Advancing New Zealand's Tech Talent through Powerful Mentorship:

A Strategic Imperative for Mid-Career Professionals.

Thomas Hadley, July 2025.

Data Summary

- The tech sector employed 121,630 people in 2023, adding 3,560 jobs.
- 97,070 ICT professionals worked across all sectors in 2022.
- The sector is projected to contribute NZ$23 billion to GDP by 2025.
- An estimated 19,000 digital roles will remain vacant by 2025.
- Tech exports reached NZ$10.7 billion in the latest year.
- Employment in tech has seen a 10.4% compound annual growth rate since 2016.
- Mentorship can reduce turnover by 25–30% and improve promotion rates 5x.
- Women comprise only 29% of NZ's digital tech workforce.
- Mentees are 5x more likely to be promoted and 75% of executives cite mentors as key to their success.
- Every new tech job creates 4.8 additional jobs across the wider economy.

Executive Summary

The New Zealand tech sector stands as a vibrant and rapidly expanding pillar of the national economy, demonstrating consistent growth and significant contributions to GDP and job creation. Despite this robust expansion, the industry faces persistent challenges related to talent demand and skills shortages, particularly concerning the advancement of mid-career professionals into highly skilled and leadership roles. This report presents a compelling case for a targeted mentorship program as a strategic and timely intervention. Such an initiative is designed to foster career advancement, enhance talent retention, and promote greater diversity and inclusion within the tech workforce. By addressing the specific needs of mid-career professionals, the proposed program can unlock substantial quantifiable benefits for individuals, their employing organizations, and the broader New Zealand economy, thereby providing a strong rationale for its establishment and investment.

New Zealand's Tech Sector: Growth, Demand, and Economic Contribution

Overview of Sector Size and Growth

New Zealand's tech sector is a dynamic and rapidly expanding component of the national economy, exhibiting consistent and robust growth. In 2023, the digital tech sector comprised 24,306 firms, marking a 5.3% growth from the previous year, which underscores its robust expansion even amidst broader economic fluctuations.[1] This growth builds upon a long-term trend, with the number of tech firms in New Zealand increasing at approximately three percent per year since 2000, and digital technology firms growing at an even faster rate of four percent annually.[2]

The sector's employment figures further highlight its vitality. In 2023, the tech sector employed a total of 121,630 people, contributing 3,560 new jobs to the economy.[1] This follows a strong performance in 2022, when the tech sector created 6,880 new jobs, representing a 6.2% year-on-year growth and

accounting for 4.1% of the total New Zealand workforce.[2] The continuous expansion of the tech sector has generated a substantial number of employment opportunities, with 43,377 new jobs created between 2000 and 2022.[2]

Beyond the core tech sector, the demand for tech skills permeates the entire economy. In 2022, there were 97,070 ICT professionals working across all sectors in New Zealand, marking a 5% increase year-on-year, or 4,224 new jobs.[2] This broader figure is particularly significant as it represents a much larger pool of professionals who could benefit from tech-specific career support, extending beyond those directly employed by dedicated tech firms. Growth in ICT professionals is concentrated in high-demand roles such as computer programmers and software engineers, numbering 34,341, followed by ICT managers (project and product managers) at 15,275, indicating specific areas where career advancement and specialized expertise are crucial.[2]

Economic Contribution and Strategic Importance

The tech sector is a significant driver of New Zealand's economic prosperity and diversification. It contributed 7billion to the New Zealand economy in2021 [3]andisprojectedtocontributeamassiveNZ23 billion to GDP by 2025.[4] This projected contribution notably surpasses the primary sector's anticipated NZ$16.4 billion [5], underscoring the tech sector's increasing importance to the national economy. This impressive growth is underpinned by a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.4% in the digital technologies sector since 2016, vastly outpacing the rest of the economy.[3]

The sector's global competitiveness is evident in its exports, which reached NZ$10.7 billion last year.[5] Its growth is also inherently sustainable, with limited reliance on natural resources and physical transportation, aligning with national goals for a high-wage, low-emissions economy.[3] Careers within the digital technologies sector are characterized by high wages, with median salaries approximately twice the national equivalent, offering substantial opportunities to enhance community prosperity and lift the overall standard of living for New Zealanders.[3]

