CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we discuss power in coaching and mentoring. We believe that power is a key concept that permeates through all units of analysis in coaching and mentoring. First, we introduce an established typography of power and then present and critically discuss three established examples where power influences coaching and mentoring. We then draw the themes together and raise some key questions about power in coaching and mentoring.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the book so far, we have argued that it is important to move beyond a technical-rational approach to coaching and mentoring. We have emphasized the importance of seeing coaching and mentoring schemes as human systems, often operating within larger human systems, i.e. organizations and societies. A key concept that permeates through all units of analysis in coaching and mentoring – the conversation, the relationship, the management triad (e.g. coach, coachee, manager), the organization, and so on – is that of power. This is for two main reasons.

First, power is a central concept in organizations, and therefore in organizational theory. Power is used to explain relationships between people within organizations and organizational structures; it is also used more widely to explain relationships between organizations, societies, countries and regions. Coaching and mentoring relationships
are inevitably located within a given context, e.g. organizational schemes, mentoring engagement schemes, and therefore power has relevance.

Second, it is often said that ‘knowledge is power’ (we explore this notion later); coaching and mentoring, whatever their nature, are often intended to enable some sort of exchange of knowledge, wisdom and understanding between their participants, so inevitably power will be involved. Further, coaching and mentoring are often associated with transition, development and growth. Therefore, it is inevitable that as people grow and develop (often at different rates and times) this will alter the power dynamics between them. It is therefore important to try to understand power and the extent of its impact.

**METHODOLOGY**

Our approach in this chapter is to use an established typography of power, present some interesting and contrasting case examples and critically discuss these by employing three models that relate to power found in other literature on the topic. In particular, we employ McAuley’s (2003) model of transference to help understand some power dynamics within some specific relationships, power in discourse and the concept of power bases. Our overall purpose is to raise key questions.

**WHAT IS POWER?**

Jackson and Carter (2000: 76), in their textbook on organizational behaviour, define power as ‘the ability to get someone to do something that they do not particularly want to do’. This ability to influence behaviour seems to be a key part of most descriptions of power as a concept (see Clegg and Haugaard, 2012, for a more detailed discussion of the various theories of power in organizational theory).

In our view, coaching and mentoring are essentially voluntary in nature and this value position is rarely explored. Power is often explained by referring to sources or bases of power and one of the best known of these frameworks is French and Raven (1962). They argued that power can be understood as being one of five sorts:

- **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 an organizational hierarchy.
- **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.
Clearly, this raises some interesting initial questions. If we take the first two categories of reward power and coercive power:

What implications does this have for a manager who is trying to coach someone whom they also line manage?
How honest and open can the subordinate be in a relationship when they know, or perceive, that their coach has the power to influence their career?

Turning to the impact of legitimate power on the matching process:

Does this mean that all coachees and mentees vie for the most senior person within the scheme because they represent the best chance for career progression?

Moving on to the expert power category:

What implications does this have for empowering the coachee to aspire to acquire this expertise?
Do individual coachee’s perception of the value of their coach change as they begin to acquire more knowledge and expertise?

Referent power is also a key issue and relates to issues of dependency:

How likely are you to end coaching and mentoring when the powerful person you are working with makes you dependent on them?

CASE STUDY 7.1

Beech and Brockbank (1999) on Power/knowledge and Mentoring

Perhaps the best way of exploring some of these issues is via a case study. Beech and Brockbank’s (1999) article provides an excellent account of how power, knowledge and different understandings of mentoring play within a mentoring scheme in the British National Health Service. From a study of 35 mentoring pairs, they identified 4 pairs to focus on in their journal article. From these eight open-ended interviews, the researchers identified four main categories of data:

- The relationship and psychosocial functions.
- Management style.
- Power/knowledge.
- Career functions.

