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# David Clutterbuck, mentoring and coaching: a commentary

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# David Clutterbuck, mentoring and coaching: a commentary

## **Abstract**

David Clutterbuck has made tremendous contributions to both coaching and mentoring theory and practice over the past three decades. One of the pleasures of reading David Clutterbuck's work is that he communicates clearly without jargon, a tribute perhaps to his journalistic background. He captures what is known or believed about a topic at the time and is not afraid to say that things have changed or that his predictions have not yet come to pass. By articulating the conceptions of coaching and mentoring at a particular point in time, Clutterbuck allows us to recognise the changes that take place over time as well as the changes in different contexts, changes that can be almost imperceptible unless someone draws our attention to them. In this commentary, I will focus on the evolving definitions of mentoring that are explicit in Clutterbuck's work and consider the distinction between coaching and mentoring.

## **Keywords**

clutterbuck, david, mentoring, commentary, coaching

## **Disciplines**

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## **Mentoring vs Coaching**

### **A response to David Clutterbuck, Mentoring and Coaching**

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David Clutterbuck has made tremendous contributions to both coaching and mentoring theory and practice over the past three decades. One of the pleasures of reading David Clutterbuck's work is that he communicates clearly without jargon, a tribute perhaps to his journalistic background. He captures what is known or believed about a topic at the time and is not afraid to say that things have changed or that his predictions have not yet come to pass. By articulating the conceptions of coaching and mentoring at a particular point in time, Clutterbuck allows us to recognise the changes that take place over time as well as the changes in different contexts, changes that can be almost imperceptible unless someone draws our attention to them. In this commentary I will focus on the evolving definitions of mentoring that are explicit in Clutterbuck's work and consider the distinction between coaching and mentoring.

It is perfectly possible for people to have an engaging conversation about mentoring, without realising that they are talking about very different processes with different applications and purposes. Clutterbuck highlights key differences between the American and European approach. There is the sponsorship model of mentoring popular in North America where mentors open doors and use their influence to help their protégés. Then there is the European version, which is now also appearing in America, where mentors help their mentees reflect and make choices about the future. On the other hand, one of the emerging trends Clutterbuck notes is that in some 'macho, task-driven cultures', senior managers in Europe may adopt the American-style sponsorship style of mentoring. Organisations wishing to promote mentoring need to have an open conversation about what they wish to achieve through mentoring and then to consider how best to achieve it, e.g. what combination and form of mentoring and coaching might offer the best fit.

As with coaching, it is the relationship that is the greatest predictor of success in mentoring. Interestingly Clutterbuck's research found that informal mentoring was more effective than formal. This may be because mentors are usually assigned in formal schemes and the matching may or may not work, whereas the choice of mentor in informal relationships enhances the relationship itself. A mentoring relationship is usually longer than a coaching relationship and evolves over time, in other words the relationship is not a static one and should be reviewed periodically to decide whether to continue, to change to a different mentor or to have more than one mentor at a time.

As Simon Jenkins notes from Clutterbuck and Megginson's work, the distinction between coaching has become blurred, because many of the same skills are used by coaches and mentors. Line managers may alternate between coaching and mentoring in the same conversation – and also take on a directive role where needed. The distinction in the abstract may not be that important. However, as Garvey [1] warns, it is important to be clear on how we use the terms in a particular setting. This allows us to communicate with those we work with and those who pay the bill. As Clutterbuck highlights in emerging trends, this shared definition should not preclude adaptation to particular contexts.

One area of difference between coaching and mentoring which does not come out clearly in Clutterbuck's work is the proliferation of coaching models in recent times, see for example [2]. While many of these approaches such as narrative or appreciative inquiry can be used in mentoring also, mentoring research tends to discuss mentoring as a unified single process, rather than discuss different flavours of mentoring. Perhaps this is because coaching is a more commercial activity and coaches need to differentiate themselves more than mentors do, or because purchasers of coaching services ask providers to articulate their coaching philosophy. In the end, though, it is not the model or framework that the coach uses that leads to successful outcomes but the relationship [3, 4] – another factor in common between coaching and mentoring.

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