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THE WORDS WE USE...

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In the world of helping people, training and development, words are often used to describe what someone does. Unfortunately, these words are vague, and everybody uses them with a different understanding of what they mean. Sometimes the one word is used to define what the other word means. This is the collective work of a research team who tried, in a very humble way to define and demarcate the meaning of a small selection of words often used without a clear and exact definition of what is intended with the specific word. Dictionaries help a lot. The challenge is that dictionaries are not consistent. These are some of the most commonly used words and what the team found to be the best user definition of each.

How words arrive at meaning something in a sentence

If you think about it, human language is quite strange. We produce sounds with our lips, teeth, tongue, throat and nasal passages. These sounds form patterns upon patterns and we arrive at a "meaning" within a community of speakers. These meanings aren't fixed! The meaning of words is mostly dependent on the context in a sentence. But the meanings of words also change over time. Sometimes the original meaning of a word could become completely disconnected with how it is used in a current context. For example, did you know that the original meaning of the word "pedigree" originally meant "a crane's foot." There's a long history behind this, but the point illustrates how far meanings can drift through time.

The history of the meaning of words is a specific science known as Etymology. How a word was used in history can be very interesting, and has a lot of value if we study texts and literature. However, for finding definitions for modern word usages, etymology does not always help and can actually end up confusing us even more. It is also important to be reminded of the fact that words do not have meaning in itself. It takes on meaning within a linguistic context. Luckily, most words tend to retain a central or "core" meaning that dominates the way words are used.
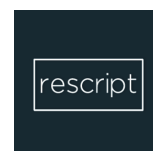
With this in mind, the intention here is to attach a cleaner set of predominant meanings to words that are often used without a dominant and clear indication of what the primary scope of content is when these words are used. Simply put, we are placing "clean meaning" where there frequently isn't.

1. **Terms that have a dominant process-driven implication**

Process-driven words imply that the relationship wants to arrive at an outcome. Someone wants to move from a present state to another (by being healed, having a problem solved, developing some aspect, etc.) Although knowledge transfer usually does play a role, it is not the main focus of the relationship.

1.1 Mentor

A person who gives a younger or less experienced person help and advice over a period of time.
To support and advise someone with less experience to help them develop in their life ventures.
This word most likely originated from a spiritual growth idea.

The core idea:

A mentor is usually in a position of greater access to:

1. Social and business connections.
2. Knowledge (of a particular topic, or in general).
3. Expertise, experience and tacit knowledge.
4. Insights and opportunities.
5. Behavioural patterns that the mentee wants to emulate.

What does this look like in practice?

A mentor will typically say (In a kind, empathetic, loyal and non-judgmental way):

1. "I will walk with and guide you"
2. "I know someone that will help you…"
3. "I my experience, be careful of this and this."
4. "This worked for me, try it, maybe it will work for you as well!"
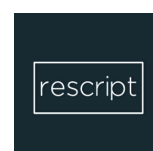
5. "The industry has shifted. This worked for me, but I seriously think you should consider another route."

The person receiving this type of help is frequently called a "mentee." However, this term is quite meaningless and basically just describes that they are on the receiving end of mentorship.

1.2 Therapist

 "Medical treatment of disease," from Modern Latin therapia, from Greek therapeia "curing, healing, service done to the sick" from therapeuein "to cure, treat medically", literally "attend, do service, take care of" (Think of physio-therapist, speech therapist, occupational therapist etc). Therapy is a form of human help where the therapist remains the specialist in the relationship. The idea is not to educate the patient or client (at least, to the level of the specialist), but to solve a problem(s) which the patient or client cannot solve for themselves. This is most likely a word that originated in the medical world.

The core idea:

The therapist is usually in a position of greater access to and mastery of:
1. Highly specialized knowledge that is usually regulated by governing bodies and long years of training and study.
2. Highly specialized techniques, substances and/or technology.
3. These knowledge and techniques are applied to cure, heal or ameliorate symptoms and clinical conditions.

