



# Understanding diversity mentoring

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This book focuses on issues related to diversity mentoring. *Diversity mentoring is a developmental process of open dialogue that aims to achieve both individual and organisational change through shared understanding and suspending judgement within a relationship of mutual learning in which differences that exist are perceived as integral to learning, growth, and development.* Let's deconstruct that.

Diversity mentoring is a process within the context of a mentoring *relationship* which takes place within the larger context of the organisation and sometimes also within society. As a process, it may be carried out in various ways, some of which will be more effective and/or efficient than others. Given the diversity of the participants, their work and life contexts and the issues they confront, it is inevitable that this process will be difficult to pin down. One of the common factors we can point to, however, is that, like all developmental mentoring, this form of mentoring works *by enhancing the capacity and quality of participants' thinking about issues that they perceive to be important to them.*

It requires *open dialogue*, which depends significantly on the level of psychological safety within the relationship. Thus, it is essential that both parties are comfortable about revealing their thoughts and concerns. Likewise, it is vital that they can challenge each other's assumptions, behaviours and actions.

Diversity mentoring is an instrument of personal change aimed at helping mentees identify how they and their circumstances could be different; and how they will bring changes to fruition. It is also an instrument of social change. In the workplace, it helps organisations achieve equal opportunities objectives, tap into a wider talent pool and become more representative to and better able to listen to their customers. In society, it helps integrate disenfranchised groups. It involves awakening awareness of personal potential – both in the individual and in those around them – and facilitating the blossoming of that potential within a context that is also changed.

Diversity mentoring builds understanding in at least three levels in the workplace:

- Mentees become more aware of their potential; gain greater clarity about themselves and their environment; and achieve greater self-motivation and

support to achieve their dreams. Mentors gain awareness of how people from differing backgrounds or situations perceive and experience the working world. This frequently results in the mentors recognising how they and others create artificial barriers to the advancement of talented people, who happen to be different. As the mentors gain a better understanding and appreciation of people, who are different from themselves, they modify and widen their view of talent.

Diversity mentoring builds understanding of the value of diversity on a strategic level – how the company as a whole can benefit from inclusion and from ensuring that the talents of disadvantaged groups are developed and utilised. It has become strongly connected to corporate social responsibility, adding value to corporate branding and helping to attract a diverse workforce.

Diversity mentoring on an organisational level is closely associated with stronger communications and more interaction between groups and strata, giving disadvantaged groups a stronger voice than they have been used to. It requires mentor and mentee to *suspend judgement* about each other, though this can sometimes be difficult. When the parties involved come from communities, which have a deep hostility towards each other, the relationship may never develop the depth of trust to be effective. Carl Rogers (1961) talks of *unconditional positive regard*. To this we add *respectful curiosity about the other person's world and their perspectives*. Respectful curiosity provides the psychological safety, where both parties can learn about each other and experiment with ways of thinking and behaving across the gulf of difference. Engaging in diversity mentoring involves *mutual learning and growth*. All developmental mentoring seeks to stimulate learning in both parties. In some cases, programmes are designed specifically with the learning of mentors as a primary focus. In diversity mentoring, however, the differences between partners provides fertile ground for much richer and substantive mutual learning and growth.

Diversity mentoring involves a *relationship*. This implies that the conversations between mentor and mentee are more than transactional. They may operate at all seven levels of dialogue, as described elsewhere by one of the editors (Megginson and Clutterbuck 2005) – social, technical, tactical, strategic, for self-insight, for behaviour change, and integrative (the 'what is the meaning of life?' conversation). As we shall discuss later in the chapter, difference can sometimes be a partial impediment to building rapport, yet, as in all mentoring, rapport-building is an essential first stage of the mentoring process.

Finally, difference is positioned within the relationship as a resource of learning, rather than as a problem or something to be avoided. The mutuality of the learning exchange is fundamental to the process. Indeed, in one of our cases, the failure of the programme is related closely to mentors' unwillingness to learn from mentees.

