CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter takes a critical perspective on the issue of diversity and its relationship to coaching and mentoring. Diversity presents perhaps the biggest challenge to humankind; it is a complex subject, one that, in an organizational context, can be dealt with in various ways. We attempt to explore these variations through the lenses of ‘tolerance’ and ‘acceptance’. Coaching and mentoring offer an opportunity for individuals to explore the concepts of tolerance and acceptance and thus move forward to a new diverse future.
INTRODUCTION

The term ‘diversity’ has many meanings; for example, on strategic, policy or philosophical levels it may relate to:

- multicultural philosophies
- political agendas
- business agendas.

Multicultural philosophies

The notion of multiculturalism is an ideology based on the assumption of inclusiveness regardless of the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of people in any specific society. Within an organizational setting, multiculturalism may be seen as a ‘proactive and systematic process’ (Dass and Parker, 1996: 384).

Political agendas

Diversity, as a topic, could relate to a political agenda where policies are aimed at developing tolerance of diversity in terms of race, religion, age and sexual orientation. Governments of all persuasions around the world take different views on these issues but many create policies aimed at addressing what might be seen as diversity in political agendas. In turn, organizations participate in policy making in relation to diversity issues.

Political and economic agendas created by governments may contribute to the creation or development of either a tolerant or an intolerant society. In very recent times we have seen the rise in activity around diversity through movements like ‘Me Too’ and ‘Black Lives Matter’.

The ‘Me Too’ movement started as a result of the gross misogyny found mainly in Hollywood, but the movement has grown to support victims of sexual abuse. At the heart of the movement is the call for more developed educational work on identity and self-worth.

The ‘Black Lives Matter’ (BLM) movement started in 2013 but gained huge momentum following the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in the United States in 2020. Parker et al. (2020) estimate that between 15 and 26 million people participated in the US protests which followed. In June 2020 the Pew Research Center, an independent think tank in the US, stated that the overall approval ratings of BLM had increased from 2018, and that by June 2020, the majority of Americans from all backgrounds supported BLM (Parker et al., 2020). This indicates a mass change in social attitudes.

Particularly at times of economic challenge, social attitudes towards ‘difference’ may take on stronger and more polarized positions which may isolate, ostracize or discriminate. Some politicians may capitalize on such feelings. The media, through the language it employs in its reporting, is not immune. A current example of this attitude in the UK is associated with Brexit. In 2019, Robert Booth of The Guardian newspaper reported that incidents of racial abuse had increased by 13% since the Brexit vote, and he argues that the two are linked. Additionally, there appeared to be some within UK society who saw the vote to leave the EU as an affirmation of their views on
the UK’s immigration policy as being a threat to their way of life and employment prospects, and that the leave vote had given these disturbing acts of aggression and abuse some legitimacy. This has been followed through by the current UK government with the introduction of new, stringent immigration rules and, even more recently, it appears, according to the popular press at least, that there is a migrant crisis.

Business agendas

Diversity could also link to broad business agendas where the business tactic is to encourage a diversity of employees to better serve a heterogeneous customer base.

On a more individual level, diversity could relate to:

- race or cultural difference
- nationality or regional difference
- gender
- sexual orientation
- age or marital status
- political viewpoints
- religious views or ethnicity
- disability as well as health issues
- socio-economic difference and family structures
- values.

Clearly, there are many diverse positions on the subject of diversity! In an organizational context, the issue of diversity raises some dilemmas. A recent survey (Churchill, 2020) noted that people from different ethnic groups are far more likely to experience discrimination in all aspects of the workplace than their white counterparts. Often, this takes the form of ‘occasional or persistent microaggressions during their career’ (see, for example, https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/sep/24/investigation-launched-after-black-barrister-mistaken-for-defendant-three-times-in-a-day). The Churchill (2020) article concludes that coaching and mentoring are vital in bringing about the necessary changes in the organisational narratives on diversity.