What does this look like in practice?

The therapist will frequently say:
1. "You have this syndrome, or diagnosis, or this happened in this stage of development…"
2. "Do these exercises 3 times a day, and contact me in 3 days so we can check your progress."
3. "Stop eating meat, or your digestion will get worse."
4. "Your diagnosis is this, and this is what you can expect to happen."
5. "Take these pills 3 times a day."

The person receiving this type of help is a "patient" who cannot immediately help themselves.
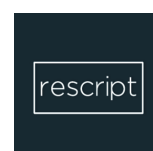
1.3 Counsellor

Someone who is trained to listen to people and give them specialist and 'objective'

advice about their problems as they – the client – understand and describe the troubles that they

have to deal with. This is likely a legal word. The legal counsel that provides counseling service to

clients. Implementation is usually left to the client.

The core idea:

The counsellor is usually someone:

1. Who will initialize dialogue ("talk therapy") with their client or patient.
2. This dialogue is conducted by the counsellor with particular models, theory, and methods in mind. (This knowledge is usually also regulated by governing bodies).
3. They then explore the problem from this new perspective to arrive at other solutions for the person's problem.
4. Some counsellors can also diagnose particular "illnesses" (pathologies) in order to "help" the client (who is now a patient) better.

What does this look like in practice?

The counsellor will frequently say:

1. "You *may* have, or fall on the spectrum, for this pathology."
2. "It sounds like you have a dysfunctional X, do this to cope better."
3. "You sound like you have a warped relationship with your X, would you like to explore that?"
4. "Tell me about your childhood."
5. "You might have suppressed these memories in order to cope with the trauma."

The person receiving this type of help is frequently a "patient" who cannot immediately help

themselves, or a "client" if there is a higher degree of self-efficacy. The distinction is mostly unclear.
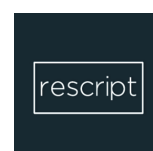
1.4 Coach:

Someone who informs, guides, shows and directs clients to reach their optimal potential. Coaching is notoriously difficult to define in research circles and there is frequently an overlap between what is meant by coaching, counselling, and mentorship. However, we believe that a cleaner definition is possible. Coaching is most likely a world-of-sport word that is now widely used to describe the work done to help individuals and teams to reach their full potential. Currently, coaching is not as heavily regulated as most other forms of help.

The core idea:

The coach is usually someone:

1. Who will initialize a coaching relationship with a client that consists of (some) dialogue, identification and clarifying of a goal, or at least a roadmap.
2. This goal/roadmap orientation implies an *immediate* action bias for the coach-client relationship.
3. The coach does not have to rely on *content* presented by the client as much as other forms of help since coaching is process-and-goal-driven, and not diagnosis driven.
4. The coach's role is not to diagnose, but to collaborate, achieve action clarity, provide support and accountability.

What does this look like in practice?

The coach will frequently say:

1. "I know the game, I will work with you and guide you to perform optimally."
2. "Let's break this down into manageable chunks to start with."
3. "It sounds like this approach will benefit you in moving forward."
4. "How can we redesign what's not working?"
5. "What are some strengths that we can leverage to get you closer to your goal?"

The person receiving this type of help is frequently a "client" since there is a higher degree of self-efficacy implicit in the approach (although not always). "Coachee" is also a frequent word, but like "mentee" is basically meaningless besides indicating that the person is receiving coaching.
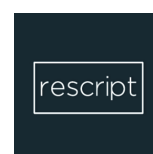
1.5 Consultant

The word was originally only a verb - consulting. Later it became an adjective - consultation rooms. Then it became a noun - consultant. Most widely used for an expert giving advice (eg. a medical practitioner). More recently, it has become, any specialist who gives advice (eg. a sales consultant, skin product consultant). The key difference between a consultant and an advisor is the fact that the consultant will engage the problem or challenge. The advisor will only work with it theoretically. Or on an information basis. Most probably it started in history as a medical word. Now it is used very widely for the work specialists do to research and inform clients about the challenges they face and how to best overcome them.
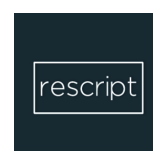
The core idea:

1. Very much like the advisor, has specialist knowledge (or access to knowledge)
2. Unlike the advisor, the consultant is involved in the problem-solving process, design, innovation and possibly implementation of solutions.
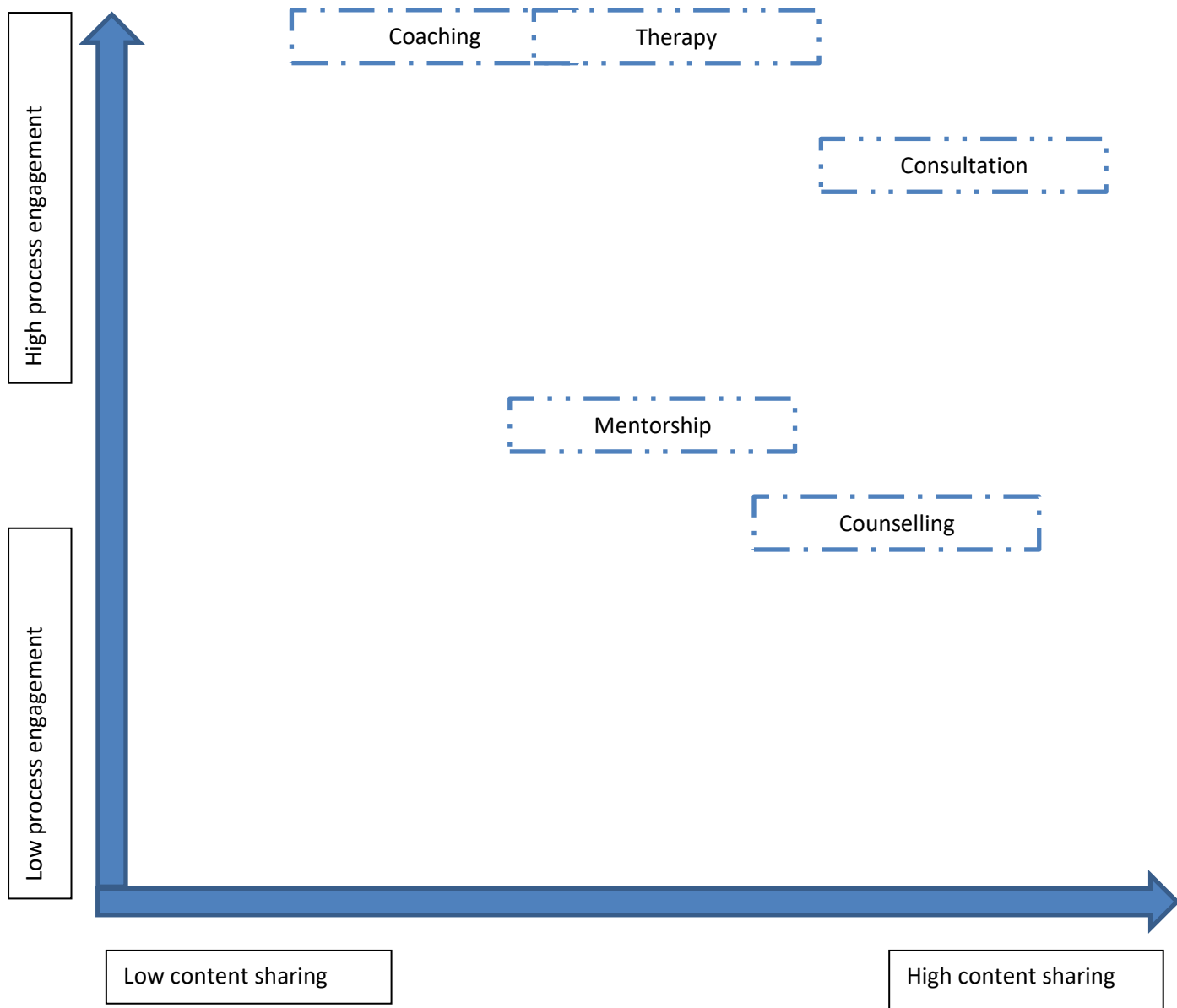3. Once the problem is solved, the consultant moves on to another client or problem.

