The AIS Mentorship Guide

A resource designed to support the development of collaborative, mutually beneficial and non-hierarchical mentoring relationships

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Introduction

Summary

The AIS Mentoring Guide has been prepared to assist the cultivation of highly effective and mutually beneficial mentorships in which individuals work together to support the personal growth and professional development of relational partners. It covers a range of topics and focuses on the behaviours that can increase the effectiveness of mentorships regardless of whether they are created formally or informally. The information, however, is not prescriptive and can be tailored to meet the needs of each relationship.

Suggested use

This resource is structured in a way that enables readers to navigate to topics that they consider most relevant and can be used as a reference tool to locate specific information within a particular section rather than being read cover-to-cover.

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Disclaimer

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Structure

The AIS Mentoring Guide has four sections:

Section One: Introduces readers to the concept of mentoring, provides a brief overview of its evolution and outlines the types of benefits that can be achieved from participating in a well-designed mentoring program.

Section Two: Summarises the different stages of a relationship, outlines the roles, expectations and responsibilities associated with establishing mutually beneficial partnerships and discusses the underlying principles and behaviours that have been shown to support their development.

Section Three: Contains information intended to help with the formulation of achievable individual and relationship goals, provides an overview of the reflective practice process and outlines the benefits of engaging in regular goal-setting and self-reflective activities.

Section Four: Reinforces the information presented in the earlier sections of the guide and provides an overview of the recourses required to ensure that highly effective and mutually beneficial developmental relationships are created.
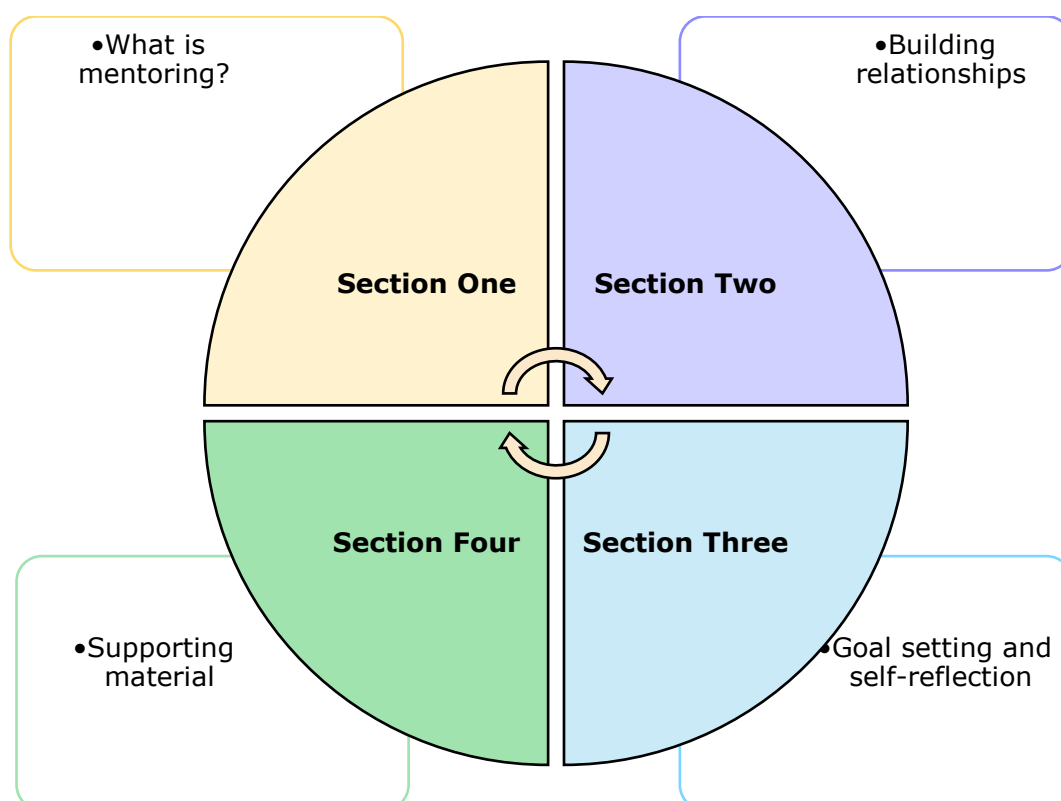
SECTION ONE: WHAT IS MENTORING?

A brief overview

Mentoring is an elusive term, and individuals have very different ideas about what it means [1]. Although researchers have not reached consensus over a functional or scientific definition, mentoring in its broadest sense can be thought of as a context-sensitive activity whereby a more experienced person helps the development of another person through confidential and thought-provoking conversations and other learning activities [1-3]. To understand why mentoring has become so popular in recent times, it might be helpful to know some its history and origins.

The original concept can can be traced back to ancient Greece through the writings of Homer and his epic poem: The Odyssey [4]. In this legendary tale, King Odysseus (the ruler of Ithaca) was preparing to fight in the Trojan War when he suddenly realised that his only son and heir (Telemachus) would be left behind without any support and/or guidance. He attempted to address this issue by enlisting the help of his trusted friend, Mentor, who agreed to watch over Telemachus whilst Odysseus was away [4].
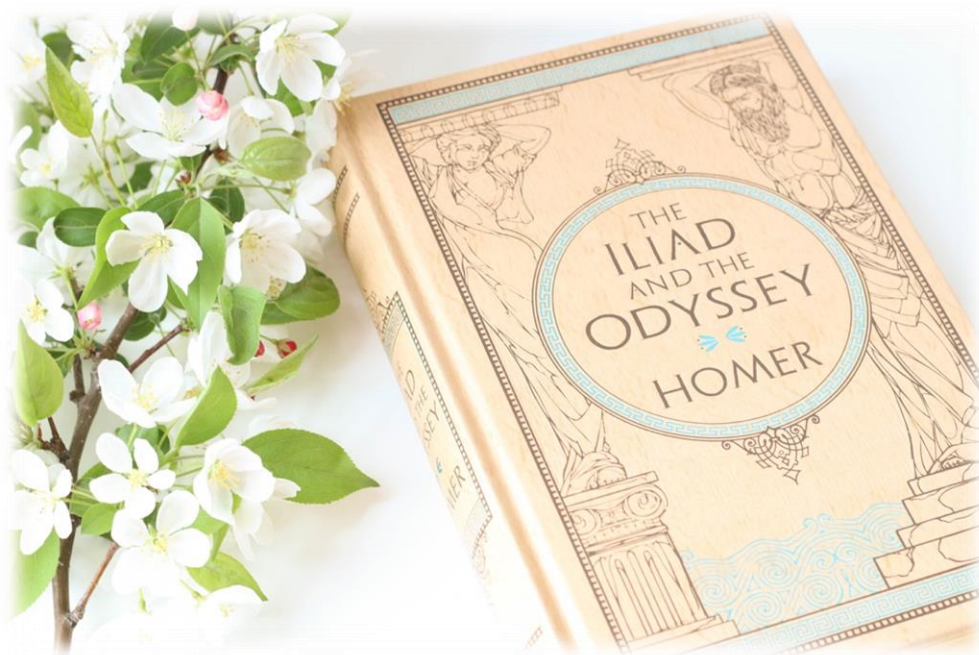

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Although this early example suggests the nurturing and supportive nature of the mentoring role, it has been argued that Homer did not assign these characteristics to Mentor and described him only as an "old and trusted friend" [5]. Instead, it is French author, Francois Fenelon, who is credited for introducing today's popular view of mentoring when he described Homer's character as a "guide and instructor" and "another father" in his 1699 novel: Les Adventures de Telemaque [5,6].

Interestingly, a similar concept was prevalent during the Middle Ages when it was common practice for young people to learn and acquire the technical skills of their crafts through the patronage of more experienced and knowledgeable trade persons [5]. The nature of this interaction extended beyond a teacher/student relationship and, in most cases, the master trade person would take on the additional responsibility of feeding and housing the young person whilst also helping with their personal, emotional and moral development [5].

By the 1970s, the idea of experienced individuals helping less experienced colleagues was again popular and people from the business and corporate sectors started to recognise "the vital role mentors play in the development of corporation executives" [5]. This has since led to the introduction of large-scale mentoring programs across a variety of industries, with such programs widely considered by many to be an effective professional development tool [7,8].

A new approach

Over the past two decades a paradigm shift has led to a reframing of the mentoring concept [7-9] and it is now widely seen as a highly collaborative and multi-dimensional process in which individuals work together to support the personal growth and professional development of relational partners [7,10]. This relational-focused approach is important in the present context because it provides a suitable framework to guide the implementation of future projects. Shifting from the traditional concept of mentoring (e.g., information transferred by a mentor and passively absorbed by a mentee) to relational mentorship also emphasises the highly reciprocal nature of the interactions [10].

