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Exploring the Impact of Coaching in Higher Education

Stimulus paper

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Stimulus Paper Series

The Leadership Foundation is pleased to present this latest series of 'Stimulus Papers' which are intended to inform thinking, choices and decisions at institutional and system levels in UK higher education. The themes addressed fall into different clusters including higher education leadership, business models for higher education, leading the student experience and leadership and equality of opportunity in higher education. We hope these papers will stimulate discussion and debate, as well as giving an insight into some of the new and emerging issues relevant to higher education today.

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Dr Colleen Harding
Project leader

The project team:

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- Lisa Sofianos, director of Robin Ryde Consulting and Leadership Foundation associate
- Meriel Box, head of staff development, Liverpool John Moores University

Executive summary

The growing use of coaching to support the development of staff in universities requires a significant investment of time and money, and yet the practice of evaluating the impact of that investment appears to be spasmodic. The sector does not appear to have fully explored the value of coaching, or the tools available to evaluate it. This stimulus paper aims to fill that gap. We begin by presenting a snapshot of the ways in which coaching is used, valued and evaluated in higher education and have used these findings to develop a series of provocations to provide thought leadership and debate within the sector, specifically on how coaching is evaluated.

Background

Acknowledging the central role of leadership in innovating change, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (Leadership Foundation), together with partners, initiated an Innovation and Transformation Fund to progress key themes of the Diamond Review on efficiency in higher education. The Leadership Foundation commissioned this stimulus paper in order to explore the investment that higher education is making in its workforce through coaching.

Aim

Our aim is to:

(i) Help to address the evidence gap on how coaching is used and valued in organisations, most specifically in higher education.

(ii) Provoke thought leadership and debate within the sector that relates to the value of coaching; how it measures its impact; and to what extent coaching has the potential to drive, or support, improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in higher education.

Our purpose is to prompt institutions to consider what questions they need to ask when initiating, developing, implementing and evaluating coaching interventions, set against the wider policy/efficiency landscape, to ensure coaching effectiveness for individuals and organisations.

Method

We started with the following questions:

(i) How is coaching being used across the UK higher education sector?

(ii) How is coaching valued in higher education?

(iii) How do we know if coaching works?

(iv) How is coaching impact evaluated in organisations?

(v) How is coaching impact evaluated in higher education?

In order to begin to answer these questions we undertook the following:

(i) A review of the literature on the impact of coaching.

(ii) A special interest group with organisational development practitioners to inform a survey designed to capture current practice across the sector.

(iii) A survey of staff and organisational developers to provide information on the extent and practice of coaching and evaluation across the sector.

(iv) Six semi-structured interviews with institutions with a developed approach to coaching in order to develop some case studies.

This design had the advantage of providing an overview of coaching impact in organisations and a snapshot of practice in higher education.

Summary of findings

The main findings from our explorations relate to how coaching is defined and used in higher education and how the value is evaluated. We include who receives coaching, situations when coaching is offered and how it is used for capacity building. We highlight how coaching is organised and note how a number of institutions are working towards developing coaching cultures for both staff and students. We look at the tangible and intangible benefits of coaching for higher education and explore a number of ways to evaluate coaching in order to realise its value.

Through our reflections on the findings in this paper we have identified confusion/uncertainty about how to measure coaching; a disconnect between what is valued and what is measured in coaching; a sense that there was a need to make a justification for coaching that was stronger than for other forms of development; that cost is a strong determinant of the need to understand the impact; that some people respond better to coaching than others; that some are not ready for coaching; that coaching is not always offered to the right people; that some organisations may not be ready for coaching; and that there is a strong assumption that coaching does have a benefit, even if it is not clear what that is, or it is not what was first anticipated.

These reflections helped to inform provocations on the ways in which coaching impact could be evaluated in higher education. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which coaching is valued; how its impact is "measured"; and to the extent to which coaching has the potential to drive efficiency and effectiveness in higher education.

The provocations are designed in particular to challenge our thinking on:

- How we define coaching and its value.
- How the various stakeholders could work more effectively to create a "value chain" for coaching.
- An opportunity to examine whether we are satisfied with not evaluating coaching and not knowing its true worth, balanced with the high cost of evaluating it more effectively.
- Questioning whether, if we did evaluate it effectively and identified that it did not bring value for money but other benefits, would that satisfy our quest to demonstrate its value in other ways.

Each of the provocations highlights some initial recommendations for consideration – 23 in total. Although these arise from a process of challenge they are intended as practical and realistic steps that might be taken by the sector to advance the work in this area. The recommendations that we would offer as higher priority are set out below and have been suggested as a starting point based on our opinion of their importance and/or distinctiveness. However, readers may prefer to select from the other recommendations in the body of the report as a starting point if they are more relevant to their context.

We hope we are providing a resource for university leaders, commissioners of coaching, coaches, coachees and researchers to prompt institutions to consider what questions they need to ask when initiating, developing, implementing and evaluating coaching interventions, set against the wider policy/efficiency landscape, to ensure coaching effectiveness for individuals and organisation.

Key recommendations

a) The coaching profession, those that practice coaching, and the higher education learning and development community should take serious steps to demystify the discipline, and to take responsibility for the shape that the reputation of coaching has been taking. It should seek to communicate the clear benefits of coaching on a personal, organisational and societal level in order that potential commissioners and coachees can make confident and informed choices.

b) There should be greater explicitness in the evaluation process regarding the links in the value production chain that will be subject to examination, and greater explicitness about who should be the arbiter(s) of value.

c) Work should be undertaken to establish the full costs of coaching - to include the external costs of coaches or developing internal coaches, the cost of coachees using their time in this way, the cost of commissioning, evaluation and so on. With this information it will be possible to make much clearer and better informed decisions about value for money.

d) An agreed strategy should be developed by the sector to guide the evaluation of coaching. This strategy should make clear and explicit the trade-offs between rigour and the level of investment involved.

e) Work should be undertaken to develop evaluative frameworks that draw from the best of the practices found in the field of social sciences, such as ethnographic methods.

f) In light of the methodological demands of undertaking robust and reliable evaluation of coaching, a review should be undertaken of the capacity and capabilities of those (typically those working within human resources, organisational development and learning and development) who undertake evaluation – specifically if they are to adopt deeper, more qualitative approaches to evaluation.

g) The sector should develop a view on the importance of coaching, as compared to other similarly costing interventions, and with this in mind perhaps develop decision-making models that will aid investment decisions.