Persistent Talent Demand and Skills Shortages

Despite the overall job growth, New Zealand faces a persistent and "unparalleled" tech skills shortage.[6] This critical gap is highlighted by a projection of around 19,000 vacant digital roles by 2025.[5] The demand for senior specialists in emerging areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, and

cloud computing is particularly acute.[4, 6, 7] For example, the demand for software engineers alone saw a 22% increase in just two years.[4] This shortage is further compounded by a "mismatch between candidate skills and employer needs," which, despite an increase in job applicants, leads to lengthened hiring times.[8]

Historically, immigration played a significant role in filling high-paid tech roles, with as many as 4,500 such roles filled annually pre-COVID.[6] However, there is a growing imperative to nurture and advance local talent to build a sustainable domestic pipeline and reduce reliance on external sources.[6, 7] The decline in students studying math and technology subjects is also a concerning trend, resulting in fewer young people entering the workforce and exacerbating the talent pipeline issue.[7]

Broader Implications of Workforce Dynamics

The distinction between "tech professionals within the tech sector" and "ICT professionals working across all sectors" reveals a much larger addressable market for career advancement initiatives than might be initially perceived. While 23,433 individuals were identified as tech professionals within the defined tech sector in 2022, a significantly larger figure of 97,070 ICT professionals were working across all sectors in the same year.[2] This substantial difference indicates that technology skills are no longer confined to traditional tech companies but are integrated across diverse industries such as finance, healthcare, and agriculture. This pervasive demand for tech skills in non-tech companies suggests that mid-career individuals in these broader economic segments often lack internal, tech-specific mentorship structures. A mentorship program targeting "tech professionals" should therefore consider this wider ecosystem. By doing so, it can significantly expand its potential reach and impact, uplifting tech capability across the entire New Zealand economy, not just within the tech sector itself, leading to broader national productivity gains.

The combination of persistent skills shortages, high demand for senior roles, and the historical reliance on immigration creates a strong strategic imperative for New Zealand to invest heavily in upskilling and advancing its existing domestic tech talent. Reports indicate an "unparalleled tech skills shortage" [6], with over 50% of new tech roles historically filled through immigration.[7] Concurrently, projections show significant growth in "highly-skilled occupations," including ICT managers, through 2028.[9] Relying predominantly on external talent is not a sustainable long-term strategy for building

national capability and retaining economic value. Therefore, a mentorship program that strategically focuses on advancing mid-career professionals directly addresses this national strategic need. By building a robust, resilient domestic talent pipeline, the program can reduce reliance on external sources and ensure that the economic benefits of the growing tech sector are retained and amplified within New Zealand, contributing to a more self-sufficient and innovative economy.

Furthermore, the observation that "each new tech job creates 4.8 additional jobs" underscores a significant ripple effect of talent investment on broader job creation and overall economic growth.[4, 5] If a mentorship program successfully helps a mid-career professional advance into a senior or leadership role, it not only opens up their previous position for another professional but also contributes to the overall growth and innovation of the tech sector, which is already expanding at a 10.4% compound annual growth rate.[3] This growth, in turn, generates nearly five times the number of jobs in the wider economy. This positions a mentorship program not merely as a professional development initiative, but as a direct contributor to national economic expansion and diversification, offering a compelling argument for government or industry sponsorship based on macro-economic benefits.

Table 1: Key Metrics of New Zealand's Tech Sector (2022-2025 Projections)

Metric	Value (Source)
Total Tech Sector Employment (2022)	118,070 people [2]
Total Tech Sector Employment (2023)	121,630 people [1]
New Jobs Created (2022)	6,880 jobs [2]
New Jobs Created (2023)	3,560 jobs [1]
Total ICT Professionals (all sectors, 2022)	97,070 people [2]
Projected Vacant Digital Roles (2025)	~19,000 roles [4, 5]
Tech Sector GDP Contribution (2021)	$7 billion [3]

Tech Sector GDP Contribution (2025 Projection)	NZ$23 billion [4, 5]
Tech Exports (latest available)	NZ$10.7 billion (last year) [5]

