Mentor and coach: Disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches

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Abstract

This comparative case study features six types of mentoring and coaching: mentors of young people; mentors of leaders; mentors of newly qualified teachers; executive coaches; coaching psychologists; sports coaches. Three practitioners from each of these disciplines were interviewed to identify if there were shared and distinctive approaches between mentoring and coaching. Participants shared how their approaches might be transferable to other types of mentoring and coaching. Findings suggest that practitioners should be supported to specialise in a specific mentoring or coaching discipline; adopt a mentor-coach interdisciplinary approach; or to develop multidisciplinary approaches. Further research is needed which takes into consideration additional types of mentoring and coaching.

Key Words: mentoring; coaching; disciplinary approaches; interdisciplinary approaches; multidisciplinary approaches.

Introduction

A recurring dilemma is evident in the mentoring and coaching literature and in practice-based settings: there is significant confusion surrounding the definition of the two concepts (CIPD Coaching and Mentoring factsheet, 2010; Clark, Jamieson, et al; 2006; Clutterbuck, 2008; Garvey, 2004; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). Whilst some commentators highlight the overlap between the two roles (Cox, 2003; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007) or the impractical nature of attempting to separate one from the other (Ferrar, 2004), others are eager to gain some clarity and distinction (CIPD Coaching and Mentoring factsheet, 2010; Clark et al, 2006; Garvey, 2004). Finding a definition that will be applicable in all contexts is an almost insurmountable difficulty (Bachkirova & Kaufman, 2009; Law, Ireland & Hussain, 2007). However, these on-going debates fail to articulate the differences and similarities in approach across different types of mentoring and coaching: how mentors and coaches see their roles, what it is they are intending to achieve and how they go about their practice.

One logical explanation for the lack of clarity within the literature about the diverse nature of mentoring and coaching is the ever-evolving settings in which both are found. This leads to authors offering frameworks which start from their particular premise or experiences, taking for granted other settings where principles are not so easily reapplied. For example, Berkeley (1994), Conway (1995), King (2012), Noe (1988), Stead (1997) and Wynn, Wilson Carboni, & Patall (2007) state that a key part of the mentoring process is the shared professional background between the mentor and mentee. However, when matching mentors to young people, the shared professional context does not apply. Similarly for coaches, the general theoretical assumption is that coaching uses a facilitative approach and therefore common ground is not needed (Blackman-Sheppard, 2004; Boyce, Jackson & Neal, 2010). However, many sports coaches believe that shared experiences and knowledge are crucial to the coaching relationship (Lemyre, Trudel & Durand-Bush, 2007). Whilst this paper does not set out

to solve the on-going debate around definition, examination of issues associated with different types of mentoring and coaching practice will help to provide additional insights.

Observing the current mentoring and coaching landscape, it is apparent that in some practice-based areas, mentoring might be more readily available than coaching, whilst in other areas coaching is the preferred intervention; and it is not altogether clear why this is the case. For example, mentoring is the preferred way of supporting newly qualified teachers; and coaching is the dominant intervention within sports. However, this is not to say that practitioners operating in a specific area do not draw on other approaches associated with different types of mentoring and coaching. This aspect will be discussed when reflecting on the experiences and understandings of the participants in the study.

Furthermore, it is not known if, and how, mentors and coaches adapt their approaches when working across a variety of settings. The potential for transferability of skills between different types of mentoring and/or coaching is also under-researched and not widely addressed in the literature. This paper also explores the experiences of practitioners working in a variety of mentor and/or coach settings and how they adapt their approaches according to the role that they are in.

Explanation of key words

It is worth noting that several key words are used within this paper which requires a brief explanation of the intended meaning; namely, 'approach', 'discipline', 'interdisciplinary' and 'multidisciplinary'. An outline of the decisions made regarding the inclusion of these words and the rejection of others is offered.

'Approach' is admittedly a broad term to use when referring to mentor and coach practice. However, the rationale for this was to use a term which incorporates the philosophy of the practitioner as well as the kinds of activities they use within their mentoring or coaching discipline. Brockbank and McGill (2006) refer to approach as a way of explaining how practice can be variable depending on the purpose and processes used. This was deemed to be a good starting point when seeking to compare practice across a variety of settings. Whilst the term 'practice' would have sufficed, it would have not incorporated the motivational aspect of what the practitioner is hoping to achieve.