With the first pair, they examine a relationship between a line manager and their subordinate. In terms of the power and knowledge issue, we
note that the mentor (referred to as Judith) paid relatively little attention to the knowledge transfer aspect of their relationship, preferring to focus on the psychosocial (Kram, 1983) aspect of the relationship. The mentee (known as Hannah), however, placed much more emphasis on knowledge transfer as being an important part of mentoring. Consequently, as the relationship progressed, Hannah’s perception of Judith’s ‘expert power’ decreased, as Hannah’s own knowledge base grew. Beech and Brockbank (1999) also use transactional analysis (Berne, 1964) to explain Judith’s strong need to fulfil a nurturing parent role with Hannah. This contrasts with Hannah’s account of the relationship. Hannah rejects the closeness of the relationship. Beech and Brockbank describe this as ‘the typical embarrassment of a child who is over-nurtured by an over-involved parent’ (1999: 13).

In French and Raven’s (1962) terms, power does seem to be an issue in this relationship. The power seems to revolve around different understandings of what the mentee wanted and was getting from the relationship in terms of expert power.

Judith’s account suggests that she was trying to minimize the effect of her legitimate power within the organization and, indeed, reward power and coercive power do not seem to be a feature of this online mentoring relationship. However, this contrasts sharply with the relationship between Juliet and Harry.

In this relationship, Juliet is Harry’s line manager but reward power and coercive power are very noticeable in Juliet’s account of the relationship. She refers several times to her power to influence Harry’s career adversely. Beech and Brockbank (1999: 19) confirm that this is also Harry’s perception. Although Harry is conscious of the reward and coercive power displayed by Juliet, he, like Hannah in the previous pair, questions the expert power of his mentor.

Jane and Hazel’s relationship (the third pair) seemed to operate from an adult–adult position in Berne’s (1964) terms and seemed not to suffer from some of the problems of the other relationships referred to in the study. This may have been because Hazel was not being line managed by Jane at the time when the mentoring study took place, though she had been, prior to that. We note that although Jane (the mentor) sought to play down her knowledge, that knowledge was nevertheless important to Hazel; again, the ‘expert power’ seems pertinent here.

In Jackie and Hillary’s case (pair four), Jackie had used her legitimate power to promote Hillary within the organization and, in her view, had invested in him. Despite achieving promotion, Hillary did not acknowledge Jackie’s contribution to his development. Instead, Hillary started to question Jackie’s knowledge and ask if it was of use to him any more.

DISCUSSION

Clearly, there are a number of patterns in this case study. First, the power dynamics are particularly significant when the mentor has some direct control over the mentee’s future in terms of rewards and punishment, i.e. reward and coercive power. Second, power and perceived knowledge do seem to play an important part in determining how ‘powerful’ a mentee perceives their mentor to be. Of course, it is important to recognize that this may well be a function of the particular study
and the individuals involved. However, the findings do seem to resonate with the power model found in McAuley (2003).

McAuley’s model (see Figure 7.1) looks at the role of transference and countertransference in mentoring. Transference is a form of projection or enactment of previous relationships. De Vries and Miller (1984: 8) argue that transference happens within a relationship when an individual, often unconsciously, treats that relationship as though it were an important relationship from the past. Phillips (1995: 2) states that transference is the ‘unwitting recreation and repetition of earlier family relationships’.

Within mentoring and coaching relationships there is the possibility that the mentee or coachee may project or enact a significant previous relationship with their mentor or coach. Countertransference occurs if the mentor or coach responds to the projection. This could be either positively and supportively or negatively. Either response has the possibility of creating either positive or negative inappropriate behaviour within the mentor.

McAuley (2003: 21) argues that ‘the ambivalence in mentoring – the manner in which it is poised between more humane organizational practice but also supports the notion of management – creates a number of tensions’. He goes on to argue that an understanding of transference would help in understanding and perhaps dealing with some of these power tensions.

Figure 7.1 shows ways in which transference issues can have an impact on a mentoring relationship. At the start of the four mentoring relationships in Beech and Brockbank (1999), there is clear evidence that there was positive functional transference on the part of all mentees towards their mentors. They appeared to have respect for their mentor’s expertise and process skills. Similarly, there is some evidence (with the probable exception of Juliet) that mentors were exhibiting positive functional transference towards the mentees, in that they were happy to be associated with their development. However, as the relationships deteriorate, we can see evidence of the mentees ‘sucking the mentor dry and then complaining about their incompetence’ (McAuley, 2003: 14) or dysfunctional negative transference. Furthermore, in Juliet and Harry’s relationship, we can see evidence of negative dysfunctional countertransference on the part of Juliet. She seems to demonstrate a destructive tendency towards Harry, the mentee.