*The style of diversity mentoring* has evolved differently on the two sides of the Atlantic. In North America, the dominant model has been, and still largely is, one in which the mentor plays the role of sponsor, using their influence on behalf of the protégé. This model did not work well in Northern Europe, where a different style

of mentoring, called developmental mentoring (as opposed to sponsorship mentoring) emerged. This style is very similar to modern developmental coaching – and was one of the sources, which gave rise to this form of coaching – in that it is primarily about helping the mentee (the word protégé is seen as too indicative of a directive relationship) build self-awareness and improve the quality of their thinking about issues that are important to them. This enables them to make better decisions, to perform better and achieve personal goals through increased self-awareness and self-motivation. However, as one of the authors has experienced working with mentoring programmes for women in leadership, the sponsor role of coaching and advising about visibility, providing guidance on office politics and actively promoting the mentee among other top managers can also in some circumstances play a very important role in achieving results of the mentoring programme. And since in diversity mentoring the mentees are facing factual barriers in their environment, they may also need sponsorship mentoring to achieve their goals.

Multinational organisations such as the World Bank were instrumental in bringing developmental mentoring to North America. As a result, we see a spectrum from strongly developmental to strongly sponsorship-oriented mentoring programmes around the world. In general, countries and cultures with high power distance, or where individual power is valued highly, tend to have more sponsorship mentoring.

In our broad overview of diversity mentoring programmes, we have been unable to find any reliable data about who owns these initiatives on behalf of organisations. In some cases, it is human resources; in others, a head of diversity; in yet others, it is a shared responsibility. Relatively few programmes have a steering committee, containing administrators, champions and representatives of the target mentees and mentors.

### History of diversity mentoring

The first, widely used definitions of mentoring were anything but reflective of diversity. Drawn from observations of mentoring relationships that supported the advancement of young, white, male professionals, these definitions in the early 1980s talked of ‘overseeing the career of a young man’ (Gray 1986). Significantly, most of the research into mentoring at that time, including the seminal study by Kathy Kram (Kram 1983, 1985), were in the context of informal relationships, brought about through the mutual attraction between older, experienced professionals, with a desire to share experience, and younger, ambitious colleagues, who valued them as a source of access to information, networks, influence and, in some cases, protection. Key to these relationships was a sense of shared identity, with both parties having similar backgrounds. The mentor often saw the younger person, known as a protégé, as a version of them decades before. With the formalisation of mentoring into programmes supported by organisations, came the opportunity to address a more diverse audience. While the first structured mentoring programmes

were aimed at much the same audience as informal mentoring (and hence tended to reinforce inequalities in companies and professional bodies), the potential for overcoming disadvantage was soon recognised and the next generation of mentoring programmes aimed or partially aimed at supporting equality objectives. They began to appear, first in the world of employment, then became rapidly integrated into the wider community.

In employment, diversity mentoring tended to evolve from an initial focus on race, to embrace a wider range of sources of disadvantage. Many companies' programmes started with a racial focus and then opened the doors to a limited number of other 'mainstream' disadvantaged groups, such as the disabled and women; then to all disadvantaged groups. Sometimes, the programmes then lost their diversity branding entirely, as mentoring became part of the corporate culture, with the result that anyone who wanted a mentor could have one. In recent years, we have seen some reversion of this trend, as shortages of resources to support mentoring have caused companies to refocus on specific audiences.

As Table 1.1 shows, the perception of diversity in an organisational context has changed dramatically over the past 30 years. This is in line with the evolution of diversity as an issue in the organisational psyche. In many recent programmes, the focus has shifted yet again, from a focus on redressing disadvantage to one of leveraging difference. By and large, these evolving perspectives on diversity have shaped the role, purpose and style of associated mentoring programmes. Equal opportunities was essentially a legalistic, compliance-based approach. Diversity management recognised that there was more to be gained for both the organisation and its disadvantaged employees (and potential employees) by focusing on the business benefits of supporting talented people, whatever their background. Leveraging difference, which extends in application to both organisations and society more generally, increases the emphasis on valuing difference as the engine of creativity and innovation. The scope of difference also evolves with these

