Maternity Mentoring Toolkit: Accelerating Impact of Philosophical and Psychological Research to Improve Perinatal Employee Support and Communication (MaMeT) Project Report

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Project Summary

The key focus of this project was knowledge transfer between researchers in philosophy and psychology and bump & glide Ltd., a local company that offers maternity mentoring for businesses and individuals.

Already-existing underlying research was used to enhance bump & glide's maternity mentoring toolkits. The resulting research-based toolkit was then field-tested using semi-structured interviews with an intervention group of mothers who received maternity mentoring using the toolkit and a non-intervention group of mothers who had not received any formal maternity mentoring. The field test aimed to explore the role of formal maternity mentoring in new mothers' experiences and understandings of the personal and professional transitions they undergo during their child's first year of life.

The results of the project show that targeted maternity mentoring can help employees navigate the challenges of new parenthood and productively return to work at the end of maternity leave. They also provide insight into how employers can improve the wellbeing, resilience, and work-readiness of employees returning from maternity leave.

A note on terminology and scope

'Maternity leave' is the legal term in the U.K for leave for employees who are pregnant or have given birth. Some employees who are pregnant or give birth find reference to 'maternity leave' alienating and prefer the term 'parental leave'. All the participants in our study identified as mothers, had experienced pregnancy and birth, and used the term 'maternity leave'. Further research is needed on the benefits of mentoring support for parents who do not identify as mothers and/or who have not experienced pregnancy and birth.

1. Introduction

This project explores how to support employees to navigate the challenges of new parenthood and productively return to work at the end of maternity leave. This goal is important due to the impact on the wellbeing of parents and children; the connection to wider patterns of inequality; and the potential impact on business.

Becoming a parent is a time of huge transition often resulting in a loss of confidence, self-esteem and sense-of-self. This is especially acute for gestational parents, who experience the physical transitions of pregnancy and birth (Jones 2023, Verbiest, Tully, and Stuebe 2017) and for mothers (or who are seen by others as mothers) who must manage demanding ideals of motherhood and assumptions that parenting is the mother's responsibility (Hays 1996, Douglas and Michaels 2004, O'Reilly 2013, Mullin 2005, Woollard 2016).

The 'motherhood penalty' – the drop in women's earnings when they have children – is thought to be a key driver of gender wage inequality (Dolton and Makepeace 1986; Waldfogel 1998). Countries in which there is long maternity leave tend to have a higher motherhood penalty (Cukrowska-Torzewska and Lovasz 2020; Joshi, Paci, and Waldfogel 1999). However, short maternity leave may make women leave the workforce or avoid having children (Keck and Saraceno 2013). Given the importance of both family life and fulfilling work to an individual's wellbeing, a system which forces women to choose between the two is unacceptable. We need to address the connection between maternity leave and gender wage inequality, while enabling parents to spend valuable time with their children.[3] Our research suggests a way through this apparent dilemma by helping to mitigate the impact longer maternity leave has on a parent's career. Targeted support for employees, appropriate training for managers, and processes designed to accommodate parents' needs can have an important positive impact on the wellbeing, resilience, and focus of employees.

There is some reason to believe that employee wellbeing in general has a positive impact on work performance (Warr and Nielsen 2018). However, the potential impact on business goes beyond this general relationship. The proposed measures can improve 'work-readiness': how prepared the employee feels to work productively on their return to work.

Measures that target maternal wellbeing can also be expected to benefit children. There is a positive relationship between maternal mental health and important aspects of child well-being, including mental health and social functioning (Coles and Cage 2022; Tough, Siever, Benzies, et al. 2010).

2. Revising bump & glide's Maternity Mentoring Toolkit

Method

Woollard, Kent and Williams worked together to revise the Maternity Mentoring Toolkit between June and October of 2023. Williams emailed the existing toolkits to Woollard and Kent in June. These consisted of two pdf manuals: one to be used by mentees before and during the maternity mentoring process and one designed to guide a facilitator providing maternity mentoring.

The toolkits were revised through:
- Email correspondence and written comments.
- Recommendations for reading
- Microsoft Teams meetings on 10th July 2023, 14th August and 23rd August 2023
- An all-day in person meeting at the University of Southampton on 31st August 2023

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[3] The ability to spend time with one's children is a key element of maternal wellbeing (de Marneffe 2004).

Both Woollard and Kent provided extensive written comments on the manuals. These were discussed over email and at the meetings. Woollard and Kent also provided readings for Williams. Williams produced a revised toolkit based on the comments, mutual discussion, and readings. Both Woollard and Kent provided further comments and further revisions were made. A final version was produced.

Summary of key changes

Woollard drew on her research on parental identities (Woollard manuscript; Cull, Holroyd and Woollard, in press) to help Serena explore how to recognise the meaningfulness of 'motherhood' while making the mentoring inclusive to parents who have gone through pregnancy and birth but do not consider themselves mothers. The introduction and the language throughout the manual were edited to reflect this.

We also discussed how Woollard's work shows that even those who do see themselves as mothers must find their own maternal identities in the teeth of unhelpful images of motherhood (Woollard 2016). The section 'Identity' was heavily edited to reflect this. The title of this section was also changed to 'Identities' to reflect that parents balance multiple identities and that parental identities shift over time.

The original toolkit had a section on 'Maternal Gatekeeping'. Woollard suggested reframing this to place it within the broader context of demanding ideals of motherhood and the idea of parenting as the mother's responsibility (Woollard 2016, Woollard 2023, Woollard manuscript). The section was rewritten to reflect this and re-titled 'Who am I parenting with?'

Kent drew on her conversation analysis and discursive psychology expertise (e.g., Kent, Meredith and Budds, 2023) to provide expert guidance focused on making the manual an effective tool for mentees. Sections on 'How to use the Toolkit' and 'Reflecting on where you are now (before mentoring)' were added, as were resources and prompts for reflection at the end of each section. Coloured 'notes' boxes were added throughout the manual, and mentees were encouraged to write down any thoughts, questions about the section/topic to think about later down the line or to discuss further with their mentor.

Kent's suggestions also led to:
- The section 'The role of a maternity mentor' being replaced with a section 'Setting expectations'.
- A paragraph being added to the section 'Current data and statistics', summing up the take-home message from the powerful statistics already included.
- Enhancements to wording/ presentation throughout the manual.

3. Maternity Mentoring Toolkit Field Test and Evaluation

Research Objectives

For the field test evaluation we aimed to conduct both a longitudinal and a comparative thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews to explore the role of formal maternity mentoring in new mothers' experiences and understandings of the personal and professional transitions they undergo during their child's first year of life. We aimed to thematically compare and contrast the experiences of mothers who have received formal maternity mentoring, with those who have not in order to better understand how maternity mentoring fits into existing support structures for new parents.

Research Questions:

RQ1:   How do mothers without access to formal maternity mentoring experience perinatal work transitions working for a large organisation?