The Mid-Career Tech Professional in NZ: Challenges and Untapped Potential

Defining the Mid-Career Professional

Mid-career professionals are typically individuals who have progressed beyond entry-level roles and are actively seeking to advance to the next stage of their careers, often targeting leadership or highly specialized senior positions. This demographic generally possesses a solid foundation of knowledge and skills, having accumulated several years of practical experience. However, they may experience a sense of being "stuck" or unfulfilled in their current roles, seeking new challenges and opportunities for further advancement.[10] The proposed program's target audience is explicitly defined as "mid-level career individuals who need mentorship and role models to advance their careers," emphasizing a strategic focus on this group rather than entry-level or highly senior professionals [User Query]. This aligns with existing programs like TechWomen NZ's "Career Developer" (4-8 years experience) and "Career Establisher" (9+ years experience) categories, which cater to similar experience levels.[11]

Specific Challenges Faced by this Demographic

Mid-career tech professionals in New Zealand encounter several distinct challenges that can impede their career progression and overall satisfaction. A primary challenge, as highlighted in the program's foundational discussions, is the absence of adequate mentorship and accessible role models. This lack of guidance is crucial for individuals navigating complex career paths, identifying their niche, and understanding the unwritten rules of industry progression [User Query].

Career progression barriers are also frequently encountered. Mid-career professionals often face hurdles in achieving economic mobility and advancement, primarily due to a "lack of access to education and training opportunities" that would enable them to develop new, in-demand skills.[10]

This deficiency can lead to slow career progression and, consequently, higher turnover rates, as a significant portion of IT workers (59% in 2023) consider job changes due to concerns about underutilized skills and a strong desire for career development.[7]

An often-overlooked yet significant challenge, particularly prevalent in the tech industry, is age discrimination. The tech world frequently values youth, and older professionals may be unfairly perceived as less innovative, less adaptable, or less technologically savvy. This can limit their opportunities for advancement or even lead to job loss, resulting in a substantial loss of valuable talent and experience for the industry.[10]

Furthermore, work-life balance and family obligations present considerable limitations. Mid-career professionals, especially those with significant responsibilities such as caring for children or aging parents, often face constraints on their flexibility and availability. This can hinder their ability to pursue additional education, training, or networking opportunities necessary for career progression.[10]

Finally, the rapid pace of technological evolution necessitates continuous updating of skills. Mid-career workers may struggle to keep pace with emerging technologies and methodologies, requiring ongoing upskilling or reskilling to remain competitive and relevant.[10] The "skills gap widening" in New Zealand tech, with new roles emerging faster than the market can fill them, underscores this urgent need for continuous learning and adaptation.[8]

The Market Opportunity for Targeted Support

The challenges faced by mid-career tech professionals in New Zealand also present a significant market opportunity for targeted support. The program's initial discussions, particularly insights from Pip, highlighted a "significant market opportunity for mentorship and role modelling at the mid-level career stage," indicating a recognized high demand for support to help these individuals "break through to the next career level" [User Query].

This demand is substantiated by broader labor market projections. The demand for highly-skilled occupations, including managers and professionals, is projected to account for 58% of total employment growth in New Zealand through 2028, with an average annual increase of 22,800 workers.[9] This projection directly aligns with the program's goal of advancing mid-career professionals into leadership and specialized senior roles. The competitive

average salaries for experienced tech professionals, ranging from NZ92,000toNZ120,000, with specialized roles reaching up to NZD 185,000 [5], further underscore the strong economic incentive for individuals to advance their careers, making a targeted mentorship program highly attractive and valuable.

Deeper Understanding of Mid-Career Barriers

The low investment in upskilling existing staff directly contributes to slow career progression and higher turnover rates, as evidenced by 59% of IT workers considering job changes due to underutilized skills.[7] This situation indicates that the problem in the tech sector is not solely about attracting new talent, but critically about retaining the valuable experience already within the workforce. When mid-career professionals feel stagnant or perceive a lack of investment in their development, they are highly likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. A mentorship program, by providing structured development, career guidance, and access to new skills, directly addresses this retention challenge. This means the program is not just about individual advancement; it is about safeguarding organizational knowledge, reducing costly employee churn for New Zealand tech companies, and stabilizing the workforce.

