



The State of People Pairing in 2026

What 80+ HR Leaders Actually Said

A field report by ignostiq

May 2026





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Research team: ignostiq

Partners: One of the 8 companies selected in 2026 for Tehnopol AI Acceleration Programme, Tallinn



Executive Summary

73%

of HR leaders say pairing programs lack measurement

ignostiq, 2026

3x

faster development of high-potential talent

Gartner, 2024

4-8 hrs

weekly admin per 100 pairs managed

ignostiq, 2026

People pairing programs, including mentoring, buddy systems, and cross-functional connections, exist in nearly every mid-to-large organization. Yet the gap between intent and execution is wide. HR leaders consistently report that programs lack measurement, matching logic, and operational infrastructure.

The findings from 80+ interviews across six European markets point to a clear pattern: the problem is not strategic awareness. Organizations understand the value. The problem is operational. Without systems to match, track, and measure, programs cap at 20-30 pairs before administrative overhead becomes prohibitive.

The gap is not strategic, it is operational. Organizations want to scale pairing programs. HR wants to run them effectively. But the operational cost is prohibitive without automated systems.

SECTION

01

Why This Report

The research behind the findings

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01

Why This Report



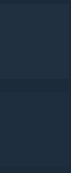
Every company wants stronger collaboration, faster onboarding, and a culture where people actually help each other grow. Mentoring programs, buddy systems, and cross-functional connection initiatives are the most direct way to build that.

Yet most organizations struggle to run them well. The programs exist on paper. In practice, they are inconsistent, hard to scale, and almost impossible to measure.

Between late 2025 and early 2026, we spoke with HR leaders across Europe: CHROs, HR Directors, Talent and L&D Managers. Companies from 500 to 50,000+ employees, across manufacturing, technology, financial services, and healthcare.

| *"We have a mentoring program. I think. Someone in L&D runs it. I have no idea if it works."*

-- VP People, SaaS company, 2,400 employees



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SECTION

02

People Pairing

The framework that connects them



02

People Pairing

The term describes any formal program pairing two or more employees for structured, intentional connection. Three archetypes dominate.

Mentoring Programs

Senior person guides a less experienced colleague through professional development, career navigation, and strategic decision-making. Goals are growth-focused and long-term, often 6-12 months. Formal programs include training, matching logic, and measurement.

Buddy Programs

Peer-to-peer, often a new hire paired with an experienced insider. Goals are immediate and tactical: onboarding, compliance, cultural integration, knowledge of internal processes. Duration is typically 30-90 days.

Cross-Functional Pairing

Employees from different departments paired for knowledge sharing, innovation, or relationship building. Goals are strategic: break silos, create shared context, build bridges between functions.

"We run all three. The problem is not the concept. The problem is that each one is managed by a different person with a different spreadsheet."