Ashley and Empson (2016), in their exploration of diversity within three accounting firms, articulate the arguments for and against seeing diversity as a source of competitive advantage for organizations. Interestingly, they offer a typology of cases that are made for diversity initiatives – the business case, the moral case, the client service and the fairness case – which sometimes compete and contradict each other. They conclude that the client service model – where it is important to be as flexible and available to clients as possible – is the narrative that tends to dominate, at least in the accountancy world. They therefore suggest that the argument that having a diverse and flexible workforce means more business (the business case) is significantly flawed. This raises interesting questions about the impact of coaching and mentoring, which we will explore below.

METHODOLOGY

First, we discuss the meaning of diversity and examine current philosophies and practices found in organizations. We then present a new case study which looks at the issue of generational
diversity and discuss this in relation to an edited version of an article that was published in the trade magazine, *Coaching at Work*. This is discussed critically. This chapter links to many of the themes already established throughout this book and we signal these in the text. We conclude the chapter by raising some challenging questions.

**CURRENT APPROACHES**

Despite being published 25 years ago, Dass and Parker (1996) remains a key text when considering diversity in an organizational context. Organizational policies still tend to be formed and enacted through the practices of human resource management (HR), and Dass and Parker’s observations remain relevant today. Diversity is an important issue and Dass and Parker (1996) suggest that organizations tend to take three main approaches to diversity:

- emergent and episodic
- programmatic
- strategic multiculturalist.

Emergent and episodic

Organizations may develop an emergent and episodic approach to diversity. This is often a senior management-led process to identify unmet or unfulfilled needs or problems with the organization. At other times, incidents occur or examples arise from other levels within the organization that require action.

An organization adopting this approach may engage trainers to facilitate diversity training aimed at sensitizing organizational members towards better communication and awareness of difference. Training is often employed in organizational contexts to tackle such challenges. The advantages of training initiatives are:

- Many people can be ‘put through’ the training.
- The administrative processes can monitor and check attendance.
- The administrative process can show statistics and numbers to confirm that ‘something has been done’.

However, tackling diversity issues is about knowledge, skills and attitudes. Training can deal with knowledge and skills but attitudes are harder to reach and therefore training may not actually tackle the issues at the heart of the incident, leaving the possibility that it may reoccur. An alternative may be action learning.

Action learning sets tend to focus on and surface common concerns and resolve problems. While this approach can have a positive impact, it may also generate false and unresolved hopes by raising expectations which later cannot be met. Alternatively, it may be used as a precursor to more developed and prolonged diversity initiatives. An example of such an episodic initiative is the research and mentorship programme for future HIV vaccine scientists (Sopher et al., 2015). An intervention was set up in the USA by the National Institute of Health to encourage African Americans and Hispanic medical students to research in the field using a research mentoring support system. The study reported increases in knowledge and skills and increased interest in
vaccine research. While the intervention appeared to be successful in relation to these particular groups, and there are plans to continue it, it seems limited to this particular issue, as opposed to addressing the wider inequity issues in the system.

Programmatic

Some organizational recruitment approaches, in the pursuit of fairness, may attempt to neutralize difference by standardizing and attempting to anonymize recruitment and selection processes. An example of this would be anonymized application forms or, in the case of the classical music industry where there was a bias towards recruiting men as orchestral players, ‘blind’ auditions. Interestingly, Thomas (2020) argues that even with ‘blind’ auditions, bias can still be present. He noted that by asking candidates to remove their shoes, there was an increase in recruiting female orchestral players by 50%. The assessors were influenced by the sound of the candidate’s footsteps! Thomas (2020) also notes the increased use of artificial intelligence systems in recruitment but cautions against their use. As was seen in the 2020 school examinations process in the UK where an algorithm was used to determine students’ grades, the process was overturned because approximately 40% of students were downgraded on the basis of which school they went to and that students from poor areas were affected the most while those from wealthy areas achieved the most. The algorithm had built-in bias (BBC News, 2020).

