

WHITE PAPER

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR MENTORING:

WHY INVESTING IN PEOPLE IS YOUR SMARTEST STRATEGIC MOVE

Most organisations say people are their greatest asset — but keep sidelining the one intervention proven to boost performance, retention and leadership: mentoring. This paper shows why mentoring isn't a soft skill or side project, but the engine powering real results across teams, sectors and ecosystems.

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In the race for performance, leadership and talent, most organisations have poured resources into systems, software and standalone training — all in the hope of building resilient, high-performing teams. Yet one of the most impactful, proven and cost-effective interventions remains vastly underused: mentoring.

At The Human Edge, we've worked across sectors, languages and continents — from fast-growing social enterprises in Nairobi to legacy corporations in London. And wherever we go, the pattern holds: when organisations centre human connection and learning relationships, people lead and grow. In environments where funding is tight or product—market fit is still evolving, it's often these relationships — not just strategy or systems — that help teams stay resilient and move forward.

This paper reframes mentoring as not a 'nice to have' or 'soft skill', but a serious lever for business performance. If you care about leadership strength, retention and productivity — then mentoring isn't an add-on. It's the engine.

While technological innovations will continue to reshape industries, it is the distinctly human qualities of self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and adaptability that will set future leaders apart. Entrepreneurs will need more than just the ability to navigate uncertainty—they will need to foster relationships, inspire teams, and cultivate a deep understanding of their own emotions and those of others.

This white paper explores why emotional intelligence will be the most critical skill for entrepreneurs in the future, and how mentoring programmes can play a pivotal role in equipping leaders with these essential capabilities.











Mentoring: Not Just a Matchmaking Exercise

Many corporate leaders still picture mentoring as a vague, informal chat between an experienced professional and a newcomer. But effective mentoring is far from casual. It's a structured, relational learning experience that activates self-awareness, sharpens decision-making and accelerates leadership growth. Unlike most L&D interventions, mentoring isn't just a one-way transfer of expertise — it's a dynamic partnership that encourages reflection, curiosity and courageous thinking. In fact, 98% of Fortune 500 companies have embedded mentoring into their talent strategies.

Leadership Development: More Than a Workshop Can Offer

Great leadership isn't built in a classroom. It's honed in real-world contexts that challenge and expand the way leaders see themselves and others. Mentoring equips current and emerging leaders with the skills that are hardest to teach but most needed in today's workplace: empathy, strategic thinking, sound judgment, self-awareness and communication. One study found that managerial productivity jumps by 88% when mentoring is added to training, compared to just 24% from training alone.

The impact is visible in promotions and leadership readiness too. In organisations with mentoring programmes, mentees are significantly more likely to be promoted to leadership positions — and they move faster through the pipeline. Some companies report <u>up to 20% more internal promotions among mentored employees</u> and mentoring participants regularly outperform their peers in 360-degree feedback assessments.

Succession planning also benefits enormously. Organisations that embed mentoring into their leadership pipelines reduce the risk of transition failure, build internal bench strength and keep institutional knowledge flowing. The Queensland Government cites mentoring as central to its succession planning efforts — and they're not alone. In fact, internal mentoring programmes are often designed with strategic talent objectives in mind, including preparing high-potential individuals for senior roles.

The real differentiator? Mentoring meets people where they are. It's tailored, reflective and embedded in day-to-day practice — not divorced from it.

Retention: Your Culture, Measured in Movement

The corporate world is waking up to the cost of attrition — but many still underestimate the power of mentoring in driving retention.

One study by Wharton found that mentees were 72% more likely to stay with their employer and mentors 69% more likely — compared to just 49% for non-participants. That's not a coincidence.

Mentoring boosts belonging. It communicates to employees: You matter here. We're invested in your growth. It gives people clarity on their path, feedback on their performance and someone in their corner when the road gets tough. At Randstad, employees participating in their mentoring programme were 49% less likely to leave. In the public sector, Trapeze Group increased operator retention from 80% to 95% after introducing a peer mentoring initiative. And within the NHS, research has shown that mentoring helps doctors feel more confident and satisfied in their roles, which directly contributes to long-term retention and wellbeing.