RQ2:   How do mothers experience pregnancy, maternity leave, and returning to work during the first year of their child's life?

RQ3:   What is the role of the revised bump & glide maternity mentoring package for new mothers?

Methodology

Research Design

We employed a prospective and retrospective longitudinal and comparative qualitative research design using interviews and thematic analysis to evaluate a mentoring intervention.

Participants

Participants were recruited from a Russell Group University in the South of England. They were recruited through posters, items on internal newsletters and websites, and by emailing line managers to ask them to pass the information to members of their team.

Non-mentored participant group: Eight mothers who had given birth since 19th July 2021 and returned to work with the same employer following a period of maternity leave were recruited for the non-mentored group to retrospectively discuss their experiences. Of these, six participants were first time mothers and two were discussing a subsequent pregnancy. The participants' work roles included standard balanced academic roles (research, teaching and admin), roles that combined research and clinical work, specialist technician roles, administration, and finance and project, event or research management.

Mentored participant group: Five mothers who were about to go on maternity leave were recruited for the mentoring group. Of these, three were having their first baby and

two were having a subsequent baby. Their work roles included standard balanced academic roles (research, teaching and admin), clinical research fellowships, clinical trial management, and operational management.

Data Collection

Eight non-mentored mothers were interviewed retrospectively about their experiences of transitioning to parenthood. The interviews covered (largely chronologically) how participants prepared themselves and their workplaces for an upcoming period of maternity leave, how they adapted to early parenthood, who was around them during their maternity leave, how they prepared to come back to work, and how the transition back to work went.

Five women who had just started maternity leave were interviewed about their experiences of pregnancy, birth and early maternity leave and asked about their expectations for mentoring. During the interview participants were provided with a code to use to access the maternity mentoring with bump & glide. Following two mentoring sessions with bump & glide, the participants were interviewed again around 5-7 months postpartum about their experiences of motherhood, maternity leave, and mentoring. Following two further mentoring sessions, four of the mothers were interviewed again 9-12 months postpartum, either just before or after their return to work, about their experiences of motherhood, work, and mentoring.

All interviews were conducted, recorded and initially transcribed via MS Teams by the same interviewer (Rebecca Brione) and each lasted approximately one hour. Transcripts were anonymised and checked by the Principal Investigator before being passed to the Keele Analysis Team. Participants were able to choose their own pseudonym. No participant data was shared with bump & glide by the researchers at any point. Analytic summaries and preliminary reports including anonymised quotes from participants were shared with bump & glide only after all participants had finished their mentoring sessions. Care was taken to protect participants from identification through accumulated contextual information when selected quotes and anecdotes for inclusion in research outputs. Participants were made aware of the potential limitations to anonymity for any readers familiar with their personal circumstances.

Analytic Approach

Analyses for all three research questions were organised within a multi-phase analytic approach using a longitudinal and comparative reflexive thematic analysis derived from Braun & Clarke (2021) and Spencer et al (2021). We progressed through the three research questions as we performed the following analytic steps:

1) Coding: We coded the transcripts according to Braun & Clarke's guidelines for a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, stage 1 and 2). Codes were derived to summarise the participants' experiences and understandings in their own terms. No *a priori* coding framework was applied or developed during analysis. Each code simply reflected the portion of text it was attached to.

2) <u>Work Transitions Analysis (RQ1):</u> Data from the non-mentored group were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to explore perinatal work transitions.

3) <u>Data Display Matrices (DDMs):</u> In line with Spencer et al's (2021) guidelines for Thematic Trajectory Analysis, we populated a Data Display Matrix (DDM) for each participant with all the codes from their interview(s) grouped by both category and phase of the perinatal journey. Categories were initially derived from the Toolkit topics and expanded as required to adequately capture the full scope of participants' experiences. We divided the perinatal journey into five phases; Pregnancy, Birth / Early Mat Leave (0-4 months), Mid Mat Leave (5-7 months), Late Mat Leave (8-12 months), Return to Work.

4) <u>Mothers Experiences Analysis (RQ2):</u> We conducted a Reflexive Thematic Trajectory Analysis (RTTA) that combined the methodological approaches advocated by Braun & Clarke (2021) and Spencer et al (2021) for making visible temporally sensitive features of themes that have been generated through a process of careful critical reflection and self-awareness by the research team. This longitudinal and comparative analytic approach involved successive rounds of thematic mapping that progressively condensed the data to focus on the most salient and prevalent features without losing access to the nuance and vividness of the participant accounts. The RTTA had five distinct stages:
   a. Micro thematic maps (n=62[4]) were created and reviewed for each participant at each phase of the perinatal journey using Braun & Clarke (2006) stages 3 and 4.
   b. Meso thematic maps (n=10) for each phase and participant group (mentored vs non-mentored) were created and reviewed using the data from non-mentored participants and time 1 and 2 interviews for mentored participants using Braun & Clarke (2006) stages 3 and 4.
   c. A Macro thematic map was created and reviewed to capture the key themes that ran across the whole dataset using Braun & Clarke (2006) stages 4 and 5.
   d. The adequacy of the Macro thematic map was checked and revised in line with Spencer et al's (2021) approach by integrating data from time 3 mentored interviews into the meso and macro thematic maps. Following this check, the overall themes for the analysis were finalised (Braun & Clarke, 2006, stage 5)
   The final macro themes were then interrogated longitudinally for how they mapped onto each time point in the data for each of the participant groups (mentored and non-mentored) using the meso, micro and DDM information. This ensured that both longitudinal and comparative features of the dataset were made visible for analysis. These insights

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[4] Participant attrition (n=1) and maternity leave extensions beyond the project timeframe (n=2) meant that fewer mentored participants completed interviews covering Late Mat Leave (4/5) and Return to Work (2/5) phases.

were then integrated into the analytic accounts of the macro themes during writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006, stage 6).

5) <u>Maternity Mentoring Evaluation (RQ3):</u> We extracted the parts of the interviews where mentored mothers spoke directly about their mentoring experiences. For the non-mentored participants, we included three questions intended to offer scope for them to address topics analogous to some of the anticipated features of mentoring.

These were:
- How (if at all) have you supported your own health and wellbeing since becoming a parent?
  - How has that changed over time since your baby was born?
- Do you feel you have had space and time to reflect on how becoming a parent has impacted your life?
- Would you have found (or did you find) it helpful to have someone neutral and uninvolved to talk with about your parenting journey?

We reflexively thematically analysed this data subset using Braun & Clarke (2021) to identify how mothers understand the role that maternity mentoring played in their experiences of moving through pregnancy, maternity leave and returning to work during the first year of their child's life. Longitudinal and comparative observations were integrated into the thematic structure at salient points.

Analysis

Here we report the findings relating in turn to each of the three research questions for the MaMeT Project:

RQ1: How do mothers without access to formal maternity mentoring experience perinatal work transitions working for a large organisation?
RQ2: How do mothers experience pregnancy, maternity leave, and returning to work during the first year of their child's life?
RQ3: What is the role of the revised bump & glide maternity mentoring package for new mothers?