What appears to have happened, following Beech and Brockbank’s (1999) analysis, is that mentees developed in their understanding and expertise while they were working with their mentors. As a result, all mentees reported a perceived reduction in the disparity of knowledge, expertise and understanding between them and their mentor. Their response to this perception was to begin to withdraw from the mentoring relationship and to question the quality of their mentor; in other words, the expert power that had attracted them to the mentor in the first place had, in their eyes, begun to diminish. This deliberate withdrawal served to protect them from any psychological damage as the mentoring relationship deteriorated. Unfortunately, this was not the case for the mentors who were left confused and with a sense of unfinished business, for the most part, despite their apparent powerful positions due to their legitimate hierarchical power as well as the reward and coercive power that many of them could have used towards their mentees.
An understanding of the mentoring process itself seems to have been missing among the participants. In particular, there appears to be little awareness of Levinson et al.’s (1978) work on adult development. This work highlights age-related transition stages in human development. Levinson, probably the first writer in modern times to acknowledge and highlight the contribution of mentoring to adult development, was interested in the question, ‘What happens psychologically as we grow older?’ He noted that adult development is made up of a series of transitions where our thinking patterns and value systems change (also noted by Jung, 1958; Erikson, 1950, 1995; and Sheehy, 1996) as we grow older and a mentor can assist with these transitions. Had participants been aware of this, it may have prompted them to see their mentoring partner in a different light. For example, mentors might have recognized that it is normal for mentees to want to separate from their mentors at certain stages in their development and this is a helpful thing for them to do. They may have taken steps to: (a) work with the mentee’s negative functional transference to encourage the mentee to establish their own expert power in relation to that of the mentor's expertise and process skills.

**FIGURE 7.1** Transference and countertransference in the mentor–mentee relationship

mentor; or (b) worked with their own negative functional countertransference so as to enable them to let go of their mentee in more deliberate fashion to minimize the damage to them as mentors.

Unfortunately, the lack of this understanding, the power dynamics implicit in hierarchical managerial relationships within organizations, coupled with the power dynamics within mentoring conversations, led to an unsatisfactory outcome for most of those involved in the programme.

**CASE STUDY 7.2**

**Mentoring in the Big Six Accounting Firms**

Dirsmith et al.’s (1997) account of mentoring within the so-called Big Six accounting firms (pre-Enron) also provides some insights into how power manifests itself in mentoring. In this study, the researchers undertook 180 interviews in two phases. They found two key mechanisms present in these organizations: management by objectives (MBO) and mentoring.

Mentoring in this context was focused around career progression as opposed to psychosocial support (Kram, 1983). Dirsmith et al. (1997) argue that mentoring was broadly informal and imply that, at least partly, mentoring became important in these organizations because ‘MBO was found to be ostensibly mute on organizational politics’ (1997: 13). Also, MBO was mainly organizationally driven in its focus and did not really address itself towards individual firm members. MBO was, therefore, perceived as technical and being about ‘looking after the numbers’. Mentoring, by contrast, was predominantly a political discourse, aimed at individual firm members. Dirsmith et al. (1997: 15) summarize it as follows:

Largely off the record and enunciated among trusted people, the mentoring guidance and advice could be highly specific and ‘gritty’, covering the protégé’s relations with clients and key partners, the business aspects of the firm, the protégé’s appearance and behaviour and the politics of practice.

However, despite this apparent disparity between MBO and mentoring, Dirsmith et al. (1997) point out that the two discourses were connected. This was because many of those within the firms understood the role of ‘a good mentor’ to be one of ‘looking after the numbers’ of their mentee; in other words, defending and interpreting their performance against classic MBO targets: realization rates, client billings, time budget averages, revenue and profit per partner. Those who had mentors that would perform these roles for them were known as being ‘on the bus’ towards partnership or greater power. A fascinating feature in this study is that mentoring in this context benefits the mentor by enhancing their power base. Again, Dirsmith et al. (1997: 18) summarize this as follows:

Mentors [who] successfully sponsored protégés through the promotion process
found themselves better connected with the new cadre of partners than non-mentors, which stabilised their own social network. Furthermore, practice office managing partners who had served as mentors often proved disproportionately effective in gaining promotions for their office’s managers, so much so that they ‘exported’ many new practice partners to other offices and thus extended and further stabilised their own social networks.