1. Introduction

Within higher education we have seen real growth in the use of, and interest in, the practice of coaching. For example, Gordon and Whitchurch (2007) identified 10 years ago that as academic staff are being recruited from a wider variety of backgrounds, such as mid-career professionals recruited to add credibility to professionally based programmes, so this has brought the need for a more flexible and tailored response to academic staff development, such as through more formal coaching and mentoring. More recently Vitae (2012) undertook a review of coaching where 14 out of 21 institutions who responded were offering coaching; in particular they report an increase in one to one coaching for researchers and postgraduate researchers, the majority being offered by internal coaches. Such is the growth of coaching, and interest in coaching within the sector, that the Leadership Foundation focused on coaching at its summer retreat in 2015.

During 2015 we also noticed that the debate and discussion on the practice of coaching had increased in pace and energy. A question posed on the Staff Development Forum (SDF) Jiscmail electronic mailing list, Mailbase, in January generated an offer to host a small event on coaching in higher education at Bournemouth University. Interest grew and it resulted in an event in May attended by 43 participants from 27 institutions from across the whole of the UK and has led to the development of the South West and South East Coaching Forum. A follow up event at Imperial College in September 2016 attracted 60 participants from 37 higher education institutions. Similarly the North West and North East Coaching Forum for higher education has been running since 2011 with participation increasing from around 25-30 participants at each event to 40-50 participants. The most recent event in Manchester in April 2016 attracted 45 participants from 21 institutions across the UK.

We point to this as clear evidence that higher education institutions are making a growing and significant investment in the provision of coaching to their staff. During a time when the spotlight is on efficiency and effectiveness in higher education (Universities UK, 2015; 2011), it becomes appropriate to ask how the provision of targeted coaching supports improvements in efficiency or effectiveness of the higher education workforce. However, there remains limited evidence of whether, or how, coaching is valued, and how the impact of coaching is measured in higher education. Our literature review highlighted one notable exception where the tangible and intangible benefits of a coaching programme at Newcastle University and the return on investment have been well documented (Howlett, Morson and Stevenson, 2009).

The widespread practice of coaching and its power to change mindsets and generate action within the corporate world has been noted by McGurk (CIPD, 2012, p. 2) who highlights that the value of coaching is often compromised by the weakness in its evaluation both on individual and organisational performance. McGurk challenges practitioners to take a more critical approach to coaching evaluation, rather than relying on the goodwill that exists around it. In the context of the higher education sector we take up the challenge in this paper and build on the case studies presented at the event in Bournemouth in 2015, which are now published on the Leadership Foundation website (LFHE, 2016)[1]. The aim of this stimulus paper is to explore the evidence gap on how coaching is used and valued in organisations, and most particularly in higher education, with the further aim of provoking thought leadership and debate within the sector, specifically on how coaching is valued and evaluated. Our purpose is to prompt institutions to consider what questions they need to ask when initiating, developing, implementing and evaluating coaching interventions, set against the wider policy/efficiency landscape, to ensure coaching effectiveness for individuals and organisations.

This work maps onto the workforce change strand of the Innovation and Transformation Fund Phase 2[2] which explores trends and developments in human resources (HR) and organisational development (OD) within higher education. In particular the Leadership Foundation funded this stimulus paper to explore the investment that higher education is making in its workforce through coaching and so we begin with the following questions:

- How is coaching being used across the UK higher education sector?
- How is coaching valued in higher education?
- How do we know if coaching works?
- How is coaching impact evaluated in organisations?
- How is coaching impact evaluated in higher education?
- Can we provide a provocation for higher education that relates to the value of coaching; how it measures its impact; and to what extent coaching has the potential to drive, or support, improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in higher education?

As practitioners and commissioners of coaching, we need to be upfront about our own perspectives from the start. We believe that coaching is a good intervention for both individuals and organisations and in approaching this stimulus paper we wish to celebrate the ways in which coaching is used within organisations, and within higher education in particular. However, true to our aim, we wish to provoke a more critical approach to the way in which coaching is evaluated within the sector, so that institutions are able to make the best possible case for developing and valuing coaching provision as efficiently and as effectively as possible. We see this as vital to meeting the increased need to demonstrate efficiency and cost-value within the sector.

In Chapter 2 we provide an overview of our methodological approach to this paper. We began the work by undertaking a review of the literature on coaching impact and then conducted a special interest group with organisational development (OD) practitioners in order to inform a survey designed to capture current practice across the sector. We followed this up with semi-structured interviews with six institutions using coaching in order to develop some more detailed case studies of current practice in the evaluation of coaching. This exploration provided a snapshot of coaching in higher education on which to build our discussion throughout this paper, and to inform a series of provocations for the higher education sector on the ways in which we evaluate the impact of coaching.

In Chapter 3 we present some of the definitions of coaching that resonate with our own experiences, along with some definitions used by the case study institutions. We then move on to explore how coaching is used and organised, before highlighting the ways in which institutions are moving towards the development of coaching cultures. We highlight some early evidence of how the evolution of coaching culture is beginning to bring benefits to staff, students and organisations.

In Chapter 4 we offer some of the ways in which coaching can support both individuals and organisations and then move on to share our findings on the ways in which coaching is valued in higher education. Evidence from the literature, the survey and interviews are then used to highlight what are perceived to be the tangible and intangible benefits of coaching.

In Chapter 5 we discuss the ways in which the value of coaching can be realised. We look at some approaches to evaluation and some models offered by practitioners. We then move on to look at how coaching is evaluated in higher education and some of the ways in which to plan so that evaluation is effective.

1
Published case studies on the Leadership Foundation website
www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/consultancy-2016/teams-and-individuals/coaching/coaching-case-studies.cfm

2
Innovation and Transformation Fund **www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/research-resources/research-hub/itf-projects/index.cfm?utm_source=research&utm_campaign=itf**

In Chapter 6 we present six provocations. These are designed to generate discussion around the theme of coaching evaluation. In particular the aim of the provocations is to stimulate debate, and to drive a greater and shared appreciation of how best to evaluate coaching within higher education in respect of the benefits to both the individual and the organisation. The provocations are designed to stimulate discussion and specifically to introduce a series of challenges in the pursuit of a frank and authentic exploration of the topic. As "insiders" to the process of coaching we must admit to a sense of nervousness about doing so and trust that our readers will receive these stimuli in the spirit in which they are intended.