RQ1 – How do mothers without access to formal maternity mentoring experience perinatal work transitions working for a large organisation?

The data revealed a rich tapestry of interwoven elements of non-mentored mothers' work transitions that interconnected in a web of stressors and protective factors. Organisations have a key role to play in supporting successful transitions by facilitating protective factors and mitigating or minimising the stressors. We generated the following themes from the data:

1) Mothers work best knowing things are ok at home

2) Workplace knowledge and experience of motherhood is vital
3) Role certainty on return to work is protective
4) Webs of connection and communication with the workplace matter.

Mothers work best knowing things are ok at home

Childcare arrangements were the most recurrent stressor for mothers returning to work. It influenced the date of return, and even if they could return at all.

> *"my old job basically wouldn't accept me back at the current banding on only two days a week. ... we decided I wouldn't go back. So I handed in my notice. ... And then suddenly [new] job came up at [same employer] and I went for it and got it. And that was a massive relief. And because it just sounded new and exciting and it was so flexible and I think that was a lot of the draw was being able to work from home because I was still breastfeeding and still wanted to carry on." (Charlotte, 966)*

On an ongoing basis the inflexibility of childcare timings and the unpredictability of child illnesses recurrently placed hard limits on mothers' work availability that took time and willingness for mothers, colleagues and line managers to adapt to.

When returning to work, mothers faced a huge adjustment learning how to balance their competing obligations towards their work and their children. Juggling these needs proved consistently challenging and mothers reported feeling as though they were always either working or parenting, with little time for any other role or activity. In this context there existed a tension between clear desires and motivations to work and progress their careers alongside a recognition that work could not be their sole priority at the current time.

Some mothers reported that reducing their hours helped them improve the balance between work and home, but many reported struggling to perform either task as well as they had done when each was their sole focus (work before pregnancy and parenting on maternity leave).

When returning to work, a soft landing (including effective handovers, phased return to working hours and thorough on boarding) appeared to support successful re-entry and retention in the mother's previous role. Flexibility in working conditions was really important both during pregnancy and on their return to work.

> *"I think coming back part time at first really helped me because it didn't feel like too big a shock to the system after not being work at work at all." (Lilly, 739)*

> *"So I think that's [answering personal calls at work] been really positive for me and being able to kind of keep track of what's going on at home, answer questions about where something is in the house. ... It felt really releasing because I'm able to focus on work better because I know she's been cared for" (Charlotte, 1138)*

Mothers need confidence that managers and colleagues understand the parental juggling act

Several participants reported distressing or challenging experiences during their work transitions, many of which we are not quoting directly to help preserve their anonymity. However, throughout all accounts, a key protective factor appeared to be whether their workplace environment had prior knowledge and experience of motherhood. Where this was the case, mothers were typically offered more flexibility than other work environments and experienced fewer snags and errors with administrative policies and procedures.

> "The hardest is the juggle of times, ... either on a day-to-day basis of nipping out to fetch [elder child] from school and bringing him back and getting on with my working day or going I can't come in today, I'm going to do what I can [child] is vomiting all over me. Everyone's really, really good about that. Really good. Because every single manager in our team has small children" (Eleanor, 930)

Having confidence that colleagues understood the juggling act, the split focus, and the childcare obligations of early motherhood provided the mothers with resilience in the face of these challenges. Colleagues' reactions could temper or magnify mother's feelings around guilt about leaving work undone, recognising their own value as an employee, and enjoying and being excited during pregnancy. Supportive colleagues and managers could and did make the difference for many of the mothers in our study.

Role-certainty on return to work is protective

A hugely consequential source of stress or strength for the mothers was the level of certainty they had around the role that they would return to.

> "The job hasn't changed that much, so it was it was the beast that I knew, so there was reassurance, although it would take me a little while to get my head around. It wasn't anything new, which was really helpful and gave me reassurance and confidence when I was picking up the latest updates like I knew what would be expected of me and what I needed to do." (Lilly, 754)

Mothers experienced considerable distress and worry about leaving their children to return to work. This distress was compounded by uncertainty and stress over not knowing what they would come back to after their maternity leave ended.

> "We had another KIT day, which was similarly tense and awful, really. ... It ended with: "if you want to stay part of this team, then you'll accept these changes. ... Which meant that when I went back, I was incredibly I was not in a good- I was feeling very, very upset about going back. ... I was so consumed by this process ...I didn't really have that much headspace or time to worry about all of the normal return to work worries; the separation from your baby, the expressing milk, all these things I just had to kind of take in my stride because I was so worried about that" (Christina, 502)

Imposed or unexpected changes to working conditions upon return to work were destabilising for the mothers and threatened their continued engagement with the

workplace. It was one of the main aspects of maternity leave that could make the mothers feel powerless and vulnerable, or valued and secure. The importance of this should not be underestimated by organisations.

> *"On my first one [KIT day], they said, oh, by the way you are not going back to the same role. ... I have never felt so much like an afterthought and have to like fight for like them to just engage their brains a little bit." (Eleanor, 781)*

All mothers experienced some concern over the impact of maternity leave on their career progression, but some experienced significant job insecurity and negative consequences arising from organisational change during their leave.

When preparing for maternity leave, mothers expressed clear preferences about what their work role would look like on their return and typically invested considerable time and effort into preparing handovers for their roles before going on leave.

> *"I probably should have gone off sooner actually, but I was so focused on, well, if I get everything done to this point, then it'll be easier for someone to cover and you know, so" (Christina, 325)*

They expressed frustration and disappointment that this diligence was rarely matched by Line managers as the mothers prepared for maternity leave or reciprocated upon their return. Some were left feeling abandoned and undermined as they attempted to pick up their work roles alongside their parenting responsibilities after their leave ended.

> *"They hadn't like gone through this thought process like 'does she have that? ... nobody did anything for me coming back to work. I just came back and got on with it. (Eleanor, 864)*

Webs of connection and communication with the workplace matter
Line managers held considerable individual power of the quality of the mothers' perinatal work transitions. Mothers looked to their Line managers for support and guidance. Where this was received, it reassured and empowered mothers. However, Line managers' organisational gatekeeping power meant that they could easily expose and exacerbate the mothers' feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability throughout the perinatal period.

> *"What it drove home for me was how vulnerable and isolated you are in that leave period when you're out of the business and you're almost entirely at the mercy of a line [manager]. Line managers have so much power in in process and governance terms. So it was very easy for her to engineer it so that I could only, everything was through her. It was very easy for her to gate-keep my access to my colleagues, my engagement, my feeling part of a team, any professional development opportunities, you know, it was she really acted as a gatekeeper there. And I think what would really have helped is if there had been any kind of. ... And I hear a lot of these stories. And you so often hear that things haven't gone well after the fact because the line*

> *manager has responsibility for the liaison and for the checking in during that period. (Christina, 576)*

KIT days were a mixed blessing. If the mother was ready, they provided valuable opportunities for building their connection and confidence with work. However, if not undertaken on the mother's terms KIT days could be disempowering or even damaging.

