

MENTORING EXECUTIVES AND DIRECTORS

Part 1 Every executive needs a mentor

Why this book?

Mentoring executives and directors is the direct result of the explosion in mentoring at the top of organisations in recent years. Relatively little study has been made of how executives find and use mentors, both on their rise to senior positions and when they get there; nor on how executives become mentors in turn.

What research literature there is tends to view mentoring as primarily a vehicle for sponsorship rather than development. Typical of this view is the study undertaken by Tilton Willcox in the 1980s,¹ who found that more than half of 250 executives considered that some form of top management sponsorship was essential or important in reaching an executive post. Willcox also concluded that high level mentors “significantly influenced [executive’s] advancement to [their] current rank” and that “organisational politics play an important role in promotion” in their organisations.

Classic studies² from the United States also suggest a strong correlation between finding a mentor at a junior level in the organisation and achieving top jobs.

It is notable that almost all these studies involve executives *looking back* on their careers and registering gratitude to mentors, who helped them up the lower rungs of

¹Willcox, T Mentoring among British Executives, Part 1: the British case, *Int. J. of Mentoring* Vol 1 no1 1987 pp 19-23

²Levinson, D *The Seasons of a Man’s Life*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1978

the ladder. Very few talk about the mentors they have now. This may be partly because it's not macho to admit you need help when you are at the top. Whatever the reason, the lack of open discussion around this topic is one of the main reasons for researching and writing this book.

In defining our topic the first step is to reach an understanding of what we mean by mentoring and in particular the mentoring of executives and directors. The definition of mentoring which we established in our book Megginson & Clutterbuck (1995) is: *Off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking.*

The same definition applies to the mentoring of executives and directors. We would argue that the frequency of the significant transitions required to deal with a changing environment are, if anything, greater for the most senior managers than for anyone else in the organisation

Development is different

One of the themes that will emerge again and again in this book is embodied in the words 'significant transition' in the above definition. Mentoring supports a process that is about enabling, supporting, sometimes triggering, major change in people's life and work. As such it is about developing the whole person, rather than training in particular skills. Our development through life can be seen as like a graph, which rises as we increase in competence and confidence. However the slope of the graph changes from time to time. There are sharp rises, as well as relatively level plateau. Mentoring is especially valuable during these periods of rapid change.

It is like climbing the side of a mountain. While we are struggling up the steep bits we are breathless, challenged, single minded, and in need of some support and sustenance. Technically there may be some moves that we can only make roped up to someone else. It is here that the mentoring process comes into its own. Coaching can help us move along the relatively level ground to the next big challenge. When we face a cliff we need help that will enable us to exercise new skills, new strategies, new perspectives.

Mentoring can help with this change and enable the developing executive or director to get to the higher ground where they can have a quite different perspective. They will see further mountain ranges, new ways forward, which were simply not imaginable from the plateau below. This means that mentoring needs to be a process which encourages new perspectives, changed ways of thinking, deeper self knowledge. These transitions are usually irreversible in the sense that once the insight is gained it cannot be lost again. It may be set on one side under the pressure of events, but it will be there, working away on the executive to shape their future behaviour. It is this change in perspective that makes mentoring such a powerful intervention, and it is the dynamics of Personal Reflective Space that makes this power manifest. We will explore this space and how the mentor and the executive or director they are helping can use it later in this chapter.

Curtain raisers for mentoring

En route to the top, key issues for mentees appear to be:

- how do I make myself noticed?
- how do I get the experience that will enhance my career prospects?
- how do I gain sufficient understanding of what happens at more senior levels?

- how do I learn to manage business politics?
- how do I get myself assigned to the “right” projects?
- how do I create the influence and information networks that will enable me to operate effectively at a senior level?
- how do I develop the depth of self-awareness necessary to operate at that level?

Once they get to an executive position, a whole new series of issues emerges:

- how do I continue to learn when most of the knowledge I need to acquire is intuitively based?
- how do I stimulate constructive challenge from my peers and people below me in the organisation structure?
- how do I cope with the stress of my responsibilities? (This concern seems to come earlier and earlier in people’s careers.)
- how can I manage my performance better, when it is so much more difficult to measure my contribution?
- how can I develop other people, when I have less and less hands on time with them?
- how do I achieve through influence rather than command?
- who can I test ideas out on without raising fears or expectations?
- do I have sufficient self-mastery to continue to grow with the job?
- how do I manage my personal credibility within the organisation?

If the person is also a director, new issues include:

- how do I learn how to distinguish between my roles as senior function head and director?
- how do I develop the skills to become a chief executive or a non-executive director?

- how can I and my colleagues work together in “collaborative independence”?
- how do I ensure I know what is really going on in the organisation?
- am I providing an effective role model for the values the top team espouses?
could I do better?
- is my strategic thinking sufficiently broad to contribute effectively to the process of creating and interpreting the business vision?
- do I have sufficient contextual understanding of disciplines I have little hands on experience in?
- what am I going to do with my life/career from now on?

These themes will occur and recur throughout the course of this book, which has been designed firstly to stimulate debate about the nature and objectives of mentoring, secondly to explore the experience of mentoring at senior levels from a variety of perspectives -- mentor, mentee, scheme co-ordinator (where the mentoring takes place as part of a formal scheme) and interested observer.

