



Leading libraries

Briefing paper on coaching and mentoring

Prepared by

Sue Hodges

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Contact the author:

SCONUL
94 Euston Street
London
NW1 2HA

info@sconul.ac.uk

Contents

1.	Introduction	4
2.	What is mentoring?	5
3.	What is coaching?	6
4.	Benefits of coaching and mentoring	6
5.	Examples of mentoring schemes	7
6.	Examples of coaching schemes	8
7.	Conclusion	11

1. Introduction

This briefing paper is intended as an introduction to mentoring and coaching which are excellent and effective learning and development methods for improving performance within an organisation or workplace, for improving leadership and management and for dealing with change.

Definitions of coaching and mentoring can often be unclear and boundaries between the two sometimes become confused. It is also useful to remember that, within organisations, mentoring and coaching can be used as standalone learning, part of the performance development review process (including monthly one-to-one meetings) or as part of the process of training and development.

Both coaching and mentoring assist staff in discussing issues they have, reflecting on those issues and identifying and setting goals. The learning relationship that develops is key to the process for both coaching and mentoring and helps to support individuals in developing their leadership skills and knowledge. The aim is also to raise the individual's self-awareness of his / her behaviours and negative and positive traits and set goals for personal leadership and organisational development. The mentoring and coaching relationship is very powerful and important as it empowers individuals to find solutions, develop, and reflect on their role. Change can then be supported for themselves and the teams within which they work. The key skills to be a mentor and a coach are similar and include listening, reflecting, effective questioning, empathy, genuineness, and supporting the individual.

Some businesses and institutions have clearly defined policies and practices for mentoring and coaching and several examples of organisations that have introduced coaching and mentoring are given within this briefing paper.

2. What is mentoring?

“The aim is to help and support people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and enable them to become the person they want to be” (Parsloe and Wray, 2000, p. 22).

Mentoring is a powerful personal development and empowerment tool. It is often described as a professional relationship in which an experienced person (mentor) assists another person (mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the mentee’s professional and personal growth. It is an effective way of helping people to progress in their chosen career and is a helpful relationship based upon trust and respect.

Mentoring utilises a more directive approach than coaching. The mentor passes on his / her expert knowledge to the mentee and fosters a supportive relationship. Clutterbuck (2004, pp. 3 – 4) states: “It is the holistic nature of the mentoring role that distinguishes it from other learning or supporting roles, such as coaching. The mentor provides a very different kind of support – one based on reflective learning and something akin to pastoral care.” The mentor can often be a more senior member of staff but the main prerequisite is that the mentor has excellent experience in the mentee’s field of work. A mentor is a guide who can help the mentee to find the right direction and assist in developing solutions to career issues. Listening skills are very important and mentors rely upon having had similar experiences to gain an empathy and an understanding of the mentee’s issues.

A successful mentoring relationship needs space to grow and develop and is built on mutual trust and respect. It is a two-way relationship where both people get the chance to learn new things. Mentoring also provides more general support to build confidence and the capability to meet current and future development needs. For this reason, mentoring is usually a longer-term relationship than coaching and can last between six and eighteen months, sometimes longer.

3. What is coaching?

Peterson and Hicks (1996, p. 14) defined coaching as “a process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective”. This definition clearly places the emphasis on the coachee as having the solutions and the coach to act as facilitator. Coaching generally uses a non-directive approach and is based on questioning. Some solution-focused approaches recognise the need for the coach to suggest a solution occasionally but generally the coachee identifies the solutions. The role of the coach is therefore to conduct the process and not to direct the outcome. Whilst there has been some consensus about mentoring as being instructional and coaching as non-directive these boundaries are not always maintained and are still debated.

Coaching therefore utilises a series of questions which assist the coachee to explore, learn more about themselves, and become more self-aware. The emphasis is on finding solutions themselves and this process is facilitated by the coach in a supportive environment. Coaching is a short-term relationship, usually eight to ten sessions, and can often be a more holistic approach, discussing areas such as life skills and areas outside work. The coach is not usually an expert in the coachee’s field or area.

4. Benefits of coaching and mentoring

The benefits of coaching and mentoring include the following:

- providing timely, structured learning and development based on the specific needs of the member of staff at their own pace
- improving confidence and self-esteem
- increasing motivation to take action
- developing the individual’s own understanding of the organisation
- developing new insights and ways of working
- providing an opportunity to receive safe and supportive feedback
- providing an opportunity for staff to reflect on, and plan their career development
- providing an opportunity to reflect on progress in leadership and management
- examining work-life balance issues.



Mentoring skills and benefits

5. Examples of mentoring schemes

Three different mentoring schemes are briefly described as examples of frameworks available for supporting mentees and mentors.

5.1 Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Mentoring Scheme

CILIP offers training to members who want to mentor colleagues through the different levels of professional registration: Certification, Chartership and Fellowship. Training is arranged by CILIP's Personnel, Training and Education Group and advertised on the CILIP website and social media. The CILIP Mentoring Scheme Guidelines 2013 give a checklist for mentors and mentees, and the responsibilities of each are stated. Regional Mentor Support Officers co-ordinate activities for mentors, including providing support, advice, and training. Mentors normally complete a training session in mentoring skills and are kept up to date on CILIP's specific Professional Registration requirements. At the moment CILIP is completely revising its mentoring scheme and plans to update the mentoring guidelines. Further information is available at <https://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/jobs-careers/professional-registration/mentoring>.

