

Coaching and mentoring

Identify ways to apply coaching and mentoring principles as part of an overall learning and development strategy

Coaching and mentoring are development approaches based on the use of one-to-one conversations to enhance an individual's skills, knowledge or work performance.

It's possible to draw distinctions between coaching and mentoring although in practice the two terms are often used interchangeably. While the focus of this factsheet is on coaching, much of it also applies to mentoring.

What is coaching?

Coaching aims to produce optimal performance and improvement at work. It focuses on specific skills and goals, although it may also have an impact on an individual's personal attributes such as social interaction or confidence. The process typically lasts for a defined period of time or forms the basis of an on-going management style.

Although there's a lack of agreement among coaching professionals about precise definitions, there are some generally agreed characteristics of coaching in organisations:

- It's essentially a non-directive form of development.
- It focuses on improving performance and developing an individual.
- Personal factors may be included but the emphasis is on performance at work.
- Coaching activities have both organisational and individual goals.
- It provides people with the opportunity to better assess their

strengths as well as their development areas.

- It's a skilled activity, which should be delivered by people who are trained to do so. This can be line managers and others trained in coaching skills.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring in the workplace tends to describe a relationship in which a more experienced colleague shares their greater knowledge to support the development of an inexperienced member of staff. It calls on the skills of questioning, listening, clarifying and reframing that are also associated with coaching.

One key distinction is that mentoring relationships tend to be longer term than coaching arrangements. In a succession planning scenario, for example, a regional finance director might be mentored by a group level counterpart over a lengthy period to develop a sound approach to dealing with the board, presenting to analysts and challenging departmental budgets.

Mentoring relationships work best when they move beyond the directive approach of a senior colleague 'telling it how it is', to one where they both learn from each other. An effective mentoring relationship is a learning opportunity for both parties, encouraging sharing and learning across generations and/or between roles.

More information on mentoring approaches to develop individuals for key or leadership positions can be found in our [succession planning factsheet](#) and in our report [Attitudes to employability and talent](#).

CIPD members can make use of their mentoring skills in helping young job seekers into work through our [Steps Ahead Mentoring](#) campaign. Our research published in [Volunteering to learn: employee development through community action](#) also demonstrates that such schemes and

other volunteering opportunities can help build coaching and mentoring skills.

Prevalence of coaching

It's clear from our research report [L&D: Evolving roles, enhancing skills](#) that coaching is seen as an increasing focus for organisational learning. This is reinforced in more recent [research by Towards Maturity](#) which shows that 96% of L&D teams view coaching and mentoring as a priority.

The aims of workplace coaching can include:

- assisting performance management
- preparing and supporting people through change
- supporting learning and development.

Although coaching is widespread within organisations, there are challenges about how best to manage and deliver it. These include confusion over exactly what coaching involves, how best to manage the stakeholders in the process, when coaching is (or is not) an appropriate intervention, and how to work effectively with a complex external coaching industry. While some organisations hire external coaches, particularly when coaching those in very senior management or leadership positions, line managers are often expected to operate internally in a coaching capacity in the workplace. Peer coaching, particularly by those with a known specialism, is also an option.