In the Summary Chapter we revisit the purpose of this paper and provide summary observations on the provocations, which highlight some important difficulties that are inherent to the business of coaching evaluation, prior to summarising the recommendations from each of the provocations. The introduction to, summary of, and the provocations themselves are also presented in total in Appendix 3 in order to provide a stand-alone resource for those who would like to explore them further within their own institutions or networks.

We hope that these stimuli will help higher education institutions to consider what questions they need to ask when initiating, developing, implementing and evaluating coaching interventions and to set these against the wider policy/efficiency landscape, to ensure coaching effectiveness. We identify the following potential beneficiaries of this stimulus paper:

- The higher education sector
- Senior leaders
- The commissioners of coaching – most typically organisational development (OD), learning and development (L&D) or human resources (HR) practitioners
- Coaches
- Coachees
- Other organisations that use coaching
- Researchers

We conclude this introductory section with a series of questions for these respective groups to help them to make the most of this stimulus paper. The questions are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 How to make the most of this stimulus paper

Beneficiaries of the stimulus paper	How it could help	Questions for beneficiaries to ask themselves while reading this paper
The higher education sector	Setting the environment for coaching and coaching impact and sharing good practice. Attracting and developing global talent within and for the UK higher education sector.	How important is it for us to have a sector approach to the ways in which we set up, value and evaluate coaching? What can we learn from this paper that will help us to develop practice within our institutions?
University executives	Identifying the potential value of coaching to individual, team, organisation, society. Prompting ideas on how to set up coaching to ensure that value is achieved. Considering how to know if that value is achieved.	What do we value about the potential impact of coaching? How might coaching help us to achieve our university strategy? How might we use coaching to help individuals and teams achieve their potential? How/where might we use coaching to give our staff a competitive edge? How might we gain most value from three-cornered contracts between coachee, organisation and coach? What is the shift that needs to be made in order to view the outcomes of coaching with the same level of importance as other investments that we make? How can we think more critically about how, or whether, we evaluate the value of coaching?
Senior leaders	Considering how coaching may help to enhance individual or team performance	What is the shift that we need to make at team or individual level that coaching may help us to achieve?

Commissioners of coaching	Ensuring coaching is put in place to enable efficiency and effectiveness for individuals, teams or the organisation. Making decisions around which development intervention to select to achieve the desired objectives. Considering the value of coaching and the extent to which it does, or does not, need to be formally evaluated.	What can we learn from how other organisations use, value and evaluate coaching? What is the purpose of coaching in this context? How likely is it that a series of purposeful, structured and honest coaching sessions between a willing coachee and a skilled and experienced professional coach will deliver some value? How ready are our coaches and our coachees for coaching? What are the expectations and boundaries that need to be made explicit? How can we set up coaching to bring value to the organisation, team and/or the individual? What is the baseline that we will recognise the value against? Which of the tangible and intangible benefits of coaching could provide support to give our people a competitive edge? Who can help to create value from coaching (HR, OD, L&D, line manager, coach, coachee etc)? How will we know if it has been achieved? Given the above, how much are we willing to pay for coaching? Does a series of six coaching sessions with one senior staff member deliver more value than a one-day facilitation with twelve senior staff around a specific organisational issue? And is a shift in self-efficacy or self-confidence as important as, or less important than, achievement of an organisational goal? How do I need to change my evaluation strategy to demonstrate the real value of coaching? Who do I need to explore these questions with in order to ensure value and efficiency from coaching and coaching evaluation?
Coaches	Supporting the "three cornered" expectations of coach, coachee and organisation.	What is the shift that needs to be enabled in order for higher education institutions to recognise and gain the most value from coaching and how can I help? How can I best engage in dialogue regarding expectations for coaching with both individual coachees and with the organisational sponsor? How can I help organisations to set up coaching so that the value can be evaluated effectively and efficiently?
Coachees	Preparing for and being ready for coaching. Helping the organisation to value the impact of coaching.	What can I expect from coaching? Where might coaching support my development? What might coaching help me to achieve? How can I make the most of the opportunity? Which of the benefits of coaching do I want to achieve? What types of evidence will I be willing to share so that others too could benefit from an investment in coaching and which would I want to keep private? What types of question would I be comfortable for the commissioners/evaluator of coaching to ask me? How can I help the organisation to identify the value of coaching?
Other organisations who practice coaching	Reviewing some of the literature on the impact of coaching	What does this stimulus paper add to my understanding of the value of coaching in my own organisation? How might I/we contribute to future research and practice on the impact of coaching?
Researchers	Identifying gaps in the literature and opportunities for further research into coaching in higher education in the UK - and the wider coaching community - seeking to define the benefits of coaching for organisations	What are the gaps in the literature on coaching impact for organisations? For higher education? How do the factors that impact on coaching and the benefits of coaching identified in this paper resonate, or otherwise, with my own research into coaching? Where is the potential for research into coaching within my own discipline area? What opportunities do the provocations provide for future research?
Research funders	Reviewing the (potential) evidence base for the impact of coaching. Considering how the evidence could support and enrich existing funded research if undertaken and supported effectively.	What is the potential impact of coaching for organisations? How can impact be most effectively demonstrated? What is the existing evidence base for coaching impact? Where are the gaps in evidence and how might society/organisations benefit if more evidence existed? How might this evidence support or enrich existing funded research if undertaken and supported effectively?

2. Method

Qualitative research has often been misunderstood and criticised for relying too heavily on observation and interviews and not spending enough time on inquiries that explore the extent to which something is happening (Faulkner, 1982). While a benefit of qualitative research is that it enables ordinary people to describe a phenomenon based in their own context using their own language (Petronic, 2008), quantitative research can measure the extent to which some features are present (Kirk and Miller, 1986). We were inspired by the work of Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, p.5) who advocate a mixed methods approach that allows for collecting, analysing and mixing quantitative and qualitative data to provide a better understanding of research problems than using either approach alone. In order to be able to understand and appreciate participant experiences within their context and to better appreciate whether or not those experiences were shared more widely across the higher education sector, we used a mixed methods approach to develop and conduct our investigation.

