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## ARCHIVE

### ***A defining time for coaching***

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The meaning of coaching is the main stumbling block for the few UK firms yet to take up the challenge. Stephanie Sparrow reports

The meteoric rise of coaching as a development tool continues to dazzle the UK. The Annual Training Survey 2005 from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found almost blanket coverage, with most respondents claiming to use some form of coaching within their organisations.

But the situation is not as clear cut as this apparent popularity might suggest. The term has a multitude of definitions and is often confused with mentoring. The coaching profession - which encompasses performance, executive and even life coaches - is in a state of flux as it contemplates regulation and the growth of membership bodies.

"Coaching can mean all things to all people," says Bob Garvey, head of the mentoring and coaching research unit at Sheffield Hallam University.

"And the terms coaching and mentoring are becoming synonymous. In five years' time, they could have merged," he says.

The broad definition, according to the co-founders of the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC), David Clutterbuck and David Megginson, is that coaching relates primarily to performance improvement, typically over the short term, in a specific skills area. Mentoring usually means nurturing potential for the whole person and can be a long-term relationship.

The learning, training and development adviser to the CIPD, Jessica Jarvis, agrees.

"Definitions are very varied," she says. "Last year, a CIPD survey found that 84% of respondents were confused by what the term coaching meant. However, my view is that as long as the organisation is clear and is communicating widely what function coaching has, then there isn't a problem."

So what are the origins of this phenomenon? And why is it growing so quickly?

Most pundits trace the growth of coaching to the US in the 1970s, where books on personal growth and motivation such as Tim Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis*, which encouraged readers to see self-doubt as an opponent, became best-selling business manuals.

Coach and psychotherapist Gary Bean says: "In the US, people are more open to discussing it and getting professional one-to-one support.

These ideas gradually drifted over the Atlantic and now the British mentality has changed to accept that we can talk about wanting to succeed."

Accelerated learning

A faster-paced business world is the major stimulation for the growth of coaching and the anticipation that one-to-one attention will bring about accelerated skills development, says Jarvis.

"Downsizing and flatter organisational structures mean people have to make step changes and coaching is being used to support this," she says.

Other aspects of the learning and development climate are bringing coaching into the spotlight, says Jarvis, referring to factors such as employers' support for lifelong learning and the need for flexible, tailored development.

"Coaching can support different learning styles so may be more adaptable than traditional training methods," says Jarvis.

Coaching is used in three different ways, according to Kevin McAlpine, senior partner at the Performance Coaching International consultancy.

"It is employed to develop a skillset, to enhance performance or to grow leadership style," he says. "It is delivered by external coaches, internal leaders and trained internal people."

At Lewisham Hospital in south-east London, the head of training and management development, Fay Blackwood, has employed external coaches for the past five years. Blackwood buys 22 hours of coaching over a year for directors and heads of department as part of its leadership and management programme.

"It is up to them how they spend that time," she says. "It is really about them building up a programme to fit their needs, which underpins the 19 leadership behaviours identified by the trust."

One of the emerging features of the UK's burgeoning love for coaching is the desire of so many organisations to create a coaching culture, promoted by line manager involvement. "Seventy four per cent of respondents in our 2005 survey said that they were looking to increase coaching by line managers," says Jarvis.

At Skipton Building Society, head of HR and training, Chris Worts, rates coaching skills as a core competency for its 280 managers.

"This has become important over the past five years as we [in financial services] have moved towards a sales culture. If someone is under-achieving, we can see it." Worts explains that the coaching focuses on both technical skills and people development.

With 1,200 employees across a variety of business activities, including estate agents, Worts sees coaching as "the key to staff retention", as he says it can open employees' eyes to their own potential and other opportunities within the organisation.

Weaving coaching into the fabric of the organisation is the way forward for this people development tool as it loses its 'new kid on the block' label. Employers have to remember that coaching is a dialogue - what Bob Garvey calls "a different way of talking to each other which is more respectful". The focus cannot remain on how the coachee performs, but has to shift to the overall approach by management.

As Clutterbuck says: "Coaching is leaving its infancy and heading into adolescence. Now the UK needs to take coaching to a different level. It needs to be an integral part of how we do our day-to-day business."