

Part Two  
**Inspiring Mentoring Programme No.3**  
**Mentoring Women for**  
**Corporate Success**

## **Mentoring Women for Corporate Success Case Study: ABN AMRO Bank<sup>28</sup>**

*By Mirella Visser<sup>29</sup>*

The ABN AMRO Mentoring Programme for senior executives was developed in 2004. By the end of 2006, over 80 international senior executive men and women had taken part in this ongoing initiative. This in-company mentoring programme can serve as a benchmark of best practices for international corporations committed to building their female leadership talent through the use of mentoring as a tool for organisational change. Thanks to this initiative, a more inclusive corporate culture is being shaped in line with the company's corporate strategy.

The first section of this article presents the key elements of the process of mentoring and discusses the differences between mentoring and coaching. The second section outlines the origins and main elements of mentoring within ABN AMRO, while the third section describes the impact of mentoring on the organisation. The article concludes with three main recommendations for launching an in-company mentoring programme.

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<sup>28</sup> Many thanks to ABN AMRO's Executive Vice-President, Fernando Lanzer Pereira de Souza, and his staff for the valuable comments and permission to share the content of the programme.

<sup>29</sup> Mirella Visser holds a Master's degree in Law and completed the General Management Programme at CEDEP in Fontainebleau. She held senior management functions at ING Group and KPMG, in Europe and Asia, before founding the Centre for Inclusive Leadership in 2004. Mirella also sits on the Supervisory Board of Royal Swets & Zeitlinger and is currently European Vice-President of the European Professional Women's Network.

### **Defining Mentoring**

Many definitions of mentoring and coaching exist. In this context mentoring was characterised as follows:

“Mentoring is a process that supports and encourages learning to happen, leading to personal performance improvement and the development of leadership talent.”

### ***Mentoring is a process***

The passage above contains the following crucial elements:

- **Process.** The greatest value of a mentoring relationship lies in discovery and learning, asking questions and reflecting, being open, and giving and receiving feedback. Crafting leadership talent is an ongoing act. It is the process and not the end result that counts.
- **Support.** The relationship involves an open and safe environment in which participants suspend judgment and stimulate each other to look beyond their usual frames of reference and enquire about prejudices and biases. Mutual trust is a vital element in the encounter.
- **Encourages learning to happen.** Implies an open mind and a willingness to set aside one’s own personal experiences and beliefs.
- **Leading to...** As opposed to the sometimes expected ‘having a coffee and a chat’ or informal discussions, mentoring has specific goals that are established by mentor and mentee together.
- **Personal performance improvement.** Mentoring is an instrument to discover conscious and unconscious behaviours that limit one’s performance in certain situations and particular settings (such as in a specific company’s culture).
- **Leadership talent.** Linked to the company’s talent development programmes, mentoring offers an interactive and powerful way of enhancing leadership potential.

### ***Mentoring is a professional relationship***

A mentoring relationship is a business relationship like any other and is regulated by an organisation’s code of conduct. Meetings take place in a professional fashion with clear objectives, agenda-setting and time management. To obtain the best results from the mentoring relationship, both mentor and mentee need to prepare for meetings in advance, just as for any other business exchange. Proper preparation prevents the frustration of aimless and unstructured

sessions. Finally, professionalism dictates that the agreed degree of confidentiality about the topics of discussion is respected by both mentor and mentee.

***Mentoring is about dual learning***

In a successful mentoring relationship both parties have something to offer and both parties are willing to learn. One-sided relationships in which the mentor is the active party and the mentee is primarily on the receiving end are not successful in the long term. Relationships that are balanced in both mentor and mentee learning provide the best opportunities for individuals to grow. Further, mentoring relationships that begin as formal and organised relationships will continue to flourish beyond the agreed timeframe only when there is a dual learning dynamic.

***Mentoring is different from coaching***

To help participants understand the different nuances between mentoring and coaching, the following Mentoring Dimensions Schedule<sup>30</sup> (see Table 1) was constructed. Mentoring and Coaching are charted across six dimensions: primary focus (subject), development horizon (term), result orientation (outcome), task orientation (content), development focus (talents and skills) and management of the relationship (setting the agenda).