In other words, mentors and their protégés both have a great deal invested in the mentoring relationship.

**DISCUSSION**

This account, similar to the previous case study, draws our attention to a number of issues that relate to power in coaching and mentoring.

First, it is important to recognize the importance of language. For example, in Dirsmith et al.’s (1997) account, the person being helped to find promotion in the mentoring dyad is referred to as ‘the protégé’. If, following the lead of Foucault (1979), we explore the genealogy of that term, the word protégé comes from the French verb *protégér*, which means ‘to protect’. In the *Oxford Reference Online* (2006), protégé is defined as being ‘a person under the protection, patronage, tutelage of another’ (ORO, 2006). This definition of the term very much describes the mentoring process within Dirsmith et al.’s study. However, the terms ‘mentee’ or ‘mentoree’ do not necessarily carry those associations and these terms are much more common in European writing than the US (for an in-depth discussion of mentoring and coaching in the US see Chapter 14 by Dawn Chandler).

In our view, the terms protégé and mentee, as well as the term ‘coachee’, imply passivity. They suggest that the person referred to is a passive recipient of the help, whereas much of the modern literature emphasizes the importance of dialogue and of two-way learning. Downey (2003) tackles this issue by preferring the term ‘player’. This is perhaps a link to the sporting roots of coaching.

Megginson et al. (2006: 131) discuss the use of the term ‘client’ to describe the learner or mentee in a mentoring scheme in Engineering Co. and states:

This has confused and misleading meanings. This term implies a customer–provider relationship and seems to be born out of the ‘customer-led’ concept [in Engineering Co.]. However, whilst the term itself may have been an attempt to alter the existing relationships within Engineering Co., mentoring is not a customer–supplier relationship.

The word ‘client’ has become common in the literature on coaching. This positively acknowledges the interaction as being a business one where ‘the client’ is someone who pays for a service. Whereas the mentoring arrangement described
above was voluntary and internal to the organization. The use of the term client does seem to equate coaching and mentoring with other professional services such as lawyers, psychotherapists and accountants, for example. However, as Hawkins and Smith (2006) point out, there are a number of different ways of seeing clients. They talk about there being three clients:

- The person in the room.
- The organization or network of which they are a part.
- The purpose of their joint endeavour (serving customers and other stakeholders).

Again, this notion of multiple clients is seen in Dirsmith et al.’s (1997) account, with individual mentoring firm members engaging with three clients:

- Their mentees and their development issues.
- The firm, as represented by the MBO discourse.
- Other stakeholders, i.e. senior partners, customers.

All of these different clients have an impact on the power dynamics both within the organization as well as within the mentoring dyad itself. This is also present in the following coaching intervention.

### CASE STUDY 7.3

**The Successful Adventure of a Downwardly Mobile Executive (Blattner, 2005)**

In this case study, Blattner (2005) presents an account of his own executive coaching work with his client, Terry. Terry is presented as a fairly senior executive who is experiencing some problems with ‘lack of professional fulfillment’. In power terms, it is interesting to note the issues Blattner chooses to focus on and chooses to play down or leave out.

Blattner says very little about himself and why Terry might have chosen to come to him. In fact, all he says is that ‘a colleague referred him’ (2005: 3). At this stage, Blattner gives no indication of who the colleague is or what being ‘referred’ means. However, in his author’s description, Blattner refers to himself as ‘a psychologist-consultant-coach with PAS International Ltd’. Upon searching for Blattner on Google, we found that he is listed as an Illinois-based psychologist (http://www.psychologyinfo.com/directory/IL/illinois-directory_15.html). This may or may not indicate a referral from a psychologist – Blattner does not tell us.
His biography is phrased in such a way that is intended to emphasize Blattner’s expert power as a consultant, describing him as having ‘25 years experience as an organizational consultant and executive coach’ and being ‘highly versed’ in doing this sort of work. Organizational consultancy and executive coaching would appear, rather like in Dirsmith et al.’s (1997) study, to involve two different units of analysis – the organization and the executive respectively. However, Blattner does not engage in any attempt to differentiate the two areas of work; indeed he seems to deliberately conflate them. For example, he says that ‘as consultants, we still do not know how the process of coaching actually works’ (2005: 3) but does raise the question as to why organizational consultants should engage in executive coaching.