Prior to using 'disciplines' when referring to mentor and coach type, 'context' was considered based on authors such as Roberts (2000), Clutterbuck (2008) and Delaney (2012) who suggest that a broader understanding of the context is needed to understand the definition intended. Cox (2003) also refers to context by identifying how environmental, cultural and historical factors significantly influence the professional relationship. This is reinforced by Bozeman and Feeney (2007) who link these elements to boundary demarcations between contexts. Garvey (2004) also associates terminology to social contexts: "Words have different and sometimes quite subtle differences in different contexts" (Garvey, 2004:7). An exploration of the role of the practitioner in any given context seems to be of paramount importance (Ferrar, 2004). However, the term context is not sufficient when considering some types of mentoring and coaching which are not specifically wedded to a contextual setting. For example, coaching psychologists are set apart by a qualification and are viewed as a sub-discipline of psychology (Grant, 2006); therefore the professional context in which they operate could be one of many. Similarly mentors of leaders could work in the private or public sector, or indeed both; therefore the context is difficult to pin down and attribute to a particular label associated with mentoring. Ferrar (2004) points out that accommodating all contextual 'anomalies and variables' (p.58) would be impossible.

Due to the perceived limitations of the term 'context', the decision was made to describe mentor and coach types as 'disciplines', which acknowledges certain parameters to the role which may or may not be context-specific. The term discipline is not widely used within mentoring and coaching. Ives (2008) describes coaching as an emerging discipline which would imply that specialist coaching

types are sub-disciplines. Renton (2009) argues that the debates associated with trying to define coaching and mentoring result from the range of disciplines that have entered into the arena predominantly from business and psychology. Additionally, she describes how within the business sector, cross-discipline approaches began to emerge in the 1990's when coaching started to grow. I would argue that as the mentoring and coaching profession develops, viewing mentoring and coaching types as 'disciplines' might help appreciate aspects of practice which could be seen as specific to that particular depiction.

Building on the idea of understanding types of mentoring and coaching as 'disciplines', the term 'interdisciplinary approach' has been used in this paper to describe how mentors and coaches focus on working within one discipline, but may from time to time draw on a range of approaches outside of their main setting as and when the need arises. Whereas a 'multidisciplinary approach' is used to describe practitioners who are able to proficiently operate in more than one mentor and/or coach discipline. They would therefore consider themselves to have a greater capacity of skills and knowledge, but are able to adapt their approach based on the discipline they are working in at the time. Viewing the field through the lens of disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches might offer greater understanding and a more accurate depiction of what is taking place.

Mentor and coach disciplines featured in this study

For the purposes of this study, six mentoring and coaching disciplines were chosen which represent three types of mentors and three types of coaches: mentors of young people; mentors of leaders; mentors of newly qualified teachers (NQTs); executive coaches; coaching psychologists; and sports coaches. A set of criteria was established in order to help identify appropriate disciplines:

- Areas of mentoring and coaching practice which have been established for a significant period of time
- Areas of mentoring and coaching practice where existing research can be found
- Areas of mentoring and coaching practice which provide practitioners with the opportunity to either work full-time as a mentor or coach, or volunteer as a specialist mentor or coach

The six chosen disciplines all fitted these criteria and also helped provide opportunities for comparison, such as similar clientele or a contrasting focus of work.

This paper first outlines the methodological approach used for the research. Secondly it provides an overview of the approaches adopted by practitioners from with the six chosen disciplines, before exploring how mentors and coaches might utilise their skills in an 'interdisciplinary' way.

Methodology

A comparative case study approach was adopted using a range of practitioners from the six selected mentoring and coaching disciplines. Eighteen participants were interviewed, of which three represented each discipline. As a qualitative study, it was felt more important to involve experienced practitioners through in-depth semi-structured interviews rather than adopt approaches which access greater numbers of participants without the depth of discussion and reflection. Participants were approached using purposive sampling as this study benefited from drawing on experienced mentor and coach practitioners (Tongco, 2007). Each participant or 'case study' worked in different locations from the others representative of the same discipline, to allow for potential diversity of practice within each professional area. The interviews provided participants with the opportunity to articulate their own approach, so that this could be compared alongside others. They were also asked to identify what might make their particular discipline different to other mentoring or coaching disciplines; and this generated a range of first-hand experiences or observations about other mentor or coach approaches. The same questions were used as a guideline for each interview; however there was also some

flexibility to allow for supplementary questions or discussions for further clarification. Case studies allow for the "generation of multiple perspectives" (Gray, 2009:169) and this was deemed necessary in order to gain some insight into the approaches of mentors and coaches in different disciplines.