These differences are nuances, however, and not absolutes. The schedule makes clear that the mentoring relationship is not intended to provide job coaching to solve an urgent management problem in a specific timeframe. On the other hand, coaching relationships will invariably include dimensions on the mentoring side, such as analysing potentially ineffective personal behaviours. The schedule should therefore be used as a framework in creating and maintaining focus in the mentoring relationship. It also serves as a guide to determine which issues are better approached by coaching instead of mentoring (within or outside the company).

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<sup>30</sup> Mentoring Dimensions Schedule was developed by the Centre for Inclusive Leadership ([www.centreforinclusiveleadership.com](http://www.centreforinclusiveleadership.com)).

**Table 3 : Mentoring Dimensions Schedule**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Mentoring</b>	<b>Coaching</b>
<b>Subject focus</b>	Person-focused	Job-focused
<b>Term</b>	Long-term objectives	Short-term objectives
<b>Result orientation</b>	Process-orientated	Solution-orientated
<b>Task orientation</b>	Beyond the task at hand	Task at hand
<b>Development focus</b>	Potential and talent	Skills and performance
<b>Agenda</b>	Agenda set by the mentee	Agenda set by the coach

### **The Mentoring Programme at ABN AMRO**

#### ***Senior women in the lead***

The Mentoring Programme was initiated by a group of senior executive women in 2004. They proposed an in-house mentoring project in which senior executive women become mentees of senior executive men, for two main reasons. First, to improve understanding on both sides of the differences in the challenges that men and women face in their careers at ABN AMRO. Second, to provide women with crucial information about how to become more effective in their senior roles, and how to further enhance their leadership competencies by learning from the experiences and insights of senior male executives.

***Strategic alignment as basis***

The programme was developed in alignment with the company's corporate strategy, Learning Model and Diversity & Inclusion programme. ABN AMRO's Learning Model promotes 'individual and collective development simultaneously, bringing about personal growth and organisational development'. Business Unit leaders see diversity as a driver for business and not as a Human Resources (HR) issue. This has resulted in a positive and dynamic atmosphere around the Mentoring Programme.

***HR as enabler***

The HR function has played a pivotal role in the design and successful implementation of the mentoring programme. The 'Leadership and Learning'<sup>31</sup> Centre of Expertise was responsible for internal communication, matching mentors and mentees, and logistics. An outside consultancy<sup>32</sup> was engaged for specific expertise, design and delivery of the workshops, and preparation of materials.

- **Internal communication.** HR organised the kick-off of the programme by placing it on the agenda of the Managing Board meeting and by promoting it in newsletters, the internal magazine and on the website. This transparent and upbeat communication led to an increase in participants. The fact that the Managing Board members had one or two mentees themselves was widely advertised and further increased the positive buzz around the programme.
- **Matching for maximisation.** The matching process was designed to maximise learning opportunities for both mentor and mentee. Gender was not the only diversity issue taken into account; cultural and company backgrounds were as well. Within the company the different divisions (e.g. investment banking and retail banking) are characterised by very specific cultures. A key principle was that mentor and mentee would not be part of the same reporting line (hierarchical or functional) within the organisation.

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<sup>31</sup> Leadership and Learning is one of the four Centres of Expertise (CoE) within Group Human Resources. The other CoEs are Talent and Performance Management (with Diversity and Inclusion as a subdivision), Organisational Effectiveness and Reward.

<sup>32</sup> Centre for Inclusive Leadership.

*The voluntary nature and flexibility of the programme*

- **Voluntary nature.** All mentors and mentees volunteered to take part. Requirements were kept to a minimum. Participants were asked to commit to the relationship for a maximum of one year only. However, many pairs continued their relationship on an informal basis after the end of the stipulated one-year period.
- **Flexibility.** Due to the very senior level of participants, a large degree of flexibility in setting agendas, identifying locations and designing workshops was necessary. The workshops took place in various locations in the Netherlands and the UK, including a number of meetings by teleconference. The mentoring pairs would organise their own locations for meetings, varying from head office to local offices around the world.