**TABLE 1.1** From equal opportunities to leveraging difference

<b>Equal opportunities</b>	<b>Diversity management</b>	<b>Leveraging difference</b>
Issue (problem) focused	Opportunity focused	Individual focused
Tactical emphasis	Strategic emphasis	Tactical and strategic
Focused on a small number of defined groups	Aimed at everyone in a wider range of groups	A wider definition of talent
An HR issue	Issue owned by everyone	Valuing difference in all its forms
'Hard' targets (get the numbers)	Changing thinking and behaviours to change the culture	About the quality of conversations between employees and the organisation
About enforcing the distribution of power, privilege and advantage	About increasing collaborative endeavour and sharing	
Driven by legislation	Driven by organisational need	Driven by alignment between individual and organisational needs

movements. Equal opportunity was mainly about easily defined groups (predominantly on the basis of colour or gender). Diversity management extended the construct to include a much wider range of difference, from social class to size. Leveraging difference extends it again, recognising that everyone is different and, while obvious differences such as colour or gender have a major impact on social interchange, they are merely superficial compared, say, to differences in personality or life experience.

### **Benefits of diversity mentoring**

As programmes involving diversity mentoring seek to change individuals and the organisation, they often come under scrutiny to demonstrate their value. Diversity mentoring programmes form the majority of those accredited by the International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment. It appears that they are more likely to come under scrutiny and need to prove the value they bring, than, say programmes aimed at graduate recruits. This emphasis on measuring the effectiveness of diversity mentoring is valuable in that it has provided an extensive database on the impact of both programmes and relationships engaging in this type of endeavour. From a societal and business perspective, diversity mentoring addresses in a powerful way issues of marginalisation, inequality and waste of talent. Each of these issues has a significant cost attached, in both monetary and broader societal terms. For example, the cost to taxpayers of keeping young people in idleness makes little economic sense. In the late 1990s, the Irish Government pioneered a programme, which brought thousands of these people into employment in sectors such as retail and airport logistics, through a mixture of mentoring, coaching and vocational training. As we write, the UK Government is looking to mentoring as a means of bringing hundreds of thousands of people back into the working economy, while in Denmark a law was implemented several years ago financing the use of mentoring to support 'weak unemployed' of all nationalities in the workplace and to retain disadvantaged young people in school.

From a mentee perspective, diversity mentoring offers a range of outcomes, which can be defined in terms of career, or as developmental, enabling and emotional. Career outcomes are the readily measurable transitions that occur when someone gains a promotion, or achieves substantial new responsibilities within the same job role, or makes a career move outside of the organisation. While developmental mentoring typically does not promise advancement of this kind, it does promise to help the mentee with the personal and professional development, which is normally a precursor to career progress.

Developmental outcomes relate to learning and the impact of learning. Learning can take a variety of forms: (1) learning directly from the mentor (tapping into their experience and wisdom); (2) learning from dialogue with the mentor (having their assumptions challenged, challenging back in turn, becoming more self-aware and contextually aware, gaining insight into their own and other people's behaviour,

learning how to learn, and so on); and (3) learning from their reflection on the mentoring sessions.

Enabling outcomes consist of changes and achievements on the way towards the mentee's goals. Some examples are: creating and beginning to implement a career development plan; or establishing more extensive and more robust networks of influence (for getting things done through others) and information (for gathering intelligence about opportunities). These outcomes might also include taking a professional qualification; setting more ambitious goals in their personal development plan, and clarifying their own values and ambitions.

Finally, emotional outcomes are an important benefit of diversity mentoring. Such outcomes involve personal, internal transitions, such as increasing in self-confidence, becoming more positively assertive, understanding and valuing one's own contributions and culture, developing relationships of trust, feeling more comfortable about working with power differentials, and achieving greater authenticity. Of such outcomes, one mentee in a recent programme shared, 'I have learned to trust my own judgement and to be more forgiving to myself.'

Many of these outcomes for mentees are reflected in the outcomes for mentors. For example, a mentor in a mentoring program for women leaders says: 'I have learned a lot from the fact that my mentee is a woman. Women do look differently at the world than men especially in relation to career and children. I realised before that there were these difference, but I had no idea how much time and effort women spend in making ends meet. I think about this a lot in my role as a manager today.' Another example is a mentoring programme aimed at helping the transition of women middle managers into directors found that approximately half of the mentors reported that they had gained greater confidence in their ability to perform their current job role (as did more than four out of five of the mentees). But perhaps the most common benefit for mentors is the opportunity to be challenged. The more senior people become in an organisation, the less people in more junior positions are willing to disagree with them. In the developmental mentoring relationship (though much less so in sponsorship mentoring), authority of position is largely put aside. Authority of experience is important, but because both parties bring different experience, there can be a much more equal exchange. More and more diversity mentoring programmes are designed with the mentor's learning as much, or more in mind than that of the mentee.

