

Mentors develop the new leaders

More companies are using mentoring to improve the performance and career prospects of their managers. Report by **Steve Farrar**

DAVID YIM was on the verge of quitting. Overlooked as a candidate for promotion to a directorship at KPMG, he said: "I was feeling undervalued and demoralised and if I had allowed my pride to take over, I would have left the company."

But Yim's mentor, Vincent Neate, a partner in restructuring at KPMG, suggested Yim take a step back to consider his next move. He explained that being a director required hunger and desire, and soon Yim was putting together a compelling business case for his own promotion. That argument proved persuasive.

"It was recognised that I could be good at this, and I was promoted last October," said Yim.

Now a director in a department called financial-services advisory and on a salary of more than £100,000, Yim is grateful that he had Neate to prompt him to think again.

"Vincent does not give me the answers to particular problems but, as someone a few steps ahead of me in his career, he can share his experience and coach me into coming up with what might be the right answers," he said.

Neate said: "Very often, it's about seeing the wood for the trees. I'm not being the great guru but having an honest and open discussion with David."

Yim said that mentoring was built on commitment, empathy, objectivity, honesty and mutual respect.

Neate enjoys the arrangement but also sees it as benefiting KPMG. He estimated that Yim was worth up to £2m a year to the company.

While Neate and Yim's mentoring began informally, many schemes at KPMG are officially arranged. The people who are being mentored get a sounding board; they are presented with different perspectives; their way of thinking is challenged and often they get help with networking.

Mentoring is also popular at other large companies, such as the mobile-phone giant Vodafone. Terry Kramer, group strategy and human-resources director, estimated that about half the company's 4,500 management team had mentors. "We actively encourage it," he said.

Vodafone is a rapidly expanding business and focuses a great deal of energy on devel-

oping its own leaders. Mentoring is seen as one of the principal ways of doing this.

"People get better faster," said Kramer. "Mentoring is a highly customised way to grow talent by understanding the needs of an individual and matching them to someone who can add value in that specific area."

Mentoring is employed in many different ways. It is widely used to boost staff diversity through the coaching of people from minority groups. Graduates are increasingly demanding high-quality mentoring, to the extent that it is becoming an important factor in recruitment in some business sectors.

Kramer is mentor to six people — two employees who have been identified as possible high-flyers, two junior managers who need to learn how to evaluate and nurture people and two foreign staff members who are adjusting to working in Britain.

Mentoring brings many benefits, according to a survey of more than 100 academic studies, commissioned by the East Mentors Forum. In 45% of the studies, people who were mentored reported that it had improved their opportunities for career advancement. Three-quarters described the

experience as positive. There were also reports of higher salaries, increased job satisfaction, improved skills and faster learning.

The studies highlighted evidence of improved performance and productivity, better staff retention rates and greater diversity.

Some 62% of the mentors said that the experience had improved their own job performance by enhancing their knowledge and understanding.

Robert Garvey, professor of mentoring and coaching at Sheffield Hallam University and one of the survey's authors, said that the practice is widespread in both private and public sectors.

He said that Halifax Bank of Scotland is a particularly enthusiastic user of mentoring, with board members engaged in the practice. Mentoring has also been widely used in the National Health Service, with 230,000 people involved in it in 2006.

"Mentoring is not some new fad that's been dreamt up at a business school — it has been known about for centuries," said Garvey.