Flexibility was also a guiding principle in the number and frequency of meetings. The rule of thumb was to meet once a month anywhere from one to two hours during the first few months to build up the relationship.

*Preparation is key to success*

The programme started with a presentation at the Managing Board followed by preparatory workshops and meetings for mentors and mentees. Separate workshops were designed for the roles of the mentor and the mentee in order to give sufficient attention to the different aspects of each. More than 30 workshops and individual sessions were held from 2004 to the end of 2006.

- **Preparatory workshops.** The Mentoring workshops were designed to meet three main objectives:
  1. To enable participants to establish a mutually rewarding mentoring relationship.
  2. To develop awareness of diversity issues and the impact on the organisation.
  3. To provide participants with practical tools and guidelines to be effective as mentor or mentee.

Key topics of the workshops were:

- The differences between mentoring and coaching.
- How to prepare effectively for the first meeting.
- How to overcome barriers and pitfalls.
- How to turn a perceived negative situation into a positive leadership development opportunity.
- The skills necessary to be a successful mentor or mentee (such as enquiry skills).
- **Interactivity combined with theory.** One-third of the workshop consisted of exercises in which participants could test their abilities to be an effective mentor or mentee. In addition, group discussions and lectures on recent research provided both an experiential and a light academic background.
- **Continuous evaluation.** Evaluations were carried out both after the workshops and at the end of the relationships. Around 70% of workshop participants completed the evaluation forms, which is an unusually high rate for senior executives. Small changes were made to the new series of workshops based on such feedback, leading to continuous improvement of the quality of the programme.
- **Guide for Mentors and Mentees.** A special Guide for Mentors and Mentees (Figure 1) was produced by ABN AMRO and the Centre for Inclusive Leadership containing additional information on mentoring, templates of the exercises used in the workshops and references to supplementary reading materials. Designed to be easy to read and easy to carry, it was printed pocket size (12 x 18 cm) and laminated. The existence of the Guide was a clear indication to participants that top management was highly committed to the process.

### **Organisational Learning**

Just as for any other investment aimed at developing individuals within an organisation, management is interested in the tangible and intangible results the programme might produce. The impact of mentoring can be found in a number of areas.

#### ***Snowball effect***

The long-term character of the Mentoring Programme ensures a snowball effect of cultural changes, as the growing number of participants share a common understanding of topics and

a willingness to continue to learn. The insights and skills learned by mentors and mentees in the first groups of the programme will continue to spread when they apply their learning to future mentoring relationships. Many participants reported that the number of mentoring relationships they were involved in, formally and informally, increased during the programme.

***Raising awareness***

During the preparatory workshops a number of challenges senior women and men face were discussed and became part of the mentoring agendas.

**Figure 1 : ABN AMRO Guide For Mentoring**



Some of the topics senior women addressed were:

- How to improve my credibility as a leader.
- How to negotiate more effectively.
- How to speak up in meetings and 'be heard'.
- How to get the job you want and use your network to get it.
- How to be successful and stay authentic (true to your own values).

Some of the topics senior executive men brought forward were:

- How do women and men measure success in their career?
- How do women and men express ambition?
- How to convince women to accept that promotion.
- How to manage emotions in the workplace more effectively.

***Ongoing feedback***

The ongoing dialogue in the individual mentoring relationships provides valuable feedback on the current Diversity and Inclusion policy, enabling the company to re-examine planned activities and focus its attention on any concerns that may emerge. This has led to a revision of certain people processes such as appraisals, promotions and talent management.

***Reaching people's hearts***

Mentoring as an experiential learning tool raises awareness in mentors. Mentors started to question how they usually judge women's performance on the job. The mentoring process is a way to reach people's hearts. Having senior executives experience the issues women face 'firsthand' in a direct exchange is far more effective than trying to change mindsets through formal culture-change programmes or by focusing only on statistics. The experience of mentoring provides mentors with the stories behind the numbers.

***Source of innovation***

Mentoring stimulates networking across functional and geographical boundaries, which results in additional paths for information flow within the company. EuropeanPWN's research<sup>33</sup> has shown that the existence of such cross-functional and cross-geographical networks can result in improved creativity and innovation. In addition, business runs more smoothly because the informal network becomes stronger, enabling the formal hierarchy to function better.