> *"I remember going in for a meeting. It was kind of quite a strategic level meeting. … I remember understanding about 40% of what was said in the meeting because I'd slept for two hours the night before and that was a little bit scary. So rather than: like, OK, This is a nice phasing in day this will get me ready for work. I was actually terrified at that point about how on Earth am I going to work on this little sleep?" (Rose 775).*

Individual strands of connection and communication that mothers have with their workplace during their leave are delicate and fragile. Encouraging a web of connections with multiple points of informal and supportive contact mean that the mother's relationship with her employment is stronger and more able to weather any disruptions.

RQ1: Summary of key findings

How maternity leave is managed by the workplace can have important impacts on the wellbeing and productivity of staff, with line managers fulfilling a particularly powerful role. Childcare arrangements were the most recurrent stressor for parents returning to work after maternity leave and mothers reported working their best when they were confident things were okay at home. Supportive managers and colleagues, who understand the pressures of parenthood in general, and motherhood in particular, could make all the difference in supporting work transitions. A hugely impactful source of stress or strength for staff on maternity leave was the level of certainty around the role that they would return to. Imposed or unexpected changes to working conditions were destabilising and threatened employee engagement. Mothers reported investing considerable time and effort into preparing for smooth transitions to and from leave, including smooth handovers, and felt frustrated and unvalued when this diligence was not matched by line managers. Webs of connection and communication with the workplace matter: line managers with gatekeeping powers can leave staff feeling powerless and vulnerable.

RQ2 - How do mothers experience pregnancy, maternity leave, and returning to work during the first year of their child's life?

The reflexive trajectory thematic analysis of the non-mentored and mentored group interviews revealed four high-level themes that were consistently oriented to across the combined dataset:

- Juggling growing demands and responsibilities
- I am not alone

- Who am I becoming?
- Precarious autonomy.

The longitudinal and comparative analysis of our themes revealed key variations in how mentored and non-mentored mothers experienced and understood their journey into motherhood. Here we summarise the themes we identified and outline the main temporal and experiential variations experienced by mentored and non-mentored mothers in relation to those themes.

Juggling growing demands and responsibilities

From the moment they became pregnant, the mothers began to gain multiple, often conflicting, responsibilities that had to be weighed against each other when determining priorities at different times. Managing the competing demands on their time required autonomy, flexibility and planning. Mothers reported that when the initial responsibility of caring for their baby overwhelmed everything, they had to drop all other responsibilities. This was difficult for them (especially when they had older children) and many tried to cling to one other thing to prioritise alongside the new baby to maintain some balance. In the early days this might just be a daily commitment to eat three meals, or get out of the house, but gradually, more nuanced priorities were introduced. As maternity leave came to an end, the compromises between the different roles weighed heavily on mothers who reported feeling as though they were failing at everything, because neither work, children, nor self could be the top priority in the way that each had been at a previous time in their lives.

Mothers reported feeling that the burden of balancing their competing demands was one they ultimately shouldered alone. This was most pointedly the case in early maternity leave for mothers who breastfed and who felt that physically and emotionally it was all down to them to care for their baby. However, it was also reflected in mothers' reports of occasions when they felt third parties did not take reasonable steps to initiate, facilitate or manage smooth interactions when their responsibilities overlapped. This was particularly the case for organising handovers and transitions with work. It touched on the issue of the extent to which the mothers felt their efforts were seen and valued by the people around them.

I am not alone

All of the mothers highlighted the integral role that other people played in their transitions into motherhood. Family, established friends, new peers, colleagues, managers, healthcare providers and the mentor all offered support in different ways and at different times. This support either facilitated shared experiences and understanding or helped to directly share the mothers' burdens.

Mothers reported that knowing others who had gone through, or were currently going through, the same experiences as them was a vital pillar of their strength to continue when things were hard. Feeling understood by others and knowing they were not alone helped them validate their feelings and gain confidence in their decisions. Chat groups with other new parents created a sense of normality and belonging for the mothers

during maternity leave. Workplace colleagues and managers with experience of parenthood contributed to an inclusive and welcoming culture that did not treat the demands of pregnancy and parenthood as an unusual or unreasonable intrusion into work life. Conversely, when mothers were confronted with a lack of understanding or shared experience, this heightened their sense of failure and vulnerability, especially when coming from individuals in a position of professional power over them.

Mothers reported many instances of others taking some of the load from them at key times in their journey through the first year of their child's life; Colleagues who covered work or managers who lightened the workload during pregnancy, family members who took care of cooking or cleaning in the newborn stage, or who offered connection and care for older children. Partners who provided postpartum physical care and joint parental responsibility. The lightening of the mothers' load during pinch points was a valuable contribution to helping them adapt to the juggling act required by their growing responsibilities.

Who am I becoming?

The theme "Who am I becoming?" explores the identity transformation experienced by new mothers during their first year of motherhood. Mothers reported significant turbulence and re-evaluation of their identities, with the non-mentored group struggling more, and for longer, than the mentored group.

Mothers faced dramatic shifts in daily activities and relationships, with childbirth being the most abrupt and impactful change. This led to a disconnection from their work identity and a focus on their new parental role and identity. Over time, other aspects of their personal and professional identities re-emerged within a growing matrix of responsibilities. The increasing role responsibilities during pregnancy and the first year were a key feature of the data. Mothers expressed doubts about their competence in new roles. While peer support was valuable, comparisons could undermine confidence. Many mothers became more cautious and reliant on planning instead of spontaneity to ensure positive daily life experiences, especially regarding their return to work.

For many of the mothers, their personal sense of self became temporarily subsumed beneath the overwhelming nature of their new parental role. It took varying lengths of time for mothers to begin to talk about a loss in their sense of self, missing the time they used to have for their own pleasure and self-care, and then actively seeking ways to reintroduce personal activities. Once mothers began to talk and think about themselves again, they reported feeling like a different person to the one they used to be. There are some indications in the data that mentored mothers may have begun to integrate their parental and personal identities quicker, more consciously, and with less guilt than non-mentored mothers. By the time they returned to work, most mothers accepted that re-prioritising their personal identity would take time.

Precarious autonomy

The mothers' freedom to control what was happening to them and to make decisions about what they should do next was an important but contested concept within the data. For many of the women, becoming a mother exposed them to a previously inconceivable lack of bodily autonomy through experiences around the visibility of their reproductive status at work, labour, and physical recovery from birth. Early maternity leave further limited their physical autonomy and functioning due to the baby's needs and sleep deprivation. Regaining control over their bodies was often the first step towards reclaiming their sense of self.