### **Issues from the diversity mentoring literature and our personal experience**

From the cases gathered for this project and others, and from our own work with literally hundreds of organisations in dozens of countries, we (the editors) have been able to observe a great deal of good and poor practice and to identify a range

of issues that influence the efficacy of diversity mentoring. In this section, we review some of the main recurring issues, in the light of that experience.

### **What makes the diversity mentoring relationship work?**

A study by the US Minority Corporate Counsel Association (Anon 2003) found that diverse mentoring relationships that worked had a number of common characteristics. This research did not distinguish between developmental and sponsorship mentoring styles, though it suggests that the data are based primarily on a sponsorship mentoring approach. In the most effective mentoring relationships, the partners did the following:

- established confidence by beginning with work-related issues;
- identified common interests and values;
- made efforts to learn about each other;
- showed empathy;
- were clear about needs and expectations;
- avoided stereotypes and untested assumptions;
- risked discomfort to make the relationship work.

In order to answer the question more fully, however, it is necessary to examine as many as possible of the influencing variables. Some of these will be internal to the participants, some internal to the relationship and some to the context or environment.

Issues relating to the individual client include why they have come to mentoring (how clear are they about how they want to be different in themselves and in their circumstances?), the level of personal competence they have in the role and personal qualities that may aid or hinder rapport building and working together. In the book *The Situational Mentor* (Clutterbuck and Lane 2004) the chapters include an analysis of both mentor and mentee competences, which suggests that mentor competencies remain relatively stable across the lifetime of the relationship, while mentee competencies evolve with the phases of relationship development. The analysis also suggests that some mentees, who come from a deprived background, may lack the initial competencies – such as communication skills – to get the most out of mentoring. Pre-mentoring can sometimes be a practical option to help them establish a mindset and basic competencies, which will allow them to work effectively with a mentor, i.e. to help the mentor help them. Some gender- and/or race-based mentoring programmes have found that offering assertiveness training to mentees before they begin their relationships has a positive impact on relationship quality and outcomes, although we have not been able to find empirical data to support this. The Mentor+Survey<sup>1</sup> used by one of the editors to evaluate the quality and results of mentoring programmes shows that mentors almost always experience personal development – and that the mentoring process has a positive influence on their active listening skills.

Personal qualities that facilitate success include behaviours, which are likely to foster rapport, or to contribute to effective collaborative management of the relationship. For example, there is some evidence to support ingratiation – in the sense of working to earn the good opinion – as an important factor in making mentees attractive to mentors (Aryee et al. 1996). On the other hand, for the mentor, altruism has been negatively associated with relationship efficacy, on the basis that ‘wanting to put something back’ is more about the needs of the mentor than those of the mentee.

Factors internal to the relationship relate, for example, to the contract between mentor and mentee. These include such issues as expectations of how frequently to meet, how deeply to probe issues and concepts about their respective roles. Factors external to the relationship include the level of supportiveness from the organisation, which appears to be positively correlated with relationship success; and logistic issues, such as the opportunities to meet. The latter may be affected by the culture, for example, in busy, high energy cultures there are many distractions from setting and keeping to meetings and stronger skills of relationship management may therefore be needed.

### **Positioning difference and disadvantage**

The MCCA study referred to above also found that ‘discussion of race and gender diversity was often avoided when one of the parties was white, even in mentoring relationships, which were strong’ The problem with this is that it can be demeaning to the person from the minority or disadvantaged group, either to ignore the source of difference or to over-emphasise it. Here’s a poignant comment from the report: ‘As a mentee, it doesn’t hurt my feelings if someone acknowledges the [racial] difference between us. In some ways I like those relationships better. It makes me feel more comfortable – we’re not dancing around the issues in some artificial way. What’s uncomfortable for me is when we have to pretend there isn’t a difference.’

