environment for WOBs. The programme's comprehensive evaluation framework, including metrics such as business growth, strategic connections, satisfaction scores and long-term mentoring relationships, ensures rigorous assessment of impact and informs continuous improvement.

The case study shows that C2S is not merely a mentoring programme but a knowledge ecosystem intervention that operationalises KM theory in a real-world context. Its integration of universities, corporations, angel investors and government stakeholders follows a triple-helix model of innovation, positioning C2S as a catalyst for systemic change within NI's entrepreneurial landscape. The C2S programme exemplifies how structured knowledge-sharing interventions can help women overcome institutional barriers, build strategic confidence and contribute meaningfully to economic and societal progress. Through sustained knowledge exchange, cross-community collaboration and strong multi-stakeholder partnerships, C2S offers a replicable model for regions seeking to advance inclusive entrepreneurship and harness the transformative potential of women's economic participation.

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