Initially, mothers sought advice and support widely, but over time, they became more selective about whose support they accepted. They grew in confidence and autonomy, valuing control over their schedules to meet their baby's and their own needs. However, a desire to remain in control of their child's development, happiness and safety did lead some to turn down offers of support or time away, even when they could see the value in such activities for their own wellbeing. The growth in autonomy during maternity leave made the prospect of returning to work and entrusting their baby to others daunting. Forward planning, anticipating challenges, and choosing compromises were crucial for mothers to feel ready to return to work. Phased returns, flexible working, and staying informed helped them feel in control of the transition.

Interactions with institutions like hospitals, nurseries, and employers were stressful due to the lack of autonomy mothers could exercise. Organising their return to work was particularly challenging, as decisions made without their input disrupted their plans and left them feeling powerless and unimportant. This exclusion from decision-making during maternity leave was more destabilising than employers might realise.

RQ2: Summary of key findings

Overall, the journey into motherhood is marked by growing responsibilities, a need for effective support networks, identity transformation, and challenges in maintaining autonomy. The transition into motherhood involves navigating a complex array of responsibilities. Initially, mothers feel overwhelmed by the demands of caring for a newborn. Over time, they gradually reintroduce more nuanced priorities, balancing work, childcare, and self-care. Returning to work is particularly challenging, with many mothers feeling they are failing in all roles due to competing demands. Support networks are crucial during perinatal transitions. Family, friends, peers, colleagues, and mentors provide emotional and practical assistance, fostering a sense of belonging and offering practical help during critical times. Mothers experience significant identity shifts in personal, parental, and professional spheres. Childbirth changes daily activities and relationships, focusing on the new parental role. Over time, personal and professional identities re-emerge, though mothers often doubt their competence in new roles. Autonomy is another critical aspect. Early maternity leave often involves a lack of bodily autonomy. Gradually, mothers regain control over their bodies and schedules, becoming more selective about support. However, interactions with institutions can be stressful due to a lack of autonomy.

The findings suggest some potential differences between mentored and non-mentored mothers' experiences that warrant future empirical testing of the role of maternity mentoring on a larger scale. Mentored mothers' accounts of their perinatal experiences suggest that they perceived enhanced support, quicker identity integration, and better management of responsibilities, while non-mentored mothers faced greater challenges and feelings of isolation. The dynamic nature of motherhood and common challenges faced by mothers underscore the importance of temporally informed research to capture fleeting moments that impact how mothers view themselves as individuals, parents, and professionals.

RQ3 - What is the role of the revised bump & glide maternity mentoring package for new mothers?

Our reflexive thematic analysis identified five main themes relating to maternity mentoring. The full thematic map of these themes can be found in Appendix C – RQ3 Maternity Mentoring Thematic Map:
- Mentoring is a positive experience that requires commitment and engagement
- Talking about work and balancing priorities
- Valuing a neutral/external safe person to offload feelings and fears onto
- Creating time to focus on me and who I am
- Empowering mothers to turn thoughts in words and words into actions

Mentoring is a positive experience that requires commitment and engagement
The mentored mothers uniformly considered mentoring to be a positive and valuable experience that met and exceeded their hopeful expectations. In fact, three of the four mothers who completed the research process spontaneously reported that they now planned to continue with the mentoring arrangement at their own expense and one reported referring a family member for mentoring. This is a powerful marker of how valuable they found it.

> *"It has had a major positive benefit on me, to the point that at one point I was like recommending to my cousin to go and talk to Serena. Because she was trying to work some stuff out and I was like, you need to talk to someone who can help you, like, work some of this stuff out, like, not just me because you're not listening to me" (Evie, 3, 910).*

Asking mothers about their use of the toolkit outside sessions revealed that finding the time and space to engage outside of the scheduled session was challenging. This reflects the theme running across our datasets around how mothers' personal needs are often de-prioritised in early motherhood.

> *"no, to be honest. I haven't used it [toolkit]. ... Just a time thing really, I think."* (Anne, 2, 170)

Where mothers did use the toolkit, they felt it served a distinct and valuable role. The toolkit aided the integration of reflection with daily life. It flagged potential topics for

future discussion, and it offered a breadth of topics that extended the scope of mentoring support beyond what could be talked about in a session. For example, Emily valued the lack of repetition between the toolkit and the sessions:

> *"Before the last session, I went through the areas that she was highlighting to me and thought about them. And it's nice actually, because there's questions in there and I was like thinking through the questions. And it's not like when we had the session, we didn't go through it. Like it wasn't like, "so answer these questions", you know. So it's quite nice because you don't just spend the time doubling up what you've thought about" (Emily, 2, 162)*

Having resources to extend the mentoring process into the everyday lives of the mothers was an effective strategy to maximise their continued engagement with and learning through the mentoring. The toolkit, summary emails from Serena, suggestions for resources and readings to access, and pre-session activities all helped to embed the benefits of mentoring more securely for the mothers. It is important that these elements of the programme are not lost in any future iterations

Talking about work and balancing priorities

When asking the mentored women what they thought they would use mentoring for and then what they had used it for, the two most prevalent topics were how to deal with work and how to balance the competing priorities they now faced in their life between self/baby/work commitments. Balancing work alongside other priorities emerged at all time points suggesting that, as early as pregnancy, women recognised the challenge that lay ahead in terms of juggling work and parenting commitments and were actively planning to use the mentoring to help with that challenge. For example, in her first interview, when asked about her expectations for mentoring, Emily stated that:

> *"I don't know really. I think just I am quite open to any help... just with going back to work, I think just a, yeah, just making that transition. And maybe confronting it more throughout the maternity, you know. So talking about it, throughout the course of maternity and thinking about how to make that transition rather than just suddenly being like, Oh my God, I've got to go back to work. And then you're stuck with like trying to tackle like you know us with our work and nurseries, and the disconnect of suddenly giving the child away. All of that." (Emily, 1,189)*

It is important not to underestimate the impact that thinking about work (and how it intersects with parental responsibilities) has on mothers during the perinatal period. Although they are absent from the workplace, this does not mean that work is not a substantial stressor for them. Mentoring has the potential to be a key resource in supporting staff on maternity leave to find positive and constructive patterns of thought around their return to work.

A marked longitudinal pattern in the data was a shift from a primary prioritisation of work during pregnancy, towards an almost all-consuming focus on the baby in early maternity leave, with a gradual transition towards seeking a balance between the two roles as the end of maternity leave drew closer. When discussing how to balance work and other responsibilities during mentoring, the concept of identity/ies became more

salient for the mothers and gave them a framework within which to understand the many roles they now juggled.