The benefits of mentorships

When done well, mentorships can be highly effective and provide numerous benefits for everyone involved with the relationship [11]. For example, a less experienced coach could gain new practical knowledge and insights from a mentor who has achieved a level of expertise that the former aspires to attain. Mentors have an opportunity to share their wisdom and further develop their skills, while an organisation has an opportunity to develop its workforce by enhancing existing skillsets and practices. The following builds upon this brief explanation and provides an overview of the types of benefits a mentee, mentor, and organisation can expect to achieve by being involved in a well-designed mentorship program.

Benefits to the mentee

Mentees can gain a lot from a non-hierarchical developmental relationship, including:

- Guidance and support from highly respected and experienced professionals.
- Leadership development.
- Improved self-confidence and increased job satisfaction.
- Development of new knowledge and skills.
- Increased awareness of different perspectives and approaches.
- Creation of new support networks.
- Access to confidential sounding boards to test new ideas [12,13].

Benefits to the mentor

Personal and professional benefits that mentors can gain from being involved with a mentorship program, include:

- Feelings of fulfillment from helping others and contributing to their development.
- Extending and/or strengthening existing networks.
- Perceptions of increased self-worth through the sharing of ideas and experiences.
- Development of new skills.
- A sense of purpose by giving back and contributing to the development of key competencies [12,13].

Benefits to the organisation

Mentorships can provide organisations with numerous benefits and have been used to support the development of workforces by:

- Facilitating the growth of future leaders.
- Demonstrating a commitment to staff development.
- Providing opportunities for continuous learning.
- Enhancing organisational knowledge.
- Fostering a collaborative and inquiry-focused workplace.
- Supporting the development of under-represented population groups [12,14].

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Some things to consider

Comprehensive understanding of the ways in which coaches can build their expertise is an essential foundation for any initiative aimed at aiding the development of coaches and enhancing current practices. This task is important in the present context since no absolute consensus exists concerning an optimal approach to coach development [15].

Physical education research suggests that expertise is a domain-specific trait, and that high levels of subject matter knowledge and experience are essential for its development [16,17]. This point was highlighted by Chen and Rovegno [18], who examined the differences between novice and expert teachers and discovered that the experts had developed certain skills over the course of their careers which enabled them to be much better than their non-expert counterparts at facilitating opportunities for the development of such outcomes as positive student interactions, critical thinking skills, and the linking of new learning to prior knowledge and experiences.

Similar findings were reported by Bell [19], who argued that experience is far more effective than verbal information for the development of domain-specific knowledge and expertise. Bell [19] also noted the importance of providing learners with carefully planned and well-organised continuous learning opportunities throughout their careers and suggested the use of mentors as a way of facilitating this process.

The importance of subject matter expertise and topic-specific knowledge was highlighted also by Swap et al., [20] who utilised a 1994 review published by Ericsson & Charness [21] as a basis for arguing that experts acquire their knowledge at different stages of development and pass through various "levels of knowledge acquisition" during their careers. According to Swap et al., [20] providing learners with authentic and meaningful learning opportunities and then having them reflect upon those experiences is crucial for the development of domain-specific expertise. Swap et al. [20] also support the use of mentors and, like Bell, suggest that mentors often aid the learning process by proving critical feedback, assisting with the interpretation of experiences, and providing appropriate levels of support.

It appears, however, that the effectiveness of mentors is relational-dependent and that positive outcomes tend to occur only once strong, positive, meaningful, and reciprocal mentor/mentee relationships are in place [22,23].

This point was highlighted by McCaughtry et al., [24] who investigated the effectiveness of mentoring relationships and reported that the most effective mentors tend to be passionate about helping and learning, have highly developed interpersonal skills, provide mentees with genuine care and support, have an ability to constantly motivate and encourage, and possess large amounts of domain-specific knowledge and pedagogical proficiency [24]. Overall, the above makes it clear that mentorships require a significant investment in time and commitment from both parties to be effective. Consequently, care should be exercised in pairing mentors with mentees so as not to impede the coach development process by providing coaches with avoidable negative experiences. Suggestions aimed at assisting with this task are outlined in Section 2.

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SECTION TWO: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

Mentorships are unique relationships based on mutual trust and respect and framed by a commitment to continuous improvement [7,10]. The real appeal of these partnerships, however, is that they are geared toward meeting the individual needs of each partner [22,23]. Consequently, a one-size-fits-all approach is not feasible or even practical when attempting to establish these types of relationships. Instead, to be truly effective, mentorships must be evolutionary in nature and adaptive to the needs of both members as it evolves [11,12]. The following is aimed at supporting the cultivation of these important relationships and provides suggestions intended to enhance opportunities for success.

Types of relationships

Although the information presented in this resource is focused mostly on developing and maintaining highly personalised one-to-one relationships, there are many ways a mentoring program can be designed and implemented [12]. They can, for example, be informally or formally structured and range from a spur of the moment catch-up to long-term partnerships [25]. Below is a brief overview of the different kinds of mentoring relationships that can exist, along with suggestions for their use.

- **Formal relationships:** Generally involves the matching of mentors and mentees, adhering to structured routines and tracking any progress and development.
- **Informal mentoring**: These types of relationships develop much more organically and normally occur when friendships already exist.
- **Group mentoring**: Involves one mentor working with several mentees.
- **Team mentoring:** Occurs when a team of mentors work with a small group of mentees to help address a particular area of concern.
- **Peer mentoring**: Happens when a mentor and mentee are at a similar stage of development.
- **Reverse mentoring**: Involves flipping the roles so that an older person serves as the mentee and a younger person fulfills the mentor role [25].

Stages of a relationship

Research published in 1985 conceptualised four sequential stages through which relationships can evolve [12]. These stages are summarised below and highlight how attending to the specific needs and potential challenges that might arise across the different stages of a relationship can be crucial to the overall quality and effectiveness of the experience.

- **Initiation:** Occurs during the initial stages of the relationship and involves mentors and mentees getting to know each other whilst outlining their expectations and highlighting any concerns.

- **Cultivation:** Happens once a relationship has matured and is where mentors usually provide the greatest degree of support.

- **Separation:** Takes place when a mentee wants more autonomy and independence from a mentor.

- **Redefinition/Closure:** Is the final stage of the process and occurs once the mentor and mentee have transitioned into a different type of relationship (e.g., critical friendship which is characterised by more peer-like interactions) or when a current relationship comes to an end [12].
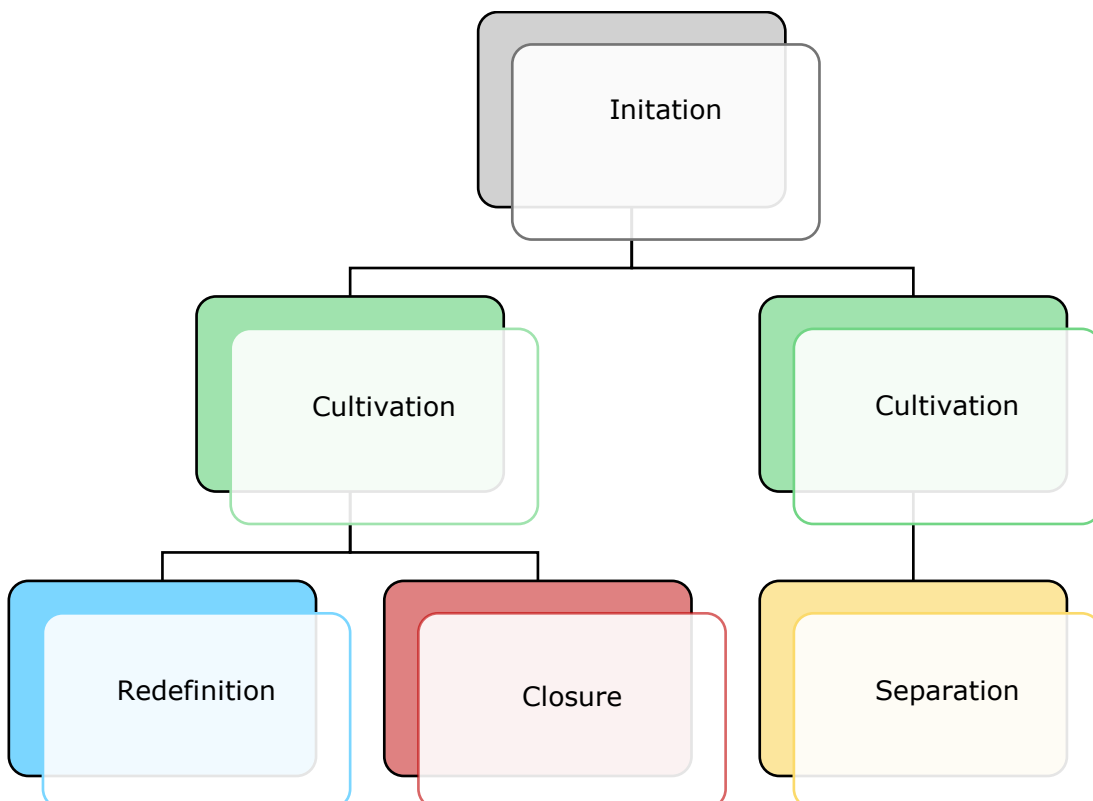
Critical behaviour