A social constructivist paradigm was adopted in order to appreciate each participant's world by using interviews as a way of exploring their mentoring or coaching experiences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) explain how social constructivism uses the idea of social actors as a way of understanding human interaction. This might go some way to describing how mentors and coaches enact their role, through interpretation and adaptation according to the meaning they place on it. By applying this approach I have sought to find ways of deconstructing and understanding these acted out roles. St George and Robinson (2011) also suggest that this paradigm is closely aligned with mentoring:

> *Mentoring is grounded in social constructivism – the idea that individuals make meaning of knowledge within a social context and as a result of interactions with others (St George & Robinson, 2011:28).*

In order to analyse the interview data effectively a thematic approach was used as a way of identifying shared and distinctive mentoring and coaching practices. Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006:6) as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. It can be applied within any theoretical framework; however the social constructivist perspective places an emphasis on the way in which the data is viewed. Judgement is required of the researcher in determining what counts as a theme, as this might be determined by the number of times this is reported; but equally a less prominent finding might warrant some time and attention because it 'captures something important in relation to the overall research question' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:82). In this instance, themes were selected that helped identify how mentors and coaches approach their role, and the reasons for these. It soon became apparent that some specialist skills or knowledge were evident in each discipline. However, a number of shared approaches were found when comparisons were made across two or more disciplines. The distinctive elements are discussed below under the heading 'specialist disciplinary approaches'; followed by an exploration of themes found across disciplines in the section entitled 'shared approaches'.

Specialist disciplinary approaches

Findings suggest that within each mentoring and coaching discipline, some distinctive features can be found which point towards elements of specialist knowledge or skills. An overview of the key findings from within each discipline is presented below.

Mentors of Young People

Some themes emerged which highlighted similar approaches amongst the three mentors who work with young people. This suggests that: in order to engage with young people, personal characteristics combined with an ability to connect with teenagers were needed, culminating in a relational approach. In addition, the mentors believed that any change or outcomes in the mentee would result from establishing a good relationship. Outcomes were considered to be inevitable but the mentor should allow these to happen, rather than steer the mentee towards change. However, the main aspect which differentiated mentors of young people from mentors working in the other two disciplines was the need to fully understand child protection procedures if a mentee were to disclose any sensitive information.

In order to engage with young people, personal attributes were needed which enabled mentors to effectively establish a good working relationship with the mentee:

> *They need to be approachable, they need to be able to have a decent conversation with the kids, they need to have some sort of rapport with the young people (Mentor of Young People).*

The mentors believed that once the relationship had been established, any outcomes would organically flow from this; therefore it was important that the mentor did not put pressure on the young person to change, but allow them to take a lead on this:

> *The objective is the relationship and the product of the relationship is growth, maturity hopefully, greater ability to contain emotions, greater ability to empathise with people (Mentor of Young People).*

Understanding what to do if a young person disclosed a child protection issue to their mentor, was seen as a specialist aspect of this discipline:

> *With child protection and safeguarding there are limits to what can be kept back (Mentor of Young People).*

Mentors working with young people place a strong emphasis on the relationship itself (Philip, 2008) and the ability to build trust and rapport (King, 2012). Philip (2008) suggests that one of the outcomes of a positive mentoring relationship is equipping the mentee with the tools to replicate good relationships elsewhere. The relational boundaries can sometimes become blurred; particularly when young people referred for mentoring are often vulnerable and could therefore become dependent upon the mentor if the relationship was not maintained in a professional manner. Mentors need to ensure that they make the parameters of the relationship clear (Jamieson, 2008) and can competently adhere to child protection procedures (Alexander, 2000) should a safeguarding issue become apparent during a mentoring session.

Mentors of Leaders

Participating mentors of leaders all shared the same starting point: that their position and experience in their particular profession was a prerequisite for the mentee wanting to work with them. Despite working in different sectors, the data highlighted some common features of leadership mentoring: mentor selection was usually based on their seniority and experience in their particular profession; whilst their expertise was significant, interpersonal skills were also recognised as important; career progression was often a focal point of the mentoring.

The mentors described how their mentees would have aspirations to progress within the same profession as their mentor:

> *The mentor typically comes from within the same profession or… they have professional insight into areas that you want to go into (Mentor of Leaders).*

Whilst having that expertise was important, mentors recognised how interpersonal skills also played an important part – particularly in terms of offering psychosocial support:

> *It is about development of a lot of rapport and trust, it is about asking a lot of questions, it is about listening and probing, and wherever possible, getting the person mentored to come up with their own answers (Mentor of Leaders).*

The participants also identified career progression as a focal point of the mentoring.