-- CHRO, Manufacturing, 8,000 employees

SECTION

03

The Case for Mentoring

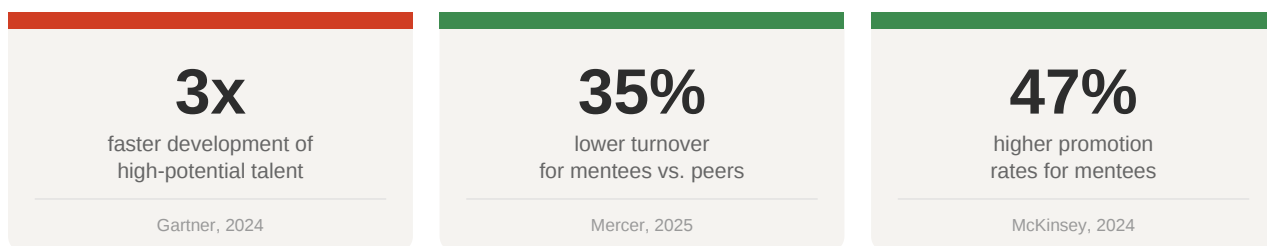
ROI, retention, and career growth



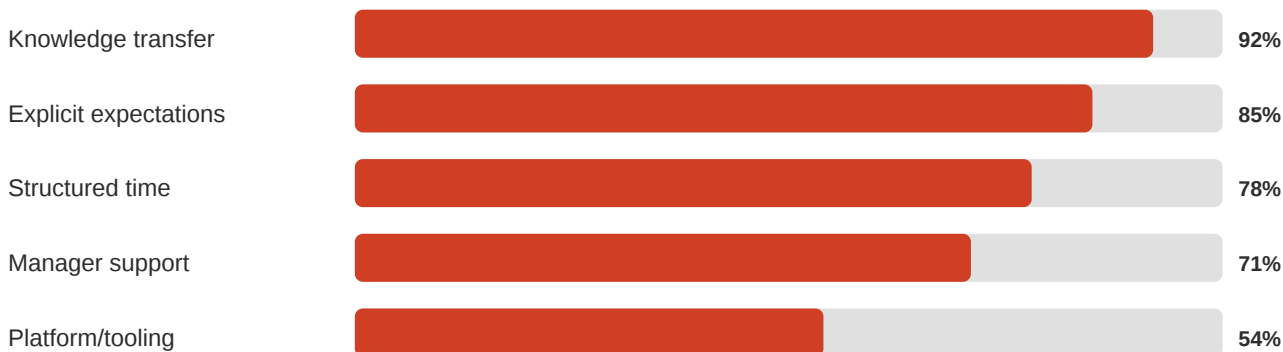
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The Case for Mentoring

Mentoring programs drive three measurable outcomes. The business case is clear.



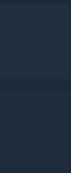
What makes mentoring work



% of HR leaders rating factor as critical. ignostiq interviews, 2026.

"Knowledge transfer is the anchor. When mentoring is framed as skill development, people take it seriously. When it is framed as networking, it dies."

-- L&D Director, Financial services, 12,000 employees



SECTION

04

Buddy Programs

The fastest path to integration

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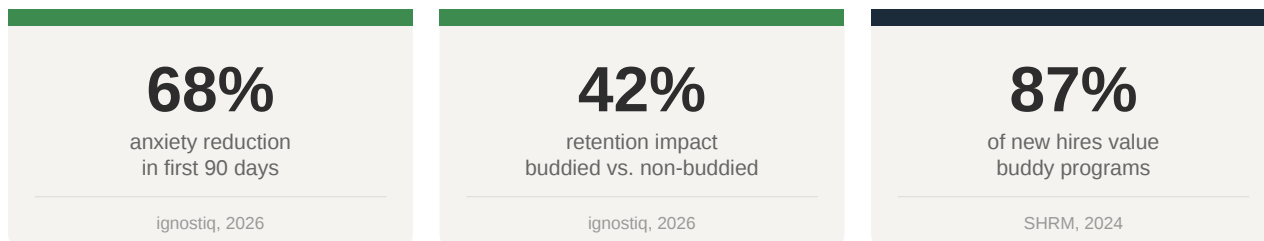
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Buddy Programs

Buddy programs reduce onboarding risk and cost. A good buddy dramatically increases new hire retention and engagement in the first 90 days.



The consistency challenge

Most companies run buddy programs informally. A new hire is assigned to someone 'who knows the place,' but there is no matching logic, no structure, no measurement of success.

What works

Written expectations. Regular check-ins. Clear exit criteria. Buddy compensation or recognition. Post-program feedback loops.

"Our buddy program was a joke until we added structure. Now it is the single highest-rated onboarding element. The difference was accountability."

