

# Compare and contrast mentoring and coaching for leadership development in higher education

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**Abstract:** *Less experienced academic staff in higher education tend to seek more professional mentoring and coaching. However, finding seniors who are willing and able to provide them with ongoing support is not straightforward. While both mentoring and coaching can provide assistance to faculty members, they serve different roles and purposes in leadership development. Therefore, it is necessary for higher education institutions to recognise the needs of academic staff and to guide them in choosing appropriate method. This essay aims to clarify the similarities and differences between mentoring and coaching and to understand the contexts in which they can each play a greater role. The present essay discussed the possible impact of mentoring and coaching on staff leadership development. And it is concluded that despite the fact that mentoring and coaching are similar in effect, they are different to a more substantial extent.*

**Keywords:** *mentoring, coaching, higher education, career advancement, leadership development*

## 1. Introduction

Mentoring and coaching are considered to be an effective way of developing leadership capacity among academic staff in the school sector (Hastings & Kane, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>; Viator, 2001<sup>[2]</sup>; VanVelsor & McCauley, 2004). According to Carmel and Paul (2015), mentoring and coaching can provide psychological and technical support to the staff, helping them to strengthen their perceptions of their careers and adapt more effectively to the academic environment. At the school level, Curee (2005)<sup>[3]</sup> argues that both approaches have contributed to the development of the teachers' professional skills and increases their academic competitiveness, which will ultimately contribute to school development.

However, higher education today is in an ever-changing labour market that is more about competition than collaboration (Darwin and Palmer, 2009<sup>[4]</sup>; White Paper, 2016<sup>[5]</sup>). Thus, it becomes difficult for less experienced academic staff to find someone at the university who is willing to support their development on a non-paid basis. In addition, Pololi and Knight's (2005) survey found that experienced academic staff may not be able to give extra help to others because they have their own priorities. In this case, Gardiner's (1999)<sup>[6]</sup> study has suggested the need for institutions to formalise mentoring and coaching, where formal coaching is provided by a line senior, under the arrangement of the university. However, more recent research has found that even with formal coaching, there are still potential problems (Carmel and Paul, 2015). For example, the inability to choose one's own coach may lead to a tense relationship; or the short duration and intensity of the coaching programme may lead to the coachee's confidence being affected (Lockwood, 2002)<sup>[7]</sup>. While mentoring can take place in a mix of formal and informal contexts, coaching may only take place in a formal context (Hastings & Kane, 2018).

In summary, even though mentoring and coaching are important methods, the two are different. Academic staff need to understand the differences so that they can maximise their effectiveness. This essay will first discuss the similarities between the two in terms of 'leadership development' and 'positive relationships building'; and then discuss the differences between the two through 'different context', 'content', and 'career transitions.'

## 2. Similarities

### 2.1 Leadership development

The effects of mentoring on leadership development are similar to those of coaching. Firstly, both mentoring and coaching are typically conducted in a one-to-one context where the transfer of knowledge

and skills is accomplished through a process of relationship building between the two participants (Hastings & Kane, 2018). This context implies that the appropriate mentor or coach can supervise the academic development of the participant and facilitate confidence building. Secondly, according to VanVelsor and McCauley (2004), both the mentor and coach are required to assess the participants' leadership abilities as well as their needs, to evaluate the participants' leadership progress at different stages, and support the participant on an ongoing basis. In other words, the smooth running of mentoring and coaching promotes the leadership development of the participants and encourages them to adapt to the work environment on a psychological and social dimension (Carmel and Paul, 2015)<sup>[8]</sup>.

At the broader level, Kolb's (2014, p. 43)<sup>[9]</sup> "the experiential learning cycle" has demonstrated that learning is a dynamic process and that it is through constant reflection on experiences and building on them at different stages that real development can take place. This suggests the importance of experience in the learning process. In the university context, although teachers can develop from their professional training, the reality is complex and variable. Therefore, the importance of teachers' personal practise and academic networks should not be overlooked (Sugrue, 2002<sup>[10]</sup>; Hampton, Rhodes, & Stokes, 2004<sup>[11]</sup>). This means that coaching and mentoring have become essential ways for teachers to access leadership development in higher education.

