



Breakfast Presentation Article: *The Next 10 Years in Coaching and Mentoring*

Coaching and mentoring have both come a long way in the past 40 years. Although both have been around, in some form, as ad hoc, informal relationships for millennia, it's only during this period that they have become formalised, researched, structured and become part of the common vocabulary. So where have we got to?

The state of coaching and mentoring today can be summarised in a handful of headings:

- **Definitional confusion.** The terms coaching and mentoring are sometimes used interchangeably. One organisation's definition of coaching can be another's definition of mentoring and vice versa. The boundaries between coaching and therapy, in particular, are often vague. In large part, this is the result of different evolutions in coaching and mentoring in the United States and Europe. Similarly, the term life coach can currently mean a highly skilled coaching psychologist, or an aromatherapist, who has attended a two day workshop.
- **Different emphases of research.** Coaching has received much less research attention from academics. The bulk of coaching literature is qualitative. The few quantitative studies of coaching that exist are mainly focused on measuring the efficacy of executive coaching interventions via self-report. Research validity and methodology are often poor. By contrast, mentoring research has been mainly quantitative. However, it also suffers from significant problems including failures of definition (being unclear about what is being measured), conflation of line manager and off-line roles, methodological issues (e.g. over-reliance on self-report) and confusion between relationship descriptors or enablers and relationship outcomes.
- **Multiplicity of professional bodies.** In the context of mentoring, there is no truly global representative body. In most countries, mentoring occurs on an ad hoc basis. The US has the International Mentoring Association, which, like American football, has relatively little footfall elsewhere in the world. The UK has a Mentoring and Befriending Network, which is pre-occupied with mentoring in schools and the justice system. It has very little interaction with the European Mentoring & Coaching Council, or the EMCC's UK branch, where the mentoring emphasis is primarily on business and employment applications. There are also regional mentoring networks in the UK, which have useful websites and integrate business and community mentoring.¹ The EMCC is the only international body to address coaching and mentoring equally as helping interventions. When it comes to representing professional coaches, however, there is a plethora of organisations, ranging from the highly reputable to the rather dubious. The main players internationally are the International Coach Federation, the EMCC (for Europe only), and the Association for Coaching. However, there are also specialist groups representing particular interests – for example, the British Psychology Society has an active coaching subdivision aimed at promoting the role of psychology-qualified coaches.
- **Significant issues relating to quality.** The assessment centres my organisation and others carry out to select pools of executive coaches for large employers confirm what many HR directors already knew instinctively – there are many more mediocre coaches in the marketplace than truly competent ones. Some are dangerous.² Although extensive work has been carried out in recent years to define coach competencies, this has not translated fully into coach training and accreditation. The attraction of the assessment centre is that it brings objectivity to a difficult process. By contrast, what people say in application forms or in interviews seems to be poorly indicative of

¹ www.mentfor.co.uk and www.scottishmentoringnetwork.co.uk

² EG Berglas, S. (2002). The very real dangers of executive coaching. *Harvard Business Review*, Vol 80 (6) pp86-92

competence. Measurement based on client satisfaction is also a poor indicator – self-reports of change are too easily conflated in executives' minds with simply enjoying having someone, who will listen to them attentively and empathise with them!

So how will this change over the next decade?

Increasing professionalism

The continued, positive collaboration and discussion between the main associations in the field looks set to deliver much greater clarity about what makes an effective coach. There are high hopes, for example, from the Global Convention on Coaching – an international network of experts in the field, who are collaborating to develop a common body of knowledge.

There is, however, unlikely to be a single definition of either coaching or mentoring. Instead, we can see emerging a matrix of qualifications based on three areas:

- Level of skills requirement
- Nature of application
- Culture

The level of skills needed to be a professional executive coach, or a professional developmental mentor, for example, is different from that required in an "elder statesman" type of mentor. The latter may need little more than a lot of experience and a basic grounding in the use of non-directive helping styles. Equally, some times of coaching may require a level of behavioural change, which is best serviced by a psychologically qualified specialist. This, in turn, is a long way from the relatively basic level of skills required from a line manager as coach.

The application may vary substantially with context. For example, the ability of mentees to actively participate in the management of the learning relationship will be radically different in a talent pool mentoring programme for a large company, compared to the programme aimed at deprived teenagers.

Culture plays a role, too. The perspective that different cultures take on mentoring and coaching differs on a number of dimensions. Qualifications designed for a US marketplace will not fit Europe without considerable adaptation. Neither are likely to be an exact match for South Africa.

