

Mentoring: an overview

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Coaching and mentoring are terms that are often used interchangeably. Mike Munro Turner outlines where the focus of mentoring lies.

Background

The first recorded use of the word 'mentor' is in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*. Ulysses left his trusted friend Mentor to take care of his household and his son Telemachus whilst he was away fighting in the Trojan War. Mentor largely failed in his duties, taking care of neither. It was the goddess Pallas Athene (goddess of war and of wisdom) who helped Telemachus, appearing throughout *The Odyssey* in a variety of human and animal forms, including that of Mentor. As Mentor she acted as a wise and trusted adviser and counsellor helping Telemachus grow in experience, maturity and courage. However, the word didn't feature in the English language until publication in 1750 of the story *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, by the French writer Fénelon, in which Mentor was the main character. *Les Aventures de Télémaque* went on to become the

most reprinted book of the 18th century, leading to the word 'mentor' being resurrected after a gap of nearly three millennia. It is Fénelon's Mentor, not Homer's, that forms the basis for modern usage of the word (Roberts 1999).¹

The word 'mentor' soon came to represent a wise and responsible tutor – an experienced person who advises, guides, teaches, inspires, challenges and corrects, and serves as a role model. Mentoring is now a widely used and effective tool for personal and organisational development.

What is mentoring used for?

Mentoring has many business uses including:

- Enabling organisational change through supporting the personal and professional transitions of key leaders.
- Providing trusted support in times of trouble and helping

with important decisions.

- Supporting individual career development, 'opening doors', and explaining organisational politics.
- Guiding a student through a course of study and competence development.
- Passing on technical expertise.
- Transferring business skills into the not-for-profit sector.
- Helping people from minority groups more into the working world.

Key learning points

- ◆ Definitions of mentoring vary widely, so check assumptions early on.
- ◆ Good mentoring always involves a wide range of skills, including coaching, counselling, consulting and teaching.
- ◆ Mentoring is a catalyst and support for individual and organisational transformation.
- ◆ The Mentoring Wheel provides a holistic approach to mentoring.
- ◆ Mentoring cohabits territory with counselling, psychotherapy and coaching.



with their surroundings. This requires an expressive and receptive interplay between the person and their environment and provides a second dimension.

The resulting two-dimensional developmental space within which the mentoring occurs is shown in Figure 1. This Mentoring Wheel describes a process made up of four perspectives:

Mentoring today

The use of mentoring is widespread across the commercial, education and not-for-profit sectors as a developmental, supporting and helping activity. In Europe, Australasia, Canada and southern Africa, a 'development-focused' view of mentoring is most common. By contrast, a 'sponsorship-focused' view predominates in the United States – or at least in the literature emanating from there. The difference is encapsulated in the language used, with sponsorship-focused mentoring referring to 'protégés' and development-focused mentoring to 'mentees' (Clutterbuck, 2004).² An example of the 'development-focused' view defines mentoring as 'Off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking.' (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995).³

develop their leadership qualities, learn new social skills, make a career transition and so on. This movement from where they are ('here') to where they want to be ('there') provides one dimension of mentoring.

The means by which the mentee gets from 'here' to 'there' is by interacting

- Freeing up: liberating ourselves from the ties that bind us.
- Envisioning: reaching up to our potential and vision.
- Implementing: transforming vision into action.
- Attracting: consistently attracting our heart's desire.

The Mentoring Wheel

The Mentoring Wheel is a framework designed to enable you to grasp the big picture of mentoring.

The purpose of mentoring is always to help the mentee change something – to improve their performance,