> *The purpose of the mentoring is to help them plan and manage their careers and help them find their way through a large organisation (Mentor of Leaders).*

Much of the literature on mentoring leaders separates out career and psychosocial functions of the mentor (Allen, Eby, et al. 2004; Ehrich, 2008; Fowler, Gudmundsson & O'Gorman, 2007). However, for mentors to be proficient, it is important that they possess skills in both areas. This was particularly evident when mentees were at a transitional point in their career, looking to develop in areas of new responsibility (Allen et al, 2004) and in need of encouragement to help them grown in confidence (Shenkman, 2010). However, participants recognised that a mentor's position didn't automatically mean that they would have the interpersonal skills needed to mentor.

One element which stood out in this discipline was the potential for sponsorship, where mentors operated internally and were matched with mentees showing signs of leadership potential (Ehrich, 1994).

Mentors of Newly Qualified Teachers

Mentors of NQTs discussed how a shared passion for teaching motivated them to want to help support those entering the profession. Because of this, they viewed themselves as role models, helping set an example of quality teaching to their mentees. They also felt it was important to help NQTs identify any weak aspects of their teaching and use the mentoring to help support them to develop in these areas.

The shared desire between the mentor and mentee to work in education impacts upon the relationship and approaches used as well as the skills needed by the mentor to successfully support a trainee entering into the teaching profession:

> *The mentor is someone who is more experienced… and is therefore actually not only just kind of helping that person to come to recognise what the areas of weaknesses are and explore the possible solutions to development issues; but the mentor would actually be able to suggest ways of improving in a very targeted way (Mentor of NQTs).*

Mentors often saw themselves as role models to the mentees, helping set an example of quality teaching based on their expertise within the profession:

> *In mentoring, if I then felt they didn't really have the knowledge or expertise or skills, I would then train them in that (Mentor of NQTs).*

They also believed that it was important to work developmentally with the mentee, helping them reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and find strategies for improvement in areas that they were struggling in:

> *It's to get them to reflect on their – you know it may be their lesson observations – on the progress they are making to perhaps see the bigger picture (Mentor of NQTs).*

The literature suggests that mentors of NQTs adopt similar approaches to mentors of leaders, because both are usually part of the senior management team. Mentors of NQTs often have a lot of credibility and authority and are therefore considered to possess a significant amount of expertise and knowledge (Ligardu, 2012). However, like mentors of leaders, their position is not a prerequisite for possessing empathy and good interpersonal skills (Aladejana, Aladejana & Ehindero, 2006) which are crucial to the success of mentoring; particularly as they are supporting teachers at the start of their career. Therefore psychosocial and career functions are also important features found within this mentoring discipline (Aladejana et al, 2006; Delaney, 2012; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Ligadu, 2012; St George & Robinson, 2011; Wynn et al, 2007).

Executive Coaches

Executive coaches work across a variety of sectors, but are united by the focus on clientele: usually senior managers and chief executives. Therefore participant executive coaches agreed that their role often served both the coachee and their organisation. Despite this, their priority was to work with the coachee and therefore they needed to be able to build up an effective working relationship in usually a short space of time. This depended upon possessing good interpersonal skills in order to facilitate meaningful conversations.

A common feature of this coaching type is the ability to balance the needs of the coachee alongside the organisational expectations, whilst maintaining confidentiality:

> *Occasionally, especially in organisations where there is a mistrustful atmosphere, they might give you little snippets of information to see if they come back (Executive Coach).*

They all placed a high value on the need to build up the relationship and use this connection to help steer the coaching:

If the person trusts you, you can start to work. And I think you develop trust first of all by displaying the behaviours that you say you will do (Executive Coach).

Possessing good interpersonal skills was therefore identified as crucial to the development of the relationship through the ability to converse at a deeper level:

The conversation is the crucible of everything, and that works a lot of the time (Executive Coach).

Executive coaches are often able to quickly establish trust and rapport (Augustijnen, Schnitzer and Van Esbroek, 2011; Dagley, 2010) by possessing a high level of self-awareness (Augustijnen et al, 2011) and ensuring that the coachee is fully understood (Boyce et al, 2010). These enable the coach to build up the relationship; although it is important that coaches are able to maintain confidentiality otherwise any trust could be lost. When referring to specific coaching tools, the participants were much more selective as they felt that, over time, these had been replaced by the use of dialogue. De Haan, Bertie, Day and Sills (2010) suggest that executive coaches will often use tools or models in their practice. However, Dagley (2010) refers to good coaches being able to facilitate deeper levels of conversation.