The use of language in this article is interesting, particularly when it comes to his description of his own interventions. These are often framed as ‘suggestions’ from the coach. For example, Blattner (2005) ‘suggests’ that he and Terry agree to a three-month coaching contract with a view to reviewing it after that. In the second session, he suggests that Terry completes a questionnaire. This appears to be a psychological instrument for assessing Terry against four measures: dominance, influencing, steadiness and compliance. It is only after this is completed that Blattner asks Terry to identify goals for the next three, six and twelve months.

As to the issues not discussed in this article. First, it is not clear why Blattner asks Terry to sign up for three months. Why not two weeks, four sessions or ten sessions? Second, it is not clear why Blattner has chosen to use a self-reporting psychological instrument to evaluate Terry. Why this one and not another one? Why use one at all? Third, the scores that emerge from the instrument are taken, uncritically, as being representative of Terry’s actual behaviour, as is illustrated from this example:

Also, the scores provided some feedback regarding Terry’s behavioural style. Some of the positive findings indicated that Terry was people orientated – building confidence in others; he was service orientated – a dependable team player, and he was cordial and helpful when dealing with new clients or customers. (2005: 4)

The discussion in the article omits any evidence from anyone, other than Terry, that this is how others perceive him. Nevertheless, Blattner and Terry then use the data to agree on Terry’s goals. The chronology of this process is interesting. Terry agrees to paid coaching for three months, then completes a self-assessment, then agrees the goals. Notwithstanding our questioning of the ubiquity of goals in coaching (see Chapter 10), it is not clear as to the basis on which Terry agrees to pay Blattner for three months. On what basis is Terry making that decision, when, as implied by Blattner, Terry is not clear about what he wants out of the coaching until session three? Furthermore, although Terry is presented as someone with significant legitimate power, he also seems very amenable to Blattner’s ‘suggestions’ as compared with our mentees in the mentoring case studies examined.

As the coaching progresses, we hear about Terry’s ups and downs and his frustrations with his new boss and his anxieties about his position. Notice, however, that despite the fact that Blattner is a self-styled eminent psychologist, there is no examination of transference and countertransference in Blattner’s account of the relationship even when it seems to be particularly merited. For example, on page 10, Blattner recounts how he felt that Terry ‘had just wanted me to roll out a formula, give him the answers and that would be that’.
However, Blattner recounts how he ‘resisted that approach and responded by repeatedly reframing his questions and asking thoughtful and clarifying questions in return’. It seems reasonable to assume that Blattner was working with Terry’s transference, in putting him in the role of expert, which had started to move towards being positively dysfunctional in nature (see Figure 7.1). By being aware of his own potential positive dysfunctional countertransference in wanting to remain being seen as the expert, Blattner appears to have avoided this danger in the service of the client. However, despite Blattner’s use of Daniel Goleman’s work on emotional intelligence and a demonstrable awareness of important phases in managing the relationship – e.g. on page 12, he talks about arriving ‘at a place to start working on closure for our coaching session’ – the account is noticeably bereft of any emotional challenges within the coaching relationship.

**DISCUSSION**

Blattner’s account of this coaching relationship and our previous discussion of language draws our attention to an important aspect of power in coaching and mentoring that we have used several times already, that of ‘discourse’. McAuley et al. describe discourses in the following way:

> Discourses are sets of ideas and practices that condition our ways of relating to and acting upon particular phenomena; a discourse is expressed in all that can be thought, written or said about a particular topic, which by constituting the phenomena in a particular way, influences behaviour. (2007: 265)

If we apply this understanding to writings on coaching and mentoring, we could argue that the ‘gaze’ or mindset of the writer influences how people coach and mentor. In particular, following Jackson and Carter (2000: 66), a dominant or powerful, legitimated discourse determines ‘who can say what, where – and why’. The arguments made, particularly by postmodernist writers, for example Gutting’s (2005) overview of Michel Foucault’s work, is that writing about something is inevitably a powerful activity – as the Prophet Mohammad said, ‘The ink of the scholar is more powerful than the blood of the martyr.’ Referring back to Blattner (2005), we can see how he uses his power as the author of the text to convey certain impressions about coaching. Blattner decides that, despite his training as a psychologist, he has chosen not to use psychological constructs in order to talk about his relationship with Terry. Blattner’s position on his own article is that it ‘offer[s] some insights into one process and to create or stimulate ideas for the professional currently engaged in such activity’ (2005: 3).