Other organizations may take a more affirmative approach by positively highlighting, nurturing and valuing difference. The programmatic approach is sometimes developed from the episodic approach to create an organizational development approach to diversity. Dobbin and Kalev (2016), in their article in the Harvard Business Review, claim to have examined three decades’ worth of data from 800 US organizations. They argue that a large number of diversity programmes fail because they rely on models and approaches that were prevalent in the 1960s – strong controls on obvious biases in recruitment and selection processes. These traditional approaches seem to fit with Dass and Parker’s (1996) programmed classification in that they are implemented to deal with a litigation problem or a company image issue via the standardization of such processes. Interestingly, they argue that mentoring programmes make significant differences in terms of positively affecting measures such as racial diversity. Mentoring and coaching have the potential at least to tackle the attitudinal issues raised earlier in this chapter because they are focused on the individual.

Strategic multiculturalist

The third level, according to Dass and Parker (1996), is a more strategic approach based on the positive philosophy of multiculturalism. This approach seeks social integration and cohesion for long-term strategic progression. Dass and Parker (1996: 385) believe that this approach makes it more likely that honest expression of difference ‘can lead to a synthesis of the conflicting perspectives to take advantage of the similarities as well as the differences within organizations’.
They also argue that this approach is more holistic and balanced and represents a more realistic position on the complexities of diversity.

While it cannot be the case that the multicultural approach is the ‘one best way’, the other approaches listed above can lead to difficulties. For example, the more affirmative approaches outlined can be switched ‘on’ or ‘off’ as the circumstances allow. With these approaches, there is always the potential for lip-service policies supported by the assumption that more education and training is the way forward. Neither policies nor education and training necessarily alter the subtle ways in which people can be intolerant or find difference unacceptable.

McDonald and Westphal’s (2013) study on the mentoring of women and minority directors is interesting in terms of this subtlety. They examined 1,305 responses to a questionnaire on how they experienced being a first-time director and hypothesized that woman and ethnic minority first-time directors would have fewer company directorships than incumbents and, critically, would receive less informal mentoring from those (predominantly white male) incumbents than other first-time directors. They refer to an aspect of mentoring that they call participation process mentoring and to the social norms of, for example, the appropriate protocols for raising concerns at board meetings. Without this informal mentoring, it would be difficult for first-time directors to know that the norm is to raise concerns separately with the CEO first before raising them publicly – to do otherwise might be considered to be too controlling. However, on the face of it, it would be difficult to see any obvious barriers to being in what McDonald and Westphal (2013: 1170) call the ‘inner circle’ of corporate boards. This lack of visibility also makes it challenging to move toward Dass and Parker’s (1996) category of strategic multiculturalism as a result.

Reflective Questions

• What is your experience of diversity initiatives that are informed by coaching and mentoring principles?
• Which of the above categories would you say these experiences fall into?

LANGUAGE

Language, spoken and written, is also a vehicle of culture (see Bruner, 1985, 1990). In relation to diversity, the concept of discourse is important because language or the discourses it creates help shape society. As Layder (1994: 97) states, ‘Discourses are expressions of power relations and reflect the practices and the positions that are tied to them.’ Dominant discourses from the media, from leaders and from politicians shape societal perceptions and may create an environment of either tolerance or intolerance. For example, both in the UK and the US, politicians and the news media are adept at using language to create an impression about the so called ‘migrant crisis’. This language is often inflammatory, aggressive and dehumanizing. As the The Guardian Observer editorial (2020) maintains:
After reading the latest crop of ideas leaked to the press last week, one would be forgiven for thinking that Britain is a country overwhelmed by people dishonestly trying to bypass normal migration routes by seeking asylum, compelling the government to discourage people from coming to Britain by any means at all.

The editorial goes on to provide the facts and figures, sourced from the Home Office itself, of the current situation in the UK, which show that this impression is totally false and that there is no crisis!