In particular, the central objective of coaching is to develop the coachee's understanding of leadership behaviours (Ely et al., 2010)<sup>[12]</sup>. Huff et al. (2013) have developed a coach model for application in education, emphasising the coach's role in providing support, assessment, and challenge to the mentee. From their model, Coaches need to customise objectives to the abilities and needs of their mentees. During the coaching process, the coach needs to give clear feedback to the coachee to enhance their understanding (Huff et al., 2013). Specifically, it can be inferred from their findings that coaching values reflection from experience and provides long-lasting support to the coachee by giving them feedback. The basic exercises of coaching, according to Lofthouse et al. (2010)<sup>[13]</sup>, are built around environments where leadership can be exercised. For example, lectures, workshops, or other activities. This means that coaching focuses more on the practise of specific skills. This is also evidenced in Carmel and Paul's (2015) study, even though fixed relationships lead to psychological development, coaching focuses more on skill gains than focusing on deep emotional issues.

On the other hand, in the process of leadership development, the central purpose of the mentor is to focus on the personal development of the mentee and to complete the leadership transition (Campbell et al., 2012)<sup>[14]</sup>. The survey by Carmel and Paul (2015) shows that the majority of teachers who choose to be mentored do so because they want further professional development and ideological advancement. Despite mentoring and coaching having similar developmental goals, the slight difference is that mentoring has more opportunity for organisational advancement, whereby the mentee receives actual job development (Carmel and Paul, 2015).

In addition, mentoring places greater emphasis on the development of the mentee's personal mental development (Viator, 2001). The long-lasting interaction will reduce academic stress, job uncertainty, and other related concerns for the mentee. Viator's research also suggests that most mentees perceive organisational attention and a renewed enthusiasm for their work (Viator, 2001). It is also worth noting that mentors can choose to develop their mentee's leadership skills based on set goals or focus on the deeper potential of the mentee to provide a more complete personal development rather than limiting it to career development (Shook & Keup, 2012)<sup>[15]</sup>. Therefore, mentoring in the field of education is often considered to incorporate coaching (Fletcher, 2000)<sup>[16]</sup>.

## **2.2 Positive relationship building**

Studies have compared positive relationship building in mentoring and coaching and found that they are essentially identical. Teachers can utilise the resources of experienced professionals to develop a social network based on a collaborative relationship with a mentor or coach (Shook & Keup, 2012). In Shook and Keup's article, they emphasise that both mentoring and coaching can facilitate the convergence of academic development and social relationships. Thus, it can be inferred that appropriate mentoring or coaching can be a positive way to promote collaborative relationships within the organisation. It allows teachers to feel inclusive while developing their academic skills. In particular, peer mentoring or peer coaching can even enable teachers to gain more positive relationships, as collaboration can develop more smoothly between peers (Shook & Keup, 2012). This in turn facilitates the construction of academic communities and allows teachers to adapt to their work environment more speedily (Shook & Keup, 2012; Carmel and Paul, 2015).

More specifically, mentoring is the process of long-term engagement and regular interaction between mentor and mentee (Hastings & Kane, 2018). Although mentoring builds on the long-term personal development of the mentee, it is not the case that mentoring relationships can necessarily only begin with long-term development. Mentoring relationships can also be transformed from a short-term programme into a long-term process (Hastings & Kane, 2018). Therefore, it could be assumed that a long-lasting mentoring relationship requires a willingness to bond on both the part of the mentor and the mentee. This implies that the mentee can gain further mentoring by developing his or her own social skills. Allen and Turner (2010)<sup>[17]</sup> argue that the mentor should also go beyond a preset plan and should accompany the mentee in the process of reflecting and learning from the mentee's life experiences to build a more reliable relationship. This means that the mentor and mentee are more likely to build a trusting relationship. According to a university-based survey conducted by Crisp (2010)<sup>[18]</sup>, for mentees, mentoring can motivate them to work, and encouragement from the mentor can promote career persistence. Furthermore, Allen and Eby (2011) state that a positive mentoring relationship will improve the mental well-being of the mentee, leading to the development of a more positive mindset. This means that for mentees, participation in mentoring has the opportunity to result in more positive attitudes and greater academic achievement. Likewise, for the mentor, the positive progress of the mentee will enhance their productivity and leadership skills, thus boosting pride and self-confidence (Lockwood et al., 2010; Hastings et al., 2015<sup>[19]</sup>). Therefore, it can be inferred that effective mentoring can lead to positive relationships. Through the maintenance of relationships, mentoring can be linked to positive interpersonal and academic outcomes for both the mentor and the mentee.