The keys, in our experience, are to do the following:

- Agree, between mentor and mentee, what role the mentee wishes difference to play in the relationship.
- Agree that mentor and mentee will challenge each other around the role of difference, where appropriate, so, for example, the mentor might question the mentee’s perception that their failure to achieve a promotion is a result of racial bias (or vice versa).
- Educate and support participants in the skills of managing difference.
- Provide avenues for assistance when difference seems to cause difficulties.

One of the reasons positioning difference is so difficult is that it often depends on subtle, elusive perceptual variations. For example, linguistic difference affects the way that people perceive time. Asked to put pictures of themselves at ages from childhood to older age, English speakers will sort them from left to right. Someone,



for whom Hebrew is their main language, would arrange the pictures from right to left. Mandarin Chinese speakers see time horizontally – they associate up with the past and down with the future (Ross 2011).

Mentors and mentees need to be open to such subtleties, developing a high level of attentiveness and awareness of both their own and the other person's reactions and assumptions. The skills of diversity dialogue do not always come easily, so the programme may need to be supported with opportunities for learning how to have productive and respectful conversations across the barriers of difference. A particularly useful tool, developed by one of the editors and now increasingly widely used in diversity training is the Diversity Awareness Ladder (Table 1.2). This is a model of two conversations – the inner conversation, which represents instinctive, emotional responses to difference, and is not normally spoken out loud; and the outer conversation, which offers a way of engaging with the other person, once the level of awareness has been acknowledged. While the inner conversation may sometimes emerge as spoken comment, this is typically not in the context of conversation with the person, who is seen as different.

The diversity mentoring relationship helps both parties take steps up the Diversity Awareness Ladder, in respect of their own relationship and ability to converse openly, and often in respect of relationships with the entire category of person, that the mentor or mentee perceives the other person to represent.

**TABLE 1.2** Diversity awareness ladder

Stage	The inner conversation	The outer conversation
1. Fear	What do I fear from this person? What do I fear learning about myself? What might I be avoiding admitting to myself?	What do we have in common? What concerns do you have about me and my intentions?
2. Wariness	What if I say the wrong thing? Is their expectation of me negative and/or stereotyped? How open and honest can I be with them?	How can we be more open with each other? How can we recognise and manage behaviours that make each other feel uncomfortable/unvalued?
3. Tolerance	What judgements am I making about this person and on what basis? What boundaries am I seeking/applying in dealing with this person?	How can we exist/work together without friction? How can we take blame out of our conversations?
4. Acceptance	Can I accept this person for who they are? Can I accept and work with the validity of their perspective, even if it's different from mine?	What values do you hold? How do you apply them? How can we make our collaboration active and purposeful?
5. Appreciation	What can I learn from this person? How could knowing them make me a better/more accomplished person?	What can we learn from each other? How will we learn from each other?

A useful exercise in exploring difference in the mentoring relationship is as follows: mentor and mentee define together the group, to which the mentee belongs. For example, 'educated male Ghanaians', or 'female ex-offenders'. They make a list, down the centre of a page, of descriptors that apply to the mentee, both positive and negative. In the left-hand column, the mentee writes a list of more negative characteristics of specific people, whom she sees as peers in the context of the group description; and in the right-hand column, the positive characteristics of other (or the same) peers. The first observation from this is that what seemed like a homogenous group is anything but. The second is that the mentor has an opportunity to recognise some of their own prejudices and to reframe them. The third is that the process emphasises the innate individuality of mentoring participants. Reversing the process (focusing on the mentor's 'group') enriches the conversation even further.

### **Stereotypes and implicit bias**

Diversity mentoring provides a safe environment, in which people can learn to face up to, accept and manage their stereotypes and stereotypical assumptions. Project Implicit is a Harvard-based, continuing exploration of the hidden biases that people carry with them. Even if at a rational, conscious level, we are diversity-aware and extend goodwill to people, whom we see as different, at a subconscious level our instinctive responses may be very different. In the same way, our minds are full of associations, many of which we may not consciously agree with or give credit to, about 'types' of people. When caught off-guard without time to think of a 'proper' response, these implicit associations shape what we say and our instinctive response.