However, an alternative reading of this text is to see it as a sales document. Blattner is presenting himself as writing for ‘the professional’ and hence associating himself with that professional discourse. Furthermore, he chooses to represent himself as a
process expert making suggestions, but nevertheless hinting that he has an overall plan for Terry – using the term ‘phases’ presents these developments as milestones along a journey that he has travelled many times before. Consequently, we believe that Blattner wishes to play up Terry’s seniority and his desire for development and stretch but seeks to minimize or play down the view that Terry is in an emotional crisis and, in particular, that this is not played out within the relationship with Blattner. Instead, Blattner is using his power as the author of the text to present himself as a senior expert who works with other senior people in an organized way that has good personal outcomes in both personal and professional domains. He seems to distance himself and his work from being therapeutic and moves towards developmental language. And, like all good sales testimonials, he even has the client, Terry’s, endorsement at the end! However, the discourses that remain silent or subdued are those of Terry’s wife, his boss and his work colleagues – we only ever hear from Blattner or an edited version of Terry’s ‘voice’.

COACHING, MENTORING AND LEADERSHIP

If we look at all three cases examined in this chapter, a common theme that runs through each of them is that of leadership. As we have seen, how leadership is understood within organizations is fundamentally intertwined with power and with the concepts of coaching and mentoring. Indeed, many of the schemes we discuss in this book are in some ways leadership development initiatives. Therefore, it makes sense to pay some attention to the concept of leadership in a discussion about power in coaching and mentoring. Grint (2010: 4) offers a useful typology of leadership, which he presents as four questions:

1. Leadership as position: is it where leaders operate that makes them leaders?
2. Leadership as person: is it who leaders are that makes them leaders?
3. Leadership as result: is it what leaders achieve that makes them leaders?
4. Leadership as process: is it how leaders get things done that makes them leaders?

Grint offers these as ‘ideal types’ which are unlikely to exist in exclusion to each other, rather suggesting that we need to decide between these perspectives as definitions of leadership. Similarly, Jackson and Parry (2012) pose three questions that most often come up when people examine leadership as a concept:

1. Are leaders born or made?
2. What makes an effective leader?
3. What is the difference between leadership and management?

Clearly, all seven of these questions raise interesting and vital issues about what constitutes leadership. As ours is a book on coaching and mentoring, and not leadership,
we need not be overly concerned with providing comprehensive answers to these questions. This would be a nigh on impossible task anyway; according to Jackson and Parry (2012), in January 2011, there were 57,666 books on leadership listed on Amazon’s website. Reviewing just this material would keep us busy for quite some time! However, as Northouse (2010: 12) acknowledges, ‘Because leaders and followers are part of the leadership process, it is important to address issues that confront followers as well as issues that confront leaders. Leaders and followers should be understood in relation to each other.’

