

# AI and the Future of *Business Mentoring*

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# Foreword

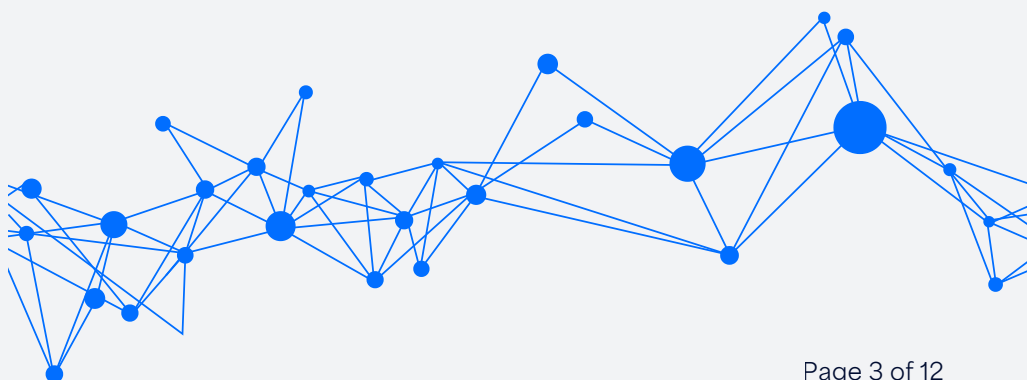
Business mentoring has always been about combining lived experience with practical guidance to help business leaders and entrepreneurs grow as individuals, grow their business, and support their wellbeing. Today, that role is being reframed because of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI tools that create content, automate tasks, and analyse data are now emerging across the economy, from marketing and design to customer service and back-office operations. However, as AI becomes more capable at handling routine advice and information, the qualities it cannot easily replicate – trust, empathy, judgment, and lived experience – become the defining strengths of human mentoring.

The Association of Business Mentors (ABM) defines a business mentor as “an experienced professional who possesses a unique blend of extensive business experience, practical knowledge of business theory and tools, and strong coaching and mentoring skills.” This blend is what gives business mentoring its distinctive power. When combined with the speed and breadth of AI tools, it creates a powerful synergy: technology takes the strain, while mentors provide the judgement, awareness and lived experience to spring businesses into action.

More than that, business mentors – as knowledgeable leaders with lived insight, human sensitivity, and mentoring competencies – are uniquely placed to support businesses as they grapple with the changes AI will bring about. Mentors draw on their real-world experience, evaluate new tools against real-world business challenges, and prepare leaders and teams for change. This change will bring significant business opportunity but also challenge.

**This paper explains why AI matters to the business mentoring profession and how ABM will support mentors to adapt. It:**

- Assesses current adoption data and UK policy signals.
- Analyses the opportunities and challenges that AI presents for businesses and business mentoring.
- Sets out how ABM, working in partnership with government and the business-support community, will ensure business mentoring remains relevant, ethical, and impactful for the businesses we support.



The message is clear: AI will transform the context in which business mentors work. With the right preparation, business mentoring can harness AI's power to achieve greater impact - blending technology's scale with human sensitivity and judgement whilst ensuring that adoption strengthens not only productivity but also the resilience, leadership capacity and wellbeing of UK businesses. By relying on professional business mentors - guides who bring empathy, business expertise and human judgement - the UK can ensure an AI future that is innovative and human at its core.

We invite business mentors, along with business support organisations and government to seize AI's opportunities - helping to super charge the businesses they support to grow and thrive.



**Georgina Waite**  
*Chief Executive Officer*



**Ben Jacobs**  
*Chief Project Officer*



# The AI Opportunity for Business Mentoring

Day-by-day, week-by-week and month-by-month, AI is moving from experiment to everyday practice across UK firms. This progress reflects the huge opportunities offered by AI - with the International Monetary Fund estimating that full adoption could lift UK productivity by up to 1.5% annually, worth an additional £47 billion per year over a decade. The challenge for businesses is how they can seize these opportunities.