-- HR Director, Technology, 3,200 employees

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Cross-Functional Connection

Breaking silos, building bridges

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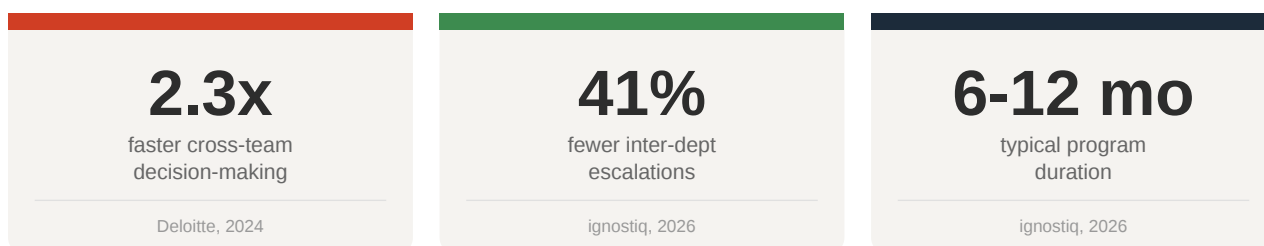


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Cross-Functional Connection

Silos are expensive. When departments do not know each other, communication breaks down. Decisions get made in isolation. Collaboration becomes friction.

Cross-functional pairing breaks down silos before they calcify. A Finance person paired with an Engineering person, or Supply Chain with Product, creates shared context and relationship capital.

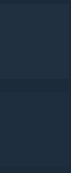


Best practice

Pair by complementary skill, not by hierarchy. Set clear learning objectives. Rotate quarterly. Measure by relationship quality and knowledge transfer, not by hours logged.

"The ROI is not immediate. But after two years of cross-functional pairing, our product launches went from 14 weeks to 9. The relationships made decisions faster."

-- VP Operations, Consumer goods, 6,500 employees



SECTION

06

Why Programs Fail

Three systemic failures

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06

Why Programs Fail

When we asked what prevents pairing programs from delivering results, three failure modes appeared consistently across all markets and company sizes.

01

No matching logic

Pairs are random or manager-driven, not based on actual fit, skills, or goals. The result is low engagement and high dropout rates within the first month.

02

Invisible to HR

Programs run but HR has no data. No visibility into participation, progress, or problems. Measurement is guesswork. Leadership cannot justify continued investment.

03

Poor timing and cadence

Pairs meet sporadically or not at all. No accountability for scheduling. Without structured rhythm, momentum dies within weeks. Programs fade silently.

04

No escalation path

When a pair is not working, there is no clear process. The default is abandonment. Good matches get no support; bad matches linger until someone quits.

05

No iteration loop

Programs launch and freeze. No mechanism to evolve based on data. What worked last year runs unchanged this year, regardless of outcomes.

"We lost three high-potentials last year. All three had been in a mentoring program that nobody was tracking. We did not know it had failed until they resigned."

-- CHRO, Healthcare, 15,000 employees

SECTION

07

The Operational Reality

Why it stays manual

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07

The Operational Reality

This is the core problem: scaling people pairing requires operational infrastructure, but most organizations lack it.

4-8 hrs

weekly admin per
100 pairs managed

HR Leaders, 2026

20-30

pair cap before
admin overwhelm

ignostiq, 2026

78%

still use email or
spreadsheets

ignostiq, 2026

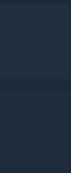
One HR person can manage 100-150 pairs before overwhelm. Matching is manual. Check-ins are via email or spreadsheet. Measurement is guesswork.

Most programs cap at 20-30 pairs simply because HR cannot scale beyond that without the infrastructure to support it.

The gap: Organizations want to scale pairing programs. HR wants to run them effectively. But the operational cost is prohibitive without automated systems.

"I spend half my week on logistics. Matching people, chasing check-ins, updating spreadsheets. I know it should be better but I do not have the tools."

-- L&D Manager, Retail, 4,000 employees



SECTION

08

A Working Program

Five principles from practitioners

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08

A Working Program

What does a mature people pairing program look like? We asked practitioners. Here are five principles from companies running programs effectively.