Age discrimination in the tech industry is not merely a social issue but an economic one, leading to a "loss of valuable talent and experience".[10] The tech world often values youth, and older professionals may not be perceived as a good fit for startup or high-growth tech companies.[10] This creates a paradox: the industry needs experienced leaders and specialists, especially with a "senior specialist shortage" in critical, emerging areas like AI and cybersecurity [4, 7], yet inherent biases may push them out or hinder their advancement. A mentorship program, particularly one focused on mid-career and senior professionals, can actively counter this by valuing and leveraging the experience of seasoned professionals as mentors. It can also provide a structured pathway for mid-career individuals to overcome perceived age-related barriers through targeted guidance, advocacy, and skill updates. This transforms a potential weakness, which is ageism-driven talent loss, into a strategic strength by retaining, upskilling, and utilizing seasoned expertise.

The confluence of mid-career professionals feeling "unfulfilled or stuck," facing significant barriers to upskilling, and potentially experiencing ageism creates a phenomenon that can be described as a "mid-career squeeze." This situation not only impacts individual well-being and career satisfaction but also represents a significant underutilization of valuable human capital for the broader New Zealand tech economy. Individuals at this stage are mature in experience and capability but are often blocked from further growth and impact due to a "lack of access to education and training opportunities" [10] and

"slow career progression".[7] The economic cost of this "squeeze" is multifaceted, encompassing not just employee turnover but also lost innovation, reduced productivity from disengaged employees, and a failure to fully capitalize on the potential contributions of experienced individuals. A well-designed mentorship program directly addresses this by providing the necessary support, guidance, and opportunities to unlock this untapped potential, transforming a liability (stagnant talent) into a significant asset for the national tech ecosystem.

Table 2: Key Challenges Faced by Mid-Career Tech Professionals in NZ

Challenge	Description & Evidence
Lack of Mentorship & Role Models	Primary challenge identified in program discussions; crucial for navigating industry and finding niche [User Query].
Barriers to Upskilling/Training	"Lack of access to education and training opportunities" hinders economic mobility.[10] Low investment in upskilling leads to slow progression.[7]
Age Discrimination	Prevalent in tech, where youth is highly valued; older professionals perceived as less innovative, limiting opportunities and leading to loss of valuable talent.[10]
Work-Life Balance & Family Obligations	Limits flexibility and availability for career development due to caring responsibilities.[10]
Feeling Stuck/Unfulfilled	Mid-career professionals may question choices, feel unfulfilled, or see roles changing, needing new skills to adapt.[10]
High Turnover Risk (Underutilized Skills)	59% of IT workers in 2023 considering job changes due to concerns about underutilized skills and desire for career development.[7]

The Transformative Impact of Mentorship and Networking

Empirical Evidence of Mentorship's Impact on Career Progression and Retention

Mentorship is not merely a beneficial perk but a critical component of career development, demonstrably preventing stagnation and accelerating success in the fast-paced world of technology.[12] Its impact is quantifiable across several key metrics.

Regarding promotion and advancement, studies consistently show a strong, positive correlation between participation in mentorship programs and career progression. Employees who have mentors are significantly more likely to be promoted; some studies suggest they are five times more likely than those who do not have mentors.[13, 14] For instance, a Wharton study found that 25% of mentees experienced a salary grade change, compared to only 5% of employees in a control group who did not participate. The same study revealed that mentees were promoted five times more often than non-participants, and mentors themselves were promoted six times more often.[13] Furthermore, a significant majority, 75% of executives, credit their mentors for helping them reach their current positions.[14]

Mentorship programs are also highly effective in improving employee retention rates. Retention rates were substantially higher for mentees (72%) and mentors (69%) compared to employees who did not participate in a program (49%).[13] Companies that have implemented mentorship programs have reported significant decreases in turnover, with one Fortune 500 company seeing a 25% decrease and a technology company reporting a 30% decrease in turnover rates.[14]

Beyond career trajectory, mentorship positively impacts job satisfaction and engagement. Employees with mentors report higher levels of job satisfaction and demonstrate increased engagement in their work.[14, 15] A compelling 94% of employees state they would stay longer at a company if offered opportunities for learning and growth [13], a benefit directly provided and facilitated by mentorship. For younger generations, specifically Millennials and Gen Z, having a mentor makes them 21% to 23% more likely to report being satisfied with their current job, compared to those without a mentor.[13, 16] Moreover, 89% of women who participated in mentoring reported it as impactful.[17]

Finally, mentors play a crucial role in skill development and confidence building. They help mentees identify and address skill gaps, guide them in choosing and mastering relevant technology stacks, and provide essential confidence building and reassurance to overcome challenges like impostor

syndrome.[12, 15] This is particularly vital in the tech sector where skills can rapidly become obsolete, necessitating continuous learning and adaptation.[12]

The Role of Networking in Fostering Connections and Industry Insights

Networking events, as proposed by the program's discussions, are an indispensable component for facilitating connections among industry professionals. These events provide invaluable opportunities for individuals to build relationships, exchange knowledge, and gain deeper insights into industry trends and opportunities [User Query]. In a dynamic sector like technology, expanding one's professional network is crucial for career growth and staying current with evolving demands.