Between July and December 2025, the ABM has seen the number of SME mentorships focusing on AI as a business challenge or opportunity double.

(SOURCE: ABM Interactive Mentoring Planner, SMEs engaged in national programme, Sample: 145 completions, 106% increase)

In July 2025, 14% of businesses planned to adopt some form of AI within three months - the highest level since the ONS began tracking.

(SOURCE: ONS, Business insights and impact on the UK economy; 3 July 2025; [LINK](#))

81% of UK chief executives say AI is a top investment priority, and they anticipate spending 10% or more of their budgets on AI.

(SOURCE: KPMG 2025 CEO Outlook, [LINK](#))

The current position of AI adoption in UK business and business support is one of high intent, supportive policy, but uneven implementation and capability. This requires further support if businesses are to gain the efficiency, quality and capability improvements on offer. Security is often the underdiscussed constraint: without early, deliberate consideration of data handling, supplier and technology use, adoption may undermine trust, exposing businesses to avoidable risk.

This risk was highlighted when 38TB of internal and employee data (incl. ~30,000 Teams messages) were accidentally exposed by Microsoft researchers whilst [giving access to AI training data](#). Working with a mentor who understands AI adoption and best practice reduces similar risks for SMEs.

In the context of business mentoring, the opportunity is threefold. First, how can mentors support businesses to assess where AI can bring the most value, implement it in their organisations and use it to generate value for them - all while respecting privacy and consent and avoiding unnecessary pitfalls?

Second, there is a role for the business mentors and the business mentoring profession itself in understanding how AI tools can be leveraged in their own practice, in an ethical way, to make their own work more efficient and impactful. They are the human counterweight to automated guidance, bringing judgement, empathy, and lived experience to ground AI-generated guidance, particularly in areas of transition and change.

Finally, in an AI-enabled economy, it is important that business support providers use technology to supercharge the performance of business mentoring and to ensure that businesses of all sizes and sectors can access professional business support.

Overall, the UK context is promising but mixed. Adoption is accelerating and intent is high, yet barriers in cost, skills and use-case remain.

By prioritising value, modelling responsible practice, and sustaining trust, mentors can help leaders capture immediate benefits while laying the foundations for productivity, innovation and competitiveness in the decade ahead.

## What are the current practical opportunities and challenges facing SMEs with AI?

“We are committed to helping SMEs move from AI curiosity to confident, practical adoption. In almost every AI training session, we have seen countless “aha moments” as leaders and their teams discover how they can automate repetitive, time-consuming and manual tasks by using AI for content drafting, policy updates, meeting summaries and client communication, immediately freeing 20–40% of their weekly workload. Another recurring theme is customer-facing improvements with chatbots, personalised marketing and AI-assisted service design consistently delivering faster responses and better experiences.

Leaders frequently express concerns about data security, ethical use, or “getting it wrong.” In one cohort, over 60% of participants admitted they had no AI strategy, even though they were already trialling tools informally. In a recent session, several participants initially believed AI might dehumanise their work but after guided demonstrations, they discovered practical applications, turning lengthy notes into clear reports,

generating staff communication templates, and drafting curriculum ideas, all while retaining their professional judgement.

When leaders are informed and equipped to move forward strategically, safely, and securely, teams innovate faster and adopt with confidence. Strategic adoption requires intentional leadership; clear use cases, experimentation, staff training, and the courage to rethink old processes. When SMEs approach AI with purpose rather than panic, the technology becomes less of a threat and more of a partner for growth, innovation and long-term competitiveness.