Coaching Psychologists

The three participants were all qualified psychologists and at one time or another had decided to specialise in coaching. They all articulated how their psychology training in particular has had an impact on their coaching approach. They cited a high level of self-awareness of themselves and the coachee and the dynamics between them as important elements of the coaching. They also focused on understanding the clients' internal and external makeup.

A variety of assessment tools, models, frameworks and underpinning theories associated with psychology informed their practice:

I would like to think that the way that I use [psychometrics] as a coaching psychologist is sort of integrating them into the background of the theory behind the instruments, and I could use them at a slightly deeper level (Coaching Psychologist).

They all placed value on possessing a high level of self-awareness which enabled them to understand their own reactions to the coachee and draw on these whilst coaching:

You need to have a high level of self-awareness. You need to understand yourself because the only tool you are using when you are coaching is yourself (Coaching Psychologist).

They placed an emphasis on the need to build up a relationship with the coachee, and in particular, explore the clients' specific needs and then tailor input accordingly:

The conversation is very much tailored to their needs. But very often in response to that we will be sketching out another model (Coaching Psychologist).

Within the literature, there is an expectation that coaching psychologists, having undergone a significant amount of training and supervision which encourages them to increase their own self-knowledge, will be aware of the influences that they have on the coaching dynamic. Marsden, Humphrey, Stopford and Houlder (2010) describe this in terms of the coach's presence. The coach should have awareness of factors other than simply what is being presented verbally by the coachee; although this is not to say that other types of coaches or mentors are not able to do this proficiently. The main difference though is the underpinning psychology theories that the coach has an understanding of which will be drawn upon as guiding principles.

Sports Coaches

The three sports coaches interviewed work in different sports: athletics, tennis and football. They each reflected on the approaches they use when working with athletes, and identified goal-setting, rapport with the athlete and the use of technological tools as ways of working effectively with athletes.

Goal-setting was viewed as key, particularly in relation to helping the athlete develop their skills in order to improve their performance:

> *You can set a goal for 8 years hence and in that moment you know that is when you will be judged as to whether or not your coaching, the process, the activity of the athlete, the decisions – you will know at that moment what has all worked (Sports Coach).*

They also recognised the need to relate well to the athletes, in order to effectively use the sporting element as a way of supporting the athlete in more holistic ways:

> *You have two functions… One is that you develop them for sport. But two, you develop them through sport for a better life (Sports Coach).*

The coaches also referred to technological developments which can be useful in helping them correct the athlete's technique, or understand ways in which they can prevent injury:

> *With my goal-keeping coaching you have to understand the role of the player in that position. And for me, to look at the technical, tactical, psychological, biomechanical and social side of the development of the individual and within a team (Sports Coach).*

Sports coaches need to have a good understanding of the sport in which they work, and their own athletic ability becomes more relevant when working as a professional coach (Gilbert, Côté & Mallett, 2006; Nash, Sproule & Horton, 2008; Rodgers, Reade & Hall, 2007). Just as coaching psychologists draw on psychotherapeutic models, sports coaches are also able to access knowledge and approaches that address physiological and psychological needs (Trzaskoma-Bicserdy, Bognar, Revesz & Geczi, 2007). Meyers (2006) found that instead of coaches simply relying on athletic experiences or knowledge, they can also tap into biomechanical analysis techniques which help assess performance and responses to injury and trauma. This information is useful in training sessions when trying to pre-empt or change physiological and psychological behaviour patterns.

By exploring practice within each discipline, it is notable how the boundary demarcations are blurred. Some themes are apparent in all disciplines, such as the importance of mentors and coaches developing their interpersonal skills; and using particular approaches to work towards change. In addition, some aspects of the participants' approach are tailor-made to the needs of the client, therefore requiring either specialist knowledge or particular approaches. Table 1 below summarises the key themes found within each discipline, providing an overview of how participants approach their work.

Table 1 helps identify some of the 'unique selling points' of each mentoring and coaching discipline. For example, mentors of young people will need to understand their organisation's safeguarding and child protection policies. This might not be relevant in other disciplines, unless a sports coach is working with teenage athletes. The table also demonstrates the complexities in defining mentoring and coaching, as several elements are found in more than one discipline, such as mentors of leaders, mentors of NQTs, executive coaches and coaching psychologists all needing to appreciate and understand organisational culture. Whilst there are overlaps in approach, these are not simply separated out as all mentoring types versus all coaches. This next section explores where shared approaches might currently exist in general terms, regardless of the specific discipline.

