

Mentoring and coaching

Topic Gateway Series No. 50



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Definition and concept

‘Mentoring relates primarily to the identification and nurturing of potential for the whole person. It can be a long-term relationship, where the goals may change but are always set by the learner. The learner owns both the goals and the process. Feedback comes from within the mentee – the mentor helps them to develop insight and understanding through intrinsic observation, that is, becoming more aware of their own experiences.’

‘Coaching relates primarily to performance improvement (often short-term) in a specific skills area. The goals, or at least the intermediate or sub-goals, are typically set with or at the suggestion of the coach. While the learner has primary ownership of the goal, the coach has primary ownership of the process. In most cases, coaching involves direct extrinsic feedback (i.e. the coach reports to the coachee what he or she has observed).’

Meggison and Clutterbuck, Techniques for Coaching and Mentoring

Context

Students are unlikely to study or be examined on mentoring and coaching. However, they may become mentors and coaches (or be mentored or coached) at any stage of their career. Mentoring and coaching, whether formal or informal, are excellent ways for CIMA students and members to achieve CPD.

Objectives

It is important to understand that individuals are unique and organisations differ. Therefore both individual and organisational goals vary widely. Common objectives are required in order to:

- achieve results either individually or in teams
- assist managers with team building
- help individuals gain clarity in their thinking and commitment
- challenge and help individuals to change limited beliefs
- help managers to become a source of support rather than a threat, for example, to assist them in bringing out the talent and potential of their team
- identify and solve problems
- make decisions, implement changes and overcome obstacles
- plan for the future and take advantage of potential new opportunities.

Overview

Differences between mentoring and coaching

Mentoring - Mentoring is an indefinite, relationship based activity with several specific but wide ranging goals. It does not have to be a formal process. The mentor is a facilitator who works with either an individual or a group of people over an extended time period. The agenda is open and continues to evolve over the longer term. Mentoring seeks to build wisdom – the ability to apply skills, knowledge and experience to new situations and processes.

Coaching - The focus is on meeting very specific objectives within a set period of time. Coaching is mainly concerned with performance and the development of certain skills.

It usually takes place on a one-to-one basis and has a very specific purpose. There is usually a planned programme with a much shorter timeframe than in mentoring, so the learning goals are usually determined in advance.

Mentoring and coaching can be 'stand alone' activities, but they can also be used to complement each other.

Parallels between mentoring and coaching

Both mentoring and coaching take place independently of line managers – they are open, honest relationships between the mentor or coach and their protégé. A mentor or coach is an 'accountability partner' who works in their protégé's best interests. He or she will bring a new approach to either a specific skill or an entire career.

Neither mentoring nor coaching is about teaching, instruction or telling somebody what to do. The role of mentors and coaches is to ask their protégé the right questions to promote greater self-awareness and more informed decision making. The role of mentors and coaches is not to solve problems, but to question how the best solutions might be found.

The mentoring or coaching process evolves over time. The aims are not inflexible, but may change as the protégé reaches the set goals and learns new behaviour. The process continues until everybody is satisfied that the objectives have been achieved.

Mentoring and coaching skills

The skills of mentor and coach overlap to some extent. Both mentors and coaches are 'critical friends' although they might use different methods. A coach is more likely to use direct feedback, while a mentor relies more heavily on the questioning process. A coach is a specialist who works with the protégé on specific goals and objectives – the professional equivalent of a fitness trainer. A mentor is likely to have followed a similar career to the one their protégé is starting, and will pass on their expertise.

For whom is mentoring or coaching appropriate?

Mentoring or coaching might be appropriate for:

- senior managers who are unlikely to benefit from conventional training courses
- managers who need the space to develop or improve new or existing skills
- those on a 'fast track' career programme
- staff who need to focus more on their career paths
- managers who have reached a career plateau and want to progress, but do not know how to
- anybody developing a new career
- staff or managers who want to change career direction
- employees returning to work after a career break
- staff wanting to improve their skills and abilities
- individuals who respond better to alternative learning methods
- mentors and coaches themselves
- staff or managers working through difficult issues.

What mentoring and coaching can and cannot do

Mentoring can:

- increase individual and team commitment to an organisation and its goals
- help improve communication within the organisation
- help to change organisational culture for the better
- allow individuals to gain a greater insight into the organisation's workings
- give individuals the chance to meet different people within the organisation, and to network
- improve levels of professional success.