In preparing this book we have assembled over 20 cases of executive mentoring. Our analysis of these cases has, of course, been grounded on our own experience and preconceptions about how executive mentoring works. The models, frameworks and assumptions that we use in this work are the subject of the rest of this first part of the book. Part 2 is made up of the cases, which are organised into three sections – private sector, public sector and voluntary sector. Many of these cases we have prepared ourselves from interviews carried out specifically for this book. We have also included other voices to enrich the data we have available to you, the reader. We have invited researchers to talk about mentoring that they have conducted (A1 Durham University’s small business schemes) or that they have observed as outsiders (A2 Liz Borredon’s account of a French mentor, A10 Lida Beers’ story of a

peer mentoring in the Netherlands, B7 Richard Hale's reading of the mentoring of a health trust's finance director). We have asked scheme organisers to talk about their own schemes (A5 Carl Eric Gestberg's scheme in ABB Sweden, A7 Nick Holley's approach in Lex, A11 Trude Stolpe's account of mentoring in Axel Johnson, Sweden, A13 Nina Lazeron's report of her HRM Director's mentoring experience in Heineken, the Netherlands), and professional mentors tell their own stories (A3 James Cannon, B4 and C2 Judy Weleminski's account of relationships in the public and voluntary sector respectively). We have in two cases separate accounts of the same relationship (A8 Colin Palmer mentoring Nigel Harrison, B1 Ian Flemming mentoring Julia Essex). In this way we have increased the diversity of the accounts you will read in the second part of this book. Of course, even the interviews we have conducted ourselves show colossal differences based on the different focus, temperament or context of the people whose stories we share through the mentoring process. In the interviews we have stuck as closely as we can to the interviewee's own words, and we have checked our text with our respondents. Those who are familiar with transcribing talk will know that people – even the very articulate people who are the subjects of our research – do not talk in sentences! So we have amended the accounts to increase the ease of readability of what they have to say.

In Part 3 we bring together the sense that we have made of this multiplicity of stories. Again we keep the interpretations open by building in perspectives of others. We have been greatly helped by participants in the seminars we have run while preparing this text – who have read some of our cases and offered their readings of their significance. In particular we are grateful to three of our respondents who spent a day with us working through a large number of the cases and coming to their own views of the issues that emerge. Their wisdom and incisiveness have shaped the

issues that we address in Part 3 though, of course, and opinions which we express are our own.

Some of the issues which struck our co-researchers were:

- The qualities of executive mentors: wisdom, outside experience, good questions and listening, role modelling, credibility, patience, networking, help in 'becoming oneself', two-way insight, balancing process and content, being dependable, helping manage knowledge
- The nature of executive mentoring relationships: triggered by crisis and long term, very high trust needed, crucial for overcoming isolation, the chemistry being right is essential, differing bases for respect, planning and preparation by both parties
- Organisational issues: integral to organisation development, need for an underlying model of mentoring; link to organisational models (balanced scorecard, transformation, EFQM, etc.); need for a systematic approach overall
- Patterns in national approaches to mentoring – northern Europe: non-selective (available for whole cohort), scheme based, egalitarian, strongly mutual; UK: individualistic, career questions and life balance issues predominate; France and southern Europe: few stories, formality of relations between managers a barrier; US: sponsorship and promoting careers are more readily accepted than in Europe.
- Pattern of purpose by sector: public sector: linked to course and career; private sector: linked to balanced lives and performance; voluntary sector: values shared learning across sectors.

Lonely at the top

The metaphor of the Captain of the ship has dominated thinking about managerial leadership for far too long. The Captain stands alone, unguided, unbowed, the master of a small, enclosed world. His word is the law and it is his defiance of the elements, his skill at direction that steer the vessel away from danger and result in rapid, safe passage. *Mutiny on the bounty* and many other tales explore what happens to those who dare to tell the Captain he is wrong.

The problem for the Captain is that he or she has no-one to turn to -- for advice, for acquiring learning, for questioning assumptions and behaviours. Once seafarers became Captains, it was assumed (whatever the reality) that they had no further need to learn, or to be given encouragement and support. The same principle applied to the next couple of ranks down -- the more senior you were, the less learning and support you needed.

The analogy with the modern CEO and business executives fails on a number of counts. First, the CEO's word is not law, nor is the ship of business an isolated small world. It has to answer to a variety of often vocal stakeholders. Second, executive directors are expected to operate as a team (as opposed to the Board as whole, which is a very different animal, especially when it includes non-executive directors). Increasingly, this means sharing knowledge and learning, leveraging each other's strengths and compensating for each other's weaknesses. Third, no-one is capable of understanding everything that is going on in a organisation, unless it is very small. And fourth, top managers are increasingly having to accept that learning doesn't stop when you reach the executive suite -- far from it, indeed, for that is one of the occasions within a career when learning has to accelerate. (Others include the first job and the first managerial role.) It takes courage to declare, as recently did the chief executive of one of Europe's largest construction groups, that tomorrow's

Board will have to have a very different, more comprehensive set of skills than the present incumbents. Such a statement focuses the minds of the top team on what has to be done to develop executive talent, so that the next board will be home grown.

Companies that have abandoned the myth of the CEO as Captain of the ship open up a whole variety of developmental options, both for the individual executive directors and for the top team as a whole. As a group, top teams and boards are more and more making effective use of approaches such as action learning³ to facilitate the process of learning from and about each other. Externally facilitated decision-making is increasingly common, valued because it combines exploration and extrapolation with urgently needed practical outcomes. Business schools are booming with executive short courses, many of them customised to the learning needs of particular companies.

Personal reflective space

The missing ingredient in most of this activity is frequently *personal reflective space* (PRS). PRS can be defined as “*the seized opportunity to develop personal insight through uninterrupted and purposeful reflective activity*”. Note some of the words used here. The opportunity has to be seized to be useful -- not always easy in a busy executive schedule. Personal insight is a critical ingredient in effecting significant purposeful personal change. Uninterrupted and purposeful means what it says. The individual needs to find sufficient quiet time to think issues through, explore their “inner meaning” and to analyse and compare different strategies. For most people, that means at least an hour.

³ Casey, D Learning in Organisations, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1993

Research by Graham Robinson and Alan Mumford indicates that directors find it very hard to reflect. They explored the learning styles of over 100 directors. The directors were classified into one of Mumford's four styles of learner (activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist). Of the four styles, reflectors were by far the smallest group.

Rather like dreaming, quality reflective time allows the learner to pass through several layers and rhythms. The first phase can be described as the *disaggregated*. The executive is still in his or her normal working state, high on activity (in both senses of the phrase). The emphasis of his or her thinking is primarily on *what* needs to be done, and *how*, rather than on *why*; and on the urgent rather than the important.

The second phase can be called *acknowledgment* or *framing*. The reflector has been aware of an issue that needs to be addressed, but has not previously articulated it in a coherent way. Framing involves putting an initial definition or structure to the issue, some clear boundaries as to what it is and is not, as an essential first step to dealing with it. It is the complexity of the framing process that prevents us from doing it on the hoof and that complexity arises as much, if not usually more, from the need to apply values and emotional understanding to an issue than to difficulty in understanding the rational and/or logistical aspects of it.