***Enhanced visibility for women***

For senior women in the organisation, the mentoring program leads to an improved sense of belonging, a better understanding

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<sup>33</sup> Women@Work No. 5 *Alice in Business-land – A Concise Manual on Diversity*, can be ordered from the EuropeanPWN website: [www.europeanpwn.net](http://www.europeanpwn.net)

of corporate culture and politics and enhanced visibility for career advancement. Women started to realise that career advancement to higher management positions does not only require consistent performance and an excellent track record. The higher up the ladder, the more attention needs to be paid to self-promotion (enhancing one's visibility and presentation, or 'personal PR') and power (having the connections to 'get things done'). The mentors provided the women with the unique opportunity to receive advice in becoming more visible in the organisation.

***Measurable results?***

Does mentoring produce quantifiable results? The following variables can be used to measure outcomes:

- **Better utilisation of the talent pool.** Mentoring provides an additional instrument to discover and build talent across hierarchical, functional and geographical boundaries. An indicator of success of the programme could be that senior executives are able to identify more talent (leading to lower investment in recruiting and executive searches).
- **Innovation.** The networking effect results in additional paths for information flow and improvement of the company's creative ability and capacity to innovate. An indicator of success could be an increased number of new products and services.
- **Improved retention rate.** Offering mentoring as a development tool provides talent with extra attention and learning opportunities. An indicator of success could be the improvement in retention rates, especially among women.
- **More women in top management.** Mentoring stimulates the acceptance of women in higher management positions (culture change) and the ability of women to become more effective in reaching and maintaining these positions (optimising potential).

An indicator of success would be an increase in the number of women in senior management positions.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In 2004, the number of women in the senior management layer directly reporting into the Managing Board (the so-called 'marzipan layer' or pipeline) was one out of 22 (4.5%). At the end of 2006 this number had increased to 5 (22.7%), both through internal promotions and external hires. Management at ABN AMRO reports that the mentoring programme has played a crucial role in this positive development. Currently there are no women on the Managing Board and two (17%) on the Supervisory Board.

### **Recommendations**

An effective in-company mentoring programme for senior executives must address the following three key areas:

#### ***1. Commitment***

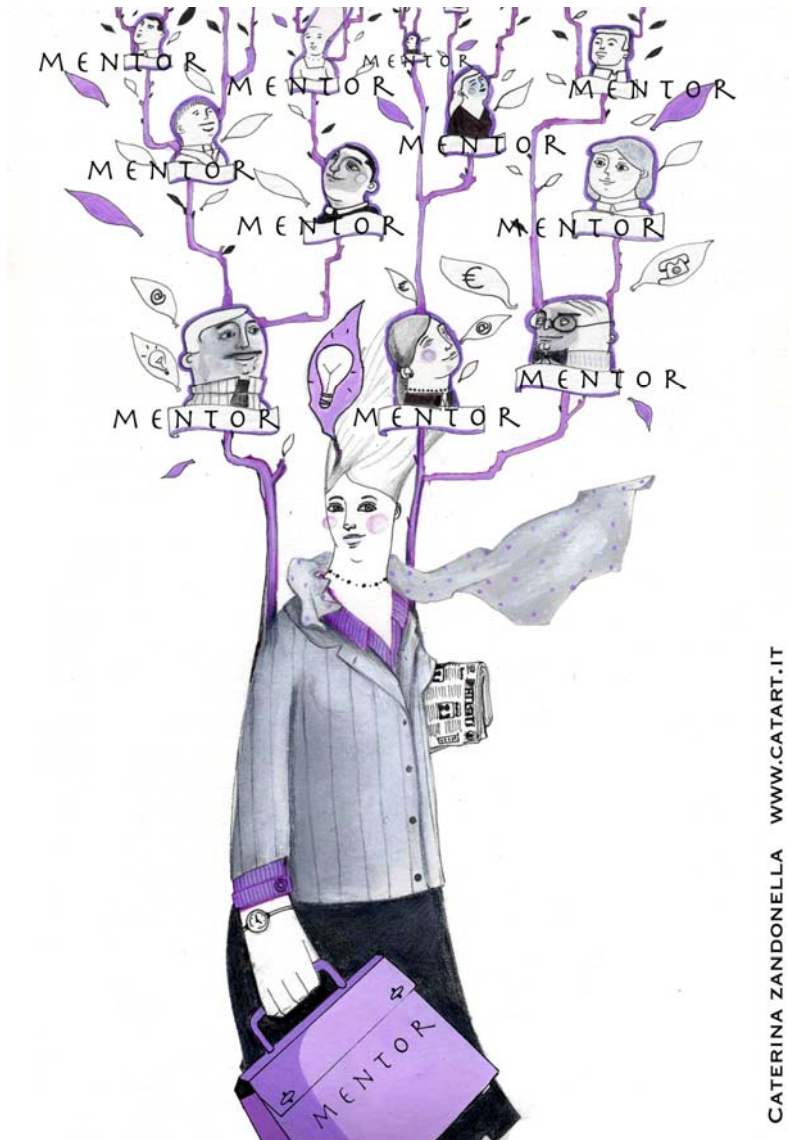
ABN AMRO's top management committed to the program by volunteering to be mentors and mentees themselves. This commitment sparked more inspiration than any advertisement could have done. Fundamental changes are most effectively started by seeing top management 'doing it' instead of 'talking about it'.