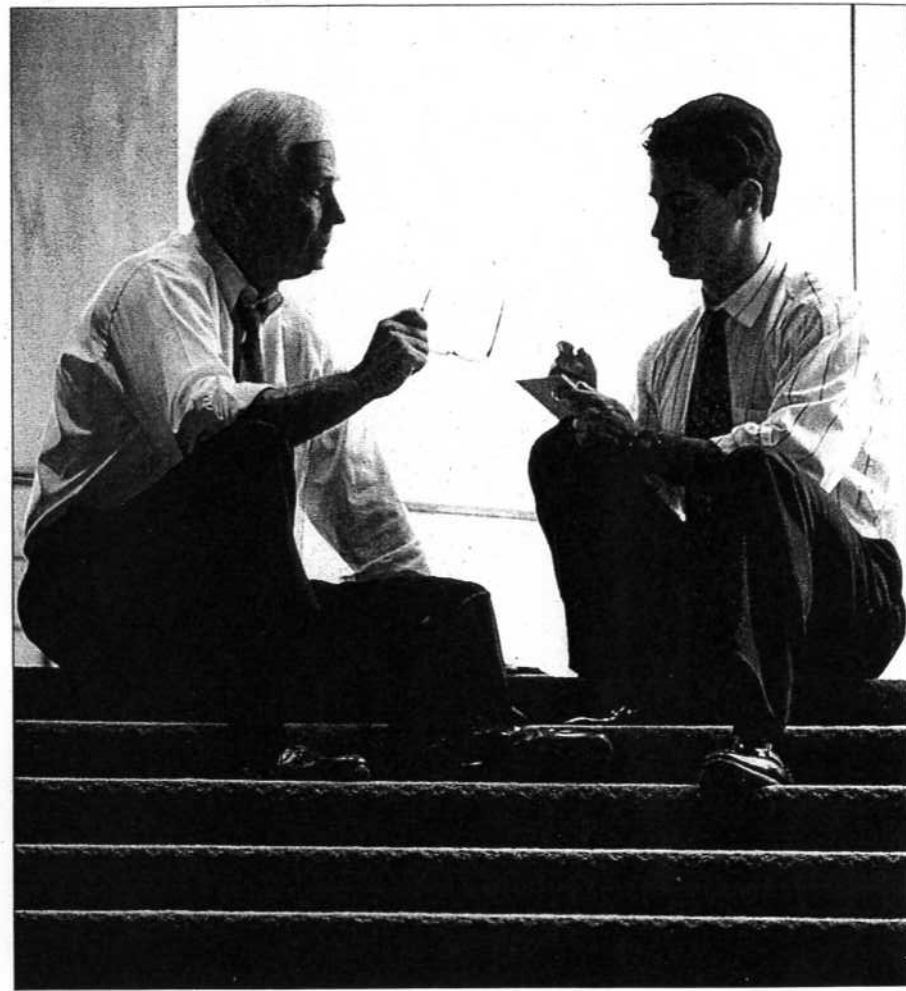
The purpose of the mentoring has to be clearly defined at the outset and there needs to be some degree of choice on who mentors who, with a formal exit clause in case the relationship does not work out.

Ground rules about confidentiality as well as how and when the two parties should communicate also need to be agreed on by each side in advance.

David Clutterbuck, author of *Everyone Needs a Mentor*, said that care had to be taken to prevent the relationship from becoming too close. "Opening your heart to someone you trust can lead to a level of dependence and potential intimacy that may not be appropriate," he said.

Clutterbuck said that training mentors and the people who receive mentoring to get the most out of their interaction could make an enormous difference. He estimated that without training, 30% of mentoring delivers real value. Where both parties were trained, that figure rises to 90%.

Anna Guest, a director of the Coaching and Mentoring Network, said mentoring helped to boost the careers of the mentors as well as of the people they were guiding. Employees with high potential can be



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assigned mentors where there are limited prospects of promotion but the organisation wants to retain their services.

"Mentors help to extend their skills and give them more responsibility so when a position does come up, that individual is better equipped to apply," she said.

The benefits for mentors include offering them the opportunity to improve their own communication and listening skills.

"For some, mentoring can be a really good stepping stone into a management role, while it can give senior executives insights into what is going on in their organisation," said Guest.

Many senior figures look outside their organisations for mentors. Fiona Eldridge, director of the Coaching and Communication Centre, has for the past year been a mentor for Andrew Thomson, chief executive of the Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning, and his four directors.

Thomson had just launched the agency and wanted help in taking it forward. Eldridge provided him with a "sparring partner" with whom he could develop strategies as well as plan his career. She also spoke to people Thomson and his team worked with, to identify their strengths.

Thomson said that his mentor's ability to

listen, grasp ideas and ask searching questions, had been really effective.

"What we have gained is the opportunity to think quite deliberately about how we are doing our jobs, talking through what is happening at work and how we are going to approach the challenges that are coming up," said Thomson. "If you can do this, you stand a reasonable chance of doing your job better."

Eldridge, who mentors about 20 people a year, said: "I am not afraid to challenge him and hold up a reflecting glass to his ideas. It has given Andrew pause for thought and enabled him to make more informed decisions."