Mentors often act as conduits, introducing mentees to valuable industry connections and expanding their professional networks. This can directly lead to new job opportunities, collaborations, and accelerated career growth.[15] The New Zealand tech community is described as "super welcoming and collaborative, with tons of meetups and networking events happening all the time" [5], providing a fertile and supportive environment for such initiatives. By integrating networking events, the program can leverage this existing vibrant community to further enhance the professional development of mid-career tech professionals.

Specific Benefits for Women in Tech

The tech industry in New Zealand faces a significant gender imbalance and high attrition rates for women, making targeted mentorship particularly impactful for this demographic. Women constitute only 29% of New Zealand's digital technology workforce [18] and a lower 23% of professional IT roles overall.[19] This significant underrepresentation, coupled with the alarming global statistic that women leave tech at nearly twice the rate of men (a 45% higher rate) [18], highlights a critical and urgent need for targeted support.

Mentorship has been shown to significantly boost retention for women in tech. Mentored women are 77% more likely to remain in tech roles after three years compared to their non-mentored peers.[17, 20] Leading tech companies like Google and IBM have reported increased retention rates among women

after implementing dedicated mentorship programs.[20] Furthermore, formal mentorship programs contribute to greater diversity in leadership, showing a 20% higher representation of diverse employees in leadership roles.[17]

Mentorship provides a safe and supportive space for women to navigate male-dominated environments.[17] It is instrumental in building confidence, especially given that men often rate their performance 33% higher than equally performing women.[17] Mentorship also helps combat the sense of isolation often caused by "bro culture" in the tech sector.[17] A great mentor helps break down self-doubt and encourages women to proactively seize new opportunities, rather than waiting until they feel "100% ready".[21]

Moreover, mentorship, particularly when integrated with flexible work policies (which New Zealand tech employers have largely retained, unlike some other sectors [18]), can help women balance caregiving responsibilities with career progression. This is crucial for mitigating the "motherhood penalty," which significantly widens the labor force participation gap for mothers.[18, 22] By supporting women returning to work after taking time off for children, mentorship can help them re-enter the industry and advance their careers, addressing a specific challenge identified in the program's initial discussions [User Query].

Strategic Advantages of Mentorship

The data indicating that companies with established mentoring programs have "profits that were 18% better than average," while those without were "45% worse than the average" [13], fundamentally shifts the perception of mentorship from a soft human resources benefit to a tangible business investment with a clear Return on Investment (ROI). This direct comparison of profit margins between companies with and without mentoring programs demonstrates a significant financial implication. This elevates the conversation beyond the qualitative benefits of "it's good for people" to the quantitative argument of "it's good for the bottom line." For stakeholders primarily focused on financial performance and organizational sustainability, this is an extremely powerful argument. It suggests that the cost of implementing a mentorship program is not merely offset by reduced turnover, but actively contributes to enhanced revenue and overall profitability, positioning it as a strategic advantage in a competitive market.

The observation that women often hesitate to seize opportunities, waiting until they feel "100% ready" compared to their male counterparts who "go for it anyway" [21], coupled with the statistic that men rate their performance 33% higher than equally performing women [17], points to a significant "confidence gap" that mentorship is uniquely positioned to address. This indicates that the barrier to advancement for women is not solely about technical skills or qualifications, but also about self-belief, self-promotion, and proactive career management. Mentorship, by providing "reassurance and confidence-building" [15], a "safe space for honest conversations" [21], and encouraging "self-advocacy" [17], directly tackles this psychological barrier. Addressing the confidence gap is crucial for unlocking the full potential of mid-career women, enabling them to step into leadership roles and contribute more effectively, thereby enhancing diversity at senior levels where the gender gap is "massive".[18]

Beyond just retaining women, mentorship programs are shown to boost "minority representation at the management level by 9% to 24%" and improve promotion and retention rates for minorities and women by 15% to 38%.[13] This indicates a broader, systemic impact on organizational diversity and inclusion. While the program's initial focus includes "women returning to work," this data suggests that the benefits can extend to broader diversity initiatives, supporting a more inclusive workforce. A more diverse workforce has been linked to better financial performance for tech firms.[19] Therefore, the mentorship program can be strategically positioned as a key component of a wider Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategy, attracting and retaining a broader range of talent, which in turn fosters innovation, enhances problem-solving capabilities, and strengthens the tech sector's competitive edge in New Zealand.