However, individuals from different cultures with a shared language may still misunderstand each other because meaning is constructed in relation to cultural filters. For example, if a British person is asked by a Swiss-German-speaking person speaking English, ‘Did I upset you?’, the British person may reply, ‘I was a little taken aback.’ The Swiss-German person may then say, quite understandably, ‘What?’ The British person actually means, ‘Yes, you did upset me’, but their cultural conditioning of politeness would inhibit such a direct response. However, the Swiss-German would, according to his or her culture, expect a direct answer of ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, and is confused by the obscure British response. Although there is a small risk of conflict in this example, it does illustrate the potential for greater misunderstanding in other situations. It is not the actual words that matter, it is the cultural filter that may alter the meaning, and this example may lead to a stereotype of ‘British people are not straightforward and Swiss-German people are rude’. Clearly, this is not the case.

The above are important issues and relate to the now familiar concept of mindset raised in Chapters 1, 2, 7, 9 and 11. At times, particularly where there are economic pressures, intolerance or prejudice are not only related to outward signs of difference, such as obvious disability, gender or skin colour, but may also appear as a political or conceptual issue. Differences in the way people think, influenced by their political position, educational background or financial position, can develop particular mindsets towards ‘the other’.

**THE CHALLENGE OF MINDSET**

Three philosophies which do not lend themselves to a diversity mindset are:

- power and control over the many by the few (neofeudalism; see Chapter 12)
- Newtonian concepts of cause-and-effect methodologies for improving efficiency and effectiveness
- Tayloristic ‘one best way’ thinking.

Garvey and Williamson (2002: 194) go further with their views, written shortly after 9/11, when they state: ‘The old frameworks for thinking about the global order of our lives, its political fracture lines, religious and ideological diversity and its sustainability in environmental terms, are all shown to be inadequate.’ Clearly, 9/11 was a horrific act, but the events which followed it can hardly be viewed as a change of such mindsets but rather as an aggressive restatement of old approaches based on the lack of understanding of difference and ‘West is best’ thinking. More recently, we find deep societal divisions in many countries of the world including in the Middle East, Asia, the
USA and the UK, where ideological differences have created intense and, at times, violent factionalism. The concept of diversity is truly challenging humankind. We can conclude, from such views, that the arguably natural human instinct of the intolerance of difference (see Back, 2004; Bhavnani et al., 2005) seems to be a major challenge across all sectors of global society.

There are two issues here. The first is that intolerance does not imply that the opposite concept – tolerance – is any less problematic. What a dominant group may see as normal, a minority group may see as an aberration worthy of punishment, or vice versa. Some may see the concept of ‘toleration’ as an acceptance or as ‘putting up with’ an unacceptable custom or behaviour. Such a position could be seen as moral relativism and, as such, as having dubious connotations. It is also difficult to separate tolerance from power. A dominant group may have more choice to tolerate than a minority group. The minority may simply have to ‘endure’, ‘suffer in silence’ or ‘put up with’ a dominant group’s perspective.

Garvey and Alred (2001: 526), in using the term tolerance, suggest that it has at least two meanings:

One is about ‘putting up with’. Tolerance in this sense implies that a person views situations as simplistically tolerable or intolerable so that the very perception of a situation becomes part of what makes it more or less tolerable. This, we believe, chips away at the personal qualities and abilities that determine optimal performance.

The second meaning put forward by Garvey and Alred (2001) is ‘closer to its etymological root [and means] “to sustain”, to keep going and remain effective in prevailing conditions’. The second quote offers a more positive perspective and involves aspects of the Rogerian concept of ‘positive regard’ for difference. A positive alternative to positive regard may be found in the concepts of ‘civility’ or ‘pluralism’. These ideas include the notion of ‘acceptance’.