The third phase is one of *implication analysis*. What does it imply if I don't deal with this issue? If I do? What am I afraid of? What is the best or worst that could happen? What do I want to happen? Why? This kind of thought process is often an essential precursor to the next phase, *insight*.

Insight is the recognition of a deeper level of understanding. It can be a “truth” -- perhaps a statement about one's behaviour, personality or motivations that had not previously been apparent; or a perception of a pattern or structure to events or data that had previously seemed random; or a significant new perception, such as viewing a persistent problem as an opportunity. Insight can also involve a deeper sense of what one's purpose is. This can be a narrow purpose in relation to the issue being considered, or a wider life purpose, which becomes clearer from examining the focused issue in this reflective way.

Phase five is about *reframing*. The individual revisits the issue(s) in the light of the insight gained. This enables them to draw upon logic and emotion to develop a set of options or alternatives for dealing with the issues. A frequent outcome is the aggregation of a number of smaller, apparently intractable problems into one or two larger ones that have a much clearer set of choices attached to them. These choices form the sixth phase, considering and selecting between options.

It is typical, watching someone go through these phases, to see their physical energy dampen, the more reflective they become. Physical energy hits nadir at insight level, gradually building up again as the executive begins to perceive viable actions he or she can take. Visualising those actions releases more and more energy until they are back into their normal working state, itching to make things happen.

THE DYNAMICS OF REFLECTIVE SPACE

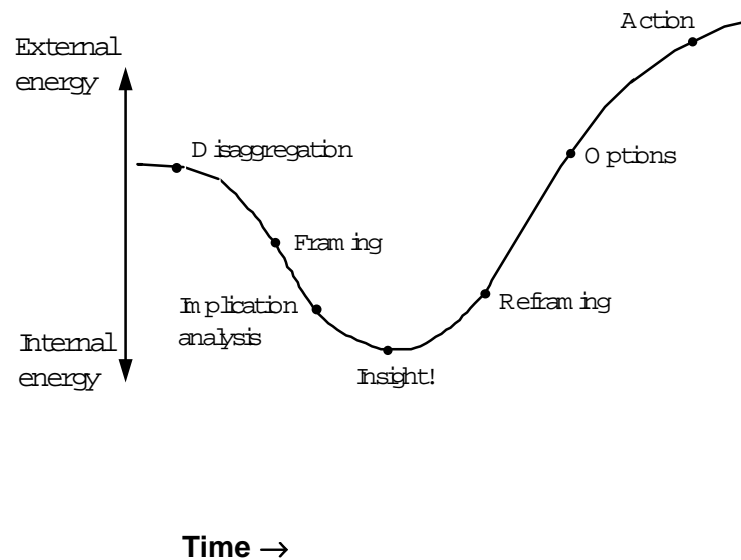


Figure 1.1: A model of personal reflective space

Reflective activity, the final part of the definition, might seem to contradict this picture of energy flow. But we have noticed that, to maximise mental activity, it is generally beneficial for a short time to minimise physical activity. True, some people (including one of the authors) often seem to think most creatively when they walk around, but they are almost always in reframing or options mode when they do so.

Reflection also implies, in its natural sciences definition, some form of interaction. It is the movement of light that makes a mirror work. For the individual taking time out to ponder, reflection can be seen as a dialogue with oneself. Nonetheless, it *is* a dialogue.

That dialogue can be much more powerful, if it is carried out with someone else, who has the skills not only to ask the questions you would ask yourself, but also those you would not ask yourself. **That person is a mentor.**

Why the rise of interest in executive mentoring?

Wise CEOs and directors have sought counsel and reassurance from sources outside their organisations since organisations began. The term mentor originates in Greek mythology, but the practice of mentoring dates from much earlier. **There is increasing evidence that the gradual dominance of Homo Hominis (Modern Man) over other related species was a consequence of becoming more and more competent at passing knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation.**

In recent years, director and executive mentoring has shown a remarkable surge.

The reasons are several:

- jobs at the top involve increasing pressure -- on time, to demonstrate performance, to meet the often conflicting demands of different stakeholders. The risks of being an executive or director grow each year, along with the volume of legislation from national or supranational sources. Maintaining a sense of balance on a multitude of complex issues is very difficult if the people you discuss them with are all involved as you are. It makes a great deal of sense to seek the perspective of an unbiased, trustworthy individual, whose judgement you value.
- maintaining the balance between work and home has become much more difficult. With allowance made for commuting time and working at home, today's typical executive works at least as long hours as his or her Victorian counterpart, who had a 60-hour week. Early retirement is as much a symptom of exhaustion

as seizing the opportunity created by society's greater wealth. Reflective dialogue about how to maintain a quality of personal life are more often than not a feature of mentoring relationships at this level.

- as executives face up to their own needs for continuous performance improvement, they need to gain greater insight into their motivations, their strengths and weaknesses, particularly in how they relate to other people in the business. Admitting a lack of confidence can be very difficult inside the organisation, yet fairly easy to an experienced listener from outside. Good mentors help executives understand their behaviours, identify where to build on good habits and address destructive ones, and plan personal improvement.
- flatter hierarchies make the jump from one level of management to another increasingly difficult. In particular, the transitions between specialist and general manager and between executive and director, director and chief executive all involve radical changes in the way the individual makes judgements and manages his or her team. It helps greatly to have the support and guidance of someone who has been through the same experience and is able to make their experiences relevant to you. In a recent research project⁴ examining high performance companies around the world, one of the common characteristics was that the outgoing CEO always remained in some capacity to act as mentor to the new CEO, until he or she no longer needed the support.
- the expectation that executives would pursue careers within a single organisation has largely vanished. Career planning has become an essential activity for the ambitious executive, providing a role for the mentor who is able to help the person think through choices and suggest new avenues to explore. Here are three summaries of issues raised in mentoring sessions with one of the authors by different CEOs over less than a month.