This recognition that leaders and followers co-construct their relationship can also be applied to coaches and mentors in their relationships with coachees and mentees. In Chapter 6, we examine the utility of stories in coaching and mentoring conversations. It seems to us that the way that leadership is understood within organizations contributes significantly to many coaching and mentoring conversations. For example, in the Blattner study above, we have already commented on the way that Terry’s seniority and achievements are played up by the author. Blattner is perhaps seeking to link his analysis to broader societal discourses about what makes an effective leader. In Grint’s (2010) terms this may refer to Terry as a leader in terms of his position within the organizations he has worked in, or to the business results attributed to him, to his somewhat ‘bullish’ style or to his personality as a ‘natural’ leader. Similarly, in the other two cases above, we can examine the participants in both schemes as being influenced by the social constructs of what is understood by being an effective leader within their respective organizations. In the Dirsmith et al. (1997) case, this includes ‘looking after the numbers’ whereas in Beech and Brockbank’s (1999) case, being an effective leader seems more tied up with specific competencies and knowledge. The fact that many coaching and mentoring interventions tend to focus on developing leaders suggest that the sponsors of such schemes have the often implicit view, following Jackson and Parry’s (2012) questions, that leaders can be ‘made’ or developed. Based on our experience working with organizational scheme development (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed analysis of coaching and mentoring scheme design), we also argue that many schemes seem to focus on developing leaders as opposed to developing managers. This might suggest that despite the fact that many people in the organizations we work with have the job title of manager, some are seen as leaders and some are not. Indeed, we could also argue that there is an implicit hierarchy as well as clear distinction here between leadership and management. Again, this discourse that seems to distinguish between leadership and management appears to parallel the distinction between coaching and mentoring. This raises the question of how useful distinguishing between leadership and management, for the purposes of coaching and mentoring scheme design, really is. Gosling and Mintzberg (2003: 54–5) address this point specifically:

Most of us have become so enamoured of ‘leadership’ that ‘management’ has been pushed into the background. Nobody aspires to be a good manager anymore; everybody wants to be a great leader. But the separation of management from leadership is dangerous. Just as management without leadership encourages an uninspired style, which
deadens activities, leadership without management encourages a disconnected style, which promotes hubris. And we all know the destructive power of hubris in organizations.

In other words, they suggest that it is probably unhelpful to artificially separate management out from leadership in terms of professional practice because most managers engage in aspects of management and leadership. In doing so, and encouraging a focus on leadership at the expense of management, this may serve to weaken the ‘leader’ and make them susceptible to their own ego. This alternative discourse supports earlier work by Collins (2001) examining the importance of humility and professionalism in what his research identified as level 5 leaders. In this research, the most effective (level 5) leaders were seen as people who had the drive, vision and competencies to make sure things got done, coupled with personal humility in terms of their own ego and reluctance to claim sole credit for the results of their organizations. As we have argued thus far in this book, much of the coach and mentors’ work is about helping coachees and mentees work on their own self-awareness in terms of what it is possible for them to achieve. The danger is that the coachee’s or mentee’s agenda may be informed by dominant discourses about ‘strong leadership’ or ‘good management’ from the organization they work in, from leadership development programmes or even popular media that may work against the interests of the organization.

For example, at the time of writing, there seem to be a plethora of reality television shows on UK television channels, some of which deal with leadership, coaching and mentoring together. In one particular programme, The Apprentice, Lord Alan Sugar, a prominent UK industrialist, seeks to employ one of a number of aspiring leaders as his ‘apprentice’ in a competitive reality game show, where the winner gets a real job in Sugar’s company. In this show, potential recruits are ‘mentored’ by Sugar and colleagues on various tasks but at the end of each episode, one of them is removed from the competition using Sugar’s catchphrase – ‘you’re fired!’ The recruits have to persuade Sugar that they are worth keeping in the show. While this could be construed as merely a game show, it is nevertheless watched by millions of people in the UK who are presented with a successful industrialist seemingly operating in a very directive, forceful no-nonsense style with followers desperate to please a dominant authority figure. Inevitably, we are invited to link together Sugar’s success with this style. It seems inconceivable, given its popularity, that this discourse of leadership and followership has no influence on the audience in terms of their practice within their respective organizations, however much it is presented as ‘entertainment’. In terms of coaching and mentoring, this might influence us, for example, to be more amenable to a sponsorship model (Clutterbuck, 2007b) of coaching and mentoring, where coachees and mentees are seen as protégés of powerful figures within organizations and the agenda for the coachees/mentees is to identify the person who is most able to influence their career progression through their personal sponsorship. It is therefore important for those of us involved in coaching and mentoring work within organizations to recognize the power of the discourses around leadership, followership and what these mean for our clients and other stakeholders.
CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have used three main frameworks: bases of power, transference, and discourse analysis to look at the issue of power within coaching and mentoring. We have raised some important issues about coaching and mentoring when seen through the lens of power. To summarize, the power relations between coaches/mentors and their coachees/mentees are influenced by a number of different factors.

