

Coaching, mentoring and other learning strategies

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Learning from another person is probably the oldest form of learning known to human kind. Below are several possible interpersonal learning approaches that can be used to facilitate learning between two or more people. Critical to these learning situations is (1) commitment on the part of those involved; (2) time set aside for the learning; (3) a supportive and challenging climate in which the learning is going to take place; and (4) compatibility between and/or amongst participants.

Peer coaching

- Used widely in teaching circles to improve trainers' instructional performance / effectiveness by observing and being observed by another trainer (i.e. deliver a training session).
- Process revolves around a three phase cycle of a preconference (planning the session), observation (watching the session) and post-conference (reflecting on and discussing the session).

Executive coaching/Life coaching

- Executive coaching has become a widespread practice, particularly in corporate America.
- Coaches help executives or managers improve their business performance, hone their people skills, and help with other matters deemed important by the manager.
- Confidentiality, personal attention and support / assistance are the benefits that executive coaching provides for executives.
- Coaches tend to be external to the organisation.
- Coaching tends to provide short-term advice.

Mentoring

- Interpersonal relationship between a mentor and a mentee. A mentor is usually more experienced, older, and has more status than the mentee (protégé).
- Mentoring can be formal (i.e. part of a planned program within an organisation) or informal (i.e. idiosyncratic, whereby a mentor decides to sponsor, support and guide a particular protégé who shows promise, talent, etc).
- Important functions provided by mentoring are learning, career development, friendship and other forms of support.
- While mentoring, like coaching and other one-on-one learning relationships, can yield very positive results for the mentor and mentee (and the organisation), poor mentoring can be disastrous. Planners of formal programs should consider carefully the following issues: the goals of the program; roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees; the matching and selection process; training for mentors; timeline for the program; ongoing monitoring and the evaluation of the program; resources required; and grievance procedures.

Conversations

- Conversations can be an effective way of learning from another person.
- Conversations can occur within the context of a coaching or mentoring relationship or within other situations where discussion is occurring.
- *Discussion conversation* is the most common way of conversing about important issues and involves participants sharing individual feelings and ideas.
- *Dialogue conversation* occurs when people become aware of others' assumptions and thereby reflect upon their own assumptions.
- Conversations which are designed to bring about change in a person's behaviour or practices will be more likely to occur if there is a shared commitment to goal or purpose and a trusting relationship between those participants involved.

Learning circles

- Learning circles are a well-known and well-used method of enabling small groups of people, particularly adults, to learn with and from each other.
- They tend to be set up for specific purposes or specific projects.
- There is no designated leader.
- The content covered emerges from the needs / interests of the group members.
- For hundreds of years, learning circles have been used in many countries around the world as an informal means of enabling adults particularly in rural and isolated communities (e.g. Danish Folk Schools) to come together to share ideas and issues, communicate, and converse.

Action research/Action learning

- Action research is a practical, hands-on and research strategy undertaken by practitioners who seek to improve some aspect of their work.
- It is also seen as an effective means of professional development since it is concerned with acting and reflecting on practice.
- It is cyclical process consisting of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting, then replanning, acting, etc.
- It is very useful as a strategy to investigate a problem or issue. While it can be used by individuals to investigate an issue or concern, it has more power when used by a group who are examining a topic of mutual interest.