#### ***2. Clear communication***

Open and transparent communication ensures that executives are encouraged to take part in the scheme. Emphasising the benefits of diversity for the business is more effective than forcing a mandatory development programme within the company. The resulting positive dynamic accelerates both the individual and organisational learning processes, leading to fundamental change.

#### ***3. Preparation***

The key to success is preparation. By providing the techniques and resources necessary to make the mentoring relationship a success, the often-experienced 'learning anxiety' is reduced. Preparation builds confidence and ensures that participants feel supported in the programme. In addition, they continue to apply these tools in future relationships, creating a snowball effect of organisational change.



CATERINA ZANDONELLA WWW.CATART.IT

## What Is Mentoring?

*By Nicola Stevens<sup>5</sup> and Mirella Visser<sup>6</sup>*

With the growing popularity of corporate mentoring programmes, more and more senior executives are working with mentors, both within and outside their company. What are the benefits of this development for women?

To answer this question, we first need to define mentoring. In this chapter, we present various new forms of mentoring that have emerged to help men and women face the challenges of professional and personal development in the 21st century. We explain the differences and similarities between mentoring and coaching. Most importantly, we have tried to show that mentoring, although of benefit to both men and women, can help fill specific gaps in the professional development of women and is therefore an imperative for the organisations that employ them.

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<sup>5</sup> Nicola Stevens works with organisations and individuals to solve paradoxes of leadership and management. She is part of the consultation group commissioned by the UK Government to establish professional standards for coaching and mentoring. Nicola is currently President of the City Women's Network (CWN) in London.

<sup>6</sup> Mirella Visser holds a Master's degree in law and completed the General Management Programme at CEDEP in Fontainebleau. She held senior management functions at ING Group and KPMG, in Europe and Asia, before founding the Centre for Inclusive Leadership in 2004. Mirella also sits on the Supervisory Board of Royal Swets & Zeitlinger and is currently European Vice-President of the European Professional Women's Network.

### Definition of Mentoring

One of the main characteristics of mentoring is that it is 'free at the point of delivery'. Mentoring is not a paid-for service, nor is it delivered by a consultant or an external coach. Instead, mentoring is a voluntary, not-for-profit relationship between two individuals who each take a defined role:

- The mentor is a person with relevant knowledge and experience.
- The mentee is a person who wants to learn from the mentor for his or her personal and professional development.

The basic concept and process of mentoring is simple and straightforward:

Mentoring is a relationship that is created to share knowledge and experience for learning in a purposeful way.

- *To share knowledge and experience* refers to the fact that age and length of service are no longer the decisive factors for choosing a mentor with the experience required to face 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges. The traditional form of mentoring where experience was equated with age and rank has given way to new, more 'egalitarian' forms of mentoring, including reverse, peer and buddy mentoring.
- The other aspect of this definition, *for learning in a purposeful way*, concerns the key strength of the mentoring process. The relationship is based on learning. Effective learning needs a clear purpose to prevent mentoring from becoming just another opportunity to have a chat with a friend.