**AI doesn't create leaders; it helps great leaders make wiser, faster, and more inclusive decisions.**



**Lola Adeleye**  
*ABM Fellow, AI Business  
Growth Academy*



# The Future Outlook for AI and Business Mentoring

Over the next decade, AI will become as fundamental to business as the internet or electricity. At a recent UK business mentoring conference, entrepreneur, investor and AI expert Piers Linney identified that even the most cutting-edge AI technology we see today is “the worst it is ever going to be”, and that we are entering a phase of rapid AI improvements akin to going from the “dialup internet” of AI today to the “fibre-optic” of AI in just a few short years. The question is no longer whether firms will adopt AI, but how intelligently, responsibly, and inclusively they will do so, and which businesses might be left behind. Business mentors have a crucial role to play in ensuring that this transformation strengthens leadership, culture, and long-term value.

The next decade will see AI and business mentoring evolve together. The near term will be about building confidence and capability. The medium term will focus on embedding accountability and ethics. And the long term will depend on clearly articulating the unique human value that mentoring brings in a world where AI systems are ubiquitous.



## Short Term (1-2 years): Building Practical Foundations

In the immediate future, the most visible applications of AI will continue to be pragmatic: content creation, customer-service automation, forecasting, and workflow optimisation. Everyday tools - from office suites to AI point-of-sales systems, to web platforms - are rapidly embedding AI features that promise efficiency but also bring disruption.

For leaders of small and medium-sized enterprises, this can be as unsettling as it is exciting. Business mentors will be vital in helping these leaders and their teams understand what is changing, how to adapt, and where to focus. Their role will go beyond the technical: it will involve building trust, addressing anxieties, and guiding organisations through early experiments. Mentors will help businesses identify where AI can create measurable value, set clear priorities, and introduce changes in a way that strengthens rather than destabilises teams.

Equally, mentors themselves must model good practice - using AI transparently and proportionately, showing how human judgement can coexist with automation. By combining technical fluency with empathy and perspective, mentors can help leaders adopt AI confidently while protecting the integrity, security, and culture of their organisations.

For policymakers, this early period presents an opportunity to recognise and support the mentoring profession's role in managing the human side of technological adoption. Investment in continuing professional development and knowledge sharing will help ensure mentors remain credible, capable guides through an era of rapid change.

### Using AI to Deepen Mentoring and Accelerate Progress

"Over the past year, I have been working with the leadership of a tech start-up developing a digital platform for the music and creative sector. I was initially invited to support them because of my marketing and branding expertise, together with my SME agency experience, but I have been able to complement these with the use of AI tools. AI has enabled me to help the founders move faster and think more deeply, particularly in areas such as research and content creation.

It has also enriched my mentoring by prompting more searching questions about the founder's core values and his approach to entering a new sector.

Using AI to model, rehearse and reflect upon complex mentoring conversations has proved an interesting and valuable addition to the process. This brings extra strength to the support I offer as a mentor, increasing the amount I get done.

If AI can provide the frameworks and data, then the real value lies in the human ingredient we add - lived experience, empathy - even humour - and the ability to help people unlock their own growth."



**Steve Paul**  
*ABM Fellow, Cesura  
Coaching & Mentoring*



## Medium Term (3–5 years): Embedding and Accountability

As AI becomes embedded in mainstream processes, expectations will rise. Leaders will need to manage not only systems and tools, but also the complex human consequences of technological transformation. Teams will evolve, roles will change, and new patterns of work will emerge. Business mentors will increasingly be on the front line, helping organisations scale, innovate, and manage the balance between technology, performance, and wellbeing.

By this stage, the emphasis will shift from experimentation to accountability. Businesses will expect AI investments to deliver measurable results - improved productivity, stronger competitiveness, better decision-making. Mentors will play a critical role in aligning people, culture, and technology so that these gains are realised sustainably.

The profession itself will need to advance in parallel. More structured training, clearer ethical frameworks, and shared standards of good practice will be essential to maintaining trust. Beyond early adopters, mentors will regularly use AI tools to prepare for sessions, analyse data, and enhance client understanding - but they will continue to provide what AI cannot: context, empathy, and accountability.