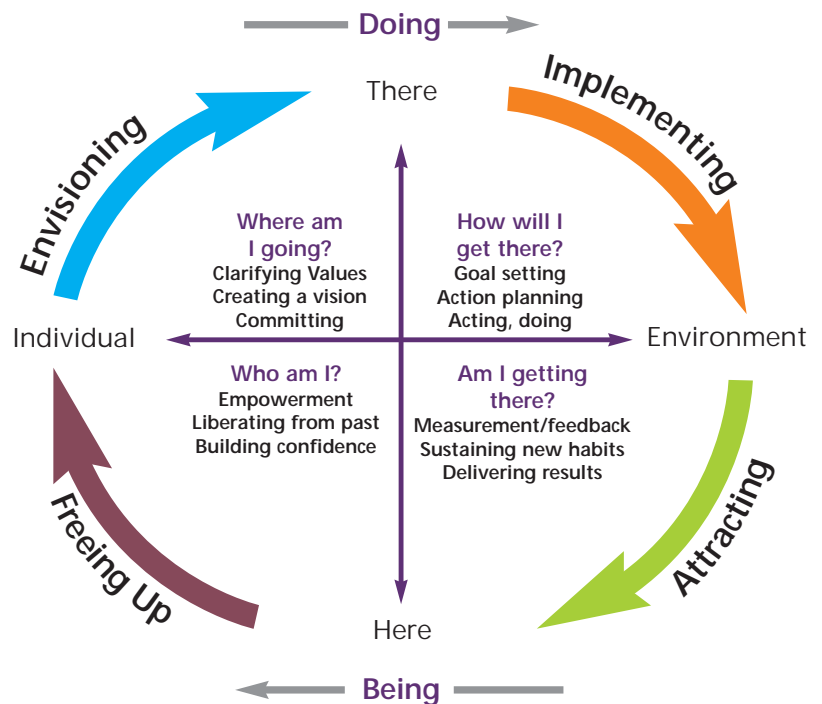


Fig. 1: The Mentoring Wheel (Munro Turner, 1999)

These four perspectives are not discrete activities that the mentee moves between – at any moment all will be present and active though one may be in the foreground.

It is one of the mentor’s jobs to keep all four perspectives alive for the mentee. Individual mentors will prefer working in some quadrants rather than others.

Freeing up

Personal history and current life situation both dramatically influence our ability to make choices now. A key task for the mentor is to help their mentee be sufficiently free of these influences to be able to discern and then make the choices they yearn for. ‘Freeing up’ describes a process of developing the autonomy, responsibility and confidence to be able to choose freely. When working in this phase, the mentor’s stance is nurturing and supportive, aiming to help the mentee develop a strong, positive self-image. The fundamental question, which the mentor helps the mentee answer, is ‘Who am I?’

Envisioning

Envisioning is about connecting with a sense of purpose, identifying and choosing personal value priorities, creating a compelling and stretching vision, and committing to realising it. Key at this stage is the ability to create and hold a tension between the current reality and the stretch vision. What makes this difficult is that it requires us to embrace our own potential to make a difference in the world – and this can be scary. But without the courage to hold this ‘reality gap’, we can end up holding a vision that is little different from the current reality – with the result that little changes. The mentor may therefore have to hold on to the vision for the mentee until such time as the mentee can take it for themselves.

The mentor’s role is to inspire the mentee and to help them answer the question ‘Where am I going?’

Implementing

Implementing consists of identifying the goals which will lead towards the vision, deciding on strategies, plans and actions to achieve these goals, and taking action. The mentor’s role is to coach and to help the mentee answer the question ‘How will I achieve my vision?’

Attracting

Every action we take attracts a response from our environment. We can’t help but attract (particular outcomes, people, situations and so on) – the challenge is to attract our heart’s desire, not the same old stuff we have always attracted. The role of the mentor is to challenge the mentee to see clearly the impact of what they are doing and to help them answer the question ‘Am I creating my vision?’

Underpinning the whole mentoring process is the development of two key skills – the ability to be self-aware and the ability to exercise will. One of the most empowering things we do as mentors is to help people see reality, as well as their part in creating that reality, and the thoughts, feelings and other responses that the reality evokes in them with unflinching clarity. This

level of self-awareness often leads naturally to appropriate action. When it doesn’t, we also help the mentee develop and exercise their will – their ability to choose and fully express who they are and take action in support of this. The degree to which the mentee enhances these two skills is a good indicator of the extent to which the mentoring has created lasting changes in the mentee’s effectiveness.

Being mentored should be a challenging and stretching experience, inviting both mentee and mentor to draw on and develop hidden personal resources and qualities. And it is an exciting, stimulating journey of self-discovery and development that opens up new opportunities for personal fulfilment and professional achievement.

Mentoring, coaching and counselling

Mentoring, coaching, counselling and psychotherapy cover broadly the same territory, but focus more strongly on different parts of it (Figure 2). For example, a development-focused mentor may be primarily helping their mentee through a major life transition (top right), whilst also coaching them to improve their relationship skills (bottom right) and helping them align with the corporate culture (bottom left).