What this means in practical terms is that the versatility of coaching and mentoring is gradually being seen as a rich resource, rather than an excuse for turf wars. Coaches and mentors in different situations require different qualifications, but these will gradually be mapped into broadly agreed categories that will give clarity to practitioners, clients and HR purchasers alike. As a result, the name given to a particular style of coach or mentor will be less important than the aggregation and level of competencies required. The main threat to this scenario is a rearguard action by some psychologists in the US, who have persuaded state legislatures effectively to ring-fence any kind of helping intervention that may result in behaviour change. This pre-emptive land grab is being fiercely contested!

The accreditation of coach/ mentor education leads inevitably to consideration of accreditation of supervisors. All the major bodies now expect professional coaches and mentors to be in supervision, although they are still edging towards a common definition of what this means. The EMCC, AOC and ICF have a European joint working party to establish common standards for supervisor training. In mentoring, we will see standards to regulate the qualifications and training offered to programme coordinators – a vital resource in making programmes deliver. We already have international standards, against which to benchmark mentoring programmes³.

Increasing incidence of non-traditional forms of coaching and mentoring

The standard US hierarchical model of mentoring still exists, but the trend around the world is for less directive, more egalitarian relationships. E-mentoring and e-coaching have been found to reduce the impact of power differentials between participants⁴. Initially dismissed by many coaches and mentors (including me) as a pale imitation of face-to-face learning relationships, e-mentoring and e-coaching have in fact proven highly effective. They offer a different, asynchronous

³ *International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment* www.ismpe.com

⁴ Hamilton, BA & Scandura, TA (2003) Implications for Organizational Learning and Development in a Wired World *Organizational Dynamics* 31(4) pp 388-402; Harrington, A (1999) E-mentoring: The Advantages and Disadvantages of using e-mail to support distant mentoring www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/ResourceCentre/Articles/viewarticle.asp?artId=63

alternative, in which time to think between questions and answers is built into the process. By contrast, we find that telephone coaching and mentoring have few of the advantages and many of the disadvantages of face-to-face and virtual relationships. While very effective practitioners can make a telephone session work, this is not the norm.

Another innovation of recent years is upward mentoring, in which the hierarchically more junior person is the mentor and the senior person the mentee. Sometimes called mutual mentoring to further reduce any sense of power differential, organisations use this in particular to educate leaders about issues such as diversity.

Team coaching will also become a more mainstream corporate activity. By team coaching I mean the collective development of the team together, rather than individual coaching of all members of a team. When we researched this area recently⁵, we were surprised to find almost no empirical studies. We found a lot of confusion between team coaching and team facilitation, although the nature of the learning dialogue and the purpose and duration of the intervention are very different. We found a number of organisations offering training in team coaching, but an absence of an evidence-based body of knowledge to support the learning assumptions.

As more research is carried out and as universities begin to deliver team coach training for the working environment, we can expect to see greater clarity around the competencies required – which appear to be considerably broader than for individual coaching – and senior managers acquiring team coach skills as part of their own career development.

Coaching and mentoring culture

Recently published research⁶ has found that the primary difference between high performing leadership teams and their so-so counterparts is the amount of time and energy they invest in coaching, mentoring and other forms of mutual development. Over the past five years, we have learned a lot about how to establish and sustain a coaching and mentoring culture. All the usual suspect characteristics are there – consistent support and championing from top management, having a clear business case for why investing time and effort in coaching and mentoring is important – but there are other factors, too.

One is to recognise that all managers and their teams are part of a system. Sending the manager on a sheep dip training programme is almost certain to fail, because both the manager and his or her direct reports (and sometimes other stakeholders such as the manager's boss) need to change expectations and behaviours as well. It's always easier to snap back into habitual behaviours, unless the entire system (i.e. the team as a whole) is helped to change at the same time.

We've also learned that training coachees is as important as training coaches, because coaching is an activity you do with someone not to them. Giving coachees the right to demand coaching, when they need it, creates a very different dynamic from what we usually find in organisations.