The second issue is that ‘instinct’ is not underpinned by knowledge and therefore there is no understanding in an instinct. In essence, we seem to be returning to the issue of the objective versus the subjective, as raised in Chapter 2. The ideas outlined above are deeply problematic because they involve both the rational (objective) and the emotive (subjective) aspects of the human brain. Acceptance or tolerance, or any other concept in the context of diversity, is a blend of the rational and the emotive. Many organizations attempt to ‘manage’ diversity and lever it for strategic or social benefit and this is a completely rational choice – it makes sense and is supported through a dominant discourse of ‘diversity is a good thing’. However, making sense, as Bruner (1990) tells us in Chapters 1, 6 and 9, is a construction based on individual and societal narratives, mindsets and discourses. People have within them narrative lines about themselves and about others, mindsets and discourses. These influence behaviour and, by exploring an individual’s narrative, attitudes which create mindsets or discourses which shape behaviour, understanding, tolerance and acceptance become possible.

As Edwards and Usher (2000: 41) point out:

Through narratives, selves and worlds are simultaneously and interactively made. The narrator is positioned in relation to events and other selves, and an identity conferred through this. Positioning oneself and being positioned in certain discourses, telling stories and being ‘told’ by stories, becomes therefore the basis for personal identity. Narratives are unique to individuals, in the sense that each tells their own story, yet at the same time culturally located and therefore trans-individual – we are told by stories.
In diversity, there are no easy ways forward, but in the context of learning and development, diversity is an essential characteristic of the creative process. It is not about ‘putting up’ with each other but more about creating genuine tolerance, acceptance and understanding of difference, about living with it as normal rather than defining others by their differences and as outsiders.

So, these things can become the province of coaching and mentoring. Mentoring and coaching dialogue offers the potential to explore dominant narratives, mindsets and discourses and the potential to develop new meanings and understandings by exploring the emotive as well as the rational. Passmore et al.’s (2013) edited book on diversity in coaching, as well as Clutterbuck et al.'s (2012) on successful diversity mentoring programmes, contain a range of examples of programmes set up to realize this aim.

The following case study from the USA provides insight into a common issue found in organizations, that is, the question of generational differences.

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**Case Study 13.1**

**Talking about Generations**

Linda, in her mid-40s, was a newly promoted Chief Marketing Officer of a US-headquartered global public firm. She requested an executive coach to help her transition into her new role, build relationships with global leadership, and set short and long-term priorities.

Linda was viewed by others as a confident leader who was able to control a room and champion her ideas. She was a visionary with a clear direction of how the company should be perceived globally, impressively delivered a message and had a savvy business mind. When she was passionate about an idea or initiative, she went all in with a level of professionalism and dignity that few had observed before.

But 360-degree feedback interviews also suggested Linda lacked empathy and understanding of the different motivations and working styles of the marketing team. Her team were perceived as being so heavily overloaded they were on the point of burnout. She was criticized for her lack of support and understanding of the challenges the team were facing.

Marketing is traditionally a young function, but Linda expressed high levels of frustration with her ‘millennial’ employees who she perceived to lack resilience, excellence, drive, and conveyed a high level of entitlement. Feedback interviews appeared to support Linda's initial assessment of her young team by questioning whether she had the right people: ‘There's sometimes little accountability and deflecting’ ... ‘millennials work differently’ or, ‘when I worked at my prior company this is how we did it. That might be true but it’s not how we do it here.’

At first, Linda’s priority for coaching was to learn how to ‘manage’ the millennials on her team. However, in early coaching sessions she recognized that challenges could be career-stage- and life-stage-related rather than generational and decided that instead of trying to ‘fix’ her millennial team members, she would set two alternative objectives. First, she heightened the quality of her conversations by creating space for others to talk and asking open-ended questions. She also increased the role and ownership of the marketing leadership team in designing agenda and interactions with each other and rewarded quality interactions between team members.
Linda recognized many of the marketing leaders were still acquiring fundamental leadership skills within the team and with Partners, so she experimented with a more genuine leadership identity. She allowed herself to be vulnerable by telling the story of her leadership journey, shared her full 360-degree feedback report with her marketing leadership team and discussed her values and her childhood, which had been exceptionally challenging.