Mentoring cannot:

- succeed unless clear objectives are agreed in advance
- succeed unless there is an agreed plan of action
- act as a replacement for conventional training.

Coaching can:

- provide individuals and teams with opportunities for gaining new skills, and personal development
- offer learning opportunities geared to individual needs
- encourage a positive attitude to learning
- provide flexibility in the learning process
- allow protégés to select what and how they learn.

Coaching cannot:

- effect change unless clear, measurable goals are set in advance
- benefit the protégé unless there is support from senior managers
- succeed unless both coach and protégé are fully committed to the coaching programme.

Application

Links to good management

The aims of coaching and mentoring are the same as those of good management. Both will try to maximise their staff potential. Good mentoring/coaching and good management have the following common characteristics:

- willingness to listen
- openness to new ideas
- a lateral, challenging way of thinking
- encouraging protégés to become involved in new work experiences
- making time available
- enthusiasm.

One school of thought suggests that every manager should be a mentor or coach to his or her staff. The aim of this 'generative coaching' is to encourage a mutual learning process. It can be argued that managers already influence the learning and performance of their staff. In addition, some managers may be reluctant to adopt an active coaching style because of a potential conflict with their own agendas.

It is important that a clear distinction remains between a mentor/coach and a manager. If the line becomes blurred, mentoring and coaching can damage a good management style. For example, a manager might spend a large amount of time mentoring or coaching one team member at the expense of the rest of the team.

Bringing a mentoring and coaching mentality to the team

The best mentoring or coaching programmes will not work if they are not accepted by the wider team. There is a danger that mentoring and coaching will be seen as a 'management ploy' and not a method of encouraging individual potential. The following points need to be applied for mentoring and coaching to be accepted.

There needs to be:

1. Sufficient information about the benefits of mentoring and coaching.
2. An explanation of what mentoring and coaching can and cannot achieve.
3. Clarity about who can be involved in mentoring and coaching programmes.
4. Clarity about how and when the mentoring and coaching programmes could be used.
5. Flexibility so that progress can be reviewed.

Setting up a mentoring or coaching procedure

The following stages need to be considered before a mentoring or coaching programme can be planned and executed:

1. How the mentoring or coaching links to the organisation's purpose and strategy.
2. Mentors and coaches need to be suitably matched to their protégés to avoid personality clashes or other issues.
3. The objectives of the mentoring or coaching – what it aims to achieve.
4. A process to support the mentoring or coaching programmes, for example, who will cover the protégé's workload while they are being mentored or coached?
5. Evaluation and feedback mechanisms need to be established.

Potential mentors and coaches need to consider the following issues:

The protégé - What is the protégé's current work situation? How does he or she see themselves in a particular role? What are his or her goals?

The protégé's work - What work does the protégé do or aspire to do? What does the protégé find challenging or satisfying? How could he or she achieve something? What are the options?

The mentor or coach - What is the mentor or coach's current work situation? Who will control the programme – the mentor/coach or the protégé?

The relationship with the protégé - Is the programme led by the mentor/coach or the protégé? Where does accountability lie?

The wider team - Where does the protégé fit into his or her existing team? What are the team dynamics? How could the protégé engage better with his or her colleagues? What needs to change?

The organisation - Who are the organisation's stakeholders? What is the organisation's structure? What is the organisation's culture? Are the goals of the mentoring or coaching programme compatible with these?

The work environment - What role does IT play in the organisation now and in the future? What are the organisation's current priorities? Are the priorities of the protégé compatible with those of the organisation? Are mentoring and coaching part of the organisation's culture? What is the organisation's current financial situation?

The wider context - What is the attitude towards work-life balance? How does this influence decision making?

Mentoring and coaching briefing

Once it has been agreed in principle to begin a mentoring or coaching programme, the mentor/coach and the protégé need to brief themselves on the following key issues:

1. Determine the area for mentoring or coaching.
2. Agree the overall objectives.
3. Identify realistic outcomes and devise an action plan to achieve the desired result.
4. Devise an appropriate mentoring or coaching programme. This might include a secondment, work shadowing or supervised working.
5. Agree a suitable timescale.
6. Agree criteria for evaluation, standards and assessment of the programme.