In the same way, coaching is also about building relationships. A slight difference is that the coachee can choose a coach according to their goals and needs (Ely et al., 2010). In other words, the coachee expects to maintain a friendly relationship with the coach as well as improve their professional skills. Furthermore, as coaching needs to be conducted according to a pre-determined plan, the characteristics of listening, commitment, and maintaining a trusting relationship are expected by the coachee (Ely et al., 2010). It has been well documented that positive coaching relationships can help coachees achieve positive psychological development and well-being at work (Grant, Curtaeyne, & Burton, 2009<sup>[20]</sup>; Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006)<sup>[21]</sup>. Moreover, by modifying the coachee's behaviour during the coaching process, the coachee is able to increase their self-awareness of the complex environment (Hastings & Kane, 2018; Ely et al., 2010). This means that a suitable coach can facilitate a positive relationship and maximise the impact of coaching.

Alternatively, the coachee's progress also contributes to the coach's trust in the relationship, which enhances the satisfaction of the coaching role (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014)<sup>[22]</sup>. Peer mentoring, in particular, is also widely recognised as important for leadership development. Although peer mentoring has similar developmental intentions, peers can maximise inclusion for the mentee (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008)<sup>[23]</sup>. According to Hampton, Rhodes, and Stokes, (2004), teachers can improve their teaching practises by participating in the academic community of peer coaching. In other words, peer coaching can provide an equal platform for the mentee to work collaboratively. By sharing experiences on this platform, teachers are able to enhance their collaborative skills alongside their academic development (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008). Therefore, it can be assumed that the establishment of collaborative academic coaching communities can further develop teacher leadership.

Although there are many similarities between coaching and mentoring, there are also differences as well.

### **3. Differences**

#### **3.1 Different context**

Coaching generally takes place in a formal context, but mentoring is carried out in a way that blends formal and informal contexts (Hastings & Kane, 2018). Such formal contexts are often arranged directly by the school or school leadership for the induction of the academic staff (Crisp, Carales, Walls, & Cassill, 2018)<sup>[24]</sup>. Through induction training, the school is able to ensure that all staff who need support have the opportunity to participate and reinforce a sense of inclusion. Thus, Hampton (2016)<sup>[25]</sup> notes that formal programmes have clear organisational significance. At this level, both coaching and mentoring take place within the context of an experienced staff member sharing academic resources and social networks. In other words, a formal context ensures that leadership training is provided to staff equally, making them feel supported and encouraged by the school (Hampton, 2016).

Generally, formal training is based on specific academic needs and is typically of short duration, as is the case with coaching implementation (Shook & Keup, 2012). Since formal relationships are often built in the context of single-sided choices, even if staff are able to receive specific skills enhancement, there is a possibility of a mismatch between the personalities of the coaching parties. This means that formal relationships may instead affect the efficacy of coaching and the intense training arrangements may lead to a lack of adaptation on both sides of the coaching (Hastings & Kane, 2018). In this case, peer coaching may turn out to be a more suitable option within the organisation (Parker, Hall, & Kram, 2008).

In parallel, there is much research to support the acceptance of informal forms of mentoring and coaching. In particular, Carter and Francis (2001)<sup>[26]</sup> suggest that in the field of education, collaborative mentoring relationships may emerge spontaneously between teachers, even when schools do not formally arrange mentoring relationships. The advantage of the informal context is that it provides the mentee with the opportunity to choose a mentor. In other words, informal relationships are often a mutual choice between mentor and mentee (Carmel & Paul, 2015). As a result, the potential for relational tension is reduced, making the mentoring environment more relaxed. In Carmel and Paul's (2015) study, they state that the informal context is more favourable for the mentee to develop their own competencies. This is because the mentee needs to initiate contact with the mentor and assess their own learning goals, which makes the mentoring more profound (Carmel & Paul, 2015). However, sometimes informal relationships can be potentially problematic. For example, if the mentee is relatively introverted, he or she may not reach out to the mentor for their own reasons. Alternatively, the mentee may lack the information to seek outside help and miss the opportunity to contact the mentor. For these staff, an informal relationship is not as inclusive as a formal relationship with regular contact.