Furthermore, Linda actively rewarded a ‘growth mindset’ to show that she valued learning more than mastery. She invested in professional coaches for team members and encouraged openness and trust, so they were able to demonstrate vulnerability and confidently ask for help from others when it was needed.

After six months, building on overwhelmingly positive feedback, she provided visibility into high-level organizational priorities and actively created opportunities for her team with senior stakeholders. After two years, Linda and her team designed and oversaw a global rebrand of the company and Linda was promoted to Partner. She understood there was more work to do, which was frustrating, but recognizing that her team were at a different stage of the same development journey helped maintain her confidence in them.

Lianne Lyne
Owner & Executive Coach
PLP Coaching, LLC, USA

DISCUSSION OF CASE

Case study 13.1 is a good example of a current theme found in executive coaching – generational differences. It either manifests as the executive, as in this case, having difficulties with their team or, at times, it may be the executive feeling fearful of being overtaken by another generation of up-and-coming people. In the context of the marketing function, this view is quite prevalent. There is also a lot of attention given to generational issues in the coaching press (see, for example, Coaching at Work, Volume 14, Issues 1, 2 and 3, and Volume 15, Issue 1).

In this case, Linda has an issue with the millennials. She has developed a view of who they are in her team and how they behave. She has exercised a judgement. How far this judgement is based on her own perceptions or the prevalence of such debates in the media is hard to determine. The central issue here is that unless Linda could ‘reframe’ her negative judgement or intolerance, the problem would just get bigger. Her coach enabled Linda to do just that and, by engaging differently with her team, she was able to make substantial progress in her leadership. This seems to be based on the idea that one cannot expect others to change unless we are able to change as well – a very established management idea!

We will now examine the wider issues behind the intolerance of different generations, in this case the so-called millennials.

The popular media discourse on millennials is, in some ways, overwhelming. A recent search using the term ‘millennial UK’ got 19.6 million hits! A general pattern found in this material is that millennials have the following characteristics:
Millennials are also described as:

- creative
- flexible
- open-minded
- possessing a sense of social responsibility
- concerned for the environment.

We wonder if the negative judgements really are the case, or if it is simply one generation complaining about another, as has been done since time immemorial.

Within the business context, we find a range of similar themes about millennials presented in the media (e.g., Alsop, 2008; Stein, 2013; Asghar, 2014; Sinek, 2017). For example, millennials are described as:

- more confident
- teachable
- more pampered
- risk-averse
- in need of constant feedback and praise
- dress badly
- can’t keep to time
- need clear goals and instructions
- have outlandish expectations
- feel entitled and superior
- hate long hours
- expect flexible work routines
- are disloyal
- expect immediate access to the senior people
- are tech savvy.

In some quarters, millennials are branded as the ‘me, me’ generation. In these business media outlets, Baby Boomers (the previous generation) are blamed for this because they, apparently, lavished unwarranted praise on their children and built their offspring’s egos beyond realistic expectations. The business discourse is that millennials are hard to manage and, in terms of coaching, they need special treatment.

In HR circles, we find much advice on how to manage these ‘difficult people’ by accommodating them through investing in training, development and career growth activity. The HR press (see, for example, Gurchiek, 2017; Morel, 2019) suggests that millennials need help to understand how they contribute to the company’s mission and leaders need to make their work ‘meaningful’. Also, organizations should provide millennials with more paid leave and create flexible working arrangements. We wonder if these suggestions just represent ‘good management practice’ and are not something unique to any particular group?