In future, therefore, we expect to see a lot more attention to changing the organisational systems, making training an on-demand "drop down" and providing just in time easily accessible resources people can use to enhance their knowledge and skills. Part of this will come from better on-line resources; part from having coaching and mentoring role models throughout the organisation, who managers can turn to when they need support or advice in their own developmental conversations with direct reports. An important part of the change of culture will also be the rehabilitation of thinking time or reflective space during the working day. It's still common in most organisations for anyone, who is quietly thinking, to be given something else to do on the assumption that he is not doing anything useful. Yet effective knowledge workers need at least 3 blocks of 20 minutes or so each working day, to provide focus to their work.

Cold turkey for goal junkies

One of the revelations for my co-author David Megginson and myself in the past two years has been that much of what we have been taught about the role and importance of goals at the beginning of coaching and mentoring assignments is simply not true! Hundreds of books have been written based on the GROW, yet only a handful have dared to question whether there was an evidence behind the assumptions that the one-to-one learning process has to start with a goal.

Now there is evidence. And it tells us that – except in very specific circumstances of short term performance goals tied to a well-defined task – GROW is a dangerous distraction. The reality is that, in a healthy developmental relationship, goals

⁵ Clutterbuck, D (2007) *Coaching the Team at work*, Nicholas Brealey London

⁶ Wageman R et al (2007) *Senior Leadership Teams: What it takes to make them great* Harvard Business School Press

emerge gradually. Expecting the mentee or coachee to come with a goal obliges them to come up with something that will satisfy the coach and their boss. How committed they are to this goal is another matter!

In a recent study of mentoring relationships over time⁷, we measured goal clarity, goal commitment and goal alignment (a general sense of purpose, linked to both individual and organisational broad objectives) at the beginning of the relationships and compared these to the relationship experience and to outcomes for participants. While goal alignment did correlate reasonably well with both relationship quality and mentee outcomes, this was not the case for goal clarity or goal commitment, which showed no significant correlation with either.

Additional evidence continues to accumulate that too narrow a focus on specific goals “dumbs down” the relationship and results in participants not noticing other opportunities, which might help the learner towards achieving broader, more important goals⁸. The majority of experienced coaches, who are exposed to this research, profess relief at being “released from the tyranny of goals”. I expect this critical re-evaluation of the role of goals to continue to gather pace and lead in turn to more holistic perspectives on associated people development practices, such as performance management.

Future research agendas

The arrival of a number of international journals in coaching and mentoring is one of the factors helping to speed up the exchange of ideas and good practice, both in the management of coaching and mentoring and in the crafting of more robust, more relevant, more credible research. A great deal of time and energy was wasted in the 1990s and early 2000s in arguments between academics and practitioners over the relative value of formal (structured) mentoring and informal mentoring. In the past few years, this has been resolved with the recognition that the level of formality or informality is merely a side issue – what counts is the quality of the relationship, whatever the context.

There is now so much research in mentoring (albeit of highly variable value) that this kind of pragmatic re-appraisal is perhaps inevitable. Moreover, researchers in coaching seem to be learning from the mistakes of their mentoring counterparts. We expect to see a lot more research grounded in the practical experience of coaches, mentors and organisations; and many more studies that utilise both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Some of the themes that remain to be explored include:

- What actually happens within the confines of the coaching or mentoring meeting? How do mentors and mentees perceive the social exchange at key points in the relationship? What are the implications of convergent and divergent perceptions?
- What are the critical success factors underlying mentoring and coaching programmes?
- What is the mechanism, by which goals are established within developmental relationships, if not at the beginning? Can the relationship flourish independent of goals?
- What is the role of role modelling?
- How do mentoring and coaching support each other?
- Do coaching relationships have similar phases to those in mentoring?
- How can line managers acquire the objectivity to coach effectively, when the main problem in a direct report's performance may be them?
- How does supervision in coaching and mentoring differ from supervision in other disciplines, such as counselling?

There are many more. The dominant impression of research in this field so far is one of often sterile repetition of similar studies with minor variations, using instruments often of dubious reliability or relevance. That is changing. There are new instruments, new perspectives, new questions. We can expect a lot of our assumed wisdom to be challenged over the next decade and that will enrich both the practice of individual coaches and mentors and the design and implementation of coaching and mentoring in the workplace.

⁷ Clutterbuck D. (2007) *A longitudinal study of the effectiveness of developmental mentoring* Unpublished doctoral thesis to King's College London

⁸ Megginson, D (2007) An own-goal for coaches. Paper to UK Annual conference of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, Ashridge; Spence, G & Grant, A (2007) Professional and peer life coaching and the enhancement of goal striving and well-being: An exploratory study. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 2(3) July 185-194