Mentoring requires quality time from both parties and is preferably not organised over a meal or drinks, as socialising can hinder focus and carries the risk of conversation being overheard.

### **Mentoring and Its Many Variations**

Mentoring has evolved to include several different forms, the most common of which are described below.

#### ***1. Traditional Mentoring***

Traditional mentoring relationships are characterised by a ‘wise elder mentoring the protégé(e)’ dynamic. In the corporate world, traditional mentoring programmes are designed to address issues such as succession planning and retention of talent. Individual female mentees use the programme to improve their knowledge in areas ranging from corporate strategy to how to advance within the organisation. For example, a female Financial Officer may ask to be mentored by the Financial Director of her company in order to improve her understanding of the politics and culture of the organisation. In addition, learning about the director’s role and contribution to the organisation’s strategy will help the mentee gain credibility among senior-level colleagues.

Another example of a traditional mentoring programme is the FTSE 100 Cross-Company Mentoring Programme,<sup>7</sup> in which women in the ‘marzipan layer’<sup>8</sup> of the participating companies are mentored by chairmen or CEOs of other FTSE 100 organisations. This programme was designed to help prepare female talent for board-level positions in order to enhance the participating companies’ competitiveness.

#### ***2. Reverse Mentoring***

Reverse mentoring has developed in response to the increasing number of situations in which younger employees possess the experience and knowledge to help companies gain a competitive advantage. For instance, younger workers have an inherently better understanding of their peers – the sought-after ‘Y Generation’ customers. They also have a better grasp of how future technology

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<sup>7</sup> See *The FTSE 100 Cross-Company Mentoring Programme* in this volume.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Marzipan layer’ refers to the management layer reporting into a company’s board.

could be leveraged to increase the ‘triple bottom line’<sup>9</sup> and meet Corporate Social Responsibility imperatives.

Reverse mentoring enables organisations to respond more adequately to demographic developments. For example, understanding the business case for having a 50% female workforce has led Cisco to design a reverse mentoring programme. Cisco’s Vice-Presidents, predominantly male at this time, are mentored by women from all levels in the organisation, with the aim of improving their understanding of women’s experiences and needs within the company.

### ***3. Peer Mentoring***

Establishing a mentoring relationship with a peer, who could be a colleague or a peer in a different company or even a different sector, is an excellent way to aid knowledge exchange. For example, peer mentoring can take place within a company to help break a silo mentality. Meeting regularly and with a clear purpose makes peer mentoring extremely beneficial.

Peer mentoring is also a very useful tool for employees who have to deal with issues of working in a new or emerging market. A mentor can, for example, help a mentee understand the attitudes towards age and youth in a new environment and culture. Best practices of working in foreign offices and surviving new political regimes can be other topics for mentoring meetings among peers. Another important issue is how to manage corruption and distinguish it from acceptable working practices. For professional women, working in a foreign, male-dominated society can be a steep learning curve. As global executives, they are dealing with these issues today, and the best source of knowledge to tap into is the experience of their peers.

### ***4. Buddy Mentoring***

An established practice within many corporations is ‘buddying’ for graduates and employees entering the organisation. Buddying enables newcomers to learn their way around the company, its practices and culture.

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<sup>9</sup> Triple Bottom Line, or ‘People, Planet, Profit’ refers to a popular thinking model in which additional criteria for measuring organisational and societal success – such as economic, environmental and social – are applied.

As a recent development, buddying is being used to help keep women engaged in the workplace through their periods of absence due to, for example, taking up an academic study, maternity leave, caring for elderly parents or personal health issues. Implementing a buddying scheme counteracts the penalties of time away from work – one of the reasons for the so-called ‘female brain drain’<sup>10</sup> in corporations. Purposeful mentoring helps maintain the connection with the workplace and allows these women to come back from a time-out without feeling marginalised in their careers.