<u>MentorcliQ's clients</u> saw turnover rates drop by nearly half and <u>Cox</u> <u>Automotive</u> reported a retention rate of 79% among mentoring participants, far surpassing their company average.

In short: if retention is a problem, mentoring is a solution you can no longer ignore.

Productivity: The Human Multiplier

Productivity isn't just about time management — it's about people feeling confident, capable and connected enough to do their best work.

When employees feel seen and supported, performance improves. Mentoring helps people make decisions faster, solve problems more creatively and stay engaged even during uncertainty. One study found a 95% increase in productivity among employees who had mentors.

More broadly, 70% of businesses report an increase in productivity as a direct result of implementing mentoring programmes. In sales teams, mentoring translated to a 19% jump in daily revenue. A Harvard Business Review case study found that mentored employees outperformed peers in revenue generation, decision-making speed and solution quality.

At Cruise, a self-driving car company, engineering teams with mentors <u>completed projects faster and with better quality</u>. And in organisations with strong mentoring cultures, <u>profits are on average 18% higher</u> than their peers.

Mentoring drives productivity not just by improving skills, but by transferring institutional knowledge, boosting confidence and creating space for better thinking. It's not a distraction from business performance — it's a direct investment in it.



So Why Hasn't Mentoring Been Prioritised?

Despite the clear ROI, many organisations still treat mentoring as a "nice to have" — not a strategic investment. Why?

- Misconceptions: Mentoring is still often viewed as a vague, informal chat between an experienced professional and a newcomer. It's misunderstood as a passive, unstructured or unmeasurable process.
- Structural barriers: It lacks a dedicated budget line.
 Ownership is unclear. It competes with louder or more tech-focused L&D initiatives.
- Short-termism: Leaders chase quarterly results instead of investing in long-term capability.
- Lack of internal champions: Without executive sponsorship or programme leads with the right training, mentoring flounders.
- Fear of failure: Some organisations worry about launching a programme without the skills or tools to run it well.

In entrepreneurship ecosystems and social impact spaces, these challenges are compounded by unpredictable funding, evolving strategy and pressure to deliver fast, visible results.

But the irony is this: when uncertainty is high, the need for meaningful human connection and reflection inside organisations becomes even more critical.







The Hidden Cost of Inaction

When mentoring is left out, the cost is real and often underestimated:

- Attrition: Losing talent means the high costs of rehiring, retraining and the erosion of institutional memory. And it doesn't just affect HR — it affects morale, team cohesion and client continuity.
- **Stagnation:** High-potential individuals often lack the relational scaffolding to grow. Without mentors to stretch their thinking, their development stalls. They become disengaged, underutilised or eventually exit the organisation.
- Burnout: In fast-moving or rapidly-changing environments, people need space to think, reflect and recentre. Without someone to talk to, employees can spiral into stress and disengagement. Mentoring offers a psychological safety net where people can surface challenges early.
- **Missed Opportunity:** Mentoring creates visibility. Without it, untapped talent stays hidden especially women, early-career professionals, or team members in satellite offices. Diverse leadership pipelines don't emerge by chance; they need intention and support.
- Lack of Networked Support: Mentoring doesn't just create one-to-one relationships it often catalyses broader networks of support, shared learning and crossfunctional collaboration. Without it, teams miss out on the informal networks that sustain resilience and spark innovation.
- Loss of Innovation: Innovation thrives in connected, trustbased environments. Without mentoring, siloed teams lack the relational glue that sparks cross-pollination and creativity.

Think of it this way: what happens to your organisation when people feel unsupported, unseen and unsure about their future? Turnover goes up, productivity goes down, and the very people you depend on to drive change start looking elsewhere.