The discourse within the coaching media on millennials draws on the discourses outlined above and it is often presented as the ‘problem’ of millennials. There is research on generational difference, but neither sociology nor psychology can agree a definition of generational difference. There is also no agreed timeframe for millennials. Strauss and Howe (1991) offer the widest age range – an individual born between 1982 and 2004. In the US in 2016, this category accounted for 71 million people.
We wonder if it is really possible that such a huge number of people share the same traits. It could be analogous with stating that all people from, say, Liverpool or certain ethnic or religious groups are the same. This makes this perception a possible discrimination issue, which is supported by the research philosophy of consensus (see Chapter 2): the idea that because many people say something, it must be true! The discourse about millennials is a very powerful one and adopted by many for a variety of reasons.

Historically, research on generational difference has two main perspectives:

- social forces
- cohort.

In the social forces perspective, Mannheim (1952) argues that a generation is a social group defined by birth dates that share events and experiences that influence their life and behaviour. He suggests that attitudes are shaped within generations and that generational difference is a force for social change.

Joshi et al. (2011) state that each generation, when faced with the norms of ‘acceptable behaviour’ imposed by previous generations, must either choose to accept or defy these norms. Young people, Mannheim (1952) claims, are more willing to accept ‘new’ ideas and are able to use their ‘new’ perspectives as a force for social change.

In the cohort view of generations, Ryder (1965: 845) defines a cohort as a group of individuals ‘who experience the same event within the same time interval’. His research offers an alternative to the social force argument. He agrees that there are boundaries between generations, drawn according to birth years, and that birth cohorts may share similar experiences and events in their lives through time. However, Ryder (1965) states that the concept of ‘generation’ is a theoretical convenience category, that it is based on generalized assumptions and that there is no evidence that an event shared within a generation leads to certain attitudes or behaviours. This perspective would align with an underpinning assumption of humanist coaching and mentoring, which is that individuals may experience the same events but will interpret them differently.

In the current research on generations, Campbell et al. (2017) looked at values and attitudes over time in work and found some differences between generations but also found evidence that generational boundaries are ‘fuzzy’; social constructs. They concluded that a cohort view of generational difference is an unsophisticated indicator.

Ryder’s (1965) criticisms are also reflected in current research. With data mainly drawn from surveys which are essentially ‘broad stroke’ research instruments – easy to do with little in-depth analysis – it is inevitable that we end up with generalized categories that say little about specifics and contexts (see Chapter 1 on purpose and context in coaching and mentoring).

With regard to the ‘tech savvy’ view of millennials, a recent PhD study (Crabbe, 2018: 27) cites 11 pieces of research that state that age is not a factor in technology anxiety. She also found that 25% of first-year business students in her study suffered from technology anxiety – so much for the tech savvy argument!

These obvious problems within generational research have led researchers to a more subtle approach. Baltes (1987) offered the idea of a lifespan developmental perspective. He suggested that human aging is best understood as a complex process that takes into account the influences of biology and sociocultural factors across time. Life span research looks for linkages across
disciplines and examines development across multiple levels. It takes into account the variability of human experience and the variations of interpretation of those experiences. It considers the universal potential for human growth and development – whatever the age of the individual (Levinson et al., 1978; Sheehy, 2006). Life span research seeks to understand developmental influences that may affect an individual’s motives, values and attitudes at work.

Rudolph and Zacher (2017) suggest that life span research needs to be focused on the individual and not treated as shared phenomena that everyone catches from each other! They recommend that practitioners recognize aging as an ongoing developmental process – people’s lives are dynamic and all people learn. Practitioners need to be cautious about creating policies and practices to put people in generational boxes.

Coaching and mentoring are for the individual, their hopes and fears, wants and needs, and it is our position here that generation is another diversity issue. People are not the same by virtue of a birthdate, any more than they are the same by virtue of country of origin, religion or sexual orientation. That road leads to discrimination and moves us away from tolerance and acceptance of difference.