Although every relationship will be different, there are certain behaviours that can greatly increase its effectiveness, regardless of whether it is created formally or informally [12]. For example, empirical evidence shows that mentees favourably rate the quality of their relationships when mentors enact such behaviours as aligning expectations, building rapport, facilitating open communication, and maintaining mentee agency [26]. Research has also revealed that deep-level similarities between mentees and mentors often leads to the development of interpersonal comfort (i.e., both parties expressing their views openly and freely with the aim of better understanding each other), greater levels of support and stronger relationships [27,28]. Therefore, to support the development of these relationships, both parties must have a genuine desire to understand the values and expectations of the other, and must be sensitive to their thoughts, feelings and needs [12,28].

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Guidelines and considerations

Below are some suggestions intended to support the development of high-quality sport-specific developmental relationships. Mentors and mentees may find it useful to consider these points when developing their own unique and context-specific partnerships.

- Mentorships should aim to achieve personally identified goals and objectives.
- Conversations should remain confidential, unless otherwise specified.
- Mentors and mentees should not be in a direct reporting relationship.
- Mentorships need to be grounded in confidentiality and trust.
- Relationships should be dynamic and highly reciprocal experiences.
- The responsibility for structuring a relationship should be a shared endeavour and involve inputs from the mentee and the mentor.
- Although there should be a defined period of time for the mentorship, relationships can be extended and/or evolved.
- Either party should be able to end a relationship for any reason at any time without fault being assigned [12,26,27].

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Underlying principles

There is an important psychology and sociology concept that views relationships as result-oriented social interactions and contents that people perform a cost-benefit analysis prior to entering into a relationship, essentially assessing the risks and rewards that it might bring [29,30].

Proponents of this social exchange theory maintain that people will pursue relationships when rewards are greater than cost (net profit) and abandon them when the costs are greater than reward (net loss). However, because the value of costs and rewards are highly subjective and intangible, it is argued that individuals make choices about their relationships based on how they perceive the costs and benefits [30]. Individuals may tend to reduce their level of commitment to a relationship if the perceived costs start to outweigh the advantages. For instance, a mentoring partnership that was initially considered to be of high reward and low cost may evolve into one that requires additional costs for lower rewards. This could cause the people involved in the relationship to try to establish a more rewarding and beneficial level or terminate it altogether.

Applying the above concept to coach-specific situations would mean considering how the mentees and mentors might appraise the value of their relationships (i.e., the perceived benefit relative to the perceived cost) and ensuring that measures designed to increase the potential for positive interactions are in place. The theory suggests that having such measures would not only increase the likelihood of achieving positive mentee outcomes but would also enhance the probability of mentors experiencing the rewards of being a truly effective mentor and critical friend.

Relationships = Perceived benefits of social interactions − The perceived costs
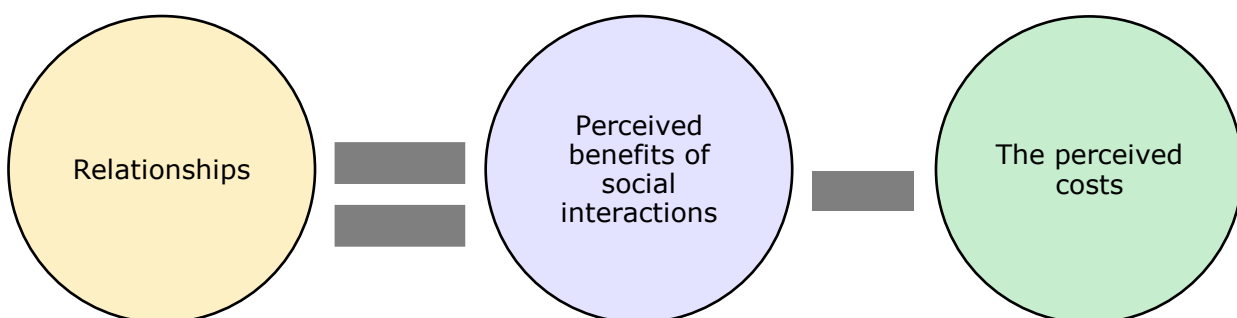
Roles, expectations and responsibilities

It is vital for everyone involved in the development of a mentoring relationship to have a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities and expected behaviours. Written specifications can be helpful in achieving this and should take account of the points presented below.

Mentee roles and responsibilities

It is important that coaches wanting to be mentored know what they want to achieve from the experience and that they:

- Be committed to the relationship.
- Take substantial responsibility for their own learning and development.
- Develop and implement action plans aimed at achieving realistic goals.
- Endeavour to monitor their own progress.
- Engage in regular reflective and self-analysis activities.
- Work towards sustained and continuous improvement.
- Share any concerns or issues with their mentor.
- Commit to all meetings and appointments.
- Be respectful and courteous toward the mentor.
- Be proactive in asking for help and support where needed.
- Maintain confidentiality [31].

Mentor roles and responsibilities

Mentors must understand the overarching rules of their engagement and should strive to:

- Develop positive and meaningful relationships.
- Encourage continual learning and reflective practice.
- Be respectful and sensitive to individual differences.
- Challenge existing beliefs respectfully.
- Assist with the development of individual goals and action plans.
- Never impose their own agendas or undermine the authority of others.
- Respond promptly to requests and maintain confidentiality.
- Be a sounding board for new ideas and practices.
- Model the behaviour and attitudes they wish to see.
- Provide support to the coaches when the going gets tough [31].

Coordinator roles and responsibilities

Sometimes, a third party is assigned a task of brokering and supporting relationships between mentors and mentees. Although not a direct partner in a relationship, this person can play a key role by:

- Acting as a valuable resource during the experience.
- Ensuring mentors are appropriately selected and trained.
- Assisting with the pairing of mentors and mentees.
- Maintaining a database of mentors.
- Monitoring relationships.
- Facilitating regular catchups and check-ins.
- Supporting the growth and development of relationships.
- Communicating with key stakeholders.
- Undertaking periodic evaluations.
- Being available to mentors or mentees who require their assistance or support.
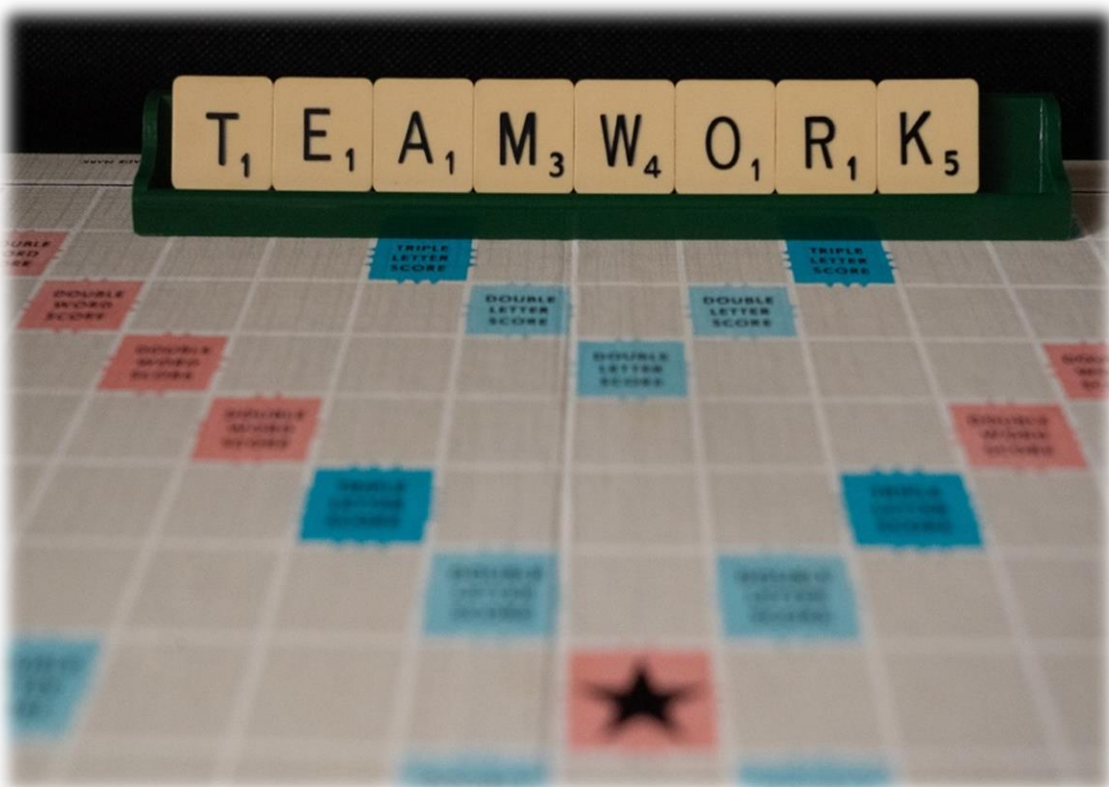- Ensuring that relationships are brought to a successful close [32,33].