Across Africa and the MENA region, The Human Edge has partnered with organisations and funders who chose to do more than tick the "capacitybuilding" box. They chose to centre mentoring — not as an afterthought, but as a strategic lever for entrepreneurial growth, leadership resilience and organisational capability.

This case study brings together results from three impactful initiatives: the GoRise Mentoring Programme in Tunisia, Imarisha in Kenya and the MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy across 26 countries. While each context was unique, the results all point to one thing: when mentoring is prioritised, people and ecosystems shift.

Mentoring Drives Real Business Outcomes

In Tunisia, the <u>GoRise Mentoring Programme</u> (run in partnership with GIZ Tunisia) supported 21 early-stage tech entrepreneurs over 5 months. The programme embedded personalised mentoring-centred support pathways — blending one-on-one mentoring with targeted coaching and ecosystem exposure.

The result?

- 162 new jobs created averaging 2.35 per entrepreneur
- 67% of entrepreneurs increased their revenue
- 28% secured new funding
- 93% reported increased confidence and leadership clarity

"What helped me most wasn't the business training — it was the conversations with my mentor. That's where I found clarity and learned how to lead my team with more confidence."

— Programme participant, GoRise Tunisia



Mentoring Reduces Attrition and Builds Bench Strength

In Kenya, our work on the <u>Imarisha Mentoring Programme</u> showed how mentoring can directly support retention, confidence and long-term engagement — especially when the wider system is under pressure.

The programme paired entrepreneurs with local mentors and focused on leadership development, emotional resilience and peer connection — exactly the kind of scaffolding often missing in fast-paced entrepreneurial ecosystems.

"Before Imarisha, I was ready to quit. Now I have a mentor, I have a network and I've got momentum again."

- Stephen Wanyingo, Mentee and Agri-entrepreneur

Participants reported stronger clarity in decision-making and a renewed sense of possibility. Many stayed in the ecosystem and paid it forward — becoming mentors themselves.



Mentoring Powers Leadership Pipelines and Cultural Shifts

The MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy, delivered in partnership with MAVA Foundation and Common Purpose, was an intergenerational leadership development programme supporting conservation leaders across West Africa, the Mediterranean and Switzerland.

Over 4 years, we embedded mentoring, coaching and experiential leadership development for 176 senior and emerging leaders.

- 93% of mentoring relationships continued beyond the programme
- Participants led cultural shifts in their organisations
- Many went on to design and lead mentoring initiatives in their own networks

"The mentoring relationship was the most transformational part of the Academy. It helped me lead beyond my authority — and give others the space to do the same."

– Senior Leader, MAVA Academy

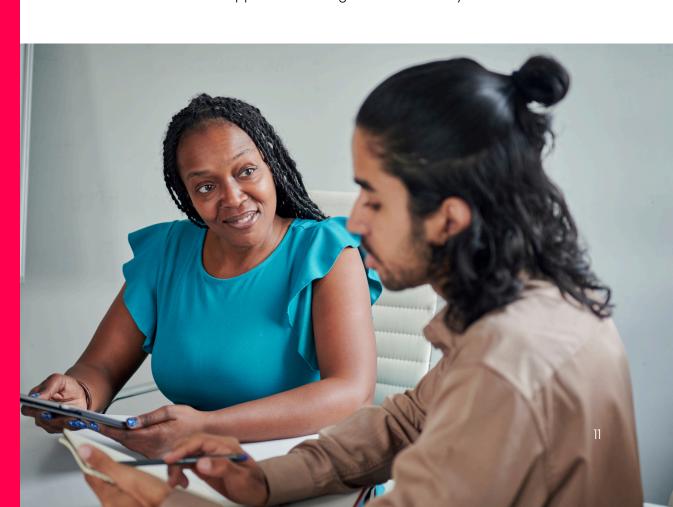




Whether it's early-stage entrepreneurs in Tunisia, youth-led businesses in Kenya or conservation leaders in Ghana and Switzerland — the data shows that mentoring works when it's intentional, relational and embedded.