Mentoring in action (case study)

Anna, who works in marketing, indicates that she would like to learn more about her company's human resources function. She isn't sure if she wants to change career, but would like the opportunity to make an informed choice. Anna talks to Stephen, her team leader, about the possibility of a secondment in HR.

Stephen approaches Richard from the HR department, to whom he introduces to Anna as a potential mentor. He bears in mind the need for compatibility between mentor and protégé. Richard and Anna agree some overall objectives and a timeframe for Anna's HR secondment. They arrange a flexible timetable of practical experience for Anna within HR. Anna and Stephen also discuss what should be done about her marketing workload during her secondment.

Anna goes on secondment in HR, with Richard as her mentor. Richard then receives feedback from Anna and helps her to weigh up her career choices and decide what to do next.

Richard's mentoring role has involved:

- being willing to take on the role of mentor to Anna
- agreeing the objectives for Anna's secondment
- arranging relevant learning experiences for Anna, for example, briefing and de-briefing, attending presentations, observing client briefings, meeting HR staff
- introducing Anna to the HR department and providing an overview of the HR function through the arranged secondment
- receiving feedback from Anna and making further recommendations.

Coaching in action (case study)

Nigel, a call centre worker, needs to improve his interpersonal skills with customers. Robert, his team leader, arranges for Nigel to be coached by Alison, an experienced, popular colleague.

Alison talks to Nigel to explain why his behaviour is seen as problematic. Nigel has the opportunity to put his side of the story. Alison and Nigel then agree the standards of acceptability that Nigel must achieve. They decide on a time limited coaching programme for Nigel. He will observe examples of best practice during 'on the job' coaching. Nigel will be able to discuss issues as they occur, so he can work towards practical solutions.

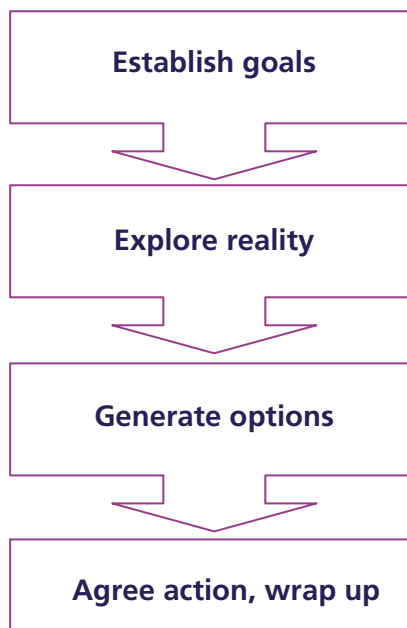
During the coaching programme, Nigel has regular reviews with Alison and Robert to ascertain his progress. When the programme finishes, there is a de-briefing session to determine how far Nigel has met the agreed objectives and to evaluate the programme's overall success.

Alison's coaching role has involved:

- being willing to take on the role of coach to Nigel
- determining objectives and a coaching programme for Nigel
- being responsible for the practical delivery of the coaching plan, for example, demonstrating best practice
- participating in ongoing reviews with Nigel and Robert
- evaluating the success of the coaching programme.

Coaching experienced learners – the GROW model

The GROW (goals, reality, options, wrap up) model provides structure for coaching discussions with more experienced learners. For less experienced learners, the process can be time consuming and often too complex. The model places the onus for development on the learner, as the coach adopts a less directive approach. The GROW model has four clear stages:



GROW devised by Sir John Whitmore and described in his book, *Coaching for Performance: growing people, performance and purpose*.

During the first part of their meeting, the coach and protégé focus on determining exactly what they want to achieve. This stage is about establishing expectations and goals.

At least 50% of the meeting should be spent on the reality stage. Good questioning and listening skills will enable the coach to define the issues that need to be addressed.

Once the underlying issues are identified, the coach should continue to ask questions so that the protégé can identify the available options.

In the 'wrap up' stage, the actions should be determined. This final stage is sometimes described as 'confirm the will to act'. It is about agreeing what specific actions the protégé is going to take away from the meeting.

Feedback and performance measurement

A feedback mechanism should be established at the start of any mentoring or coaching programme. This enables the mentor or coach to evaluate honestly whether the programme is successful or not. It is helpful to seek informal feedback at all stages of the programme so that any changes or problems can be addressed.