The following methods were used:

- A review of the literature on the impact of coaching.
- A special interest group with organisational development practitioners to inform a survey designed to capture current practice across the sector.
- A survey of staff and organisational developers to provide information on the extent and practice of coaching and evaluation across the sector.
- Six semi-structured interviews with institutions with a developed approach to coaching in order to develop some case studies.

This design had the advantage of providing an overview of coaching impact in organisations and a snapshot of practice in higher education. The findings from each of these methods helped to inform a series of "provocations" for the higher education sector designed to stimulate thinking on the ways in which coaching is evaluated. Further details about the methods used are outlined below.

Scope of the literature review

To contextualise this piece of work we reviewed the literature on coaching impact. While evidence-based research into coaching is relatively new, it has been growing since universities and research institutes began to develop coaching as a field of research early in the 21st century (CIPD, 2012). Due to this growth in the coaching profession and a gathering evidence base for its application across a range of professions/activities, the search focused primarily on literature from 2000 to 2016; fortuitously this included 10 meta-analyses of the coaching literature undertaken in the last 11 years. Due to the lack of literature on coaching in higher education, the scope of the review included literature from management and psychology, along with some earlier works from higher education.

The review included a search of books, scholarly databases and journals together with accessible, web-based grey literature from higher education and the professions. As we reviewed the literature we asked questions such as: "how does coaching work?", *"how is coaching evaluated?"* and *"what impact does coaching have?"* The literature that we reviewed enabled us to identify foundation factors that can impact on coaching and how coaching can have impact. The literature is integrated into the discussion throughout the paper, alongside our findings from the data.

It was clear from the literature that the strongest evidence base for coaching reported in the literature relates to academic staff, although the definitions and terminology are sometimes confused. There is a lack of literature on leadership or executive coaching in higher education, or for professional and support staff specifically. The literature on coaching more generally in higher education is growing, but tends to be practitioner based, including some recently published case studies (LFHE, 2016).

A taxonomy of selected literature on the impact of coaching

Throughout this paper we draw attention to a number of reported studies from the literature on coaching. These studies take a variety of stances, such as the view from the coach, coachee, organisational purpose, coaching approach, relationships, process and who is undertaking the coaching. As we reviewed the evidence-based literature we developed a "taxonomy" of coaching and impact. A taxonomy is a way of categorising and ordering information to arrange it within a structure with metadata values.

We structured the taxonomy in two dimensions, similar to a pattern noted in De Haan and Duckworth (2012). The taxonomy reflects findings from both the higher education and wider organisational literature on coaching:

(i) A focus on factors that can impact on the effectiveness of the coaching, such as the environment, coach characteristics and client needs.

(ii) A focus on the impact that coaching had for individuals and organisations, which can be described as both tangible and intangible outcomes of coaching.

As a resource for readers we have included a taxonomy of some of the coaching literature that we reviewed in Appendix 4. This is included to signpost the reader to some of the literature on coaching impact in order that they can explore further the aspects of coaching and impact that most interest them, and this may help to guide their own evaluation practice. However, the taxonomy should be viewed as a sample from the reviewed literature, rather than as a comprehensive picture of the coaching impact literature.

Data collection methods

Special interest group

In order to begin to understand what is happening in the sector in relation to coaching and evaluation, we held a special interest group (SIG) at the Organisational Development in Higher Education Group (ODHEG) in May 2016. Ten individuals from ten different institutions attended the SIG, with one participant also being the convenor of a regional group. This enabled us to gain a clear steer from sector practitioners on what they most wanted to know about the evaluation and impact of coaching; this was useful in helping us to design a survey, develop the case studies and position the stimulus paper.

Survey

We developed and conducted a survey of organisational and staff developers through Jiscmail using the Bristol Online Survey tool. The survey questions (see Appendix 1) were designed to provide information on the extent and practice of coaching and evaluation across the sector. In particular, the survey was designed to explore where coaching is being used; what it is being used for; how institutions know whether coaching is useful and valuable; and if yes, why, and how they evaluate the impact of coaching. Some questions in the survey required respondents to select from a list, and some invited free text responses. The survey attracted 30 respondents. As some respondents chose to reply anonymously it is not possible to know whether or not any of the responses were from the same institution. The results of the survey are presented in graph form in Appendix 2 and referred to according to their figure number within the text in the discussion chapters; where relevant the number of responses for a particular point are inserted in brackets. The free text responses also provided some of the quotes that have been used in the discussion chapters.

Case studies

We followed up the survey by undertaking semi-structured interviews with six individuals from six institutions that appeared to have a fairly well-formed approach to coaching; this enabled us to develop more detailed case studies of the ways in which institutions evaluate the value and impact of coaching. The intention was that the particular learning from the case studies could lead to some more general learning for the sector (Scholz and Tietje, 2002); they also provided an opportunity to bring some of the survey data to life; and helped to inform the provocations.

Five of the six institutions that were selected for interview had presented their experiences of coaching at the Bournemouth coaching event in 2015 and the sixth institution volunteered their institution following the SIG. The participating institutions were Ulster, Leeds Beckett, Liverpool John Moores and Bournemouth Universities and the Universities of Hertfordshire and Westminster. Although the interviews were conducted with individuals, they were given the opportunity to review their case study and to discuss it with their institution for sign off; they also confirmed that their institution could be named in the final publication. Extracts from the case studies have been used to provide quotes in the discussion chapters, or are inserted into shaded boxes close to the relevant text.

Analysing the data

We followed a procedure for concurrent quantitative and qualitative analysis in mixed methods studies similar to the approach outlined by Cresswell and Plano Clark (2007, p.129) and the stages are outlined in Table 2. This approach enabled us to identify the how and why of participant experiences and the extent to which they confirmed each other.