01

Matching by intent

Know why you are pairing people. Growth? Integration? Collaboration? Match accordingly. Never pair by randomness or convenience.

02

Structured rhythm

Meetings are not optional. Cadence is set (weekly, bi-weekly). Duration is agreed upfront. Both parties commit before the program starts.

03

Visible measurement

HR sees what is happening. Participation. Completion. Feedback. Outcomes. Not guesswork. Data drives iteration.

04

Escalation paths

When a pair is not working, there is a clear process. Not abandonment. Not forced continuation. A graceful, supported exit.

05

Continuous iteration

Programs evolve based on data. What works? What does not? Double down on what works. Kill what does not. Review quarterly.

"The turning point was when we started treating pairing like a product, not a project. We measured, we iterated, we killed what did not work."

-- VP People, Technology, 5,000 employees

SECTION

09

The AI Opportunity

From admin to insight

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09

The AI Opportunity

AI solves the operational problem. Not by replacing HR judgment, but by automating the logistics that prevent scale.

Today (Manual)

Random matching

Spreadsheet tracking

No measurement

Reactive to problems

Caps at 20-30 pairs

With AI

Skills-based matching with transparent logic

Automated check-ins and progress dashboards

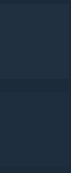
Real-time participation and outcome data

Predictive risk scoring and early intervention

Scales to thousands with same overhead

The shift is operational. AI handles matching, scheduling, reminders, and measurement. HR focuses on program design, coaching struggling pairs, and iterating based on data.

AI is not the strategy. Pairing is the strategy. AI is the infrastructure that makes the strategy scalable.



SECTION

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Methodology

How we built this report

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Methodology

Research Period	September 2025 to February 2026
Interview Count	80+ semi-structured interviews
Geography	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, UK
Company Size	500 to 50,000+ employees
Industries	Manufacturing, Financial Services, Energy, Luxury, Tech, Pharma, Consulting
Participant Role	CHROs, HR Directors, Talent Managers, L&D Managers
Interview Length	45 to 75 minutes, conversational
Data Handling	Anonymized by industry and company size

Benchmarks cited

Gallup (2024, 2025), Gartner (2024), Deloitte HR Tech (2024), McKinsey (2023, 2024), SHRM (2024, 2026), LinkedIn Learning (2024), ATD (2024), MentorcliQ (2024), Microsoft (2023), Chronus (2024), CIPD, Fosway (2024), DDI (2024), Mercer (2025), AIHR (2025), Glassdoor (2024).

A note on methodology: These were conversational interviews, not a controlled survey with statistical sampling. The percentages cited reflect the frequency of themes across our conversations. They indicate pattern strength, not population-level prevalence. Where we cite external benchmarks, the source and year are provided.



ABOUT

ignostiq

ignostiq builds **AI-powered** HR tools for mid-market companies. We transform painful, multi-week HR processes into minutes of actionable, transparent insights.

Pulse360 transforms 360 feedback from a broken process into a competitive advantage. Real-time coaching guides assessors as they write, prompting for evidence and specificity. AI analyzes all perspectives simultaneously and creates development plans people actually follow.

Pulse Tandem is our **AI-powered** people pairing platform. It helps organizations create, launch, and manage mentoring programs, buddy systems, and connection initiatives at any scale.

Every decision stays with HR. The AI produces reasoning and confidence scores. HR can accept, modify, or override any output. That is the **Human Decides** principle.

Built in Estonia. **EU-first** by design. GDPR compliant by architecture, not by configuration. Your data stays yours, never used for model training, always exportable.

"We built ignostiq because we saw the same broken process in every company we worked with. 80 HR leaders told us what they needed. We listened."

-- Alessio Biancheri, Co-founder & CEO, ignostiq

See it in action

30 minutes. No commitment. No slides. A live demo with your context.

ignostiq.com | a.biancheri@ignostiq.com



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