### **5. Corporate Mentoring Programmes**

These in-company programmes tend to focus on the development and retention of women in order to accelerate their advancement to higher management positions. Mentors and mentees are employees of the company, but do not necessarily operate in the same geographical or organisational unit. This book provides an excellent example of a corporate mentoring programme in the article *Mentoring Women for Corporate Success – Case Study ABN AMRO*.<sup>11</sup>

### **6. Community Mentoring Programmes**

Community mentoring programmes are typically organised by people who share a common interest, hobby or goal. The EuropeanPWN-Paris Mentoring Programme,<sup>12</sup> for example, helps professional women from international backgrounds to develop leadership skills and advance in corporate life.

In London, the City Women’s Network (CWN) fosters informal peer mentoring – the backbone of the network that continues to be as important today as it was for women in the 1970s. It provides members with the necessary support to achieve, and be effective in, top positions in corporate and public life. CWN’s Personal Development Committee raised the question: ‘What do senior professional women want to develop at this stage in their career?’

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<sup>10</sup> “Off-ramps and On-ramps – Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success” by Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Carolyn Buck Luce, *Harvard Business Review*, 1 December 2005.

<sup>11</sup> In this volume.

<sup>12</sup> See *Mentoring in a Women’s Network* in this volume.

The debate concluded that senior women with careers stretching over 20 to 30 years had attended virtually all the standard training courses and experienced all the management buzzwords and fads. They acknowledged that the truly beneficial learning now – surprisingly for some – came from mentoring and developing others.

The senior women reported that the information and experiences shared through mentoring others had refreshed their thinking. It had given them insights into current issues and challenges, which they might have missed sitting in their ‘ivory towers’. Most importantly, they wanted to learn and to be reminded that they were never too old to discover something new. It became clear to them that open-mindedness was the key to their future personal development. As one mentor put it:

“My mentoring another executive became my own refresher course in leadership and management. I learned from listening to, and reflecting on, my mentee’s working demands, which are at a different level from mine.”

These women realised that participating in the concept and process of mentoring was the best way to learn, develop and implement their experience. This view is echoed in organisations that have firmly embedded mentoring as a practice in their culture, underlining why mentoring is essential for professional women at all levels in the workplace.

### ***7. e-Mentoring***

This new form of mentoring, ‘encounters in social cyberspace’, is fast gaining momentum. In e-mentoring, the mentoring process is aided by computer-mediated communication. E-mentoring not only includes sharing experiences and insights by email, but also via web-based media such as chat rooms, online meetings and discussion areas.

Developing online communities around themes relevant to career advancement is a popular application of e-mentoring. EuropeanPWN’s Think Tank Groups, which focus on topics such as ‘accelerating a career in midlife’ or ‘managing the first 100 days in a new job’, are clear examples. The Think Tank Groups make use of web technology to stimulate debate and share best practices, enabling

ever-changing groups of members across Europe to learn from each other. The main challenge in e-mentoring is achieving the right balance between distance communication and the face-to-face meetings necessary for establishing an effective learning relationship.

### **Mentoring vs. Coaching**

Mentoring and coaching present both differences and similarities. One common misconception is that coaching can provide the same as mentoring; mentoring has sometimes even been referred to as a lesser version of coaching – so-called ‘poor man’s coaching’.

In truth, mentoring and coaching require different skills and knowledge. Mentoring and coaching differ in that a coach needs to be an expert in the areas and skills required to foster his/her client’s development, whereas a mentor has specific knowledge or a particular experience the mentee is looking for. They are similar in that both mentor and coach should be able to share their knowledge in a way conducive to learning. In an ideal world, the mentor has learned and honed the same skills as a professional coach, but will use them to differing degrees of effectiveness and depth.

The five key areas of coaching skills are identified as: Rapport, Listening, Questioning, Communication and Learning & Experience. These include important soft skills such as pacing, meaningful language, curiosity, listening levels and perception.<sup>13</sup>

In both mentoring and coaching, the mentee and coachee are accountable and responsible for their own learning. Nevertheless, the mentor and coach may have different roles in the learning process. A coach is responsible for the challenge of teaching and stimulating the coachee to reach a higher level of his or her potential. A mentor, being a role model, shares relevant and required experiences, but leaves it to the mentee to apply the knowledge in the way that best suits his/her own purpose.