⁴Goldsmith, W and Clutterbuck, D *The Winning Streak Mark II* Orion, London, July 1997

- *My contract comes to an end in two years. I could renew it, but do I want to carry on doing what I'm doing now? (Discussion revealed that, in order to change careers in two years' time, the executive needed to start creating opportunities now.)*
- *I'm only in this post for a year, until a new appointment is made. I've decided not to put my hat in the ring -- I want a less high pressure job where I can spend more time with my family.*
- *I've reached the top here. The next logical step is to European headquarters, but my family have already made too many sacrifices for my job. I won't put them through a move abroad as well.*
- Small business enterprises have become an almost obsessive interest for successive governments across Europe. The problem is that, as the seedcorn for tomorrow's successful giants, a great many get eaten or wither before they can take root properly. A major cause of the high failure rate is that the owner-managers are so busy growing the business that they do not grow their own abilities in tandem. As a result, they rapidly outreach their competence. Small business counsellors can help to grow the business, but it often needs a mentor to help the entrepreneur plan and manage his or her own development.

Formal versus informal mentoring

To some extent mentoring at senior management level is always informal. A more meaningful distinction might be between paid and unpaid mentoring, or between peer and professional mentoring.

Executive coaching (which is often confusingly described as mentoring by consultants trying to take their product upmarket) has to be relatively formal. It starts with an assumption that the executive needs to make significant improvements in a specific area of behaviour, skills or knowledge. It tends to have a strong element of judgement by the coach, who gives feedback about what he or she observes.

By contrast, mentoring tends to be much more holistic. It uses many of the same techniques, but concentrates on helping the executive gain his or her own insights. It encompasses a much wider range of potential issues for discussion. Whereas the coach uses his or her experience to guide the executive along a particular track, the effective mentor allows the learner to manage the process of drawing down on the mentor's experience.

Of course, mentoring relationships often shade into coaching and vice versa. Does it really matter what you call it, if it works for the individual? But the distinction between the two processes is more than academic. Current research into "helping to learn" roles⁵ suggests strongly that clarity of expectation about the role makes a significant difference to the quality of the outcomes.

Informal mentoring has historically been the norm for executives and directors. It usually starts at an early stage in people's careers. A study of women in business by one of the authors⁶ found that a high proportion of female executives perceived that a mentor had been significant in giving them the confidence and self-image to seek advancement, in making them visible to top management and in helping them learn

⁵ Clutterbuck, D, *Learning Alliances*, Institute of Personnel and Development, London 1998

⁶ Clutterbuck, D *Businesswoman*

how to handle organisational politics. In very few cases were these relationships formal.

Formal (paid, professional) mentoring is undoubtedly on the increase. Why isn't immediately clear, but reasons advanced include:

- the difficulty of finding people with the *breadth* of relevant experience to meet the needs of a would-be top management mentee
- the recognition by executives, especially CEOs, that this has to be *quality time* if they are to get the maximum benefit out of it. That implies that the mentor should have a higher level of behavioural skills and insight than most senior managers have time to acquire
- greater acceptance of the role of professional help for individuals and teams in business -- career counselling, process consultancy, personality profiling and so on.

What qualifies someone to be a professional mentor is also still debatable. The UK has a BTEC qualification and plans for a National Vocational Qualification in mentoring in three levels, of which the highest may be "professional" mentor.

A further senior executive mentoring role that lies somewhere between the formal and informal is the increasingly common practice, whereby the retiring CEO becomes a chairperson/mentor to his or her successor. The transition between director and CEO requires a period of rapid personal growth, if the new CEO is to avoid expensive mistakes, for both the organisation and for themselves as an individual. Having the retired CEO around as chairman for a period provides a very useful sounding board and source of cautionary advice. Of course, the chairman acting in this role has to have the strong respect of the new CEO and the CEO in

turn has to have a strong inclination to listen and learn... which is not always the case.

What do executive mentors do?

As illustrated in the cases within this book, executive mentors play a spectrum of roles, often within the same relationship. Among the most common are:

- sounding board: someone independent and uninvolved, who can give honest feedback on how the executive plans to tackle an issue. Implicit in the role of sounding board is that the executive respects both the mentor's accumulated experience and his or her ability to recognise when and how to draw on that experience -- in short, the mentor's *wisdom*. Examples of sounding boards within our case studies include.....
- critical friend: someone willing and able to "speak truth to power", to say openly the things that colleagues are reluctant to expose, either from embarrassment, fear, politeness or (occasionally) malice. The critical friend provides a source of challenge to the executive's assumptions, probing beneath the surface of issues to test the logic of decisions, prompting the executive to question his and other's behaviour and motivations. Examples of critical friends in our cases include.....
- listener: simply being there to offer encouragement and provide a listening ear
- counsellor: an empathetic listener, with the reflective and questioning skills to help the executive analyse problems and opportunities in a dispassionate manner. Effective counsellor mentors do not ignore the emotional side of issues under discussion, however. Rather, they help executives explore how their emotional drives affect their apparently rational decisions. They can help the executive increase his or her resilience to change, and manage areas of weakness either by coming to terms with them and finding ways to compensate,

or by planning significant changes in behaviour. They are particularly adept at helping the executive identify and respond to repetitive dysfunctional behaviour.

- career advisor: helping the executive think through career options, plan personal development towards defined career goals and learn lessons from previous career experience.
- networker: providing access to networks the executive will find useful in both career and developmental terms
- coach: helping the executive make personal change happen, especially at the behavioural level. A coaching approach is most likely to be of benefit when the person has a specific behavioural issue to tackle, or needs to demonstrate a specific interpersonal competence, over a relatively short period of time

In a study conducted by one of the authors several years ago⁷ over 100 mentoring pairs were established for newly created boards of National Health Trusts in the UK, within the Oxford Regional Health Authority. Mentors and mentees were closely agreed on the most valuable roles: sounding board, critical friend and listener.

(Mentors also felt they played a strong role as “giver of encouragement” although the executives recognised this much less.) It would not be a valid conclusion to assume that all executive mentoring relationships would have the same core roles -- the relationships were established for a very precise purpose (developing personal development plans) and for a very specific type of Board. However, it *is* significant that the roles most valued by executive mentees tend to be the more reflective options.