Mentors of Young People	Understand the needs of young people Normally adopt a non-directive approach Do not usually need to have any specialist knowledge Understand safeguarding, child protection and boundary-setting Normally work with the mentee long-term
Mentors of Leaders	Understand the needs of leaders and senior managers Normally adopt a directive approach when focusing on skills Require specialist sector and leadership knowledge Understand organisational culture Normally work with the mentee long-term
Mentors of Newly Qualified Teachers	Understand the needs of teachers Normally adopt a directive approach Require specialist teaching knowledge Understand school culture Normally work with the mentee long-term
Executive Coaches	Understand the needs of executives Normally adopt a non-directive approach Do not normally require specialist knowledge about coachees' skill-set Understand aspects of organisational culture Normally work with coachee short-term
Coaching Psychologists	Understand the internal needs of people Normally adopt a non-directive approach Are training in psychology Normally understand aspects of organisational culture Normally work with coachee short-term
Sports Coaches	Understand the physical needs of people Normally adopt an instructional approach Require training in sports coaching Understand technicalities of sport Normally work with coachee long-term

Table 1: Summary of practitioner approaches within six disciplines

Shared approaches across all disciplines

Whilst some distinctive elements were found (as outlined in Table 1), participants also acknowledged areas of commonality regardless of the discipline or type of work. Some participants felt that the overall purpose was the same even where mentor and coach approaches might differ, as two coaches pointed out:

> *A mentor or a coach could theoretically be looking to get to the same outcomes (Executive Coach).*
>
> *Coaches and mentors are in a one-to-one professional area which is helping other people based on a philosophy of the individual can grow themselves if you can work with them correctly (Coaching Psychologist).*

One mentor also identified similarities in terms of approach and purpose:

> *Mentoring and coaching both provide… learning and growth; cater to individual needs… process real life issues and problems and decisions; they both facilitate access to information and choices of actions and they both support the achievement of positive outcomes (Mentor of Leaders).*

Change was also regarded as something which links mentors and coaches:

> *What they are trying to do is create effective change in people (Sports Coach).*

These views highlight some shared beliefs about what can be achieved through mentoring and coaching. Clutterbuck (2008) echoes these discussions by highlighting areas in which mentoring and coaching overlap, including how both look to work with the mentee or coachee's chosen goals in order to bring about change.

The main element which was similar, regardless of role or context, was the need for mentors and coaches to be able to relate and connect well to other people:

> *A lot of it is about the relationship and the rapport, it is about the combination of having an organised, well thought through approach… A lot of intuition and empathy and people awareness… That would be common whether you are mentoring… or you are coaching (Coaching Psychologist).*

Questioning and listening were particularly referred to as key skills that mentors and coaches regularly use.

> *There is a lot that is similar, because the skills are the same, aren't they? The questioning and the listening and the probing and the tools that you might use, they are all similar (Executive Coach).*

Mentor-coach interdisciplinary approaches

This section explores participants' views about mentors adopting coach approaches from time to time based on the need being presented by the mentee; and similarly coaches utilising approaches traditionally associated with mentoring. This will be followed by a discussion about mentors and coaches operating in a multidisciplinary way when working across a range of mentoring and coaching disciplines.

Using mentor-coach approaches interchangeably

Given that aspects of the mentor and coach approaches used can be similar, participants were asked about the potential of mentors adopting coach approaches, or vice versa. Some coaches and mentors agreed that practitioners could and should use mentoring and coaching approaches interchangeably where appropriate.

A range of themes were touched upon by participants, reflecting ways in which mentors dip into coaching, and coaches make use of mentoring approaches from time to time. The place of practitioner self-disclosure was highlighted by an executive coach, who said that she would in certain situations find it helpful to share her own personal experiences; something she considered to be more akin to mentoring:

> *If they see that it is appropriate to use an approach which is more like mentoring, or sharing of experiences, then a good coach will do that appropriately (Executive Coach).*

One participant coaching psychologist oversees a maternity coaching programme where the coaches are all mothers; so this common shared experience can provide a useful starting point in

the coaching, where it is appropriate for coaches to refer to their previous experiences of going on maternity leave and then returning back to work:

> *There is a strong element of mentoring in maternity coaching, because you are supporting people through a transition. The coaches have all – they are all mothers because that is great for the credibility. So there is an element of knowing where the other person is going to; there is a certain element of having to make sure we are not making assumptions and trying to create that person in our own image, which I think is a danger in mentoring (Coaching Psychologist).*