An exercise here is to ask mentors and mentees on their first meeting to offer each other three rapid and unreflective assumptions about the other person, for example, what kind of car they drive, or how tidy their home is. They then explore how accurate the assumption was and – more importantly – the reasoning process that led to that assumption. Most of the time, the assumptions are based on images and associations gleaned from newspapers, films, or casual; or on encounters with somebody, who shares some characteristic with the other person. That characteristic may be their name (for example, 'I always think of Malcolms as being effete'), some physical attribute, their job ('professors are dull and have no sense of humour'), and so on.

The good news is that the more people get to know peers from other races or backgrounds, the more positive their attitudes tend to be towards them. Indeed, even having a friend who has positive social contact with people of a different race, for example, can improve a person's attitudes. Research exploring this phenomenon has recently shown that simply imagining positive contact with someone different can have a positive impact on how you regard them.

It's also possible, of course, to be over-empathetic. We have encountered relationships, which have struggled or failed because the mentor tried too hard and

empathy became sympathy, which was not conducive to an adult-to-adult conversation! Another related issue here is privilege. For example, it is often difficult for people in senior positions to recognise the frustrations of people lower down, who have less control over their work and time and who are not trusted to work at home one day a week. It is likewise sometimes difficult for people on reasonable incomes to relate to the difficulties of having to rely on buses to get to work, rather than drive in their own car. Diversity mentoring provides the opportunity to bring such issues into the open. When an entire top team of an organisation understands the nature of privilege – something that can happen, for example, as a result of reverse mentoring<sup>2</sup> – it lays the grounds for quite radical change in the corporate culture.

### Managing the diversity dialogue

Diversity dialogue can be defined as ‘finding the appropriate language to engage with another person’. This is often easier said than done. Indeed, much institutional racism can be put down to conversational avoidance – choosing not to have conversations, particularly about difficult issues, with people of difference, for fear of giving offence. (Giving clear feedback and handling conflicts are behaviours managers often avoid, so when diversity becomes part of the picture, the issue becomes even more complex.)

One of the more unfortunate effects of our instinctive attempts to avoid saying the wrong thing is that we become more distant and less able to engage with the other person. One recent study (Norton et al. 2006) found that the harder people try to be colour-blind, the worse the communication with people of different colour.

Some ground rules that can be useful in terms of contracting for diversity dialogue include:

- 1 *Build agreements that allow mutual feedback about the impact of language.* Agree with people you work with that you expect them to tell you if you appear to be prejudiced or using language that has the potential to offend.
- 2 *Develop greater awareness of your own and other people’s reactions to language.* Body language is an important clue. In most cultures, avoidance of eye contact is an indicator of emotional discomfort, for example.
- 3 *Recognise and respond appropriately to slip ups you make.* No matter how well we think we have buried or displaced racial or other stereotypes, there are almost always residual traces that surface from time to time without warning. If you do say something that offends, or which you know on reflection to be inappropriate:
  - Admit it to yourself.
  - If relevant, admit it to the other person(s) as well. (It’s OK to say: ‘I’m really surprised at myself. I do apologise. I think I need to reflect on this.’)
  - Talk it through with someone whose wisdom you trust.

- Don't feel guilty – feel intrigued about the potential to learn more about yourself.
- 4 *Don't confuse avoiding offence with abdicating responsibility.* Tough feedback can be very painful and quite upsetting. If a person dislikes a message, that doesn't mean it's offensive. It's very easy to back off from saying what needs to be said, using fear of giving offence as an excuse. If you do need to have hard words:
- Think about them beforehand, wherever possible.
  - Ensure that the feedback you give is focused on specific behaviour or actions.
  - Ensure that you don't import broader prejudices.
  - Choose language that will not hinder the other person in addressing the issue.

### Power dynamics

Power differentials are viewed differently in different cultures (Hofstede 1994; Trompenaars 1998; Rosinski 2003). Likewise there may be some preconceived power issues inherent in the environment or relationship (i.e. gender, race, socio-economic differences), which may affect the ability of mentor and mentee to engage in meaningful dialogue.