At the outset, the mentor or coach and protégé should agree the assessment and standards criteria to measure the programme's success. The objective(s), standard target(s), assessment and evaluation need to be clearly stated so that the protégé's achievement can be reviewed easily.

Example of coaching programme standard targets and assessment

Peter Smith	Coaching programme
Objective	To work as an integrated team player
Standard targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with other team members • Propose ideas • Share the workload • Offer help to colleagues without having to be asked
Assessment	Informal monthly reviews for the next three months
Evaluation	After three months

Traditionally, feedback has involved the protégé completing a questionnaire. However, feedback can also be obtained through formal or informal discussions between the protégé and his or her mentor or coach. The results of the programme should be recorded in a written report, along with a set of recommendations and protégé feedback.

At the end (or before the end) of the programme, all progress should be checked against the agreed criteria. Usually there is a de-briefing session between the mentor or coach and the protégé which should:

- discuss how far the objectives and standard target(s) have been met
- evaluate the overall success of the programme
- make any further recommendations as necessary.

Example of coaching programme standard targets and evaluation

Peter Smith	Coaching programme
Objective	To work as an integrated team player
Standard targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with other team members • Propose ideas • Share the workload • Offer help to colleagues without having to be asked
Evaluation	70% of standard targets met. Very good progress on sharing workload and taking responsibility. Some good ideas put forward. Still not communicating ideas within the team as effectively as possible.
Further recommendation	To take charge of a team project that will demand ongoing briefing sessions with the team if the project is to succeed.

Training the trainer (to be a mentor or coach)

An organisation's personnel and training department will need to select and train sufficient numbers of people to be mentors and coaches. There should be an agreed procedure to screen applicants. Not everybody will be suitable. All candidates must be in a position to be released from their own job function to mentor or coach others.

All successful candidates should be able to demonstrate:

Strong verbal communication skills (ability to listen, good presentation skills, ability to summarise information, experience of giving feedback).

Good written communication skills (ability to write business documents and summarise briefs).

A working knowledge of mentoring and coaching topics (for example, assertiveness, conflict resolution, leadership, managing difficult people, negotiation, presentation skills).

Previous experience in running training, mentoring or coaching sessions (for example, presenting new ideas, encouraging colleagues to speak, managing disagreements).

Personal qualities

A potential mentor or coach will require the following personal qualities:

- ability to recognise changes in mood and body language
- observant
- ability to maintain confidentiality
- warm and confidence-inspiring personality
- objective and impartial in dealing with people
- willing to commit time and energy to learn mentoring or coaching skills.

Training objectives

It will be necessary to organise training for potential mentors and coaches so they can develop the skills and knowledge required to conduct mentoring and coaching programmes. Training should cover the following:

- relationships in the workplace
- communication and behaviour motivation
- personal development
- one-on-one mentoring/coaching framework
- one-on-one mentoring/coaching activities
- planning mentoring/coaching objectives
- mentoring/coaching approaches.

Barriers to effective mentoring and coaching

Most barriers to effective mentoring and coaching stem from:

1. Issues of organisational culture where the prevailing culture is not sympathetic to mentoring and coaching, or does not fully understand it.
2. Personality issues between those involved in mentoring and coaching programmes.

Barriers include:

- poor matching of mentors or coaches to their protégés
- lack of managerial support at higher levels
- resentment from those not chosen to participate in mentoring and coaching programmes, perhaps due to a perception of favouritism
- the creation of unrealistic expectations as to what mentoring and coaching can achieve
- the blurring of role boundaries, for example, between the role of manager and mentor.

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CIMA resources

Harvard ManageMentor Plus

The CIMA business skills resource with practical information and advice on over 35 key management topics, including mentoring and coaching. Available from:

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E-books

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Websites

The Coaching and Mentoring Network

Provides information on the latest developments in coaching and mentoring. Available from: www.coachingnetwork.org.uk
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CIPD: The HR and development website

Provides advice, guidance and tools on coaching and mentoring. From the home page, click to the learning and development section, and then to coaching and mentoring. Available from: www.cipd.co.uk
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Harvard Business Online

Website of all Harvard Business School publications.
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