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Putting it all together

The following is based on information presented earlier in this section and offers some tips and suggestions on how to promote significant commitment from mentors and mentees during the various stages of their relationship, thereby facilitating establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships.

Stage 1. Initiation: This takes place during the early phase of a relationship and is where mentors and mentees focus on developing the relationship whilst also clarifying their interests, values, goals and needs [12]. In common to other social situations, the beginning of a partnership can sometimes be awkward, and time dedicated specifically to getting to know each other should be a priority.

Tips and suggestions: It is important that mentors do not allow their preconceptions to define who they think the mentee should become or how they will approach the discussions during the initial phase of a relationship. Instead, they should work with their mentees to help establish the parameters and social norms of their partnership [12]. Although there is no set formula to guide and support this process [7], the following suggestions may help.

- Each party should let each other know how they would like to be addressed (e.g., first name or nick name).
- Open-ended questions should be used.
- Body language should remain open and not guarded.
- Active listening techniques should be employed.
- High levels of empathy should be demonstrated.
- Discussions should be nonjudgmental, friendly and courteous.
- Every session should finish on a positive note [26].

Outcomes: Key outcomes that can be achieved during the initial phase of a relationship include:
- Development of realistic and achievable long and short-term goals.
- Creation of highly supportive relationships that encourage and promote self-motivation and critical reflection.
- Establishment of strategies aimed at dealing with external concerns.
- Development of mentorship guidelines and agreement [31].

Stage 2. Cultivation: This happens once a relationship has been established and is where the initial expectations and agreed guidelines are implemented and pursued [7,12]. Here, challenges are met, needs are fulfilled and objectives achieved. Stage two, however, can also be a time of intrinsic growth and revelation for some people, which can sometimes lead to the termination of a relationship [11]. This should not be viewed as a failure and individuals should aim to part on friendly terms without any fault being assigned to either person.

Practical example: As highlighted above, mentors and mentees work together to achieve the mutually agreed upon goals and objectives during this phase of a relationship [12]. For instance, a mentee coach might decide that they want to improve their delivery skills and become more proficient at individualising the learning process during periods of training. The mentor could support the mentee in reaching this goal through a mixture of job-embedded learning, appropriate challenging, critical reflection and observational-assessment. In addition, the mentor might suggest that the mentee spend some time getting to know the different personality traits of the athletes, and might assist with the development of communication strategies aimed at catering to the needs of each individual within the group.

Tips and suggestions: During this critical phase of the mentorship the parties should:

- Use the information contained within their relationship agreement to keep the partnership on track and goal focused.
- Stay committed to the relationship during challenging periods.
- Develop action plans for each objective.
- Hold regular meetings and catch-ups at defined intervals.
- Engage in regular self-reflection activities.
- Set goals that are Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) [33,34].

Stage 3. Separation: This occurs when a mentee wants more autonomy [34]. In the present context, separation might occur once a mentee coach becomes more confident and knowledgeable and no longer sees a need for the same amount of guidance and support [12]. In this case, and if the objectives of the relationship have been achieved, both parties should consider the timing of the separation as appropriate and even essential for the continual development of the mentee [12].

On the other hand, separation could occur when defined and agreed goals are not accomplished [13,14]. In contrast to the above example, this cause of separation could be associated with feelings of disappointment and frustration on both sides, and may have serious consequences for the organisation hosting the mentorship program [11,13].

Time should be spent during the initial stages of a relationship anticipating and discussing this important topic, and understanding how it could emerge during a mentoring partnership. This could prove to be an effective way to minimise the risk.

Tips and suggestions: The success of this sensitive phase of a mentorship may be enhanced by adopting the following recommendations:

- Autonomy and self-determination should form the basis of a relationship.
- Separation should be seen a natural and healthy occurrence.
- Independence and separation should be anticipated and discussed during the initial stages of a relationship.
- Relationships should be reassessed, redefined and reconsidered at regular intervals.
- It should be recognised that mentees will often outgrow the need for regular guidance and that this is a marker of the efficacy of the mentorship process.
- Where appropriate, meetings and catch-ups should still continue after separation, albeit with much less frequency.
- Agreed expectations, social norms and ground rules should be in place [12,26].

Stage 4. Redefinition/Closure: This happens once the mentor and mentee have transitioned into a different type of partnership (e.g., critical friendship, peers and colleagues) or when a relationship has met its objectives and comes to an end [12]. As can be seen from the list below, however, a number of requirements must be satisfied for a relationship to reach this point and fulfill its intended purpose.

- Mentees and mentors must experience a sense of closure at the end of an agreed term, or be committed to furthering their relationship.
- The end of a relationship in the present context should signify that the objectives were achieved and there is no need to maintain the existing structure.
- Everybody involved with a mentoring relationship should reflect upon and acknowledge what they have learned from the experience.
- Mentors and mentees should acknowledge that the relationship is changing not because it was unsuccessful, but because they have succeeded and it is time for them to pursue goals in a different way [26].

Guiding questions: Addressing a few salient questions can aid in determining whether a mentoring relationship should be closed or redefined. These questions include the following.

- Have we accomplished what we set out to do?
- Are there any additional learning opportunities that we would like to jointly pursue?
- Is this relationship the best way to continue to focus on the mentee's objectives?
- Would a different mentoring experience better serve the current needs of the mentee?
- Are there other learning experiences that would be of more value at this time? [26,27].

Tips and suggestions: The ending of a positive and successful relationship can often be an emotional time for mentors and mentees and, for many, it is difficult to say goodbye. The suggestions below are aimed at helping with the successful navigation of this process.

- A formal procedure specifically designed to help mentees and mentors have a positive attitude about closure should be in place.
- When possible, a trusted person from the host organisation should oversee the process and help to capture the gains of the relationship.
- If the mentor is unavailable during this time, the above person should also be responsible for ending the relationship with the mentee.
- Sessions aimed at preparing both parties for closure should be incorporated into a mentorship plan.
- Time should be spent reminiscing, reviewing and reflecting on outcomes.
- Discussions should focus on what the mentee and mentor will take from this match into future relationships and activities [26,27].

Final points: If both parties believe there is value in continuing their relationship, then time should be spent refreshing the partnership and establishing new goals. If a decision is made to continue, the suggestions below may assist the evolution of a relationship by helping to redefined its nature and purpose.

- New achievable goals must be established.
- New approaches to learning need be developed and applied so that performance can continue to improve.
- Role clarity should be revisited and adjusted.
- If not already doing so, mentors should actively encourage mentees to engage with other advisors and seek alternative viewpoints from people who have topic-specific expertise.
- Both parties must commit to the new arrangements [10-12].

SECTION THREE: GOAL SETTING AND SELF-REFLECTION

General outline

Setting goals and regularly engaging in self-reflection are important activities for personal and professional growth and development [35]. The basic premise is simple: Individuals who set clear and specific goals and then reflect on their progress are able to direct more attention and effort towards these activities and away from irrelevant and less-productive ones [36-38]. The importance and benefits of these key concepts and how they can assist with the learning of new knowledge and skills or enhance existing ones are discussed in this section. The information, however, is intended to provide mentees and mentors with ideas that might facilitate creation of plans appropriate to their own specific needs, rather than being prescriptive.