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<sup>13</sup> *Learn to Coach – The Skills You Need to Coach for Personal and Professional Development* by Nicola Stevens, How to Books, 2004.

### **Benefits and Challenges of Mentoring for Women**

The mentoring process creates benefits for the mentee, the mentor and the organisation they are part of.

1. The **mentee benefits** from purposeful, personal and professional development. Women mentees in particular can fill certain gaps in knowledge, traditionally passed on to men.
2. The **mentor benefits** as mentoring becomes a source of both continuous professional development and training in leadership and management. This is especially beneficial to senior women who have moved beyond standard training and development organised by their companies' Human Resources departments.
3. The **organisation benefits** as the results of mentoring manifest themselves in the improvement of the company's competitive advantage and quality of future leadership.

All stakeholders therefore benefit through working together in an effort to optimise the most under-utilised resource in the world: women.

#### ***Specific mentoring benefits for women***

While traditional mentoring relationships foster the professional development of both men and women, they also help fill gaps that are specific to women's careers while offering women development opportunities that many would otherwise miss. Key benefits for women are:

1. **Strengthening support relationships.** Even successful women do not always take full advantage of informal mentoring in the workplace. Men often 'adopt' each other in order to have 'people like me' around to succeed them; they build informal networks from which women are generally excluded. Formal mentoring programmes can help women open up to using mentoring relationships as a crucial support network for career advancement.
2. **Expanding career horizons.** Women tend to concentrate on their current jobs without dedicating sufficient time to planning their next career move. By confronting the points of views of a mentor and mentee at different stages of their careers, a mentoring relationship helps women put their own career path into a broader perspective.

3. **Bridging career breaks.** As women aspire to maintain a certain quality of life, their careers typically include breaks that may impede their career advancement. Mentoring can help women plan and bridge these out-of-work periods. In addition, mentoring programs have an impact on a company's culture and organisational values, which ultimately results in a more positive attitude towards women in the workplace.

#### ***Conditions for successful mentoring***

Mentoring is only successful when it takes place within a relationship based on mutual understanding and under the following conditions:

- **Complete confidentiality.**
- **Absence of a judgemental attitude** regarding each other's values, attitudes and differences.
- **Open-mindedness** and willingness to learn in unexpected ways.
- **Courage** to be honest, challenging and open, in order to derive maximum value and effectiveness.
- **Respect** for each other's contributions, as well as differences in personalities, learning and working styles.
- **Understanding** that today's working environments and social expectations differ from those in the past, and that examining the past is valuable for providing clear insights into the future.

These conditions are especially crucial in relationships where women are being mentored by senior men. Often it is only men who have the relevant experience to mentor women at senior levels. Under these circumstances, it becomes even more important to agree on guidelines and conditions from the outset of the mentoring relationship.

#### ***Ineffective mentoring relationships***

Mentoring relationships fail or are ineffective if the mentee perceives an unsafe atmosphere in the relationship. The following mentee behaviours are indicators of an ineffective relationship:

- The mentee is suspicious that personal information is not being kept in confidence.
- The mentee feels constantly judged and assessed on performance.
- The mentee feels insecure about freely asking 'silly' or 'minor' questions.

- The mentee lacks appreciation and understanding of the differences between the mentor and her own role as mentee.
- The mentee experiences or believes that the mentor is either too busy or simply lacking the interest and commitment to establish an effective relationship.
- The mentee views mentoring as an extension of a social interaction.

### **Conclusion**

Organisations realise that they need to win the war on talent in order to remain successful in a highly competitive future. The 'hard-core' business case for employing women at all levels of the workforce has been widely accepted. Nevertheless, many professional women are still not achieving the career paths they aspire to and companies are confronted with a significant loss of female talent.

Mentoring provides women with multiple benefits in the areas of career planning and advancement, personal skills training, support networks, and development of leadership potential. As such, mentoring provides an essential tool for women to optimise their personal and professional lives.

For companies, mentoring has become an integrated component in their business strategies, enabling them to develop and retain female talent in order to achieve a sustainable and competitive performance.