Table 2 Data analysis

Quantitative procedures	Procedures in data analysis	Qualitative procedures for the SIG, survey and interviews
Downloading the survey data from BOS. Converting Likert responses into graphs.	Preparing the data for analysis	Downloading qualitative responses to the survey. Transcribing the SIG and the interviews
Visually inspecting the data. Checking for trends and distributions.	Exploring the data	Reading through the data. Developing mindmaps of the data.
Too few responses for full statistical analysis, so further exploration and comparison between quantitative and qualitative responses in the survey, SIG and interviews.	Analysing the data	Manually coding the data. Grouping codes into themes. Connecting related themes.
Providing results in graphs an extracting figures to support the narrative.	Representing the data analysis	Extracting relevant quotes to represent the codes, themes and connections.
Triangulating data between survey, SIG and interviews.	Validating the data	Sharing high-level findings and provocations at the 2016 SDF Conference in Sheffield, including a workshop (c 20+ participants) to explore three of the provocations in more detail to check that findings related to experience were shared by others.

Developing the provocations

Following the data analysis procedure described above, we synthesised the data from the literature, SIG, surveys and interviews and reflected on it individually. Two of the project partners met on two occasions to compare and combine these reflections, incorporating our own experience of coaching and coaching evaluation in higher education to develop a series of provocations. The aim of these provocations is to stimulate discussion around the theme of coaching evaluation and, specifically, to introduce a series of challenges in the pursuit of a frank and authentic exploration of the topic. In doing so we take a critical inquiry approach, as described by Gray (2004, p. 23):

> *"A meta-process of investigation which questions currently held values and assumptions and challenges conventional social structures … in order to develop new ways of understanding as a guide to effective action….. [this perspective is] not content to interpret the world but also to change it."*

Project partner perspectives

It is appropriate here to note our own position; as we collected and interpreted the data we were conscious of our position as "insider researchers"; with our experiences of working within organisations and the higher education sector and our experiences of coaching. Variously as coaches, coachees and commissioners of coaching, we were aware that our previously held beliefs and assumptions about the impact of coaching could influence the study and its findings. The various methods used to collect the data were helpful in triangulating between the literature, the survey and the interviews to ensure that the findings that we present are a snapshot of "what is" rather than presenting our own views.

Another challenge for us as insider researchers was not to get ahead of the data. In order to surface our own existing assumptions two of the project partners spent some time asking ourselves: "What do we hope to find?" and "What do we expect to find?"

We acknowledged our hope that there would be an acceptance that coaching is valuable and positive and that scientific metrics are not the only way to measure its impact; we hoped that we could discover ways to value coaching through a range of measures and outcomes. We felt that organisations have a more developed sense of psychological spaces than we think that they do and wanted to help develop within the sector a general understanding of the deeper changes that coaching can bring.

We expected that commissioners of coaching are not always 100% clear on the briefing for coaches; we expected that there would be variable practice around measures and impact; we thought that some may be sceptical of coaching; and we expected that across the sector there was not a fully formed idea of when coaching is appropriate. We also expected that the evaluation of coaching value and impact is not well disseminated, and that there may be confusion about who the evaluation is for.

Acknowledging and articulating these factors helped us to pay explicit attention to the ways in which we represent the data in this paper to ensure that it is a fair representation of what we discovered; and we have aimed to minimise any over use of our own perspectives. The combination of our interpretations of the literature, the findings, our acknowledgement of the potential of coaching for higher education, and our realistic appreciation of the ways in which coaching is currently managed and valued contributed to the development of the provocations. This means that, at times, developing the provocations has been uncomfortable for us as coaches and as commissioners of coaching. Nevertheless, we have aimed to develop provocations that provide a "rounded" view of the possibilities for effectively identifying the impact of coaching and we trust, therefore, that our readers will receive the provocations in the spirit in which they have been written.

3. What is coaching and how is it used in higher education?

In this chapter:
Definitions of coaching
How coaching is used in higher education
How coaching is organised
Developing a coaching culture

The growth of coaching in organisations is a global phenomenon (Henley Business School, 2014) and a study of current and intended future coaching practice for 2008-2018 indicates that further growth is planned (American Management Association, 2008). In the introductory chapter we highlighted the volume of higher education institutions engaged with, or interested in, coaching as evidenced by the numbers attending nationwide higher education coaching events in the UK. In addition, one university told us about the growing engagement in coaching within their own university following the introduction of coaching via their external coaching bank:

> *"In the first year the take up from staff given the opportunity for coaching was 43%, in the second year 78% and in the third year it rose to 85%."*

In this chapter we draw on the general and higher education coaching literature together with feedback from the survey and interviews to draw attention to the ways in which coaching is defined and used in higher education. In particular we cover:

- Definitions of coaching
- How coaching is used in higher education
- How coaching is organised
- Developing a coaching culture

Definitions of coaching

Coaching is used to support a number of developmental situations and a variety of approaches are used to suit particular individuals or situations. Approaches used by coaches include psychological, cognitive, behavioural, solution focused and person-centred (Palmer and Whybrow, 2007; Cox, Bachkirova and Clutterbuck, 2010). Coaching is also provided through a variety of channels, which have all been identified as being equally effective, including face to face, electronic or a blended approach (Jones et al, 2016). It is hardly surprising therefore that there are many definitions of coaching and the ones outlined below are just some that resonate with the experiences of the project partners. We have divided them into process, role and outcomes.

Coaching process:

> *"A process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve."*
> *(Parsloe, 1999, p.8)*

> *"Unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance."*
> *(Whitmore, 1996)*

> *"The art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another."*
> *(Downey, 2003)*

Role of the coach:

> *"A coach is a collaborative partner who works with the learner to help them achieve goals, solve problems, learn and develop."*
> *(Caplan, 2003)*

> *"The coach need not be an expert in the coachee's area of learning. The coach need only have experience in facilitating learning and performance enhancement."*
> *(Grant, 2001)*

Outcomes from coaching:

> *"A practical, goal-focused form of personal, one on one learning for busy executives [that] may be used to improve performance or executive behaviour, enhance a career or prevent derailment, and work through organisational issues or change initiatives. Essentially coaches provide executives with feedback they would normally never get about personal performance, career and organisational issues."*
> *(Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck, 1999)*

> *"Coaching [involves] structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders…Coaching is therefore recognised as a powerful vehicle for improving performance , achieving results and optimising personal effectiveness."*
> *(Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterbuck, 2010)*