5.2 RLUK Mentoring Scheme

RLUK (www.rluk.ac.uk) is also in the process of devising a mentoring scheme for members. So far they have produced an RLUK Mentoring Framework which defines what mentoring is and outlines a guiding framework for moving forwards. They are still in the process of working out the details of the scheme.

5.3 Women in Universities Mentoring Scheme (Wales)

The Women in Universities Mentoring Scheme (WUMS) aims to put early career women in contact with other women who have achieved a higher grade in a similar or related job. The scheme aims to help alleviate the feelings of isolation and invisibility often reported by women working in male-dominated environments and to help to give rise to productive professional networking and other opportunities. There is a WUMS co-ordinator based at Bangor University who oversees the matching process and provides further information, advice, and support. Following the application and matching process for both mentors and mentees and a programme of training, participants in WUMS are encouraged to agree arrangements. This includes arranging their own mentoring meetings, agreeing the frequency and duration of each meeting, as well as discussing options for communication such as telephone, email and video conference technology such as Skype. The WUMS mentoring scheme gives excellent guidelines for mentors and mentees and provides detailed information about active listening and questioning skills, including some examples of mentoring questions to use. For further information please see: www.bangor.ac.uk/humanresources/staffdevelopment/wums/backgroundandreports.php.en.

6. Examples of coaching schemes

There are many types of coaching including leadership coaching, business coaching, professional coaching, life skills or life coaching, and executive coaching. Coaching can also be delivered internally within the organisation or it can be delivered by external coaches. Sometimes a mix of internal and external coaching is delivered.

Contemporary research has acknowledged the rise of both coaching and mentoring as effective methods of supporting workplace learning. Carter, Hirsch and Aston (2002) note that organisations typically resource one-to-one coaching in one of three ways or use a combination:

- utilising in-house specialist coaches
- commissioning external coaches to train line managers to coach their own employees
- co-coaching.

6.1 Utilising in-house specialist coaches

There has been a growing demand for flexible and targeted coaching within organisations and there has been an increase in the number of organisations setting up internal coaching. In addition to the widespread acceptance of coaching, the organisational benefits of investing in employee development have also been widely publicised. In many organisations, the responsibility for employee development is now being devolved to line managers (Hyman and Cunningham, 1998) who are also trained in coaching. Some see the central role of the modern manager as supporting the management of performance and the management of learning. There has been a shift from the role of the 'manager as a controller' to that of a coach or mentor, where developing employees plays a major part (Tamkin, Hirsch and Tyers, 2003).

It is only recently that organisations have started to source coaching internally. This makes sense as an internal coach not only has a deeper understanding of the organisational functioning, but may be less expensive and can be seen to have more reliable credentials. Some people are referring to themselves as 'internal coaches' and the organisation may have developed coaching training and a coaching policy and guidelines for both coaches and coachees.

6.2 Commissioning external coaches

External coaches are generally qualified and experienced professionals who have worked with a number of organisations. In addition to their core coaching skills, external coaches with specialist expertise can be matched to the coachee's requirements.

Some team members (particularly members of an executive team) may feel more able to discuss issues with an external coach than with someone who is within the organisation. Because external coaches are not affected by the organisation's internal politics, they are more adept at providing sensitive feedback, as well as maintaining objectivity and confidentiality. One of disadvantages of external coaching is its cost, since it is likely to be more expensive than using existing resources. In addition, it might be felt that the coach's lack of intimate knowledge of the organisation's culture and processes could be a problem.

6.3 Training line managers to coach their own employees: Coaching Skills for Managers pilot at Bangor University

Whilst there is a small team of internal coaches within Bangor University, the library wanted a less structured approach in order to be able to use coaching skills for managers as a style of management and leadership. This initiative followed on from a major restructure in 2013–14, when a change management programme was implemented across the service. Coaching Skills for Managers was later run as a one-day workshop by HR and was followed by a half-day workshop six months later to measure practical skills and give managers the opportunity to explore difficulties and how to overcome them. Coaching with one of the internal coaches was also offered to each manager on a one-to-one basis. This pilot has now been rolled out to other departments.

The programme focused on the knowledge and skills needed in order to use the coaching style with colleagues, staff and others. Participants explored the appropriateness of coaching in different situations and informal coaching was advocated as a style of management that encourages staff to participate in the decision-making process and to make decisions they trust. It also encourages a sense of ownership and responsibility. For further information, please see: http://www.sconul.ac.uk/sites/default/files/documents/18_13.pdf.

6.4 Co-coaching

Co-coaching is a structured practice that involves peer-to-peer coaching with the aim of gaining knowledge in learning how to coach or improve coaching techniques. This is usually done with one peer being the coach while the other peer is the coachee and vice-versa during a set amount of time. It gives the time and opportunity to practise coaching, to try new ways of coaching or to work on improving coaching techniques. Attending a co-coaching forum allows coaches to have the opportunity to practise in a safe environment and experience receiving feedback. Co-coaching forums are run by experienced facilitators who are coaches themselves and who follow established guidelines. This ensures that the maximum time is spent in coaching practice and that new ideas are continually investigated and explored. There is a growing network of co-coaching forums across the United Kingdom. For further information, please see: <http://www.associationforcoaching.com>.

7. Conclusion

Mentoring and coaching have been shown to be key developmental and learning techniques used to engender change, develop leadership skills, raise awareness, and change attitudes and behaviours within the workplace. Several key areas of mentoring and coaching have been explored. It is of course wise to check what coaching and / or mentoring already takes place internally and what is available externally before seeking to address any need for coaching or mentoring within your own service.

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