Table 3: Quantifiable Benefits of Mentorship in the Tech Industry

Benefit Category	Specific Impact	Source
Career Progression	Employees with mentors are 5x more likely to be promoted.	[13, 14]
	25% of mentees had a salary grade change vs. 5% in control group.	[13]
	Mentees promoted 5x more often; mentors promoted 6x more often.	[13]
	75% of executives credit mentors for reaching current positions.	[14]

Employee Retention	Retention rates: 72% for mentees, 69% for mentors, vs. 49% for non-participants.	[13]
	Companies with programs saw 25-30% decrease in turnover.	[14]
	Women in tech with mentors are 77% more likely to stay in roles after 3 years.	[17, 20]
Job Satisfaction & Engagement	94% of employees would stay longer for learning/growth opportunities.	[13]
	Gen Z & Millennials with mentors are 21-23% more likely to be satisfied with their job.	[13, 16]
	89% of women found mentorship impactful.	[17]
Diversity & Inclusion	Boosted minority representation at management level by 9-24%.	[13]
	Improved promotion and retention rates for minorities and women by 15-38%.	[13]
	Companies with formal programs show 20% higher representation of diverse employees in leadership.	[17]
Organizational Profitability	Companies with mentoring programs had profits 18% better than average; without, 45% worse.	[13]

Strategic Imperatives for the NZ Tech Mentorship Program

Analysis of Existing Mentorship Initiatives in New Zealand

Several mentorship initiatives currently exist within the New Zealand tech landscape, demonstrating a recognized and growing need for such support. These programs, while valuable, often have specific target audiences or structures.

The **NZTech Mentoring Circles** program, officially underway for 2025, forms circles of 6-10 professionals across various New Zealand cities (Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Queenstown) and virtually. It focuses on non-technical career development topics and building professional relationships. This program has received an "incredible response" and "very high registration and interest," indicating strong demand from tech professionals nationwide.[23]

The **Tech Waka Mentorship Program** targets "emerging technology professionals" aspiring to leadership roles in New Zealand. It offers structured monthly 45-minute sessions with experienced tech leaders and aims to accelerate leadership growth, build lasting networks, and enhance people skills. This program operates on a paid model, requiring a donation to a designated charity.[24]

The **TechCommNZ Mentoring Scheme** specifically targets members in the "early stages of their career as technical communicators," providing guidance from experienced practitioners. It is offered as a free benefit for financial members of the association, indicating a niche focus on a specific technical communication discipline and early-career support.[25]

The **TechWomen NZ "Return to Tech" Program** is a 10-month digital content series designed to support women re-entering the workforce, particularly in the technology sector. It focuses on community building, coaching, mentorship, training, and addressing the challenges, anxieties, and hurdles associated with re-entry. Crucially, it specifically targets "The Career Developer" (4-8 years experience) and "The Career Establisher" (9+ years experience) stages, making it directly relevant to mid-career professionals.[11] This program also has historical roots, with a "Return to IT" pilot established in 2017 by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and the Ministry for Women, which included training and mentoring components.[26]

Identification of Gaps and Alignment with Proposed Program

While the existing programs address various aspects of career development, a significant and clear gap remains for a comprehensive, industry-wide mentorship program specifically tailored for **mid-career tech professionals** who are beyond the "early stages of their career" [25] but are seeking structured support to "break through to the next career level" [User Query]. The current landscape features programs that are either niche-specific (e.g., technical communicators), focused on early-career individuals, or specifically for women returning to the workforce. While the "Return to Tech" program addresses a segment of mid-career women, a broader initiative encompassing all mid-career tech professionals is still needed.