Teachers therefore need to distinguish the appropriate method for their own situation. While coaching is chosen according to the specific development needs of the teacher, mentoring requires the selection of the appropriate mentor in a suitable context.

### **3.2 Content**

Mentoring is different from coaching in content respects. According to Hastings and Kane (2018), the purpose of mentoring is not to train short-term skills but to facilitate a process of personal development for the mentee. It can even be a long-term process that is “for life” (Clutterbuck, 2014, p. 11)<sup>[27]</sup>. Therefore, mentors may choose to focus on developing a specific skill of the mentee, or they may choose to concentrate on the psychological development of the mentee and support the mentee over time. In other words, mentoring focuses more on the development of the mentee's potential than on a specific strategy (Clutterbuck, 2014). However, the content arrangement of the mentor may not change depending on the different mentees and often has a specific developmental process to follow (Hastings & Kane, 2018). This means that mentoring can be less flexible in terms of the content. The mentees themselves need to reflect on the content and summarise it before giving feedback to the mentor (Lofthouse et al., 2010).

In contrast, coaching involves the coach giving feedback on the assessment to the coachee (Clutterbuck, 2014). It is beneficial as the mentee is consistently aware of the updates of the contents and their weaknesses. Moreover, the formal content setting can reduce the possibility of coachees not contacting the coach and eventually losing contact with the coach. It could be assumed that feedback from the coach would also provide a kind of guarantee that each coachee would be included in the organisation. According to Korotov (2016)<sup>[28]</sup>, the content of coaching is more personalised than mentoring and the progression process is more flexible. In Korotov's article, the coach needs to implement the programme according to the desired goals and adjust the progress according to the mentee's performance. As coaching is designed based on the specific needs of different mentees, its content is more flexible and unique (Ely et al., 2010). This means that coaching can meet the particular skill development of all coachees at a certain level. Although a positive relationship between coach and coachee can contribute to their psychosocial development, it is primarily concerned with specific skills and behavioural development and rarely deals with the psychological dimension (Shook & Keup, 2012).

### **3.3 Career transitions**

Beyond the above differences, mentoring also has some intention of “career transitions”, whereas coaching has no obvious career promotion implications (Curee, 2005, no page). Lofthouse et al. (2010) note that mentoring generally occurs at specific career points to prepare teachers for the work environment in the long term. As mentioned above, mentoring can be arranged during induction or

“succession planning” (Lofthouse et al., 2010, p. 8). In contrast, coaching focuses on the development of a particular skill and is not necessarily linked to career advancement, but rather to the development of expertise that can enhance leadership succession planning (Lofthouse et al., 2010; Kaparou & Bush, 2016<sup>[29]</sup>).

#### 4. Conclusion

Higher education institutions have become conscious of the importance of mentoring and coaching for leadership development (Hakro & Mathew, 2020)<sup>[30]</sup>. For academic employees, studies have shown that they are also aware of the changing nature of their career and want to improve their competitiveness (White Paper, 2016). Therefore, experienced mentors or coaches can voluntarily create an inclusive environment for their academic staff (Hampton, Rhodes, & Stokes, 2004). More importantly, the management of higher education institutions should support mentoring or coaching programmes, taking into account the specific circumstances and providing the necessary assistance to teachers.

This essay suggests that both mentoring and coaching can provide career development for academic staff. At the same time, they can increase staff confidence and a sense of belonging to the institution, which can further contribute to the development of the school (Lofthouse et al., 2010).

Although mentoring and coaching are similar in effect, they are different to a more substantial extent. The purpose of this essay is to provide a comparative perspective to help teachers select a more appropriate method in their specific context.

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