What does this look like in practice?

The consultant will frequently say:
1. "We've collected data on your process, and we suggest the following action plan."
2. "Your behavioural audit says this. I can break this down into easy to follow steps."
3. "I can design a strategy for you going forward."
4. "We are running into implementation problems with Y, but the rest of the project is on schedule."
5. "I have a mobilization fee and the report has an up-front payable amount. After that, I bill per hour or per outcome."

The above can visualy be presented as follows:

Coaching

Therapy

Consultation

Mentorship

Counselling

High process engagement

Low process engagement

Low content sharing

High content sharing

2. Terms that have a dominant information-transfer implication

The "knowledge transfer" words we use like teacher, instructor and lecturer, (also guru, expert, etc.) carry an idea that the person doing the teaching has knowledge that the student does not have. An impartation of knowledge occurs. The primary purpose of this relationship is to *transfer knowledge*. Although a process can be involved, arriving at an outcome is not so prominent.

Advisor

Someone who gives advice. They are specialists about the problems that needs to be solved – for instance, financial advisor, legal advisor, political advisor. "Advisor" is most probably a political word in origin.

**The core idea:**

The advisor is usually someone:

1. Highly specialized knowledge that is usually regulated by governing bodies and some formal study route is associated with advising professionally.
2. The advisor will frequently divulge industry standards, models, and best practice.
3. The advisor can point out risks, opportunities and help the client make the best *choices.*
4. The advisor's role is to provide structure for the best decisions in his field, but not to actively support the client in execution.

What does this look like in practice?

The advisor will frequently say:

1. "I have specialized in this field and I'm and expert. Let me give you some good advice."
2. "You run the following risks in 5 years' time."
3. "Your growth is not optimal. Take the following steps to increase growth."
4. "It would be best to do X in order to avoid Y"
5. "There is a new product out which gives you more of this."

Advisors have clients (or politicians).
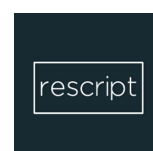
Teacher

This is someone who expands the knowledge of a student. Although teachers (professional educators) are trained that education is, in a sense, wider than just information transfer, in practice it is predominantly an information transfer task. The teacher uses information resources to broaden the knowledge faculties of the student/learner. The word has been used in the school system and parents teaching their children could also be referred to as teachers. The meaning of an adult transferring knowledge to children in a school context dominates the current use of the word. It is a primary and secondary school dominated word and originally meant, "I show you something you don't know."

Tutor

Teacher (see above) to a single pupil/learner/student. It could also refer to someone who supports the learning activity of a small group. Generally, a tutor does not receive the training of a teacher, and helps the learning process and outcomes rather than transfer knowledge. Originally a military word from Latin meaning "to watch over/guard."

Instructor

Tells people how and what to do. Instructors do not discuss, negotiate or think with their clients about possible solutions. Instructors tell people what to do and exactly how to do it. There is no room to argue or question what an instructor teaches and tells you. Flying instructors, self-defence instructors, karate instructors, military parade instructors, medical emergency instructors are all examples of this function. It is about learning to adhere and knowledge necessary for obedience. Functions predominantly as a military word meaning "to teach and discipline."

Lecturer

This is the same as teacher but it refers to more senior students and learners. Post high school institutions like colleges and universities have lecturers. They do what teachers do in the primary and secondary schools. Ironically, a lecturer was originally "the one who can read (in the class or community)."

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