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Goal setting

Goal setting takes place once a relationship has been established and when feelings of mutual trust and respect are firmly in place. Here, mentees and mentors should begin to outline the goals for their relationship and the personal objectives they aim to achieve. The following provides a step-by-step approach to facilitate the formulation of effective individual and relationship goals.

The SMART framework

An established model for developing actionable learning goals is the SMART framework. As noted earlier (p:19), these goals should consist of practical action steps, and should be articulated in such a way that fosters clear and mutual understanding of what constitutes expected and successful development [39,40]. The examples below demonstrate how this framework can be used to support the development of new knowledge by focusing on self-identified areas of improvement and combining self-reflection with a detailed plan for success.

SMART goal criteria

Mentees and mentor should consider using the following framework to help guide the development of their own goals and objectives.

- **Specific:** What will be accomplished? What actions need to be taken?
- **Measurable:** How will attainment of the goal be measure? What type of data will be used?
- **Achievable:** Is the goal doable? Do we have the necessary resources?
- **Relevant:** Why is this goal important?
- **Time-Bound:** What is the time frame for accomplishing the goal?

Suggestions for writing SMART goals

Specific: When setting a goal, mentees and mentors should try to be as specific as possible about what it is they want to achieve and should at least consider:

- What exactly are we trying to accomplish?
- Why are we pursuing this goal?
- Where will the work take place? (e.g., daily training environments, workplaces, online, coffee shops).
- Who else may need to be involved for the goal to be achieved [41,42]?

Measurable: In addition to considering what metrics will be used to determine if a goal has been attained, mentees and mentors may need to also consider:

- What types of data will be required?
- What does success look like?
- What are the most feasible and practical data collection methods [41,42]?

Achievable: When developing their goals, mentees and mentors will need to develop the strategies to ensure gaol attainability and may need to think about:

- The methods that will need to be adopted to achieve their goals.
- Whether they have the required skills.
- Whether they have access to more knowledgeable others [41,42].

Relevant: Consideration here should be given to the relevance of the goal and how it relates to the broader development plan of the mentee [41,42].

Time-Bound: Having a date in place for the achievement of goals can often be beneficial. Mentees and mentors therefore need to consider what can be accomplished within the designated mentorship period while complying with organisational guidelines and remaining within the limits of available resources [41,42].
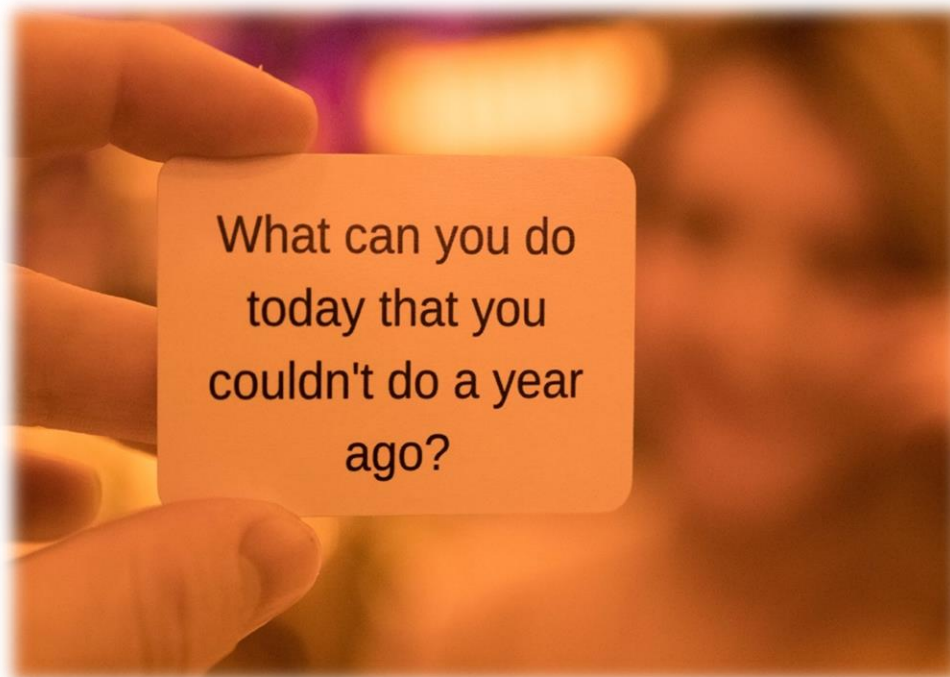

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Reflective practice

Reflecting on an experience can be highly beneficial and produce significant learning and development outcomes [37,38]. Importantly, the greatest value tends to occur when reflection becomes a regular habit and aligns with personal goals, values and objectives [43]. The following complements the previous information presented in this section and aims to demonstrate how regular engagement in reflective practice can greatly assist the achievement of goals.

What is reflection?

Reflective practice is the process of thinking about and reflecting on what you do. It is closely linked to the concept of experiential learning (i.e., learning from experience) in that you think about what happened, what you did and what you would do differently next time [43,44]. While there is considerable debate around what actually constitutes reflection [43], most researchers agree that it helps to develop greater levels of self-awareness, creates opportunities for development and can be highly beneficial for a range of professions. Significantly, and perhaps most importantly, nearly all experts agree that reflective practice is a skill which can be learned and refined through experience and the dynamic interactions of everyday living and work [37,38].

Benefits of reflecting

Regular engagement in reflective practice has been shown to improve performance across a range of professions by providing a systematic and structured approach to learning that enables new ideas to be transformed into practical solutions [43,44]. It provides opportunities for teams and individuals to reflect openly and honestly when things go wrong and is often used as a tool to assess situations, decisions and behaviours [37,38]. Arguably, its greatest strength lies in the way it helps develop the habits, skills and mindsets required for personal growth and development [43]. Individuals who develop a regular habit of reflecting often improve such valuable skills as:

- Emotional intelligence.
- Decision-making.
- Communication.
- Problem solving and critical thinking [37,38,43].

What does the process involve?

Reflective practice involves integrating reflective activities into daily life on a routine basis, which in turn can prompt self-analysis, aid self-management and improve decision-making. Essentially, the process entails:

- Listening to ourselves.
- Being aware of our feelings.
- Addressing our assumptions.
- Noticing patterns in what we see.
- Changing how we see things [37,38,44].

Key attributes

A list of personal qualities considered essential for effective reflection is provided below. Mentees and mentors may need to consider these points when developing their own strategies, approaches and processes.

- A willingness to learn from experiences through reading and critical self-analysis.
- A belief that it is possible for change to occur.
- A willingness to be informed by research.
- A belief that there is no end point to learning.
- An ability to be open to other opinions.
- An ability to take action based on reflection [38,43].

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Tips and suggestions

While there is no set approach or formula for reflecting, mentees and mentors may consider the following factors.

- **Time:** Little and often is generally the most effective way to implement a new routine or begin working toward achieving a new goal. Even a few minutes of reflection per day is much better than doing nothing at all [37,38].

- **Focus:** It is important that people make a conscious effort to minimise distractions before and during reflection, and they should find a space where they are unlikely to be interrupted [43]. For example, if someone was in a loud and noisy environment, they might consider using headphones to help block out the noise.

- **Mindfulness:** Even if only a few minutes a day are devoted to the practice, people should make sure they are present and clear of mind before beginning [43].

- **Approach:** Reflecting is a highly personal process and there is no 'one right way' to do it. Therefore, practicing it should be done without any judgement or self-criticism [37,38].

- **Experiment:** When starting to engage in regular reflective activities, people should experiment and try different approaches until they find one that suits their style and needs [43].

Practice

Practice without any judgement or self-criticism.

Focus

Make a conscious effort to minimise distractions before and during reflection.