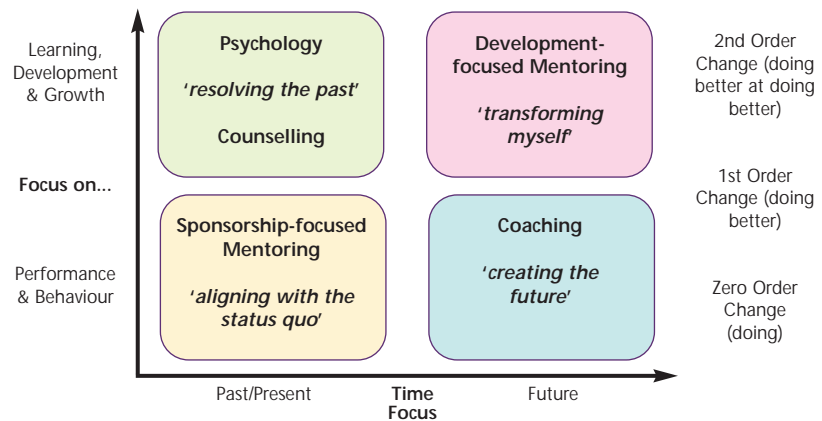


Fig. 2: Mentoring, coaching, counselling

Executive mentoring

This is particularly suited to senior executives who have risen above the scope of formal management development programmes, and require highly focused development and support, tailored to the particular challenges facing them in their work.

Executive mentoring stimulates and supports the individual growth necessary to deliver performance beyond present levels and beliefs of what is possible. It works by helping mentees:

- develop a solid physical, psychological and mental foundation for their leadership capability;
- uncover their value priorities and clarify their personal vision;
- think strategically and inspire shared vision, mission and values;
- uncover self-sabotage, recognise repeating patterns and identify their personal winning strategies.

Executives take advantage of the opportunities provided by mentoring programmes in a wide variety of ways. One senior technical expert, realising that his promotion prospects as a manager were becoming limited, used it to develop his interpersonal and people management skills and is now in charge of a £15 million unit. Another used it to support him in raising the commitment level of under-performing staff. A CEO used mentoring to help him and his management team become champions of the organisation's vision by developing their leadership skills and aligning the team's and the organisation's values.

Organisational mentoring

The increasingly global, fast-moving and competitive business environment is forcing fundamental change on organisations. Many are investing heavily in new systems, structures and processes and in giving people the skills necessary to use them. But often this is not enough. For organisational change to be effective, the people involved are increasingly likely to have to make fundamental transitions in how they see themselves, how they think and how they relate to others. Organisational mentoring programmes are used to help leaders and other executives make these shifts.

An organisational mentoring programme will: accelerate personal and organisational change; support executives in making the transition to new roles and cultures; help manage the downside risk of change management and maintain performance during periods of rapid change; remove obstacles to successful change by predicting and

managing personal and organisational regression; promote balance and provide a stable base during periods of major organisational and career change.

The future of mentoring

We are moving towards an increasingly ecological view of mentoring. As we grow and mature, we make the transition through a series of predictable developmental stages. At its simplest this series can be reduced to three stages, named egocentric, sociocentric and world-centric – or 'me', 'us' and 'all of us' (Wilber, 2001).⁵ The initial focus of most mentoring is on the individual mentee (egocentric). If the mentoring continues (and much mentoring is long term), then the focus will move beyond the individual to supporting transitions in the larger groups to which the mentee belongs, in the wider society or even at the global level. At this stage, the fundamental question the mentor asks the mentee is 'What is it that the world of tomorrow needs that you are uniquely able to provide?'

References

- 1 Andy Roberts, 'The Origins of the Term Mentor', *History of Education Society Bulletin*, no. 64, November 1999, pp. 313-329. Also at http://home.att.net/~nickols/homers_mentor.htm
- 2 David Clutterbuck, 'Mentor Competencies: a Field Perspective', in David Clutterbuck and Gill Lane (eds.), *The Situational Mentor*, Gower, 2004.
- 3 David Megginson and David Clutterbuck, *Mentoring in Action*, Kogan Page, 1995.
- 4 Mike Munro Turner, 'Mentoring for Change', *Project Magazine*, November 1999.
- 5 Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything*, Gateway, 2001.

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