In looking at these definitions it is important to draw a distinction between mentoring and coaching (CIPD, 2015). Although our focus is on coaching, the terms are sometimes confused in higher education, as we will outline in this paper. A helpful distinction, in our experience, is that of Grant (2001:6-7) who compares coaching and mentoring as follows:

> *"Coaching is a process in which the coach facilitates learning in the coachee. The coach need not be an expert in the coachee's area of learning. The coach need only have expertise in facilitating learning and performance enhancement."*

> *"Mentoring traditionally involves an individual with expert knowledge in a specific domain passing on this knowledge to an individual with less expertise."*

The case study institutions (hereafter referred to collectively as the case institutions), have identified definitions of coaching that suit their institutions. Bournemouth University provided a reference from the literature that it uses to describe coaching as an approach:

> *"Coaching is the predominant style of managing and working together, and where a commitment to grow the organisation is embedded in a parallel commitment to grow the people in the organisation."*
> *(Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2007, p.19)*

The University of Hertfordshire describe how it differentiates between coaching and mentoring when applied to career support, indicating that its distinction between coaching and mentoring is similar to Grant's (2001) above:

> *"Sometimes [development requests] are specifically about career progression. If it is specifically about career in the initial conversation we have with them we explore whether mentoring is what they really want, then we might push back on the coaching side because we are trying to make a distinction between coaching and mentoring."*

Ulster University adapts its definition from Caplan (2003), which particularly describes the role of the coach:

> *"A coach is a collaborative partner who works with the learner to help them achieve goals, solve problems, learn and develop."*
> *Caplan (2003)*

The University of Hertfordshire and Liverpool John Moores University define coaching respectively as:

> *"Coaching offers people a safe space to talk through work related issues, challenges or opportunities that they want to review and talk through with someone neutral."*

> *"An enabler allowing individuals to recognise their situation, articulate what is important to them (and whether this aligns with organisational needs) and what they intend to do going forwards."*

While their definitions differ slightly, what connects them is the spirit of an individually focused and supportive activity with a view to enabling staff within their organisational contexts.

How coaching is used in higher education

Coaching is used to support a variety of people and developmental situations and also for capacity building. Survey and interview respondents explained the variety of ways in which they use coaching (Table 3). However, these practices are not necessarily widespread; some institutions commented, unprompted, on how there were missed opportunities within their institutions to provide coaching for these very people and situations.

Table 3 Developmental situations where coaching is used

People who access coaching	Situations when coaching is offered	Coaching for capacity building
Executives	Embedded as part of development programmes	High potentials
Leaders	Induction, including newly appointed leaders	Team coaching
Academics	Change and transitions	Developing internal coaches
Associate professors	Career support	Leaders developing coaching skills/ approaches
Early career researchers	360 degree feedback	Mentors developing coaching skills
Professional and support staff	Work-life balance	Enhancing good performance
HR business partners	Wellbeing	Improving poor performance
Women in medicine; Aurora participants		City-wide coaching partnership with the NHS and city council
Students: MBA; postgraduate researchers; sports		

All figures referred to are included in Appendix 2. The extent to which coaching is used for some of these people and situations is indicated in Appendix 2, Figure 1 and Figure 2, with the majority using it for leadership (26) and executive development (23), closely followed by professional and support staff (23) and academic staff development (21). Nearly as many use it to support poor performance (14) as good performance (19). This is somewhat of a surprise: when the issue of coaching as a support for remedial or good performance was discussed at the SIG, the majority of institutions were using it to support good performance, and the institution that did use it to support poor performance was actively moving towards using it for good performance. All figures subsequently referred to are to be found in Appendix 2.

How coaching is organised

Twenty-six respondents report that coaching is used as a "stand-alone initiative" (Figure 2), which perhaps relates to the high number of responses in Figure 1 that show that coaching is mostly used for leader and executive development. Figure 5 indicates the number of coaching sessions that are offered; this suggests that coaching is more likely to fit with a structured programme of between one and six sessions, or as aligned to an activity, such as 360 degree feedback, than as rare or isolated sessions. A variety of channels are well used for coaching, including face to face, telephone, Skype and e-coaching and the extent to which these are used by the respondents is reported in Figure 6. This echoes the findings by Jones et al (2016) who also report that there are no identifiable differences in the different channels through which coaching is delivered.

Coaching is commissioned in a variety of ways (Figure 3), indicating that coaching is commissioned more through formal processes, for example paid for from a central or local budget, embedded in development programmes, through HR processes or the line manager, rather than being organised directly by the coachee with an invoice sent to the institution. The majority of respondents indicated (Figure 4) that they used both internal and external coaches, which is similar to a growing debate in the literature on the efficacy of each that reflects both how senior staff prefer to work with an external coach (Ridler, 2013) and how coaching can be more effective when provided by internal coaches (Jones et al, 2016).

Leeds Beckett University is the only UK university that reported a collaborative coaching partnership with other sectors and highlights how the competitive nature of higher education is currently preventing progression to a sector-wide collaborative approach within higher education.

> *"The university participates in a successful city-wide partnership, the Leeds Citywide Coaching Network, with the NHS and Leeds City Council. This is really having an impact in developing senior managers and leaders; as an example a new female professor had a coach, the director of allied health professionals in the NHS Trust, and the feedback was amazing. Regional collaboration with other universities with a view to sharing coaches across institutions is ongoing, however due to the perception that universities are in competition with each other this has not progressed yet."*

Developing a coaching culture

All of the case institutions advocated the use of coaching to develop a coaching culture. Bournemouth University contends that using coaching behaviours such as "effective listening, good questioning, critical thinking, space for reflection and challenge" does not just need to be for dyadic coaching, but can support a "way of being in the organisation" (see also Harding, 2016).

Similarly, at the University of Westminster, coaching is being used successfully to create a coaching culture, where "coaching is the preferred style of leadership and management that supports improving performance, career progression and wellbeing" (see also Kapoutzis, 2016). A postgraduate coaching programme for leaders at the University of Hertfordshire has helped them to grow a pool of internal coaches available to any member of staff, at any grade, who are facing transitions (see also Charlwood and Flinn, 2016). Likewise, the University of Hertfordshire, Ulster University and Leeds Beckett University have introduced coaching in order to develop leaders and managers to encourage a coaching approach; they have extended this to create a pool of coaches as a resource for other leaders and managers in order that more staff can access coaching (see also Ferris and Madden, 2016; Ashton, 2016).