Experiment

Try different approaches until you find one that suits your needs and style.
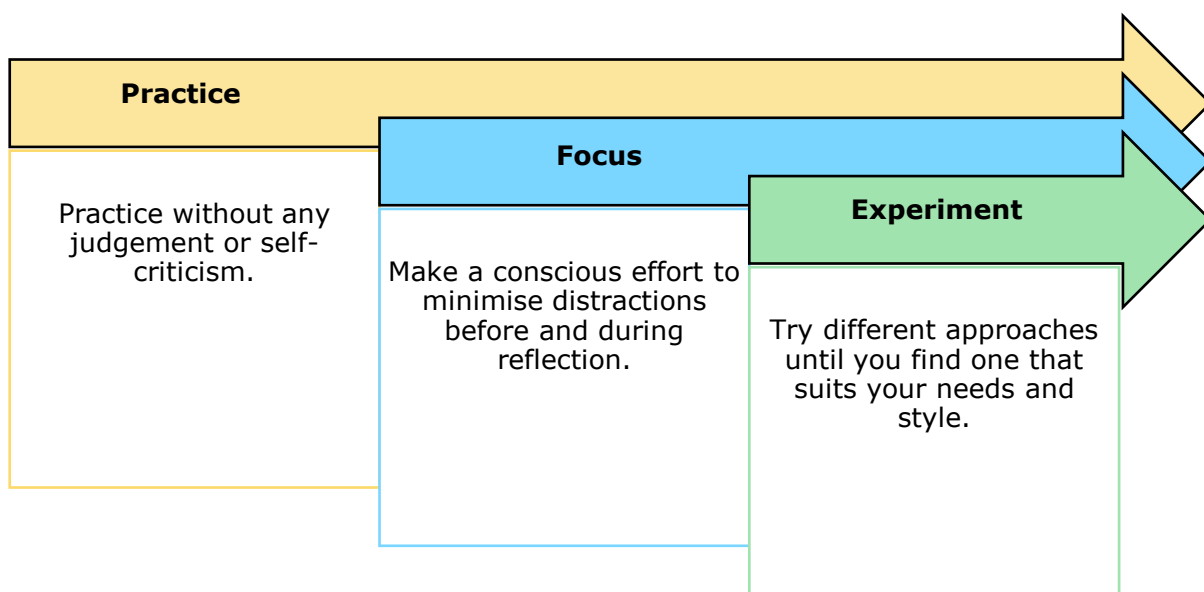
Methods aimed at supporting reflective practice

Reflection can be spontaneous and occur in response to a situation (**reflection-in-action)**, or as part of a planned attempt to examine and determine what factors are aiding or hindering work practices (**reflection-on-action**) [37]. In a coach development context, the former refers to the quick thinking and responses that often occur during periods of training. For instance, a coach trying to explain something which the athletes do not initially understand may be able to **reflect-in-action** to quickly recognise the problem, understand why it is occurring, and promptly respond to it by reframing the explanation or approaching the topic from a different perspective. By contrast, **reflection-on-action** would take place after the training session when the coach has the time and space to critically reflect on what occurred and can think much more deeply about the situation. Critically reflecting on the action not only allows the coach to develop a more refined understanding of what caused the initial problem but enables the development of solutions aimed at minimising the potential for recurrence. The quality of the solutions, however, depends on coach characteristics such as level of knowledge, degree of experience, understanding of relevant theories, and ability to examine and revisit thoughts through reflective writing [37,38].

During a training session		**Reflection-in-action**		**After the training session**
A situation arises.	→	Consider the situation. Decide how to act. Act immediatiely.	→	The coach has the time and space to critically reflect on what occured and apply deeper thinking.

Reflection-in-action		**Next training session**		**Reflection-on-action**
Recognition of situation. Implementation of new strategies.	←	The same or similar situation arises.	←	Reconsider the situation. Think about what caused the problem. Develop the solutions.

Reflective writing

As noted above, writing is an integral part of the reflective process [37,38,43] and while this can be done on a computer, sometimes the added physical dimension of moving a pen across paper can help create a calmer and more receptive brain state thereby, increasing the overall effectiveness of the practice [45]. Regardless of the method, the important thing here is to capture your thoughts and feelings as soon as possible after an event while they are fresh in the memory and easy to recall, so that a rich and accurate account of the experience is recorded [43]. Even when we believe we did everything we could during an experience to make it as good as possibly, and therefore feel that nothing needs to be changed, the perception should be documented, reviewed and assessed [37,38]. The following, based on the "3W model" [46], seeks to support and encourage reflective writing by providing a practical framework for the documenting and exploration of personal thoughts, feelings and experiences.

An example of the 3W model in action

A general outline of the 3W model is provided below.

Step 1: What happened? (Description). Provide a descriptive account of the experience.

- What happened?
- Who was involved?

Step 2: What's important? (Interpretation). Reflect on and interpret the experience.

- What was the most important/interesting/relevant/useful aspect of the event?
- How can it be explained?
- How is it similar/different to other experiences?

Step 3: What's next? (Outcomes). Determine what can be learnt from the experience.

- What have I learned?
- How can this be applied in the future?

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Examining and interpreting experiences during periods of reflection could also be aided through use of the six-stage model presented below [37]. As can be seen in figure, the first three stages are concerned with what happened, while the remaining three entail formulating a response to the experience.

Description
What happended?

Feelings
What were you thinking and feeling?

Evaluation
What elements of the experience were good and what parts were bad?

Analysis
What sense can you make of the experience?

Conclusion
What do you need to do to improve next time?

Action Plan
How will you improve?
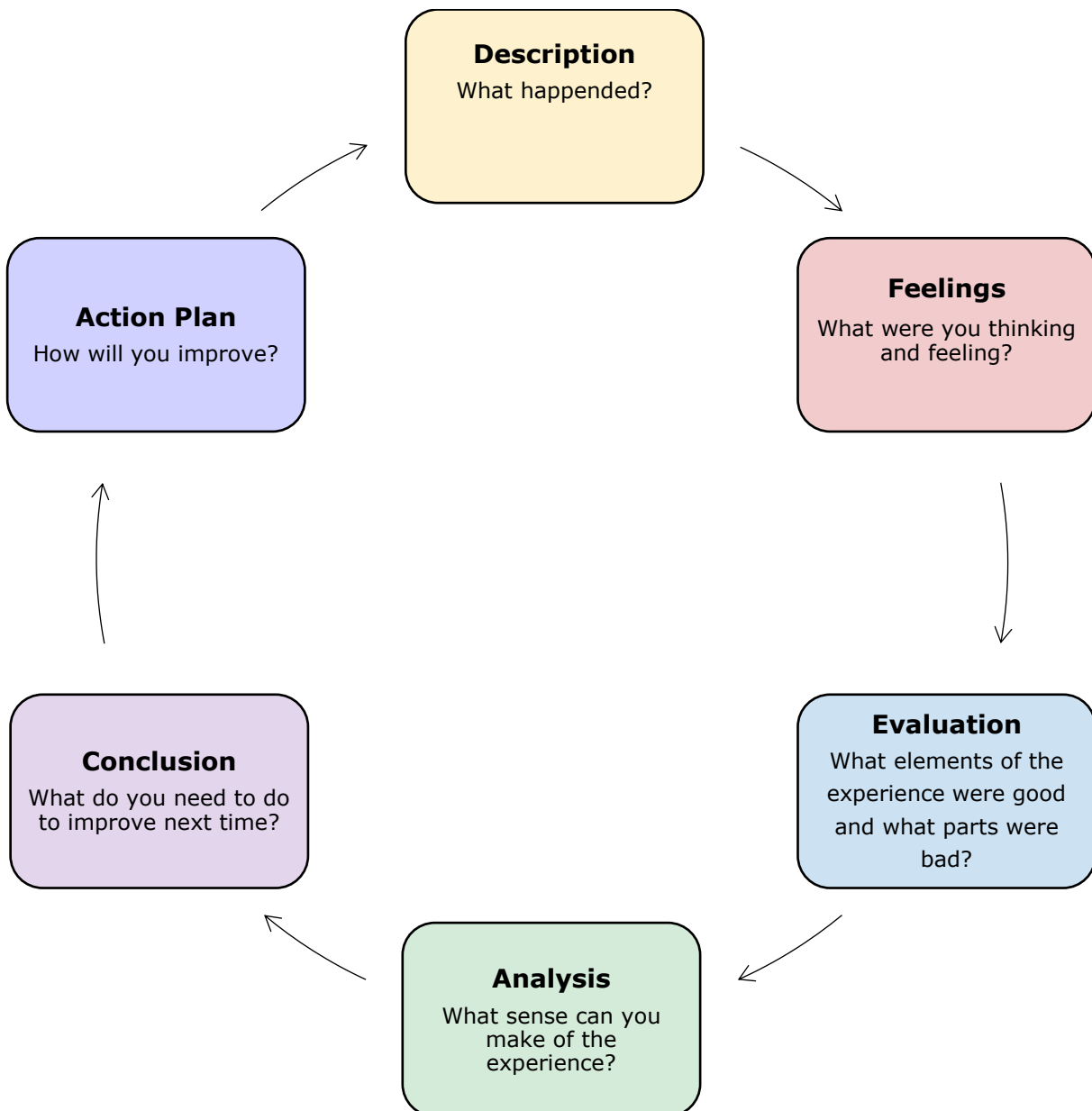
An example of Gibbs' Reflective Cycle in action

A summary of how Gibb's six-step process could enhance capacity for reflective practice in a coach learning situation is provided below.