The proposed program directly addresses this identified gap by explicitly focusing on mid-level career individuals, offering a more structured and potentially broader-reaching initiative than some existing niche or early-career focused programs. Its emphasis on forming a "leaders group to give back to the IT industry through mentorship and networking events" [User Query] aligns with the need for experienced professionals to guide the next generation of

leaders. The proposed digital presence (LinkedIn group, website/app) and in-person events will create a flexible and accessible platform, leveraging existing collaborative tendencies within the NZ tech community.[5] By focusing on this critical demographic, the program can unlock significant untapped potential, contributing to a more robust, diverse, and sustainable tech workforce across New Zealand.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The New Zealand tech sector is a powerhouse of economic growth and innovation, poised for continued expansion and a significant contributor to the nation's GDP and employment. However, its trajectory is challenged by a persistent and unparalleled skills shortage, particularly at the mid-career and senior levels. This report has demonstrated that mid-career tech professionals in New Zealand face specific barriers, including a lack of structured mentorship, limited access to upskilling opportunities, and the subtle yet impactful presence of age discrimination. These challenges contribute to a "mid-career squeeze," leading to underutilized talent and increased turnover, which ultimately carries a substantial economic cost.

The analysis unequivocally establishes mentorship as a powerful intervention, moving beyond a mere HR benefit to a strategic investment with a demonstrable return on investment. Empirical evidence highlights that mentorship significantly boosts career progression, with mentees being several times more likely to receive promotions and salary increases. It also dramatically improves employee retention and job satisfaction, reducing costly turnover and fostering a more engaged workforce. Crucially, for women in tech, who are significantly underrepresented and face higher attrition rates, mentorship provides a vital support system, enhancing their retention, building confidence, and enabling their advancement into leadership roles. Furthermore, the impact of mentorship extends to broader diversity and inclusion efforts, fostering a more equitable and innovative industry.

Given the compelling evidence, the establishment of a dedicated mentorship program for mid-career tech professionals in New Zealand is not merely beneficial but a strategic imperative. Such a program can directly address the identified talent gaps, enhance the capabilities of the existing workforce, and ensure New Zealand retains its competitive edge in the global tech landscape.

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are put forth for the proposed mentorship program:

1. **Prioritize Mid-Career Professionals Across All Sectors:** While the tech sector is the primary focus, the program should actively outreach to ICT professionals working in non-tech industries. This broader scope acknowledges the significant number of tech-skilled individuals outside traditional tech firms who also require career advancement support, thereby maximizing the program's national economic impact.
2. **Design a Structured Mentorship Framework:** Implement a formal program with clear objectives, structured meeting guidelines, and a robust mentor-mentee matching process. This structure should be flexible enough to accommodate the diverse needs of mid-career professionals, including those balancing work-life commitments and women returning to the workforce.
3. **Integrate Upskilling and Reskilling Pathways:** The program should actively connect mentees with opportunities for skill development in high-demand areas such as AI, cybersecurity, and cloud computing. Mentors can guide mentees in identifying relevant training and certifications, directly addressing the skills gap and enhancing career mobility.
4. **Actively Combat Ageism and Promote Experience:** Position the program as a vehicle for valuing and leveraging the extensive experience of seasoned professionals. Encourage experienced individuals to become mentors, thereby reinforcing the importance of their knowledge and providing a counter-narrative to age-related biases in the industry.
5. **Champion Diversity and Inclusion:** While focusing on mid-career professionals broadly, maintain a strong emphasis on supporting women in tech and other underrepresented groups. Tailored support, confidence-building initiatives, and advocacy from mentors can significantly improve retention and accelerate leadership progression for these demographics.
6. **Establish Robust Measurement and Reporting:** Implement clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from the outset to track the program's success. Metrics should include participant engagement, skill development, career progression (promotions, salary increases), and retention rates. Quantifiable outcomes will be essential for demonstrating the program's value to stakeholders and securing ongoing funding and support.
7. **Leverage Digital and In-Person Engagement:** Utilize a hybrid model combining a strong digital presence (e.g., a LinkedIn group, a dedicated website/app for mentor profiles and connections) with regular in-person networking events. This approach maximizes accessibility and fosters a vibrant, connected community, enhancing both formal and informal mentorship opportunities.

By strategically investing in its mid-career tech talent through a well-designed mentorship program, New Zealand can not only address critical workforce challenges but also unlock significant economic growth and cultivate a more resilient, diverse, and innovative tech ecosystem for the future.