People acquire power in a variety of ways. Some of the most significant in this context (Garvey et al. 2009) include:

- *Reward power* – the ability to provide rewards such as promotions, pay rises or developmental projects.
- *Coercive power* – the ability to withdraw or withhold the rewards mentioned above or to make life difficult or unpleasant for those who do not comply.
- *Legitimate power* – derived from someone's formal authority or position within the organisation.
- *Expert power* – derived from being perceived to hold knowledge, experience or judgement that others value but do not yet have.
- *Referent power* – based on personal qualities, i.e. likeability, being respected, charisma.

One person in a mentoring relationship may have a great deal of all of these sources of power, while the other has very little. In such circumstances, the person with least power will tend to be deferential towards the other. This will lead to behaviours such as:

- reluctance to put forward their own opinion, for fear of appearing presumptuous;
- inability to challenge what is said;
- feeling obligated to follow the recommendations of the other person;

- expecting the more powerful person to ‘have the floor’ and to do most of the talking.

However, although someone may have power, they do not necessarily have to use it. In a mentoring relationship, it helps if both mentor and mentee agree to leave any power differential outside the relationship – as much as that is possible, if the formal power is still there.

In sponsorship mentoring, however, the authority and influence of the mentor are central to the relationship. The mentor uses his or her power to do the following:

- make introductions;
- intervene on behalf of the protégé;
- ‘promote’ the protégé by putting their name forward;
- protect them.

In developmental mentoring and developmental coaching, power is ‘parked’. Both mentor and mentee attempt to minimise any effects of the power differential between them.

Some practical ways of reducing the negative impact of power in the learning relationship include:

- Agree learning goals for both parties.
- Recognise that power is often best exercised through influence rather than authority and make the development of influencing skills in the learner (as well as for the mentor) a sub-goal of the relationship.
- The mentor should encourage the mentee to put forward their view, before expressing their own; ask and show respect for their opinions.
- Don’t meet in places that emphasise the mentor’s status (e.g. mentor’s office, mentor’s club, restaurants beyond the mentee’s budget).
- Use language that emphasises equality, rather than authority.
- Avoid a directive style, wherever possible – depending on what the mentee needs at the time.
- Ensure that the mentee retains responsibility for managing the relationship and for actions arising from the mentoring conversations.
- Review the relationship regularly to identify any situations where the mentee has felt a power imbalance.

Closely associated with the issue of power is that of rank. Rank may be conferred by:

- *Social status* – the relative value society places on their attributes (skin colour, gender, physical height and ability/disability, age, and so on).
- *Psychological status* – how confident you feel in your ability to function effectively in an environment or society (i.e. integration with the external world).

- *Spiritual status* – having a sense of personal purpose and meaning (integration with the inner world).

As with privilege, when people have high rank, they are usually unaware of it. They feel comfortable (integrated) and cannot understand why people of lower rank do not feel the same. They have little awareness of the stereotypes and prejudices they apply to others of lower rank. Other people respond by listening to them – their opinion has high credibility.

When people have low rank, they are very aware of it. They lack confidence, feel uncomfortable and have lower self-esteem. Other people respond by attaching less significance to what they say – their opinion has less credibility.

It's easy to see this scenario playing out in a mentoring relationship. Hence it's important in the contracting and review processes, and in the training of participants, to integrate these themes into the relationship dialogue.

### Individual and shared stories

One of the simplest and most powerful ways to build understanding between diverse mentors and mentees is for them to share their stories. By this we do not mean their biographical history. These stories operate at a much deeper, emotional and values-laden level. Some practical ways to approach this include:

- Identifying the metaphor that they feel best describes them and their relationship to the world they currently inhabit. For example, one highly qualified professional, who was a refugee and was unable, in his adopted country, to work in his area of expertise, because his qualifications were not recognised, described his life as being a tiny person holding on to the leg of a big table.
- Finding and exploring the story, from the mentee's own culture, which expresses something of the mentoring theme.
- Sharing their personal journey of self-discovery. A useful framework for this is *The Hero's Journey* (Campbell 1949), an analysis of the common elements of epic stories, which has reportedly been used, for example, to design the *Star Wars* films. The steps of the journey pass through the comfort of normal, uneventful life, through the call to adventure, the support of a mentor, trials and tribulations, to self-discovery and personal change.

