

Coach? Mentor? Leader? Manager?

Joanne Hunt
New Ventures North

It seems that we are working harder than ever these days. If we are supervising staff or leading teams or projects, the complexity of our jobs has increased exponentially. This is not simply due to an increased workload but also due to an increase in the number of roles that we are called to fulfill in how we accomplish the tasks at hand.

- **Tasks** - the things to be accomplished, done or completed
- **Roles** - the various ways we are supposed to get them done

Role complexity has led to the examination of the disciplines present in our present day organizations. Distinguishing the various roles or disciplines present in an organization is a critical step in addressing role complexity and its related managerial workload. The purpose of this article is to contribute to the emergent dialogue concerning the various roles in our organizations. What are these roles or disciplines? Regardless of title, are we called upon to wear all of these hats? What does that require of us and how do we know when to put on which hat? Here are some of the hats that people are called to wear:

ManagerLeaderMentorCoach

This article will be addressing these four roles because if you have supervisory responsibilities, chances are your job description may now include these words: manage, lead, mentor, and coach. We have begun to treat these roles as part of a good manager's tool kit. And yet, we have not necessarily acknowledged them as distinct disciplines that require training and development to support the people whose job descriptions now hold these terms. This role complexity has added many layers to a manager's day-to-day operating responsibilities.

Consider the following example:

Task:

You are a supervisor of a small group of people. A major report and final recommendations are due from your team in 8 weeks.

Question:

What do these people need from you? What is your role?

The Answer:

That depends! Do they need:

- a. Clear, concise instruction regarding the requirements for the final product and a due date?
- b. Inspiration, freedom and encouragement to bring forward their most creative and innovative ideas?
- c. Examples of exactly how you have done these reports in the past, some history on how 'things get done around here' and some names of people to talk to for advice?
- d. Development of new competencies requiring small project planning opportunities, new practices for how to work together to support the ongoing delivery of these kinds of reports?
- e. All of the above?

How would you categorize the above items in terms of the role that is being called upon? Here is one categorization to consider:

- a. Managing - Clear, concise focus on outcomes, deliverables and due dates
- b. Leading - Providing inspiration, encouraging new possibilities, vision
- c. Mentoring - Providing expert advice, guidance, taking them under your wing
- d. Coaching - Development focus for new competencies, qualities, ways of being

And if we are expected to do e) all of the above, the role complexity of our jobs has just risen exponentially. Sound familiar?

Decades ago we clearly understood and valued the word 'Manager'. Sometime in the last decade 'Leader' became a word of choice (She/he is a born Leader). Now we are also using words like Coach and Mentor. We are at risk of diluting these disciplines by blurring their unique contributions to organizations and individuals while expecting supervisors to excel at each of them.

The first step we need to take is to acknowledge these roles as distinct disciplines and ensure that we are providing people with adequate training to feel competent. Secondly, we need to provide them with support in exercising these disciplines. Lastly, we need to clearly recognize that we are asking them to take on this role complexity that is considerably more demanding than a traditional supervisory function.

This article is being written to support this ongoing discernment and offers some basic distinctions concerning these four disciplines. Consider the following:

BEGINNING TO DISTINGUISH THESE DISCIPLINES

Discipline	Nature of Relationship (power)	Quality of Relationship	Focus
Managing	Power difference between manager and subordinate	Accountability	Performance measures
		Clarity of requirements	Reliability, stability
		Focus on deliverables	
Leading	Power difference between manager and subordinate	Inspirational	Possibilities, visions
		Creating of 'new'	Future opportunities
Mentoring	Expert / Learner	Development through expert guidance	Knowledge transfer
	Senior / Junior	What to do, where to go	Organizational history
Coaching	No real power difference (unless combined with a formal role as above)	Development through new insights, practices and self-awareness	Competency building
			Enabling new distinctions and interpretations
			Self-correcting ability

I would like to examine this chart more fully in terms of 1) the nature of relationships that are present in each of these disciplines and 2) practical application of the disciplines.

Nature of Relationships

Managing Relationship

- At the end of the day, regardless of how 'equal' relationships may feel between managers and subordinates, the 'managing function' in our organizations is still responsible for performance reviews of members of the team. Whether we are comfortable admitting this or not, it impacts the nature of the relationship, the types of conversations that can occur, and the types of interventions that are possible. The person responsible for managing is required to meet deadlines, set performance standards, and be reliable regarding the commitments of the organization. This necessitates a focus on what is needed in order to meet organizational metrics. Thus, it creates a relationship of accountability - a necessary and critical function for organizational success.

Leading Relationship

- Often, people in a 'leading function' do not just possess informal leadership power but also positional power and can therefore, have more power in a relationship. People who are very effective in this discipline are very inspiring bringing forward new ideas, directions, and conversations for possibility. This can rally people to follow, join and contribute. The Leading function is important in identifying and creating new possibilities. However, Leading does not necessarily produce the conditions necessary for implementation (or the development phase), which requires the building of competencies beyond vision or inspiration.

Mentoring Relationship

- People who work in a mentoring role often have expert knowledge that they are bringing: Knowledge of systems, knowledge of how things 'get done around here', wisdom from years of work and relationships and networks. The relationship between a mentor and the mentored is usually one of Elder & Novice or Senior & Junior. It is a relationship where the mentor usually takes the mentored under their wing to support and guide them along the path. This relationship and support can be critical in order to retain corporate knowledge and develop new staff during their orientation and ongoing learning. There is a high level of trust and the relationship is very supportive.