> *"I think it was a big well, definitely it was a big decision for me to decide to try to have a child. And for a long time, you know, I was thinking ... How on Earth would I have time for a baby and a child alongside work? But in these few weeks between [first and second mentoring] sessions and I was thinking a bit about that I thought yeah, but my mindset's changed now and now I'm thinking how on Earth am I gonna have the time for work alongside baby? And I found this really, really interesting and this was quite a central part of our discussion about work and different layers of identity and priorities."*
> *(Jemima, 2, 159)*

Valuing a neutral/external safe person to offload feelings and fears onto

When women with no access to maternity mentoring were asked if talking to someone outside of their usual social connections might have helped as they adapted to parenthood, they all unambiguously agreed it would. They highlighted the value of having someone uninvolved to vent to without fear of judgement. Some, like Rose, commented that they deliberately sought out new social connections to try and meet this need, but that it was only partially successful.

> *"So we had our sort of NCT teacher who we could kind of reach out to. She wasn't. Yeah, she was really lovely. She was fantastic. Yeah, I wouldn't describe her as neutral though. She had quite strong opinions about how things should and shouldn't go and you could kind of take what information you wanted from it. ... And so, yeah, so maybe someone neutral, just to be honest. Is it OK to feel like this is? You know, am I doing this OK? Because I do think, yeah, it's quite hard. I have signed up to kind of a being a parent course actually, to go along. As I imagine that would be a fairly kind of neutral space for parents to just share their difficulties. ... So yes, that would be a helpful thing and that sort of kind of, yeah. Something I'm yeah, kind of reaching out to do at the moment"* *(Rose, non-mentored, 1070)*

Both non-mentored and mentored mothers highlighted the value of a neutral listener who was engaged and non-judgmental, as well as not seeking reciprocity in return for their attention.

Having a safe outlet to offload difficult thoughts and emotions was really important. The mentored mothers reported valuing Serena's external and experienced perspective.

> *"I feel like in these mentoring sessions you can let it rip a bit more and say: Ohh, this is really tough. I'm finding this really, really hard. So it was nice to be able to talk about that, you know, just let it, let it go. ... I don't want solutions, I just want to offload, you know, I just want to complain. I don't want you to make suggestions! And my mum's a bit like that. She's always, you know, sort of trying to think practically. And I just wanna complain, I just wanna offload!"* *(Katrina, 3, 447)*

The opportunity to access an informed, external, attentive, and supportive listener was recognised by all participants as beneficial during the transition to parenthood. It appears to be the cornerstone of the support provided through the role of maternity mentoring.

Creating time to focus on me and who I am

The mentored mothers placed considerable value on how the mentoring process gave them time and space during the chaotic first few months of motherhood to concentrate on themselves and to be able to reflect on what they were going through. Mentoring served as a vehicle for mothers to feel they had permission to take some time for themselves.

> "It's like 'I don't want to return my baby but also what happened to my life?' So like being able to voice those things. I think it's really important. Yeah. And we already said, you know, just having, space and time to think 'How am I feeling?' 'Cause, I think you often as a mum you just don't do that. Ever. So just, yeah. Being able to pause and say, 'OK, actually, aside from being really, really tired... Am I anxious? Am I sad? You know. What's causing those feelings?' And so now I think that's definitely been the most valuable thing." (Anne, 2, 281)

The mentored mothers' ability to create time and space for themselves contrasted with the experiences of the non-mentored mothers who struggled to carve out time for anything other than parenting and work.

> "I'd say it took me until recently actually, so as I say, my youngest is literally just turned 2 the last couple of weeks and it's only literally recently that I sort of said this is getting... I need to do some more stuff for me because it's quite got, I've got a little bit lost." (Dotty, non-mentored, 954)

Without the structured support of mentoring, it took longer for mothers to begin reflecting on what they'd been through. After so long not processing their early motherhood experiences, some of the non-mentored mothers found it challenging to reflect back on what they'd been through.

> "When I do think about it, I go. How did that happen? How was that a real experience and not just something that somebody came in and went this is terrible, let's do better!" (Eleanor, 1122)

By creating early and ongoing opportunities for new mothers to reflect on their experiences, the mentoring helped them to think more strategically about their goals, motivations and priorities.

The protection and promotion of time with the mentor for reflection, led to the mentored mothers reporting more deliberate consideration of their identity and they spoke about their identity more explicitly and in a more conscious and integrated way than the non-mentored mothers did.

"Yeah, it's nice to have that outlet to talk about those things that you maybe you don't really talk about. I mean, I have mum, friends and... but you talk about other things. Then you talk about kinda nappies and what colour their poo is and like, have they got teeth yet or are they crawling yet? You don't really tend to talk about your identity, how you're feeling as a person, how it's affecting your relationship and those kinds of things" (Emily, 3, 220)

Mothers reported that the reflection activities in the toolkit were very effective at supporting them to independently apply the learning from the mentoring sessions at crunch points in their daily lives.

"Early on in my return to work, I found myself needing to reflect a bit more on where I am in my career and my vision, you know, going ahead as it were. And I don't find always that work easy. I don't always find that sort of self-reflection, easy. And so I did find those questions of, you know, how do other people, how do you think you know 3 words that other people would describe you? 3 words that you describe yourself? I actually found that incredibly valuable for quite strategic thinking actually that I had to do at that point. So I think I've liked the fact that that's coming from quite a kind of personal level of reflection, but that it really feeds into, I found it was really feeding into this sort of strategic thinking for professional purposes. So that's been really, really useful." (Jemima, 3, 383)

Mothers really valued the role maternity mentoring played in creating time for them to focus on themselves and consider their own identity more deeply. There is some indication that this helps promote more rapid and less traumatic acceptance of new parental, personal and professional identities compared to non-mentored mothers, though it would require further research to be sure. What is clear is that the mentored mothers found the practice of reflection useful and it helped them to take positive, purposeful actions on their return to work.

Empowering mothers to turn thoughts into words and words into actions

There was a gradual trend throughout the data that mothers first approached mentoring to seek advice. They found it a safe space to share problems and think about themselves without guilt or minimisation. This made mentoring sessions somewhere that nebulous or unconsidered thoughts could be given voice and made tangible through words.

"I think that, you know, although they are things I'm interested in, things I would have thought about, once you verbalise things and you talk to someone who knows a lot about that kind of area, then it kind of gives you more power. Your thoughts, more power. To kind of manifest, doesn't it? To be part of your day-to-day life. ... I suppose it's just the way that you feel about yourself and the way that you...How you're like, reacting to how your life is changing. So. So I don't think I would have done any specific things differently. I'd just probably behave differently, you know. Or understand my behaviour differently, perhaps. Yeah, which is really important" (Emily, 2, 250)

A focus on encouragement and boosting confidence from the mentor, helped mothers begin to make plans and consider actions to address the issues they had raised. By supporting the mothers to act themselves, the mentoring empowered them to turn thoughts into words and then actions.

> *"It has given me a lot of confidence. The space to talk and Serena's style of mentoring, which has been very open and affirmative, has given me a lot of confidence." (Jemima, 3, 429)*

Although many participants struggled to identify concrete changes in their lives as a result of mentoring, there was a pattern within the longitudinal data of mentoring making scary things safer to confront, and once confronted, they could then be tackled.