Three common roles

⁷Clutterbuck, D Mentoring at Oxford Regional Health Authority, a project appraisal, March 1993

Wider discussions with executives about their mentors suggest that they seek help from people prepared (or able) to play one of three largely distinctive and often incompatible roles. For simplicity's sake, we call these *executive coach*, *elder statesman* and *reflective mentor*.

The executive coach is usually part of a short-term relationship, based on a clearly defined skills or behavioural issue for the executive concerned. Some coaches shadow the executive closely for a period, to observe what they do and provide objective feedback. Executive coaches need strong observation and communication skills, but often may not have had significant personal experience of managing at the top.

Executives tend to seek them out (or have coaches thrust upon them) when they:

- are deeply concerned about some aspect of their performance
- want to make some specific changes in behaviour
- want to acquire some specific skills.

The elder statesperson is typically a senior player who has “been there, seen it, done it”, the elder statesperson gives the benefit of their experience and may act as a role model. They need good listening skills and the ability to withhold judgement and advice, until it is needed. This can be very frustrating for the person who is itching to pass on their accumulated wisdom and many of these characters spoil the role by trying to give more than is wanted. In doing so, they risk taking the ownership of the relationship away from the mentee. Elder statespersons tend also to be very well networked and able to introduce the executive to new sources of information and influence. If the relationship works well, it often leads to an enduring friendship.

Executives tend to seek elder statespersons when they:

- want a successful role model to follow
- simply need a sounding board
- want to tap into a source of much greater experience, without using consultants (eg a CEO making a first acquisition).

Reflective mentors operate at a more intensive, holistic level than either the coach or the elder statesperson. They help executives explore their own issues, build their own insights and self-awareness and develop their own unique ways of handling how they interact with key colleagues and the business. They use current issues to examine recurrent patterns of thinking and behaviour, asking penetrating questions and stimulating the executive to take control of issues s/he has avoided. They build the executive's confidence through greater self-understanding.

Executives seek reflective mentors when they:

- are keen to maintain the pace of their learning
- recognise the need for constructive challenge, beyond what they will receive from insiders and non-executives
- want to build and follow through demanding personal learning plans
- are committed to managing their own development and owning the processes involved
- want to explore a wide range of issues as they emerge and become important to them
- want to develop a more effective mentoring style in the way they develop others.

Most of the examples in this book refer to either the reflective mentor or elder statesperson roles. Of the two, effective reflective mentors are more difficult to find, because they require an unusual combination of attributes. In particular, they need:

- a broad exposure to executive decision-making and processes
- a large store of relevant business, strategic and behavioural models – and the capacity to generate other models on the spot, to help executives explore the context of issues under discussion
- strong interpersonal skills, typically underpinned with some competence in counselling.

This combination of skills enables the reflective mentor to deal with a very wide spread of business and personal issues and to adopt a variety of helping roles according to the executive's need. They may switch between coach, counsellor, networker, critical friend or sounding board all within the same session. (For a detailed view of this process within mentoring in general, see the book ⁸*Learning Alliances*.)

⁸ Clutterbuck, D *Learning Alliances*, Institute of Personnel and Development, London 1998

How reflective mentors approach the task

We mentioned earlier that energy levels are generally muted in reflective space. One of the reasons this is particularly so in executive mentoring is that the mentor deliberately helps the executive step outside the box of his or her job and personal circumstances, so they can look in at it together. It's like standing in front of the mirror with someone else, who can help you see things about you that have become too familiar for you to notice. However, there are times when mentoring sessions become very emotional, particularly at the framing, implication analysis and insight phases. Reflective space may be the only space in which people are able to release pent up emotion, particularly where it relates to issues they have been avoiding, or which affect their sense of self. It is far from unusual to see an executive -- male or female -- break into tears as they relive a particularly frustrating episode in their current or previous work, or in their personal life. This release of energy -- whether through anger, tears or intense physical activity -- can often be a precursor to the calmness where insight occurs.

Mentoring and emotional intelligence

While the concept of emotional intelligence has been somewhat oversold, it nonetheless provides a neat and relatively practical way at looking at the range of competencies an executive needs to exhibit, to be fully functional in the role. Given that over-reliance on some aspects of behavioural interaction with others may well have propelled the executive to senior levels in the first place, there may be a considerable amount of *emotional unlearning* to take place. The degree, to which the executive is open to such learning -- and the inevitable discomfort of discovery about

oneself -- will influence both the mentoring style and the benefit the executive can extract from the relationship.

Emotional intelligence, as defined by Goleman⁹ involves five key skills:

- Knowing one's emotions (self-awareness)
- Managing emotions (handling feelings)
- Motivating oneself (marshalling emotions in the service of a goal)
- Recognising emotions in others (empathy)
- Handling relationships (social competence).

One of the ways in which the executive mentor can help the executive build greater understanding and strength in each of these five areas is to ask penetrating questions, constantly pushing for insights. Some examples follow:

Knowing one's emotions

The mentor helps the executive separate the emotional and intellectual content of issues and develop an understanding of the interaction between the two. Typical questions:

- what exactly happened?
- what did you feel before, during and after?
- why do you feel that way?
- is there a pattern here?
- do you think you might see this different as an independent observer?
- how can you raise your real-time awareness of feelings?
- how do you feel about yourself? (what do you like/ dislike about yourself?)

⁹ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, Bloomsbury, London, 1996

- how do you feel about the people you work with? (do you like/ respect/ value them?)

Managing emotions

The mentor helps the executive develop greater control of feelings...

- is the way you feel appropriate? helpful?
- how do you think you should feel?
- how can you gain greater control over your emotions?
- how can you *use* emotion to achieve goals?
- when and how should you state to others what you are feeling?

Motivating oneself

The mentor helps the executive envision the goals s/he wishes to achieve and plan how to get there. In doing so, the mentor may ask questions such as:

- what drives you to want to achieve this goal?
- what's stopping you?
- what will it feel like when you reach it? (really good, or flat?)
- what will you want to do next?
- what kind of things motivate you in other circumstances? can you mix high motivation and low motivation tasks so that you accomplish both?
- how can you use your creative intellect to find silver linings in tasks you would otherwise have no enthusiasm for?
- to what extent is reluctance to pursue something a matter of lack of confidence and how could you gain that confidence?