As well as coaches adopting mentor approaches, there were times when mentors cited coaching techniques as helpful. One mentor of leaders explained how mentors might move into coaching when a mentee wants to change aspects of their behaviour:

> *As a mentor, if somebody has a particular behaviour or performance issue… inevitably the mentor shades a little into coaching, in terms of helping them to consider how they plan the change in their behaviour (Mentor of Leaders).*

One way in which practitioners can develop their skills further is to have an understanding of how mentor and coach approaches might differ, but to use them in an integrated and informed way. This then broadens the scope of the mentor-coach and allows them to operate at a level which meets a diverse range of needs. A mentor of leaders described how practitioners might flit between mentor and coach approaches within the same session, because the client's needs are driving a best-fit approach:

> *You can become too purist… in mentoring you do this and in coaching you do that. When they are in a room and they are having a one-to-one discussion with somebody, they are not thinking that, oh I am straying into coaching or am I, you know, so they will just go where the need is (Mentor of Leaders).*

A mentor of NQTs saw the value in practitioners being fully trained as both mentors and coaches, and then using them interchangeably in sessions so that the most appropriate intervention could be matched to client need:

> *I guess the conclusion that I have come to is, you have the different skills in your toolkit, and you bring out different ones as and when it is appropriate (Mentor of NQTs).*

This same mentor of NQTs currently uses mentoring and coaching approaches interchangeably but she sees the coach approach as the one to aim for:

> *I would always start with coaching, and if they are able to identify for themselves what the issues are, and if they are able to identify solutions for themselves, then I would leave it at that (Mentor of NQTs).*

This participant understood coaching to be used in a way that allows the client to formulate their own thinking without being told what they could or should do. She switched into mentoring if she felt the client did not have the knowledge or experience to make those judgements or decisions for themselves; but would always have in the back of her mind the aim of working towards a coach approach, as this demonstrates that the client is becoming less dependent upon others. This point is interesting, because the view taken is that coaching approaches are interventions which practitioners should aim for, as it suggests the client is taking more ownership of their own development and learning.

These views reflect a general consensus of opinion from participants that mentor and coach approaches can and should be used interchangeably when the need arises; therefore practitioners can develop their skills by generating a greater understanding of matching approach to need, rather than be limited to specific types of mentoring and coaching.

Mentor-coach multidisciplinary approaches

Some mentors and coaches had already had a range of experiences where they had worked in a variety of mentor and coach disciplines. For example, one mentor of leaders had previously been a sports coach. This resulted in him being more directive when coaching athletes than he was when mentoring leaders. Another executive coach was also volunteering as a mentor and would rarely give advice when coaching; but happy to offer guidance when mentoring. Some had changed roles as their career had taken on new directions; others operated in two different mentoring and/or coaching disciplines simultaneously. For these practitioners, they recognised the importance of understanding the aims and purpose of each role, and applied the most appropriate approaches accordingly. This reflected an emphasis on self-awareness and the ability to consciously avoid certain techniques because the demands and expectations of another discipline required a slightly different approach.

Participants did raise some questions about whether or not all mentors and coaches could work across two or more mentoring and/or coaching disciplines, either due to a lack of understanding or not possessing the right skills.

The first issue relates to the amount of input a mentor contributes within a mentoring session and whether or not the same person could turn their hand to coaching, as one mentor of leaders pointed out:

> *If you are doing sponsorship mentoring, then I think apart from anything else, you need to learn to shut up! (Mentor of Leaders).*

These sentiments were echoed by an executive coach:

> *I think there are more skills in shutting up than there are in speaking (Executive Coach).*

Similarly, another executive coach felt it might be difficult for mentors to switch to coaching without resisting the temptation to offer direct advice:

> *Even if you were really good at listening and reflecting and all the other stuff, and putting the client at the centre of what you are doing – it can be very hard to step away from that and not leap in and solve problems (Executive Coach).*

One mentor of NQTs felt that many mentors in his discipline would find it difficult to support people outside of a teaching context, because this is something they know inside out:

> *I think mentoring an NQT – it is all about teaching pretty much. Whereas coaching is far more to do I think with other people, and relationships with other people, and organisation, and how to take a department forward (Mentor of NQTs).*

These views represent some potential difficulties of mentors being able to hold back, where their views, experiences and advice are often sought out by others through mentoring; or moving outside of your known field might lead to a lack of confidence in helping others effectively. One executive coach described how a coach's ability to work effectively outside of their specialist discipline would depend on a number of things:

> *That would depend on the capability and flexibility of the coach to utilise their skills, knowledge and experience in different contexts, and whether their attachment to their own experience is a key part of how they can be confident and credible (Executive Coach).*

Similarly other practitioners found it difficult to imagine coaches operating as mentors. One mentor viewed coaching as all about process, which could be something that would get in the way of mentoring:

People who are at process-based level of coaching are probably not quite going to get it when it comes to mentoring, because they will still have a process that they want to push somebody else through (Mentor of Leaders)

A coach agreed that a switch from coaching to mentoring would not be an easy transition:
I have to work quite hard to be a mentor, harder than I have to work to be a coach in a sense, because the coaching is so ingrained now it is almost part of me (Executive Coach)

This suggests that it is not appropriate for all mentors and coaches to work in any discipline at any time. However, where practitioners possess self-awareness and understanding of different professional settings and have a range of approaches which match these areas of work, they could work in a multidisciplinary way, taking on a number of different mentoring and/or coaching disciplinary roles. Similarly, some mentors and coaches could adopt interdisciplinary approaches whilst located in a specialist discipline, by drawing on other approaches from time to time, based on a best-fit approach according to need.

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been to explore how mentor-coach approaches might be viewed in disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary terms. Within each discipline featured in this study, further light was shed on the particular needs of the mentee or coachee, leading to specific distinctive approaches that help practitioners work effectively with those needs. Findings showed how each discipline requires some form of specialist knowledge or understanding such as child protection and safeguarding for young people or the particular demands and pressures facing executives and leaders. This does not mean that other mentors and coaches cannot learn and adapt in order to work in a discipline that they have not had experience of previously. However, it does suggest that there are aspects of mentor and coach approaches which are tailor-made for specific situations or client needs (Walker, 2004) and practitioners might benefit from additional training which takes specialist factors into consideration. Therefore, training providers in particular need to recognise where specialist knowledge and experience might be necessary and provide additional learning opportunities and support accordingly. This also raises implications for others involved in supporting practitioners, such as professional bodies or those employed as supervisors. They also need to have an understanding of the diverse range of mentoring and coaching disciplines in order to facilitate learning and growth in practitioners so that they might successfully meet those needs. Supervisors can also help practitioners recognise their own limitations and identify aspects of the field that might not be suitable for their approach and/or skills.

Findings also suggest that skilled mentors and coaches may operate in an interdisciplinary way. Consideration was given to participant responses where they were able to cite experiences of adopting other approaches as part of their toolkit, when the need of the mentee or coachee required them to diversify their approach. Most mentors and coaches were able to articulate a rationale for the times when they felt an adaptation of approach was justified; and this was understood as using mentor-coach interdisciplinary approaches. However, participants also felt that some mentors and coaches demonstrated a range of approaches which enabled them to proficiently work across disciplines, described as using multidisciplinary approaches. However, participants also acknowledged the risks of some practitioners venturing into territories outside of their known discipline, if they lacked self-awareness or did not have the right skills or knowledge.

Limitations and the need for further research

Further work needs to be done that looks at additional types of mentoring and coaching, as the six areas featured in this study do not fully represent the field. This study focused on six mentoring and coaching disciplines and has shown how there are elements of a practitioners' approach which might

require specialist knowledge, whilst aspects of the role can be reapplied elsewhere. By analysing more disciplines, a fuller picture will be created which shows where other overlaps lie, or where other specialist mentors or coaches need to remain distinctive.

It was felt to be important to start from the perspective of the practitioner to assess underlying aims of the work that influence the different approaches used by mentors and coaches. However, an important missing element was the perspective of the mentee or coachee and finding out from them what approaches best meet their needs, in relation to their own context or set of circumstances. It would be interesting to look at the six disciplines which have featured in this study and compare findings from the practitioner perspective with those on the receiving end. Findings would help ascertain how perceptive practitioners are about the relationship between discipline, approach and need of the mentee or coachee; and how accurate these might be when compared with the mentee and coachee perspective based on their first-hand experience.

Another area of research would be to explore the perspective of training providers and professional bodies to provide additional insights into the parameters of mentoring and of coaching and how the two roles can be developed in a healthy way.

A greater understanding is also needed of the ways in which individuals are able to access mentoring or coaching and whether or not they are given the option to engage with a mentor or coach. Many contexts seem to prefer one over the other and this might prohibit prospective mentees or coachees accessing the approaches most suitable to their needs.

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