

Mission Connect: A Unified Approach to Navy Culture

Hacking for MOD (H4MOD), Team Navy 99: product strategy for military-civilian integration in the Royal Navy

Role	Product / strategy team member. Led the Knowledge Transfer pillar and contributed across discovery, the Mission Model Canvas, prototype design and roadmap.
Client	Royal Navy (UK Ministry of Defence), via the Hacking for MOD programme, with a named problem sponsor and an industry mentor
Problem	Persistent structural and cultural divides between military, civilian and contractor staff behind the "One Navy" ambition
Methods	30 stakeholder interviews, root-cause analysis, hypothesis testing, Mission Model Canvas, value proposition, MVP definition, Lewin change model, SECI knowledge model, phased roadmap, costing, risk plan
Outcome	"Mission Connect" 3-pillar programme: onboarding, leadership development, knowledge transfer. Designed and costed; piloting not completed within the project.

1. Client brief and challenge

"One Navy" is a unified cultural ambition, but interviews showed fragmented training, rigid hierarchies, few shared experiences and gaps in psychological safety and gender inclusion. Cultural change relied on rotating leaders rather than embedded practice, so well-intentioned efforts risked being isolated and unsustainable.

2. Discovery: what I learned

- **30 interviews** across ranks and employment types (Lieutenant to senior leaders, civil servants, contractors), plus Defence research papers and academic literature.
- **Root causes** grouped as people, process, place/culture and policy. Examples: no joint onboarding; civilian roles unclear without uniform or rank; military jargon; civilians needing approval to join team events; no link between training and career growth.
- **Onboarding:** no standardised induction for military and civilians together, so expectation gaps form.
- **Leadership:** military leadership development is structured; civilian development is fragmented. The flagship course takes about 18 months, so people use the learning for roughly half their time in role.
- **Rotation:** frequent rotations cause knowledge loss; civilians become the sole long-term knowledge holders; handovers depend on line managers; tacit knowledge needs 3–6 months of hands-on transfer.
- **Shared definition of success:** interviewees across all groups described One Navy as feeling valued, heard and clear on role, regardless of rank.

3. Hypotheses and pivots

I treated the work as product discovery: state a hypothesis, test it with stakeholders, then keep, change or retire it.

Hypothesis	Test	Result
Joint induction is needed to close the military-civilian gap	Interviews and literature	Supported; became the onboarding pillar
Civil dress days / uniform days will reduce perceived hierarchy	Follow-up interviews and survey design	Partially validated, then retired: seen as symbolic, and uniform carries identity value
Two-year rotations drive knowledge loss and weaken integration	Interviews on continuity and workload	Validated; became the knowledge transfer pillar

Hypothesis	Test	Result
Mid-level leaders lack joint development	Interviews, Defence research, curriculum review	Supported; became the leadership pillar

Retiring the dress code idea is the kind of product decision I want to show: evidence over a popular idea.

4. Solution: the Mission Connect 3-pillar programme

- **Onboarding for new joiners:** a 5-day joint cohort programme ("Step In. Belong. Thrive.") with leader storytelling, role-mapping, EDI and ethics sessions, a military-civilian panel, buddy pairing and a commitment ceremony. Quarterly, 15–20 per cohort.
- **Leadership programme for middle and lower-level leaders:** workshops on communication, feedback, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, psychological safety and inclusion, plus changes to the existing Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA) curriculum. 2–3 days, quarterly, 10–15 leaders per session.
- **Knowledge transfer for rotating staff:** a standardised handover process built on the SECI model (socialisation, externalisation, combination, internalisation) with a knowledge handover checklist, mentor shadowing, a handover pack, a learning journal and a knowledge base updated by the incoming team.

MVP: the smallest testable set was an onboarding toolkit, leadership modules and a mentorship-based handover model. The first onboarding prototype and the knowledge handover template were drafted.

5. Roadmap and costs

A phased vision plan ran from Q2 2025 to Q2 2026: pilot the structured onboarding, test the handover tools, embed the leadership content in existing MPLA schedules, then scale and integrate into HR and learning policy. Outcomes were mapped across short, medium and long term.

Item	Estimate
Quarterly onboarding cohort (external trainer, facilitator prep, video, materials, logistics, kits)	£6,250 per quarter
"Mission Connect" leadership workshop (trainer, venue, kits, reflection tools)	About £5k
Scaling MPLA places (up to £24k per person), 100 middle managers	About £2.4m for the pilot
Knowledge transfer and onboarding set-up	Mostly staff time, not cash

6. Risks and measurement

Pillar	Risk	Mitigation	How measured
Onboarding	Inconsistent delivery	Standard toolkit; assigned HR contact and buddy	New-joiner satisfaction survey
Leadership	Low participation; the people who attend already care	Real-world scenarios; senior sponsors; certificates and visibility	Pre/post surveys; participation rate; usefulness feedback
Knowledge transfer	Reluctance to share; poor handovers	Mandatory templates; shared repository	Process and culture assessment; manager follow-up in probation

I also planned for change resistance (loss of status, predictability and belonging) using Lewin's unfreeze-change-refreeze model.

7. Impact and what I would do next

No measured results yet. Expected outcomes are targets: clearer communication after joint induction, higher staff satisfaction, better knowledge retention, lower friction, and stronger retention of civilian and military talent.

- Pilot one cohort of onboarding with a before/after survey
- Trial the handover pack on one rotation and compare time-to-productivity
- Test the leadership workshop with one region before the wider MPLA change