

***Extract from my submission leading to the award of a Level 7 Certificate in Executive Coaching and Mentoring.***

**Define and differentiate between the different focus, roles, processes and environment for the two different disciplines of coaching and mentoring.**

There are challenges in helping potential clients, corporate or individual, to fully understand the difference between coaching and mentoring. The language that is used to describe each activity is often misappropriated, sometimes by those who are offering one or other as a service. The fact that there are issues with definition is reinforced in work done by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) (*Coaching at Work*, 2016, **11** (2), 10-11) in which survey respondents noted the need for further definition of coaching and mentoring. Small wonder that clients may be confused if practitioners are! To help deal with this common practice has been defined at EU level in a Professional Charter establishing definitions with the EMCC and the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the Association of Coaching (AC) as signatories.

The truth is there are some fundamental areas where differentiation can be made clear. There are other cross-over areas where either the practitioner or the client can choose to change the emphasis of a particular coaching/ mentoring attribute to fit their own understanding. These cross over areas become more challenging as one explores the various typologies of coaching that have come into being. Even more complication will arise at different typologies in mentoring are explored and defined by appropriate descriptors (*Coaching at Work*, 2016, **11** (2), 10-11).

The capacity for confusion is offset by the fact that both mentoring and coaching, when pursued properly, start with the process of contracting. Amongst many other things contracting offers an opportunity to establish a common understanding of the service being offered by the provider and the one required by the client. Completion of a successful contract will ensure a shared understanding at the outset of the relationship.

Nonetheless, it remains valuable from the point of view of customer service to ensure that key differences between coaching are accurately and consistently defined. These differences are noted below after the definitions of each intervention from the EMCC:

- **Coaching** is a process limited to a specific period of time that supports individuals, teams or groups in acting purposefully and appropriately in the context they find themselves in. The coach supports clients in achieving greater self-awareness, improved self-management skills and increased self-efficacy, so that they develop their own goals and solutions appropriate to their context.
- **Mentoring** is a developmental process in which a more experienced person shares their knowledge with a less experienced person in a specific context through a series of conversations. Occasionally mentoring can also be a learning partnership between peers.

The definitions themselves capture some of the key differences. Mentoring involves an intervention between practitioner and client where the former has **experience and relevant expertise** to bring to bear in support of the latter. At its purest coaching does not require the coach to have subject specific knowledge, only the ability to help their client unlock their

own skills. There are coaching typologies that are exceptions to this: executive and skills based coaching where there is, more often than not, the prerequisite of experience or relevant skills.

If knowledge is **power** then the mentor is in a position of power in relation to their client although the responsibility for manifesting the benefits of new knowledge resides entirely with the client. There would almost certainly be a perception on behalf of the client that the additional experience and expertise of their mentor should be of value to them. A coach might be viewed a number of ways depending on the typology of the coaching interaction but in general it is true that they have to earn their stripes with a client unless they come with a reputation that precedes them.

In the professional setting **the focus** of mentoring will be on the individual while coaching is more related to performance. The most recent Ridler Report has shown that the return on investment related to coaching is still measured in relation to how it has supported achievement of objectives although there is a trend towards measuring the financial impact of coaching on an organisation (*Coaching at Work*, 2016, **11** (3), 12). In some areas of coaching, for example life coaching, the focus is on both individual and their performance.

Mentoring tends to be a **long term intervention** with the intellectual benefactor passing on skills and knowledge that may be cherry picked by the mentee. Their motivation for engagement is the pleasure of learning attenuated by a need/ desire for development. Add to this the opportunity to have this accelerated by someone helpful in navigating around obstacles, ones that are invisible to the mentee but known and conquered by the mentor. Coaching tends to be shorter term and focussed on achieving an improvement in performance and coaching meetings will be based around objectives that relate to it. The gains from coaching will be improvements in a particular task or activity, although the learning may well be extrapolated to a wider life benefit by the client.

The shorter interaction time associated with coaching is an element of the **higher level of structure** that there is in a coach/ client vs a mentor/ mentee relationship. The former will normally be based around a schedule of meetings, each with its agenda and expectation of tangible outcomes. The latter is potentially more fluid and informal with the only need for structure being imposed by the challenge of synchronising busy schedules. The different structures extend to the **expectation of client outcomes** with each intervention. In mentoring there is an expectation of the relationship being value adding to the individuals and their employer but there is rarely an expectation to quantify the benefits. In coaching there is a clear expectation of the return on investment by tangible improvements in performance.

Other differences are manifest in **corporate behaviour in relation to mentoring and coaching**. Mentoring has been available in one form or another throughout history. The value of an expert guiding the novice in the workplace recognised as an extension of one of the basic principles of education. The informal aspect of mentoring also lends itself to acceptance in working communities and as such most organisations have supported both formal and informal mentoring programmes. Coaching for performance at work is a much more recent phenomenon, from the outset associated with tangible improvements in performance. In large organisations coaching has gained traction in the last decade where it has demonstrated impact in the form of executive coaching, typically involving external coaches. More recently there has been a democratisation of coaching in large companies

with it being available to the wider community, supported by a substantial increase in the number of internal coaches. All of this is happening at a time when coaching credibility is judged to be at a record high as described in the Sherpa 2016 Executive Coaching Survey (*Coaching at Work*, 2016, **11** (3), 7).

The competition in the public and private sector marketplace and the need to innovate and change to beat the competition have been significant drivers for increased use of both mentoring and coaching. Given that both are processes that enable individuals (and now teams and groups) to achieve their full potential they are also a means of gaining a competitive edge over rivals. A consequence of this includes a drive to quantify the benefits of both mentoring and coaching. Further, there is a drive to ensure that practitioners are properly skilled to deliver within mentoring and coaching, and to cope with the different needs of the different typologies and to do so consistently within a corporation. It would appear that the future is rosy in mentoring and coaching, yet there will remain ample opportunity for confusion in defining what each can deliver to clients seeking these services.

***Dr Jeremy Hinks, Alpamayo Coaching, 2016***