### Choosing the media

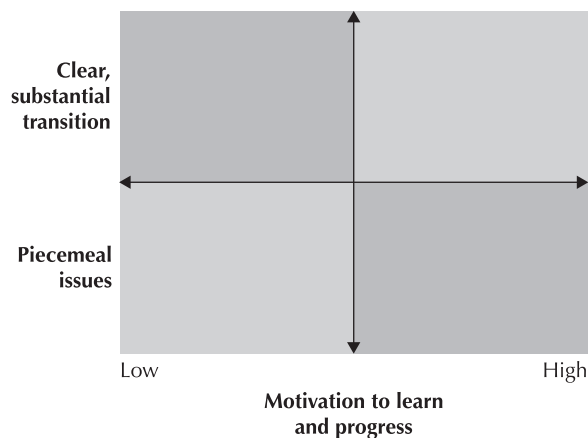
Most of the cases in this book are based on traditional face-to-face mentoring. However, mentoring using other media is increasingly common, especially in the context of diversity and in cross-cultural programmes, where the participants may both be from different cultures and in different continents. E-mentoring – defined as mentoring through e-mail – has proven to be a highly effective medium, although it differs in many ways from face-to-face mentoring (Clutterbuck and Hussain

2010). One of its positive advantages is that it has built-in reflection time, which can be hard to create in the flow and excitement of a face-to-face mentoring session. Another is that e-mail correspondence is associated with lower power distance – people are less conscious of and hence less influenced by power differentials in the relationship (Hamilton and Scandura 2003), and since the mentor and mentee are unable to see each other face-to-face, this adds to the feel of being anonymous and thus make it easier to talk about ‘intimate’ subjects. However, e-mentoring has come to include many other. In practice, the trend in mentoring media appears to be towards multi-media solutions, including face-to-face (Skype and similar programs), email, telephone, text/chat and social media.

### Maintaining the relationship

A phenomenon we observe frequently in mentoring and especially in the context of diversity mentoring is ‘relationship droop’. It occurs when the relationship deals mainly with transactional and relatively superficial issues to begin with, perhaps because one or both parties feels uncomfortable or constrained about exploring deeper issues, and then runs out of things to talk about. In the diverse relationship, reluctance to make personal disclosure can be greater at the beginning, because trust takes longer to build with people, who are seen as different. At this point, there is often a dip in interest and motivation, due in part at least to a lack of any sense of progress towards the relationship goals, or a failure to agree goals, which are sufficiently challenging.

The cause and the cure go back to the selection stage of the programme and the contracting stage of the relationship. The relationships that have most resilience to relationship droop are those in the top right-hand box of the mentee purposefulness matrix in Figure 1.1 – where there is a clearly defined and



**FIGURE 1.1** Mentee purposefulness

significant transition for the mentee and where the mentee is strongly motivated to progress and learn.

Closely related to this issue is: How long should the diversity mentoring relationship last? The simple answer is 'as long as it needs to'. However, the danger of relationships that go on past their sell-by date is that they develop into a state of dependency (Scandura 1988; Eby and McManus 2004). Research into endings of both coaching and mentoring relationships (Clutterbuck and Megginson 2004) has found that relationships that drift away, as opposed to having a clear ending, with recognition of each party's contribution, tend to be regarded by both mentor and mentee as unsatisfactory. We surmise that diverse mentoring relationships may encounter greater than normal difficulties in respect of mentees being able to tell mentors that they have gained all they need from the relationship and need to move on. In the authors' experience, having a defined period for the formal part of the relationship helps remove most of these problems – mentor and mentee still have the freedom to continue, if they wish, but do not have to negotiate an end point.

## Conclusion

This short introductory chapter cannot hope to cover the full spectrum of issues relating to diversity mentoring. However, we have raised some of the primary concerns and most of these themes you will find echoed and re-echoed through our case studies. Some of the themes we will revisit in the light of the analysis of the case studies. All are potential areas for further research and experimentation.

## Notes

- 1 See Poulsen and Wittrock (forthcoming 2012), for additional information, see [www.kmpplus.com](http://www.kmpplus.com).
- 2 Reverse mentoring upturns the traditional hierarchical approach by making the mentor more junior to the mentee. For example, in the UK's Cabinet Office, junior black and minority ethnic managers mentor members of the top 50, helping them to become more aware of diversity issues.

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