The idea of leaders developing coaching approaches is linked to the concept of creating empowering cultures, with a number of universities sensing that where a coaching style could be a part of "everyday practice" and "university culture", it would have the potential to:

"Become the way of life fully embedded into the culture of self-improvement."

This can support leaders and managers to move from:

"Command and control [to a] coaching, empowerment, development approach."

The evolution of coaching culture is not solely a staff-focused activity. Liverpool John Moores University appears to offer the most comprehensive range of uses for coaching from the six case institutions, which suggests a real potential for developing an institution-wide coaching culture. Coaching opportunities include: coaching on development programmes for a range of staff; for HR business partners; coaching skills for mentors; and they also provide coaching for students, such as postgraduate researchers and sport students.

One survey respondent discussed how coaching has the potential to develop a wider feedback culture for students, commenting:

"To give good quality feedback to students we need to be good at receiving feedback."

The power of coaching as a positive ripple effect has been demonstrated by the establishment of networks for learning and development at Warwick University (Wileman, 2013). Warwick has established a University Coaching Network, open to all staff, to create partnerships outside of existing line management; these are intended to encourage relationships for enhancing performance, learning or development. Not only has the Warwick model enabled staff to develop their own coaching skills, but it has also led to collaborative work, including the Medical School and the Institute of Education co-developing a postgraduate award in coaching and mentoring. However, the challenge of establishing cross-institutional coaching relationships is highlighted by Weston and Graham (2013), and Leeds Beckett University (Ashton, 2016), which nevertheless has been successful in establishing a cross-sector coaching network working with other sectors in the city.

There is a strategic intention at Westminster (Kapoutzis, 2016) and Bournemouth (Harding, 2016) Universities to develop a coaching culture, with existing programmes being a step on the journey to the evolution of such a culture. Conversely, Ulster University (Ferris and Madden, 2009) demonstrates how the evolution of a coaching culture does not need to be a strategic intention as it has the potential to grow from the bottom up. Indeed, De Montfort's evolution of coaching started with just one internal coach role modelling the behaviours that have since been developed by other staff in the organisation, in particular HR partners (Wileman, 2013). Further examples of the evolution of coaching culture are described by Ulster University and the University of Westminster in Box 1.

Box 1 Evolution of coaching culture

Ulster University

After 10 years of embedding a coaching culture we believe we've reached a tipping point, as we have clear evidence, though external evaluation conducted by consultants with a cross section of staff and managers at all levels, that captured evidence showing that coaching is beneficial to individuals and teams and most importantly it is enhancing our organisation.

Additional internal evaluation of coaching engagement reported 86% of staff interviewed confirmed coaching has been beneficial to them and 100% would recommend it to colleagues.

Our line managers practice "corridor coaching" also known as "fast (or agile), coaching" - it's a hybrid adopted from Dr Carole Pemberton's approach and blended with Julie Starr's coaching principles. Our managers have found this very useful in supporting their staff.

Managers have described coaching as "freeing" and a relief to realise they don't need to direct staff all the time or need to know all the answers. Coaching skills are changing the culture in how they lead people and how they engage with staff by using a coaching style of leadership.

A head of school confirmed "the benefit is that I'm a better head I now have a structure and general framework in mind of how to deal with multiple, varied and stressful situations which I think has had a general beneficial effect on the running of the school."

An example of impact in terms of efficiency and effectiveness is a dean who reviewed how their senior team communicated and revised all the committees within their faculty, they introduced thinking time and a more solution-focused rather than problem-focused approach to issues. They also revised how they made decisions within those committees. This was a direct result of team coaching that we provided for the faculty.

University of Westminster

Coaching is being used successfully to create a coaching culture. Coach development has been provided to establish an institution where coaching is the preferred style of leadership and management supports improving performance, career progression and wellbeing. Since the project more academics have requested coaching and more academics have become coaches.

At the organisational level the annual Staff Engagement Survey results report year on year improvements fed back by staff that they are engaging in more open and honest conversations, interactions and relationships with line managers. This is a good indication that the culture is shifting from a directive management style to a more effective coaching leadership style. When we introduced coaching, the perception of many staff tended to be negative, and coaching was regarded as a remedial intervention to address poor performance. A coach was assigned to a head of department who registered a grievance because they perceived it to be a remedial intervention. There has been a significant shift in staff perception, as they now see coaching as strength based and positive, progressive, looking to the future.

Thus it seems that there is diversity in the definitions of coaching and in the ways in which it is used and organised in higher education, with varied intent and benefits in respect of developing coaching culture. The variation across the literature, the 30 survey respondents and the six case study institutions suggests that there is no "right" way to facilitate coaching and signposts the benefits of a situational approach for coaching. In the next chapter we move on to explore further the benefits of coaching for higher education.

4. The benefits of coaching in higher education

In this chapter:
The value of coaching for both individuals and organisations
How coaching is valued in higher education
Tangible benefits of coaching
Intangible benefits of coaching
Evolution of coaching culture

When organisations give consideration to the value of development interventions they often discuss the importance of the return on investment (ROI). However, our investigations indicate that it is not a widely held or common practice to calculate the ROI in higher education when valuing, or evaluating, coaching interventions. Indeed, the value of coaching has been described in a number of ways. In this chapter we look first at the value of coaching for both individuals and organisations and then present our findings from the literature, survey and interviews on the following:

- How coaching is valued in higher education
- Tangible benefits of coaching
- Intangible benefits of coaching
- Evolution of coaching culture

The value of coaching for both individuals and organisations

A return on investment methodology advocated by Phillips and Phillips (2007a; 2007b) and Phillips, Phillips and Edwards (2012) has been used by "1000s of organisations" and they have shown how ROI is appropriate for improving performance. While acknowledging that money may be the ultimate report of value, they demonstrate how value is also "in the eye of the beholder". They argue that the method used to describe the value of coaching and development must therefore also show the value as perceived by all stakeholders; this would need to reflect their varied definitions of value, and may include organisational, spiritual, personal and social values, which may be different for individuals and organisations.