First and most obviously, the impact of line management power relations on coaching and mentoring. As shown by our case studies, this can serve to influence mentee/coachee engagement with the process by either establishing collusion (see Dirsmith et al., 1997) with the manager in terms of the use of legitimate power to enhance the career progression of the mentee/coachee, or cause withdrawal from the process. Our discussions in Chapters 1, 3, 5 and 6 suggest that trust is a key component of the coaching and mentoring process. Adding the notion of power to the trust condition means that if coachees and mentees feel restricted in their openness with their coaches or mentors, due to managerial or hierarchical relationships, then the process is likely to be limited in the extent to which it can be successful.

Second, and related to the first point, it appears that the line management relationship can often crowd out the psychosocial aspect of mentoring (Kram, 1983) in particular, but can still be helpful for both parties in terms of career progression. However, this appears to be dependent on both parties in the dyad understanding the purpose of the process and their role within it. This was not the case within the NHS case study (Beech and Broekbank, 1999) where a limited understanding of the mentoring process appears to have contributed to psychological damage for the mentors and withdrawal and lack of satisfaction for the mentees.

Third, the statement that ‘knowledge is power’ appears to hold some water in terms of the evidence considered here. In each of the case studies, the coach or mentor’s expert power was a critical feature of the process. Correspondingly, as the asymmetry in terms of knowledge and expertise between, in particular, mentor and mentee begins to reduce, the mentee’s perception of the expert power of the mentor begins to diminish. However, how this is handled in the mentoring and coaching dyad is critical to the outcomes.

McAuley’s (2003) analysis of transference and countertransference is useful in that it offers us a conceptual framework for understanding and anticipating the various traps and challenges facing us in coaching and mentoring relationships. Indeed, although Blattner (2005) does not use the terms (for reasons we will explore below), there is evidence that he did use these ideas within his coaching intervention with Terry, which seems to have helped Terry develop.

Fourth, all of the analysis above leads us to recognize that, although thinking about individuals having or possessing power may be a useful analogy, to some extent, power is relational. The work of Foucault (1979) and others (see Gutting, 2005 and McAuley et al., 2007) helps us to recognize that power resides not in individuals but is co-created in the relationships between people. Key components of that co-creation are the various discourses that are created around coaching and mentoring, particularly those around leadership and management, as related concepts. It is important to recognize, following Jackson and Carter (2000), that the dominant
discourses that emerge are inevitably power-laden and are concerned with who is able to say what to whom, when and why. In these different case studies, it is easy to see how the writer has certain purposes and agendas, be they academic, financial or a combination of these. One of the advantages of deconstructing discourses and developing a genealogy (as we do in Chapters 1 and 2) of coaching and mentoring is to recognize that it is possible to draw very different and often contradictory conclusions from a piece of writing, and much depends on the lens used to view it.

Finally, we should recognize that we ourselves, as writers of this text, are choosing to privilege certain discourses above others in this book. Because of our mutual background, areas of interest and power-interests in aspects of coaching and mentoring, we cannot hope to escape from the same challenges and criticisms that we have posed to others in this chapter and throughout the entire book. Clearly, we are seeking to influence the dominant discourse of coaching and mentoring and our own status within it as a result of writing this book, but hopefully in a way that helps others become aware of those challenges and choices as a result.

The Future

We should recognize that as coaching becomes a more commonplace activity, issues of power, voice and discourse will become more important. Coaching and mentoring can seem attractive because there is the possibility of emancipation from dominant forms of control and oppressive power relationships. However, this does not mean that coaching and mentoring are immune from such power issues – far from it.

International professional bodies, like the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) or the International Coach Federation (ICF), and national bodies like the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (UK), will increasingly need to work with the power dynamics. For example, at the 2008 EMCC UK conference, there were more than twice as many papers using the term ‘coaching’ as the term of reference. We conclude from this observation that the current popularity of the term ‘coaching’ may be crowding out the positive contribution of the mentoring discourse. The impact of this is not yet clear but will increasingly become an issue over time.

QUESTIONS

- Who or what is driving the content of the discussion in the coaching/mentoring relationship?
- What might be being denied or avoided in your coaching or mentoring scheme?
- Who is being empowered or disempowered in your coaching and mentoring work?