Our argument is that it is through learning that social challenges are addressed. Therefore, understanding provides the basis for tolerance and acceptance. This position is, to some extent, justifiable and is the core assumption made by those who support ‘learning solutions’. If learning is necessary for people to develop tolerance and acceptance, coaching and mentoring could provide help and support for what is an individual’s strongly held position. We could therefore consider coaching and mentoring arrangements in organizational settings as offering co-mentoring or co-coaching (see Chapter 5). This would mean that both parties in the co-relationship need to learn and develop in the way Linda did in Case 13.1. It is our view that there is a need to focus on re-balancing power, or addressing these injustices of perception through developing critical thinking but there is a long road ahead because the educational and communication challenges this raises are considerable.

Ultimately, we argue that the one-to-one approach in the diversity context is a good thing because it considers the individual, and therefore potentially it reaches greater depth and has more impact through the development of critical thought. As in other contexts, the key is the relationship and its intent. As we have emphasized throughout this volume, it is important to understand how the political, social and organizational context can have a significant impact on how coaching and mentoring initiatives are enacted and, ultimately, on how successful they are.

**Future Direction**

Overall, given the current tendency towards religious, social, cultural, generational and political polarization of difference in modern society, we believe that diversity is a major challenge to humanity but one which should be embraced. De Bono (1992) offers insight into polarization with his concepts of rock logic and water logic. Rock logic positions beliefs as right or wrong and therefore options are severely limited in this two-way system. Water logic is about flow and possibility; it is about where this might take us and therefore offers multiple possibilities. A key principle of coaching and mentoring is the generation of many options to work with, and they therefore offer scope to develop multi-layered perspectives on respect, tolerance and acceptance.
Without intending to overstate it, mentoring and coaching may offer a serious way forward for humanity and provide an alternative to the human tendency to simplify and polarize. While, as we have argued here, there are limits to what can be achieved via mentoring and coaching initiatives, the processes at least have the potential to open up dialogues on the important values of respect, tolerance and acceptance.

Activity

Higher Education is a rapidly changing environment. The changes in fee structures and restrictions on international recruitment have both had an impact. Within this context, many universities are seeking to develop and enhance their research profiles. This includes seeking ways to encourage academic staff to become research active, to publish and attract research funds. Set against this, particularly in the so-called post-1992 universities, there are increasing pressures on teaching hours and assessment. One institution with an excellent reputation for teaching decided that the best way to achieve an increase in research activity was to introduce a mentoring programme for academic staff. Senior staff members with strong research profiles were identified as potential mentors. A key issue for the university, however, was that, of those staff who were research active, a disproportionately small number of them were women (15%), even though women constituted 56% of the employees. Furthermore, while a large number of the staff on fractional contracts were women, an even smaller percentage of those on such academic contracts were research active (7%). An exploratory qualitative research project, conducted in one of the faculties, suggested that part-time women academicians found that the working culture of the university was not conducive to those who had young families having teaching and management commitments as well as aspirations to do research. For many in this situation, the research time was sacrificed to keep up with other demands.

Imagine that as a coaching and mentoring consultant, you are tasked with designing and implementing a mentoring scheme within this university:

- How will you deal with the challenges discussed above?
- What would be an appropriate measure of success for this scheme?
- What do you expect to be the impact of this scheme?

Questions

- What is your organization’s or your personal approach to diversity?
- How might coaching and mentoring offer realistic opportunities for a new order of things?
- How might you operationalize coaching and mentoring for diversity?
Further Reading


Kollen, T. (2016) ‘Lessening the difference is more: The relationship between diversity management and the perceived organizational climate for gay men and lesbians’, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(17): 1967–96. This research article puts forward the view that mentoring schemes that target LGBT workers add to the notion that they are different, which militates against a positive organizational climate for these workers.

Pelham, G. (2016) *The Coaching Relationship in Practice*. London: SAGE. This volume makes some strong references to diversity issues that might affect the coaching relationship, which may be useful for readers particularly interested in this area to examine.