- **Description:** During the initial phase, a coach should aim to provide a clear, concise and accurate account of an experience.

- **Feelings:** The coach should use this stage to identify and record any thoughts and/or feelings they had during the experience, with these directly referenced to specific moments of the experience.

- **Evaluation:** This phase provides an opportunity for the coach to consider what went well and what did not go as well as initially planned.

- **Analysis:** During this phase the coach may refer to relevant literature and seek the support of a mentor to help make sense of the experience.

- **Conclusion:** Based on the coach's research, all the different ideas are pulled together resulting in a clear understanding of what needs to be improved and the ways in which it can be done.

- **Action plan:** The coach creates a step-by-step detailed plan for provision of a new learning experience by utilising information arising from the previous five phases. Here the coach decides what will be kept, what requires changing and what can be done differently.

Self-awareness
Think, feel, sense and know through intuition.

Reflective Practice

Reflection
Reconsidering and critically evaluating existing ideas, knowledge and concepts.

Critical thinking
Imagine and explore alternatives.
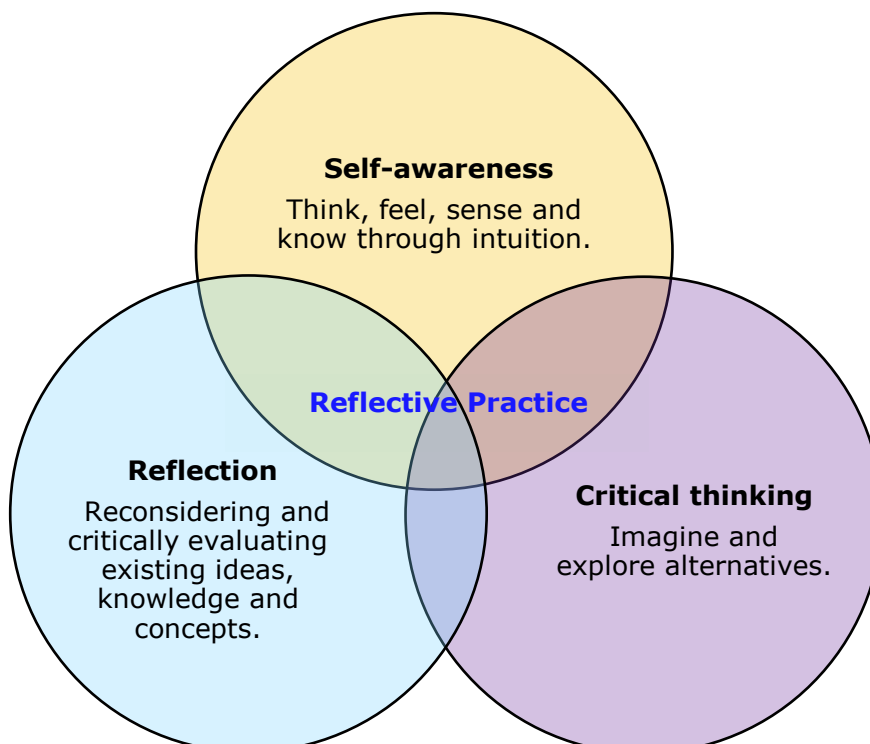
Concluding thoughts

This section outlined two separate but highly complementary concepts and suggested ways in which they could be implemented together to support the development of new knowledge and skills. It demonstrated that by focusing on self-identified areas for improvement and combining self-reflection with a detailed plan for success can lead to highly successfully outcomes and enable new ideas to be transformed into practical solutions. A need for repeating cycles to ensure the continual progression of learning occurs was highlighted, along with the importance of being informed by research. Making sense of previous experiences and how the above factors all contribute to both professional and personal growth and ongoing learning and development was discussed. It is hoped the information contained within this section will help mentees and mentors to achieve their goals through the use of very personal and highly effective self-improvement practices that are grounded in reflection and constantly modified by new experiences.

Photo credit: Glenn Carstens-Peters free from unsplash

SECTION FOUR: SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Overview

Throughout this guide, the importance of relationships has been consistently emphasised, and attention has been given to the behaviours that can greatly increase their effectiveness. It has been pointed out that for mentorships to be truly effective as means of professional development, mentees and mentors must work closely together to achieve their agreed goals within designated timeframes. The following reinforces these key points and provides examples of the types of resources that might be required to ensure creation of highly effective and mutually beneficial developmental relationships are created. The examples serve only as a guide, since it is envisaged that over time mentees, mentors and host organisations will develop their own strategies and approaches to support the development of their own unique and context-specific partnerships.

Photo credit: Nick Fewings free from unsplash

Example 1: Mentorship agreement

This agreement acts as the foundation for the proposed relationship by establishing the roles, highlighting expectations and positioning the partners for success. It is recommended that the form be completed during the first meeting.

Goals

The mentee and mentor commit to developing an action plan to help achieve the following goals:

1.
2.
3.

Expectations

The mentee and mentor are both committed to developing a productive and highly collaborative relationship and will strive to meet the following expectations.

The Mentee agrees to:	The mentor agrees to:
Work with the mentor to develop and execute an action plan aimed at achieving the designated and agreed upon goals.	Work with the mentee to develop and execute an action plan aimed at achieving the designated and agreed upon goals.
Take responsibility for the scheduling of meetings and other learning events (e.g., mentor attending training sessions).	Review any documentation provided by the mentee prior to attending meetings and/or catch-ups.
Seek and welcome feedback and constructive criticism.	Help find additional mentors, advisors and resources to support the achievement of goals.

Meetings and catch-ups

The mentor and mentee plan to meet weekly □ fortnightly □ monthly □ other □.

Meetings will last a maximum of ____ minutes and will take place via phone □ video conferencing □ in person □.

The parties agree to be respectful of each other's time and, if a meeting has to be cancelled or rescheduled, agree to provide a minimum of 24 hours' notice whenever possible.

The mentee agrees to provide the mentor with regular updates during scheduled meetings □ via email □.

Confidentiality

Information and content shared within the confines of the relationship shall be considered confidential, except in circumstances when both parties give permission for it to be shared.

Duration

The mentee and mentor estimate the duration of the partnership will be
_____ ; but this may be reassessed and adjusted as needed.

Please note either party can decide to opt out of the relationship before its natural conclusion for any reason at any time without fault being assigned.

Mentee's signature: **Date:**

Mentor's signature: **Date:**

Contact details

Mentee	Mentor
Name:	
Email:	
Phone:	

Example 2: Guidelines for completing an action plan

There are many ways in which an action plan can be designed and completed. For instance, a mentee might prefer to draft a version first and then ask their mentor to review it. Alternatively, the work could be completed together during a joint planning session. Regardless of the approach used, mentees and mentors should jointly decide how to structure their plan, ensuring they are not written by the mentor for the mentee.

Step 1: Identify an area of improvement

When considering this matter, mentees and mentors should select a skill, competency, or behaviour that they believe would benefit from further development. Career goals, personal aspirations, performance appraisals, peer feedback and success profiles can all be used to guide these choices.

Step 2: Create a SMART goal

Once an area of improvement has been identified, mentees and mentors should aim to create the underpinning SMART goals for their work. For example, if improving a mentee's delivery skills was an agreed target area, one possible goal might be enhancement of the person's communication skills. Once this goal was achieved, other important delivery skills such as encouraging and motivating others, adapting practices to best suit particular situations, and managing complex situations could then be pursued using the same format.

Step 3: Identify developmental activities

The aim here is to identify the activities that will be undertaken by the mentee in order for that person to achieve the agreed goals. This would involve exposing the mentee to a range of different learning experiences and situations such as those highlighted below.

- **Mediated:** Learning events that are directed by another person (e.g., topic-specific seminars, formal courses and workshops).

- **Unmediated:** Situations where learners take the initiative and are responsible for choosing what to learn (e.g., reading an article, listening to a podcast, engaging in a webinar, talking to colleagues and observing more experienced coaches).

- **Internal:** Reconsidering existing ideas and concepts through repeated cycles of reflection (e.g., documenting and exploration personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences).

Step 4: Determine what support mechanisms are required

Here, mentees and mentors need to consider what type of support is required to ensure the developmental activities are completed on time and that the SMART goals are achieved. This could include engaging with topic-specific experts, obtaining monetary support, receiving advice from other mentors, accessing additional resources, and having discussions with more experienced coaches.