Recognising emotions in others

The mentor seeks to make the executive aware of how their behaviour breeds behaviour in others and how to observe the emotional content in other people's speech and behaviours. Questions might include:

- what do you think you might be doing or saying that might make your manager react to you in this way?
- to what extent and when should you be concerned about how others think and feel about you?
- do you tend to get the same reaction from people in similar situations?
- do you think what they were saying reflected what they were really thinking? (eg was there a difference between their words and their body language?)
- why do you think they might have felt upset about that?
- how would you have felt in their shoes?

Handling emotions

The mentor helps the executive develop strategies to handle interpersonal exchanges in a way that is more likely to achieve the intended results, more consistently. Questions could include:

- how did/do you *want* them to feel?
- how do you manage the conflict between what you think and what you say?
- what is your strategy for motivating others?
- what is your strategy for influencing others more generally?
- what is your strategy for *being* influenced by others?
- do you have a wide enough range of responses to react appropriately in most situations? If not, how could you extend your repertoire?

General questions for improving emotional intelligence

- how do you create the reflective space to consider these issues?

- how do you get feedback on the appropriateness of your responses and who from?
- do you perceive a clear value from investing in developing this aspect of your personal skills?
- where can you find low-risk opportunities to practise?

While it isn't necessary for the in-company mentor, or the mentor in a community programme to have the competence of a professional counsellor, it can help greatly to recognise when emotional processes are preventing the executive from recognising and dealing with an issue. Each of the five key domains of emotional intelligence can be observed in what people think and say, and how they behave.

Effective mentors may also look at themselves against this same checklist, or ask for feedback from colleagues.

The following are some of the clues you might look for:

Knowing one's emotions

- the executive avoids talking about how they feel
- the executive does not admit to behaviour of the same kind as they criticise in others
- the executive says one thing but does another – and doesn't recognise that they do so
- the executive is very defensive to criticism
- the executive constantly blames other people
- the executive is not able to explain why s/he feels the way they do

- the executive seeks intellectual solutions to problems but avoids trying to understand the causes
- the executive doesn't recognise repetitive patterns (like always being ill when the work pressure is high)
- the executive consistently gets angry or uncomfortable about addressing certain topics
- the executive interprets data about his/herself from only one perspective, without accepting the potential validity of other perspectives
- the executive can't describe his or her own weaknesses
- the executive's view of his/her strengths and weaknesses is radically different from other people's
- they show no apparent interest in how others perceive them.

Managing emotions

- the executive loses his/her temper frequently
- the executive is often depressed or "down"
- the executive exhibits the wrong mood for the situation
- the executive appears *too* controlled
- the executive doesn't know when to give up on something that isn't going to work
- the executive finds it hard to delegate, even though they feel they are working too hard
- the executive is seen by others as volatile, or a "cold fish"
- the executive has little apparent sense of humour
- the executive finds it hard to trust other people
- the executive has little trust in his/her own intuition
- the executive over-relies on strengths to the extent that they become weaknesses.

Motivating oneself (not normally a problem with executives, but can occur as an effect of “burn-out”)

- the executive misses goals and targets frequently
- the executive lacks confidence in their own ability
- the executive is apt to give up when things get difficult
- the executive seeks rewards for their efforts unrealistically soon
- the executive seems to have little drive
- the executive finds it hard to think of times when they have been on top form (“going with the flow”)
- the executive has few strong ambitions
- the executive is unable to link ambitions with strongly held personal values.

Recognising emotions in others

- the executive avoids asking others about how they feel
- the executive interprets data about others from only one perspective, without accepting the potential of other perspectives
- the executive gives people solutions to problems rather than explores the causes of the problem
- the executive gets other people’s backs up
- the executive gets into repeated cycles of conflict or poor performance in the team
- the executive is often baffled by other people’s “unreasonable” behaviour
- the executive doesn’t see the gap between what other people say and what they do
- the mentor has a poor evaluation of other people’s behavioural strengths and weaknesses

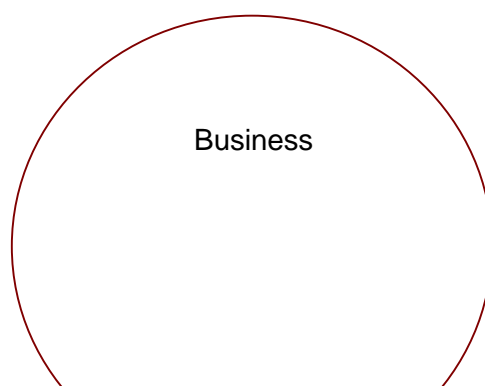
- the executive misses undertones at meetings
- the executive has low interest in other people's views and perspectives.

Handling relationships with others

- the executive has little presence at meetings
- the executive finds it hard to influence/ motivate others
- the executive is often aggressively assertive
- other people feel dominated by the executive
- the executive is not seen as a good team player
- behavioural issues seem to be blocking the executive's performance/ advancement
- the executive is not trusted by other people
- the executive finds it hard to relax in groups, with which s/he needs frequent interaction (eg people of greater/lesser authority, people with more/less formal qualifications)
- the executive feels his/her efforts are being undermined by others.

These are just a few of many indicators you might observe. Be careful, however, on your own part not to jump to conclusions or make judgements – let the executive reflect on whether and to what extent these symptoms are real or apparent. They will only commit to doing something about them, once they have come to a conclusion themselves.