> *"It's hard to know, you know, how much is attributed to the mentoring versus not. But like I do feel like I've got a good let's say like bank of like, resilience in there now. And probably that's probably heightened by the fact that I've had someone almost like patting me on the back or like, you know, like building me up to it. So when I had somebody to be a bit of a nightmare earlier this week, you know that I was able to go like, that's clearly not an ideal way to support someone who's just returning from maternity leave. I know that. But they're not good at that. Like, that's not their strength. They're not good at that. Isn't that a shame. But like you know, and I'm just gonna step back now and like and not get too personally affected by that." (Evie, 3, 524)*

This was most clearly visible in how many of the mentored mothers talked about how Serena's support enabled them to face KIT days and subsequent return to work on their terms and with confidence. The experiences of the mentored mothers were in stark contrast to the unsuccessful KIT days and lack of engagement with KIT days reported by the non-mentored mothers. Rose (non-mentored) felt she had to use KIT days to avoid being overlooked in work allocations, "I remember understanding about 40% of what was said in the meeting because I'd slept for two hours the night before and that was a little bit scary" (779). When back at work, she said "I remember the first month feeling like I really like I can't do this, I'm doing a bad job of parenting. I'm doing a bad job of work" (833). Similarly, Dotty didn't find a way to make KIT Days work for her and ended up dreading her return to work.

> *Dotty -*   *So I never actually had a formal KIT day. I've never registered a KIT day. Or anything like that.*
>
> *Interviewer - Would you have wanted to have any?*
>
> *Dotty -*   *If it had been on my terms, maybe. ... But I would have liked to have got paid for the time that I was investing in trying to prepare for going back to work if that makes sense, so I would have liked it in that regard ...*
>
> *Interviewer - How did you sort of feel in the days and the weeks before you came back to work?*
>
> *Dotty -*   *Oh, dread. Absolute dread. I just didn't want to do it.*
>
> *(Dotty, non-mentored, 771)*

A really strong theme for the mentored mothers was that the mentoring provided the time, focus and safety to verbalise nebulous thoughts and fears. Then, through the mentor providing encouragement, confidence boosting validation and support with planning and solution finding, the mothers were able to generate strategies to bring about positive actions that mitigated their concerns and worries.

RQ3: Summary of Key Findings

The mentored mothers uniformly considered mentoring to be a positive and valuable experience that met and exceeded their hopeful expectations. Comparative qualitative analyses of their work transitions suggest that they had smoother and more positive experiences than their non-mentored peers. The mentored mothers valued an ongoing mentoring relationship and wanted support before, during, and after maternity leave. Having resources (e.g., toolkit) to extend the mentoring process into the everyday lives of the mothers was an effective strategy to maximise their continued engagement with and learning through the mentoring, but was limited by their willingness to prioritise time for themselves over completing parenting and other duties.

Balancing work with other responsibilities was a consistent concern for the mothers. Mentoring has the potential to be a key resource in supporting staff on maternity leave to find positive and constructive patterns of thought around their return to work. Mothers really valued the role maternity mentoring played in creating time for them to focus on themselves and consider their own identity more deeply. Mentoring provided the time, focus and safety to verbalise nebulous thoughts and fears. Then, through the mentor's encouragement, confidence boosting validation and support with planning and solution finding, the mothers were able to generate their own strategies to bring about positive actions that mitigated their concerns and worries. Mothers found the practice of reflection useful, and it helped them to take positive, purposeful actions on their return to work. Learning how to apply reflection in their daily life appears to be a potentially enduring legacy of mentoring. A follow up study could explore the persistence of reflective thinking following re-integration into the workplace.

Conclusions and Implications

When considering the findings of all three analyses conducted for the MaMeT project, we draw the following conclusions:

1. Feeling valued and supported at work makes it more likely that an employee will continue to see their work as important.

2. Management of maternity/parental leave and the presence of support networks appear to be crucial for the wellbeing and productivity of staff. Supportive managers and colleagues, along with mentoring programs, seem to play a crucial role in facilitating smoother transitions back to work.

3. Webs of connection and communication with the workplace matter: line managers with gatekeeping powers can leave staff feeling powerless and vulnerable.

4. Childcare arrangements and certainty about the role to which staff will return are reported as major stressors for mothers. Ensuring clarity and stability in these areas may greatly reduce stress and enhance employee engagement.

5. The transition into motherhood involves significant identity shifts and challenges in maintaining autonomy. Support systems, including mentoring, can help mothers navigate these changes and regain control over their schedules and responsibilities.

6. Effective mentoring can be a key resource in supporting staff on maternity leave to find positive and constructive patterns of thought towards their return to work. Mothers valued an ongoing mentoring relationship and wanted support before, during, and after maternity leave. Mothers also valued that the mentee toolkit, summary emails from the mentor, suggestions for resources, readings to access, and pre-session activities supported them in extending the mentoring process into their everyday lives.

These conclusions suggest that supportive management, effective mentoring, and flexible working arrangements could enhance the wellbeing and productivity of staff during maternity/parental leave transitions. Future research should continue to explore these areas to further improve practices and policies for supporting working parents.

Our conclusions make relevant the following recommendations for employers to support the retention, wellbeing and work-readiness of working mothers:

1. Review processes to ensure that they recognise and respect the inflexibility of childcare arrangements and the need for parents to be able to set fixed boundaries to working hours.

2. Support staff in accessing effective maternity mentoring programmes. This may be offered through an employee benefit scheme. Ideally, staff should be able to access repeated maternity mentoring sessions with the same mentor during pregnancy and after the return to work and the programme should give mothers the resources to extend the mentoring process into their everyday lives, such as a mentee toolkit, summary emails from the mentor, suggestions for resources, readings to access, and pre-session activities.

3. Create and maintain up-to-date onboarding protocols for staff returning from extended periods of leave (including all informal changes of practice at a local level).

4. Ensure that working roles are not changed – unless absolutely necessary – and that any changes are clearly communicated, through pre-agreed means of communication with the staff on leave.

5. Broaden lines of communication and connection with staff on maternity leave to include staff outside line management. Include a named person that employees on parental leave can communicatewith, in addition to their line manager.

6. Provide appropriate training and resources for line managers to ensure that they understand best practice. This process may include training as part of the initial line manager development training, and/or online training that can be done at point of need.

Next steps:

Our data was deliberately semantically coded and inductively themed to remain as close as possible to the participants' meanings and understandings of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that our analysis was not guided by a pre-selected theoretical model but designed to foreground the participants' own understandings of their experiences as much as possible. Now that the themes have been finalised an important next step will be to consider how the application of relevant theoretical models might enhance and deepen the insights possible from this research.