Step 5: Establish timelines

Mentees and mentors need to agree on realistic timelines. Although timelines will differ according to the types of activities being pursued, it might also be possible to establish an overall deadline for the competition of all tasks. For instance, a mentor and mentee may agree to spend twelve months trying to significantly improve the mentee's delivery skills, and dedicate three months to each individual goal, as shown in the example below.

Identified area of improvement: Delivery skills.

Proposed timeframe: Skills will be developed over a 12-month period.

SMART goals: Communicating more effectively (3-months).
Encouraging and motivating others (3-months).
Adapting practices to best suit particular situations (3-months).
Managing complex situations (3-months).

Having such milestones in place might provide a stimulus for the completion of all development activities, while also facilitating the monitoring of progress.

Step 6: Criteria for Success

Attention here should be focused on the methods and criteria that will be used to determine the extent to which an identified area of focus has improved. For example, measuring the rate of improvement of delivery skills could be achieved qualitatively through expert observation of training sessions and small group discussions with the mentees' athletes. Alternatively, or in addition, questionnaires, surveys and evaluation forms could be employed to capture quantitative datasets for subsequent analysis.

Example 3: Action plan

Identified area of improvement			
SMART Goal			
Developmental Activities	**Support Mechanisms**	**Timelines**	**Success Criteria**
SMART Goal			
Developmental Activities	**Support Mechanisms**	**Timelines**	**Success Criteria**
SMART Goal			
Developmental Activities	**Support Mechanisms**	**Timelines**	**Success Criteria**

Example 4: Mentee self-assessment form

This form has been prepared to help determine if a mentee might benefit from a mentoring relationship and assist matching with a suitable mentor.

1. What do I want to achieve?

2. What could support the achievement of these goals?
   -
   -
   -
   -

3. What could prevent me from achieving these goals?
   -
   -
   -
   -

4. Do the demands of my work and personal life allow me to devote the time needed to execute an action plan that supports attainment of my goals?

5. Am I prepared and willing to take substantial responsibility for my own learning and development?

6. Am I willing to monitor my own progress and engage in regular self-reflective activities?

7. Am I prepared to openly share any concerns or issues with a mentor?

8. Am I comfortable requesting and receiving feedback and constructive criticism?

9. Am I prepared to take the initiative for managing a relationship with a potential mentor and willing to schedule meetings, prepare agendas, provide regular updates and initiate communications?

10. To achieve my goals, I believe I would benefit from working with a mentor with the following expertise:

-
-
-
-

11. In addition to the above, I would prefer to work with a mentor who had the following qualities.

-
-
-
-
-

Key Point: When searching for potential mentors, mentees should focus on people who are most likely to meet their needs and preferences based on the above information.

Potential Mentor	How well does the person meet my mentoring needs and preferences?				
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

(Scale: 1 = lowest rating. 5 = highest rating).

Example 5: Mentor readiness assessment form

This form has been prepared to help determine if a person is ready to become a mentor, and to assist with the match-making process.

1. **1.** Am I ready to commit to a mentoring relationship?

2. **2.** What do I want to achieve from the relationship?
   -
   -
   -
   -

3. **3.** What skills do I have that could support a mentee's personal and professional development?
   -
   -
   -
   -

4. **4.** Do I have enough time to devote to a relationship?

5. **5.** Am I prepared and willing to assist with the development of mentee goals and action plans?

6. **6.** Am I prepared and willing to encourage continual learning and reflective practice?

7. **7.** Am I comfortable requesting and receiving feedback?

8. Am I prepared to attend regular meetings?

9. Do I have the capacity to respond to all requests in a timely manner?

10. Am I prepared to be a sounding board for new ideas and practices?

11. Am I prepared to provide support when the going gets tough?

12. Based on the above, I believe I could support a mentee who has the following needs and preferences:

-
-
-
-

13. In addition to the above, I would prefer to work with a mentee who wants to develop the following qualities.

-
-
-
-

Example 6: Best practices guidelines

Below are some brief checklists that can be used to aid development of successful mentoring relationships.

Best practices for mentees

Things to do	Things to avoid
Take responsibility for the relationship.	Negativity.
Acknowledge how busy your mentor is.	Using words others might find offensive.
Strive to be on time for appointments.	Waiting for your mentor to schedule your meetings and catchups.
Be aware of any cultural and/or religious protocols.	Attending meetings and catchups unprepared.
Be receptive to feedback.	Being unreceptive to suggestions.
Be prepared to tactfully and respectfully disagree with your mentor.	Discussing and/or sharing confidential information.
Follow through on commitments.	
Admit mistakes and take responsibility for them.	
Have goals in mind.	
Stay focused on your goals.	
Discuss whether your mentor's suggestions were helpful and what effects they have had on your development.	
Always thank your mentor.	

Best practices for mentors

Things to do	Things to avoid
Ask your mentee to have an agenda of questions or discussion topics for meetings and catchups.	Taking over conversations and discussions.
Assist with the development of action plans and realistic goals.	Providing commercial services or advice which normally require fees.
Be positive.	Using words that others might find offensive.
Be aware of any cultural and/or religious protocols.	Trying to resolve your mentee's problems yourself instead of encouraging them to discover the solutions by themselves.
Encourage developmental opportunities.	Allowing the focus of conversations to drift off topic.
Promote the concept of continuous learning.	Discussing and/or sharing confidential information.
Bring focus to relevant topics if/when conversations stray off topic.	
Share pertinent work experiences.	
Give positive reinforcement whenever your mentee does something well.	
Serve as a sounding board for new ideas.	
Set SMART goals with your mentee.	
Always thank and encourage mentee.	

Example 7: Essential relationship skills

Mentoring literature shows that successful outcomes are usually achieved in relationships when mentors and mentees employ certain skills. Research also shows that the following skills and qualities can be developed over time:

Key skills

- Listening actively.

- Building trust.

- Identifying goals and building capacity.

- Encouraging and Inspiring.

Listening actively

Listening actively is perhaps the most basic skill people will use throughout their relationships. It not only helps establish rapport but assists in creating positive, non-judgemental and accepting environments. Examples of good practice include:

- Showing interest in what the other person is saying, and reflecting back important aspects of what has been said to show that you have understood the message.

- Using body language and positive gestures to show you are paying attention to what the person is saying.

- Reducing any background noise and limiting interruptions during video calls, as this helps to demonstrate that the relational partner has a person's undivided attention.

Building trust

Trust is a precious commodity that is built over time. Research indicates that it is fostered when:

- Conversations and other communications remain confidential.

- Scheduled meetings and appointments are honoured.

- Interactions are mutually beneficial and highly productive.

- Both parties show interest in the dialogue.

- Both parties demonstrate supportive behaviours and honesty.

Determining goals and building capacity

Each person in a relationship brings their own unique experiences, skills and attributes. Sharing these, when appropriate, is likely to benefit the other person involved in the relationship and can often aid the identification and achievement of new personal goals. Ways in which relationship partners can help to develop another person's capacity for learning and assist with goal realisation include:

- Assisting with finding new resources. This could include, people, books, research articles, online tools, podcasts, YouTube clips and web-based information.

- Sharing knowledge and skills by providing examples, demonstrating processes and asking thought-provoking questions.

- Helping the person gain a broader perspective of their role and responsibilities.

- Discussing and interpreting personal experiences that have led to positive outcomes and/or the achievement of an objective.

Encouraging and Inspiring

According to the mentorship literature, giving encouragement is the skill most valued by mentoring partners. While there are many ways in which this can be done, those listed below are the most cited.

- Always acknowledge accomplishments.

- Constantly communicate and reinforce belief in a person's ability to grow and reach their goals.

- Acknowledge personal challenges and, whenever possible, provide support and encouragement.

- Always respond to frustrations with kind words - just knowing that someone else has been in a similar situation can be of tremendous help.

- Share visions of successful leaders.

- Describe personal challenging experiences that have been encountered and overcome.

- Introduce each other to colleagues and friends who could become additional useful contacts or inspiring models.

Example 8: Meeting format

The following is based on personal experiences and is intended to assist with the running of productive meetings.

1. Start with an exchange of pleasantries.

2. Summarise how things have gone since the last meeting, highlighting any outcomes or setbacks.

3. Ask mentor for his/her opinion, advice and/or feedback on the above points.

4. If required, seek clarity before moving onto the next phase.

5. Clarify the topics for today's meeting and the type of support that might be required to address them.

6. Explore topics with the mentor and be open to new ideas and suggestions.

7. Summarise any agreed actions that have to be undertaken before the next meeting.

8. Check with the mentor to ensure the meeting has been productive and record anything that would enhance future meetings.

9. Confirm the date and venue for the next meeting.

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