A model of executive mentoring processes



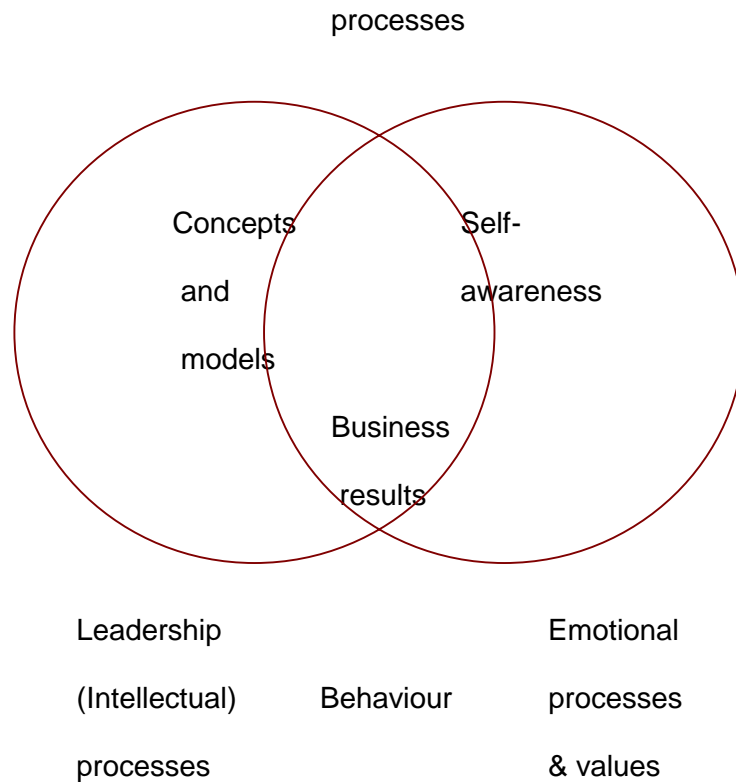


Figure 1.2: A process model

One of the reasons executive mentoring is so difficult to do well is that it operates at several different levels, responding to the mentee's needs. At one level, it is an intellectual process, providing the executive with challenge from a source of equal or greater intellect and expertise, introducing greater rigour into the executive's thinking and helping him or her direct the course of future learning, manage personal development and construct viable career plans. The key question here is *What and how do you think?*

It is equally about the emotional processes of recognising personal needs, ambitions and values; about reconciling individual values with the organisation and

those of colleagues; about internalising and committing to personal change. The key questions here are *What do you feel?* and *What are your values?*

The emotional and intellectual insights gained through mentoring combine to stimulate progress towards behavioural goals, primarily in the workplace, but also in the executive's private life. *How do you behave?* is the critical question in linking the executive's intellectual and emotional personae.

Mentoring executives also demands a strong understanding of business context. Breadth here is more important than depth, but the mentor is unlikely to win the executive's respect if s/he doesn't have at least some depth of knowledge and experience, ideally from having done a comparable job elsewhere. The key question here is *How do you make things happen?*

To make the business issues real and to provoke rapid insight, the mentor needs to be able to draw on a stock of models, which may be drawn from general management, strategy, behavioural science or other helping roles, such as counselling. The more diverse the mentor's spectrum of models, the more flexible his or her response is likely to be. *How do you understand what happens in the business?* is central here.

Models tend to operate at the intellectual level although, properly used, they can also open up emotional responses. The business context and the emotional context come together in the creation of self-awareness -- insight into personal preferences, styles, needs and drives. In general, the more self-aware the executive becomes -- ie the more aware they are of how their mind works -- the easier s/he will find it to identify and deal with behavioural issues. Self-awareness also helps the executive

understand how his or her personal behaviour influences what happens in the business processes for which they have partial or overall responsibility. The critical question here is *How do you understand what happens within you?*

When the mentor and the executive work effectively together in all three contexts -- intellectual, emotional and business -- the potential to improve the executive's personal performance (and therefore, business results) is high. The fewer contexts they operate in, the less impact the relationship is likely to have on the business. Again, mentors ask a central question: *How can you contribute more?*

EXECUTIVE MENTORING STYLES

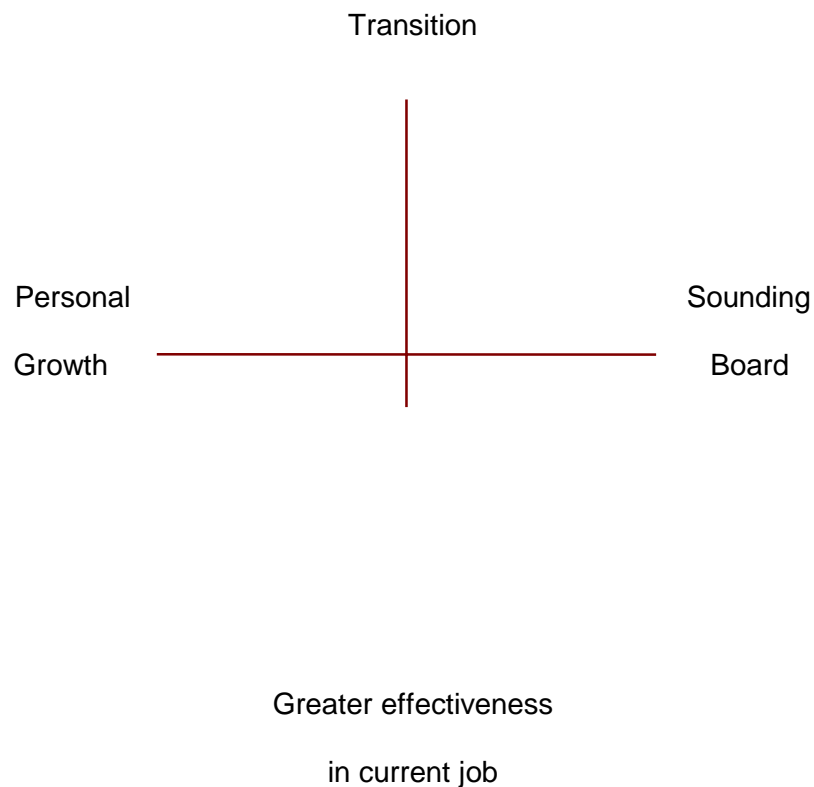


Figure 1.3: Executive mentoring styles

The effective mentor is also able to demonstrate considerable flexibility in terms of responding to variety in relationship purpose. Although in the course of a relationship, the executive's need may change dramatically over time, it will tend to be relatively stable in the short to medium term. Where the emphasis is on achieving personal growth through or towards a clear transition in role (eg a promotion, or assignment to a project that requires the exercise of new skills), the mentor will encourage the executive to focus on specific competencies and help him or her identify and tackle behavioural barriers that may stand in the way. Where the requirement is for more of a sounding board, to help an executive work towards a transition, the agenda will change from meeting to meeting. Effective executive mentors often begin sessions with a variation of the question: *So what's keeping you awake at night at the moment?*

What do mentors and mentees discuss?