It:

- Supports retention and reduces burnout
- Builds leadership pipelines and succession strength
- Boosts productivity by creating clarity and confidence
- Enhances ROI by linking behaviour change to business goals
- Creates networks of support and strengthens community and teams



Measuring What Matters: ROI You Can Stand Behind

We get it. If you're going to advocate for mentoring, you need data. ROI. Hard numbers.

The good news is: mentoring is measurable.

From improved leadership competency scores to reduced turnover, from faster onboarding to stronger engagement scores — the business benefits are trackable. Tools like the <u>Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model</u> and the <u>ROI Methodology</u> provide clear ways to assess mentoring effectiveness.

You can use A/B testing to measure the impact of mentoring cohorts versus control groups. SMART goal setting at the start of a programme allows organisations to benchmark progress. Feedback surveys conducted before matching, mid-way and post-programme give rich qualitative and quantitative data. And specific KPIs — like promotion rates, time-to-productivity for new hires, retention costs saved, or 360-degree feedback improvements — help demonstrate ROI in language decision-makers care about.

Some organisations also calculate mentoring ROI by estimating the dollar value of productivity gains or turnover reductions. For example, if replacing an employee costs 33% of their annual salary, even a 10% improvement in retention among high performers can translate into significant savings.

Bottom line: mentoring ROI isn't fuzzy. It's there — and you can measure it with intention and rigour.

What Can You Do Differently?

Here's what we challenge you to consider:

- Are you spending more on software than on people?
- Are your leadership programmes too generic or one-size-fits-all?
- Do your teams have access to learning relationships that build trust, confidence and capability?
- Are you retaining your best people or just hoping they stay?

As you reflect, consider how mentoring can fit within existing leadership development frameworks. Are you setting SMART goals for people development? Are you creating structured feedback loops to understand where your talent is getting stuck or disengaged?

And when was the last time your leadership investment was evaluated for real behavioural change, not just knowledge retention?

Now ask: what could shift if mentoring wasn't a side project, but part of how your business works every day??

What Prioritising Mentoring Looks Like

When organisations take mentoring seriously, it becomes part of how they operate — not a side project. It looks like:

- Training mentors in active listening, boundary-setting and powerful questioning
- Preparing mentees to take ownership of their development
- Designing programmes aligned with organisational strategy and leadership needs
- Facilitating contracting and feedback loops for reflection and accountability
- Evaluating impact with both qualitative and quantitative data

At The Human Edge, we support organisations to embed mentoring at every level — from programme design to delivery and impact measurement. We offer training for mentors, mentees and programme managers in English, French and Arabic.

Whether you're a funder seeking to amplify your impact, an ESO looking to equip your entrepreneurs or a corporate team ready to build leadership depth — we can help mentoring become a business driver, not a checkbox.

Ready to Make Mentoring a Strategic Asset?

At The Human Edge, we've supported corporates, governments and social enterprises to build mentoring cultures that work — across languages, sectors and leadership levels. We offer mentor training, mentee preparation, programme design and practical support to make mentoring stick.

Whether you're ready to launch your first initiative or level up what you've already got — we can help you make mentoring a business driver, not a checkbox.

Let's talk about what mentoring could unlock for your people — and your performance.

Get in touch with us



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The Human Edge is a leadership development organisation that has been supporting entrepreneurs, managers, and leaders since 2008.

We design and deliver integrated leadership, mentoring and coaching programmes that equip individuals, teams, and organisations with the skills, tools, and approaches needed to drive lasting positive change.

Building thriving organisations requires clear direction, confident leadership, strong relationships, and the ability to overcome challenges.

Our programmes and courses focus on deepening self-awareness, strengthening leadership capabilities, and fostering connections and cultures that help people, organisations, networks and ecosystems achieve greater results, faster.

We collaborate globally with governments, foundations, NGOs, and corporations, working across diverse contexts, cultures, and sectors, and in multiple languages.