Our inductively generated themes appear to hold surprising congruence with concepts central to Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT suggests there are three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) that are the essential constituents for psychological development (including identity development) and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001). By applying SDT to our themes we can better understand the underlying psychological needs that influence mothers' experiences during maternity leave transitions and develop more effective strategies to support them. We have not yet conducted a full theoretical mapping of our results against SDT. However, the three psychological needs set according to SDT might provisionally provide the following explanations of our findings.

Autonomy
- Findings: The research highlights the importance of certainty around roles, flexible working arrangements, and the ability to balance work and childcare responsibilities. Mothers reported feeling stressed when they lacked control over their schedules and roles.
- SDT Explanation: Autonomy refers to the need to feel in control of one's own behaviour and goals. When mothers have clear communication about their roles and flexible working options, they are more likely to feel autonomous, reducing stress and enhancing engagement.

Competence
- Findings: The transition into motherhood involves significant identity shifts and challenges in maintaining a sense of competence in personal, parental, and

professional roles. Mentoring programs that provide support and encourage reflective practices help mothers regain confidence and develop effective strategies.
- SDT Explanation: Competence involves feeling effective in one's activities and having opportunities to exercise and expand one's abilities. Mentoring and supportive management can help mothers feel more competent by providing validation, encouragement, and practical strategies to manage their responsibilities.

Relatedness
- Findings: Support networks, including family, friends, colleagues, and mentors, are crucial during perinatal transitions. Mothers valued the emotional and practical assistance provided by these networks, which fostered a sense of belonging and support.
- SDT Explanation: Relatedness is the need to feel connected to others and to experience caring relationships. Supportive networks and mentoring relationships fulfil this need by offering emotional support, practical help, and a sense of community, which can mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance overall wellbeing.

It follows that our recommendations for employers for how to support women during maternity leave transitions can be similarly embedded within an SDT framework in the following ways:

- Promote Autonomy: Employers should provide clear communication about role expectations and offer flexible working arrangements to help parents feel more in control of their schedules and responsibilities.

- Enhance Competence: Implement training and mentoring programs that support mothers in developing their skills and confidence, helping them to feel more competent in their roles.

- Foster Relatedness: Encourage the development of support networks within the workplace, including peer support groups and mentoring programs, to help mothers feel connected and supported.

These preliminary considerations will require further scrutiny and peer review.

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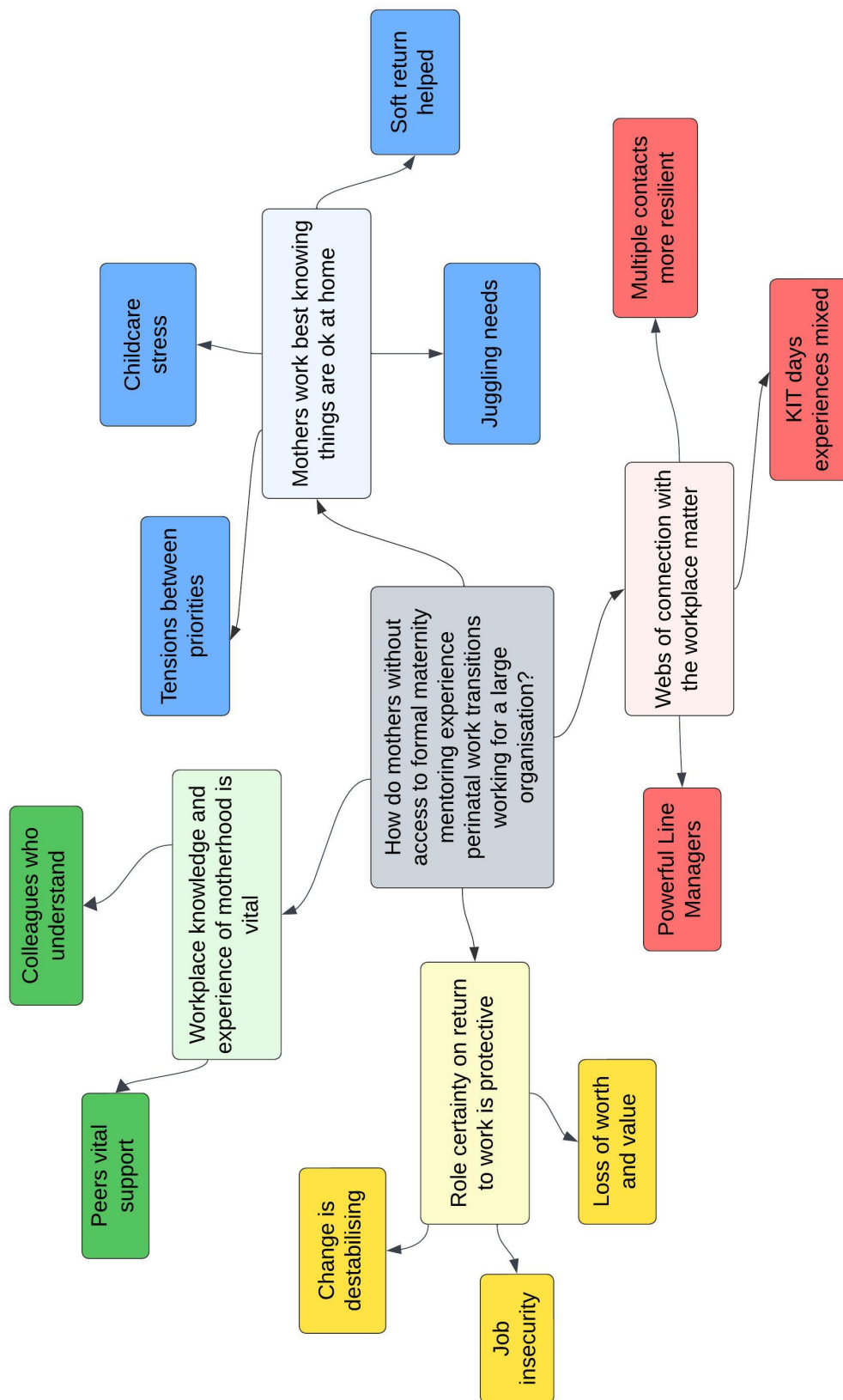
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Acknowledgements

Appendices

Appendix A – RQ1 Work Transitions Thematic Map

Appendix B – RQ2 Mothers' Experiences Thematic Map

Appendix C – RQ3 Maternity Mentoring Thematic Map

What is the role of the revised bump&glide maternity mentoring package for new mothers?

- Positive experience that requires commitment and engagement
  - Positive expectations and experiences
  - Not enough time to engage with toolkit outside of sessions
- Empowering mothers to turn thoughts in words and words into actions
  - Planning and talking through solutions
  - Encouraging, reassuring, and boosting confidence
  - Seeking advice
- Valuing a neutral / external person to offload feelings and fears onto
  - Neutral listener is helpful
  - Offloading is valuable
  - Outside insight is useful
- Talking about work and balancing priorities
  - Balancing Priorities
  - Work
- Creating times to focus on me and who I am
  - Time for me
  - Talking about identity
  - Time to reflect