The diagram below indicates the wide spread of topics that may typically occur in discussions within an executive mentoring relationship. The relationship purpose (and how well it is mutually understood by mentor and mentee) clearly has a major forming influence on what gets talked about. If the relationship is primarily about dealing with issues in the current job, for example, then the discussion will typically involve a lot of reflection on specific incidents and how to learn from past successes and failures. If the focus is on the future, then the analysis will tend to involve a lot more discussion of alternatives and tactics.

In practice, most long-term mentoring relationships wobble back and forth between these present and future objectives, as circumstances change. Moreover, a dialogue about the future can very easily find itself redirected to current issues, as blockers and enablers in achieving a career goal. Similarly, discussion of what seems like a

simple operational issue (eg how can I get my team to accept the new remuneration package?) may lead directly to issues of personal development. At the end of most of these chains of dialogue, however, lie some future learning intent -- a commitment by the executive to continue thinking around the issue, and/or to taking action, with a view to maintaining the learning process.

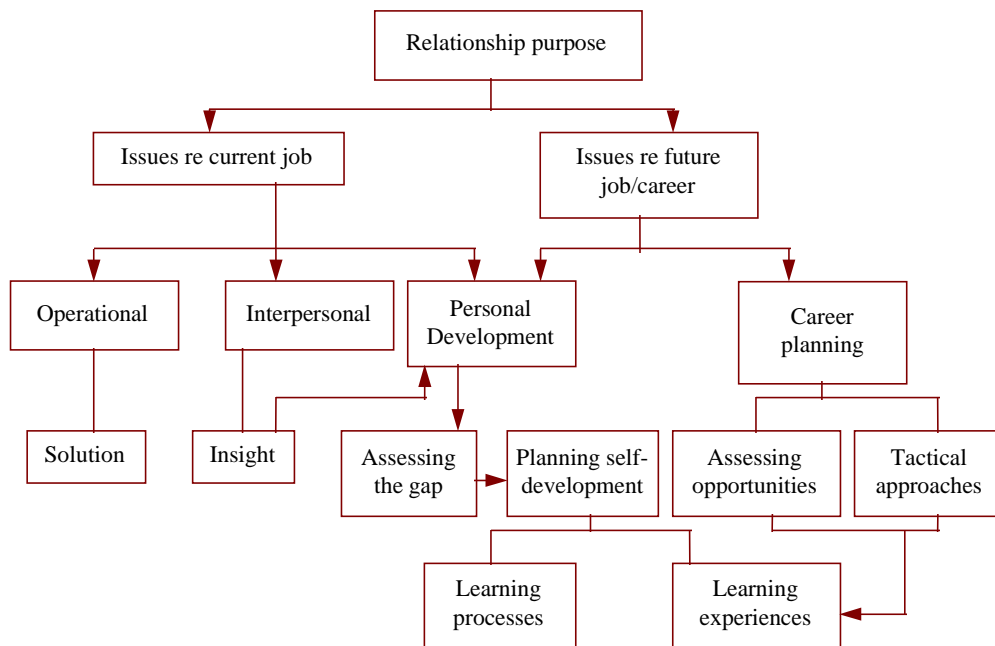


Figure 1.4: What do mentors and mentees discuss?

Among specific topics that occur frequently are:

- coping / stress management
- own and/or colleagues' behaviour and the dynamics between them
- personal fears and doubts
- where am I going?
- recognising and responding more effectively to repetitive cycles
- reassurance that they are doing the right thing
- drawing on best practice elsewhere
- examining a wider range of options

Our case studies illustrate this spectrum and more.

What makes an effective executive mentee?

The experiences we have gathered both for this book and in practical work with hundreds of executives suggests that those who get the most value from their experience invariably spend time considering what they want to achieve from the relationship and in preparing for each meeting. They also consider carefully what sort of mentor they require and are open with the mentor about whether they are getting the value that they require from the relationship. Many of them are stung into action about issues they had discussed with the mentor a few weeks before, by the realisation that they have another meeting soon. But most of all, effective executive

mentees value the opportunity to learn, not just about tasks and skills, nor just about personal, behavioural issues, but about the complex interaction between all of these.

Relationships that work at this level seem to be characterised by:

- very few cancellations or changes of date
- both parties enjoying the experience and being stretched by it
- the executive emerges from each session with a new insight into an issue that has been nagging them, and energised to take action about it
- a high degree of positive challenge, typically laced with at least a modicum of humour.

How to read this book

Part One has attempted to set out a variety of ways of thinking about executive mentoring and describing this rapidly growing phenomenon. Part Two moves from the theoretical to the practical experience of both mentors and executive mentees. Part Three builds on both of these to draw some lessons and common themes from those experiences. Whether you choose to dip into Parts Two and Three, or to read them straight through, will probably depend on your personal learning style.

However, we ask that you will consider, as you do so, how you would feel in these various shoes. How would *you*, as mentor or mentee, have handled this learning situation and what could you have gained from it? We suspect that this is the most powerful way of understanding the essence of mentoring at the most senior levels in organisations.

One final word of caution. In providing analysis of executive and director mentoring, it is not our intention to reduce it to a stark science. Like Keats' rainbow, there is enormous value in retaining some of the mystery in what happens when two people enter reflective space together. Arguably the worst mentor of all is the person who has attended courses on counselling, NLP, or other analytical styles of helping at a mechanical level, yet has little grasp of the *humanity* that underlies a mentoring relationship. As more and more people offer their services as paid and unpaid mentors, it is vital that executives and directors exercise caution in selecting a personal mentor. Indeed, our advice (and we have deliberately given very little direct advice in this book) is to decide first about the kind of mentee you wish to be (see immediately above) before thinking about the kind of executive mentor you might wish to engage!