Coaching Relationship

- Often clients share with their coaches exactly what is 'going on' for them at work, where they are struggling, where they are trying to improve, where they have hit the wall in terms of trying to develop. The focus is on the client's development, insights into their way of approaching situations, increasing self-awareness, and as such, it can be a very vulnerable space that requires a very high degree of

mutual confidentiality and trust. It is an equal relationship where mutual freedom of expression exists, where what needs to be said, is said without risk of reprisal. It leaves the client more competent in the areas being developed.

Practical Application of the Disciplines

The second element to consider is, 'What kinds of situations require specific disciplines and what is the focus of the interaction'? There are characteristics that can run across these disciplines i.e. managing or leading can both be done very effectively and compassionately. This section of the article will examine some of the unique aspects of the disciplines themselves. Also, I will briefly highlight some of the confusion that can occur when these disciplines are combined or blurred with coaching.

Managing Situations

- Producing Results Reliably - Organizations need to be well managed. We need to be able to produce results, outcomes, programs, policies, etc. in a way that is reliable and dependable. We need to be able to rely on peoples' abilities to 'get the job done' in the time frame that is critical to our organization's mandate. Effective managing involves knowing the critical path, the outcomes, the resources required, and the required time frames. This may apply to projects or team member development (i.e. skills their team members need and knowledge as to where they can best build those skills whether it be training to learn a new skill, or working with a mentor to be taught an existing process or coaching to build a new competency, etc.). Good managing also involves being able to manage in a way where contributions are valued and supported.
- 'Managers as Coaches' can, in certain situations, create confusion for both the 'supervisor and subordinate'. For example, when a result must be produced at the last minute especially in a pressure-filled situation, the 'Coaching Discipline Hat' may be removed completely to put on the 'Managing Discipline Hat' as the outcome must be produced NOW. Without clarity regarding the two disciplines that this supervisor has to draw on, the staff member can become confused... 'But I thought they were interested in my development - obviously they just wanted the job done fast'. Further, one breakdown can jeopardize the 'Manager as Coach' relationship. The power dynamic coupled with the required results NOW can signal the end of an open, trusting coaching relationship focused on the client's development.

Leading Situations

- Inspiring New Directions & Opportunities - Effective leading creates many ideas for the long-term future of organizations and projects and growth. Leading brings our awareness from the present out into the future and cultivates a renewed sense of purpose and direction. However, with the 'leading discipline' alone, the ideas may not come to fruition. The ideas would not necessarily be figured out, fully developed, put in place, mechanized and made reliable (details associated with managing). Bringing vision to reality also includes people building new competencies, organizing tasks, and working with people who understand what was done in the past. Leading is

critical to organizational success but, as a distinct discipline, it alone does not produce long-term sustainability.

- 'Leaders as Coaches' can also be confusing because of the difference in these two disciplines. As mentioned, leading can inspire new possibilities, enable clients to name new possibilities, and can identify all kinds of new breakthrough ideas. However, the coaching part of the equation can be overlooked in the leading function once the possibility has been declared...that is, the focused work of implementing 'new' (including sustaining the desired change through practices, new daily activities and ongoing developmental support). Insights and new distinctions provide a high level of inspiration. Building the new competencies to support the inspiration involves staying with the blood, sweat and tears of the developmental process until the new insights are actually realized and fully integrated. Evidence of a lack of developmental discipline to support leadership is experienced when visionaries become frustrated or confused as to 'why things haven't happened already' given that the vision was seen and declared some time ago.

Mentoring Situations

- Access To Expertise - The knowledge base of a mentoring community is extensive. Mentors tend to be the holders of the 'corporate history'. They possess great expertise and access to networks of colleagues not yet built by younger contributors in places of work. They provide fast answers to difficult questions in complex organizational systems from the perspective of a wise insider. Providing access to mentors will be a key area to develop as a greater number of senior workers retire taking with them vast knowledge.
- 'Mentors as Coaches' can also be confusing to clients. Mentors provide advice, direction and guidance from a place of past experience. They can support a 'do it this way because it worked for me or I know the system'. A coach is primarily interested in competency building focused on the person's unique way of interpreting how to contribute in a particular situation (versus the coach offering their own way). A coach is not necessarily an expert in a particular domain and does not tend to be part of the internal system of advice giving. Their approach is competency building outside of the main system.

Coaching Situations

- Building New Competencies - The coaching discipline is focused on working with clients to build new competencies that can be sustained long past the end date of the coaching work. Coaching work includes the client gaining new insights about areas of competence or development, engaging in new practices that bring these insights to the workplace. Coaching is totally focused on what the client is trying to build anew and does not have to keep a managing eye on the report that is due tomorrow at noon.
- Coaching situations can include any domain that involves building a new competency. It does not include teaching i.e. someone who

needs to learn how to write a technical paper. It is also very personalized to the client, his/her view of the world, the competencies that are impeding them from contributing the way they deeply want to contribute. The outcomes of coaching are developmental outcomes that, when met, have a positive influence on performance overall (while also being able to point to specific outcomes).

Conclusion

The time is ripe to expand this conversation more fully into our organizations. We need to more fully understand these disciplines and determine what they mean inside the complexity of our productive work teams such that there can be greater shared clarity from which we can operate.

Take a moment and ask yourself the following questions:

- How are you asked to contribute in your organization?
- Which disciplines do these contributions call upon?
- What new competencies do these disciplines require of you?
- How are these disciplines understood in your organization?
- How can you further these discussions within your work environment?

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