Policy support will remain crucial. By endorsing ethical frameworks that emphasise privacy, consent, and fairness, policymakers can help establish a national culture of responsible AI use. Partnership between government, business mentors, and other support organisations will ensure that every leader, regardless of size or sector, can access guidance that combines technical insight with human understanding.

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## Long Term (5–10+ years): Defining Human Value

Looking ahead to the 2030s, AI is likely to be embedded across almost every business system. In that world, information will be abundant - but wisdom, judgement, and empathy will be scarce. The distinctive value of mentoring will become even clearer: helping leaders navigate complexity, think ethically, and sustain human connection in increasingly automated workplaces.

The mentors of the future will act as trusted partners in leadership and culture, ensuring AI adoption strengthens diversity, creativity, and resilience rather than eroding them. They will help leaders adapt to continuous change, manage risk, and maintain focus on human outcomes.

AI will bring data and scale; mentoring will bring interpretation, context, and conscience. Together, they can form a model for high-performance organisations that are both technologically advanced and deeply human.

To realise this vision, mentoring must be recognised as a strategic element of the UK's AI-driven growth agenda.

Policymakers can work alongside the mentoring community to co-create standards, tools, and pathways that maximise both economic and social outcomes - anchoring empathy, trust, and leadership at the heart of innovation.

## The Impact of AI Training for Business mentors

“At the ABM Training Centre, we’re seeing first-hand how the rise of AI is reshaping the conversations mentors have with business leaders.

AI has sparked genuine curiosity among mentors, many of whom want greater confidence in supporting businesses to implement AI solutions effectively and avoid costly mistakes. We are seeing strong appetite to strengthen AI understanding, with mentors valuing the practical frameworks, tools and insights gained through our training. AI-confident mentors help business leaders approach adoption in a measured, ethical and human-centred way and it is this combination of experience, curiosity and structured learning that makes them such powerful partners in guiding successful AI transformation.

One way we are seeking to do this is through the “AI for Business Mentors Course”. A recent course completer described the impact:

“The course content has had a significant impact on the way I have approached support of mentees who are looking at introducing AI into their businesses over the last few months.

As a training centre we are thrilled to see mentors engaged in these activities, seeing first-hand how small training interventions with mentors create a snowball effect on the multiple businesses that they support.”



**Liz King**

*ABM Training Centre  
Manager and ABM Fellow*



# Building an Ethical, Human-Centred Future

Across these time horizons, one constant remains: mentors must be equipped to guide leaders through both the technical and human dimensions of AI. The prize is significant. By enabling businesses to adopt AI with confidence, mentors help unlock productivity gains, strengthen competitiveness, and stimulate innovation. The benefits extend far beyond profit - resilient, well-led businesses underpin healthier local economies and stronger communities.

The Association of Business Mentors (ABM) is already taking practical steps to shape this future and support business mentors to evolve their mentoring practice through the use of AI. The launch of its “AI for Business Mentors course” in September 2025 marked a major milestone, providing mentors with hands-on experience of AI tools, data security, privacy, and change management. It equips them to help businesses decide where best to invest and how to implement change responsibly. This is not just technical training; there is a focus on building the human capability to manage transition with confidence and care.

ABM’s long-term ambition is to deepen collaboration with government and industry partners, developing shared standards on ethics, inclusivity, and innovation.

By agreeing clear principles on data privacy, security, and the irreplaceable human touch, ABM aims to build confidence in AI-enabled mentoring and showcase the sector’s leadership.

AI is reshaping the way businesses operate - and mentoring will be central to ensuring that transformation benefits people as well as profits. When technology’s scale is combined with human understanding, empathy and real lived experience, businesses gain not only productivity but also resilience, creativity, and purpose. The challenge is not AI’s arrival, but how we choose to use it.

Through professional business mentors, trusted guides who blend empathy with expertise, the UK can ensure that its AI future is both innovative and human at its core.



Supporting the *people*  
who power *success*



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