Research conducted by the CIPD (2009) with nearly 600 respondents has demonstrated that coaching can be used to support both individual learning and improvements in performance for organisations. These benefits have also been echoed in meta-analyses undertaken by Theeboom et al (2013) and Jones et al (2016). The Institute for Leadership and Management (ILM, 2011) reported that 95% of 250 large UK organisations surveyed believed that coaching benefited the organisation and 96% believed that it benefited the individual. A broad range of specific benefits were identified including improvements in communication and interpersonal skills, leadership and management, conflict resolution, personal confidence, attitudes, motivation and management performance, as well as preparation for a new role or promotion.

One instrument sometimes used for development is multisource feedback (also commonly known as 360 degree feedback) and some have explored its use as an indicator of coaching effectiveness (Jones et al, 2016; De Haan and Duckworth, 2012; Nieminen et al, 2013; Cunningham and McNally, 2003). The study of a leadership programme that included coaching by Nieminen et al (2013) also used a control group. Results showed that those who received coaching and those in the control group both improved, however only those managers who were coached improved according to self-ratings.

O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013) discuss how coaching evaluation often takes a linear model and assumes that change in the leader has a uniform effect on others. They argue how this does not take into account the complexity of organisations and have used Complex Adaptive System Theory to consider organisational change and the wellbeing of people working within those systems. Their research used wellbeing measures and social network analysis on the degree and quality of interactions for those who received coaching and those with whom they interact. They employed individual and multi-source feedback with a control group and for pre- and post-evaluation periods. From this study they observed that those who received coaching experienced a significant increase in goal attainment, transformational leadership and psychological wellbeing. However, an unexpected decline in the perceived quality of interaction with those who were coached was revealed. They contend that it was because managers were being supported through difficult challenges that they were taking a more intentional and deliberate approach to managing change, and that this may have been the reason for their reports taking a more negative view. Nevertheless, social network analysis demonstrated that the closer a person was to the one who was coached, the more likely they were to experience positive increases in wellbeing.

How coaching is valued in higher education

When asked how coaching is valued in their institutions, respondent views varied. Responses ranged from "sadly not hugely" and used "if necessary", through to "increasingly" and "valued very highly". Those who feel it is valued highly evidenced it by noting senior level support, the "huge investment" that is being made and the "high take up" for coaching. One respondent commented that it is:

> *"A significant investment … [seen] as a way of helping to achieve our organisational strategy by improving organisational performance through people performance and wellbeing."*

Another said:

> *"It is still seen by some as an intervention for those…poor performers rather than [for] good to great."*

A number commented on its inclusion in their People or Leadership Strategy, the ways in which it is being used to develop leader and manager capability and how it is deemed to be "meaningful, especially for senior staff".

Another described it being seen as an "abstract resource", with some saying that coaching is expensive and "only for the few" with the "benefits still forming"; others were "currently exploring" the value. Some said that it was "not widely used or understood", with the value dependent on which department is using it. However, one respondent commented that they have a dedicated team running the programme, and another that it is valued through qualification and continuing professional development programmes.

However, the overwhelming view is that coaching helps those who receive it to feel "valued" that staff are "eager to take it up when offered" and that it is "asked for more often". One respondent commented that it is valued by those who are close to those who receive it. This finding is similar to that reported by Nieminen et al (2013) who report that coaching has a unique positive effect on those who receive it and on those working closest to the recipient.

Liverpool John Moores University described how perceptions of the value of coaching at the institution have shifted over time (Box 2). Originally coaching was thought to be an intervention only used when something was wrong, but explaining coaching as part of induction has helped staff to understand that it is a positive intervention. Those coming forward for coaching are often responding to a recommendation from their colleagues; and senior managers now value coaching with some working with a coach themselves.

Box 2 Shifting perceptions of the value of coaching

Liverpool John Moores University

It is becoming more valued.

We start coaching programmes by asking participants the first thing that comes to mind if they were to go into work and their manager said "I think you could benefit from some coaching". So far the first response each time (100% to date) is "I would think what I have done wrong?"

We meet with new staff on a one-to-one induction basis. In addition to explaining our provision this is a useful opportunity to explain that we offer one-to-one coaching and what it is typically used for, to embed the perception of coaching as a positive development intervention available to all.

It is not uncommon for an individual to say that they have been encouraged to make time and request coaching because of the benefits their colleagues have reported.

Our feeling is that senior managers are in favour of the idea as many of them either already have, or have been encouraged to have, a mentor or coach.

As research becomes more readily available to support the benefits of coaching there is a growing acceptance and encouragement at senior levels to implement coaching (and mentoring). Naturally this is assisted by persuasive and coherent arguments for implementation by directors, heads of department, middle managers as well as senior managers. External coaching is valued by senior managers.

A member of my team has co-presented at conferences about coaching and mentoring with academic and research colleagues; Professional Services Conference 2015 (internal), Vitae International Conference 2015 (external) and Teaching and Learning Conference 2016 (internal).

Survey respondents were asked if they thought that there were missed opportunities for coaching in their institutions with the majority agreeing that there was. A couple commented on how much more they could achieve if they had more money to allocate to it and another said that although coaching was embedded in development programmes, there could be more scope for targeting the resource for those with potential and talent, while noting that they did not want to set up an "elitist culture".

We will now look at some of the tangible and intangible benefits of coaching for higher education; in doing so we will reference some of the literature, as well as sharing feedback from survey and interview respondents. It is important to note that the definitions of coaching in the higher education literature are not clear and there is some confusion between the terms coaching and mentoring. For example, Frantz et al (2011) explored "coaching as a mentoring technique" yet the model of coaching used was based on a "mentoring model" and Maddern's (2010) exploratory paper discussed a university's attempt to "create a coaching culture" by instituting a "formal mentoring scheme". However, when considered collectively there are some themes in the higher education coaching literature worthy of noting in this paper and they will presented along with the case study and survey data.

Tangible benefits of coaching in higher education

Survey respondents were provided with a list of more "tangible" benefits of coaching as identified via a review of the literature on executive coaching (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015). Participants were asked to select what, in their opinion, were the three most likely tangible benefits of coaching and these are set out in Figure 7. The highest rated were personal goal achievement, links to organisational objectives and links to organisational strategy. In theory all of these benefits could be explicitly "measured" against a baseline, although in practice it is not clear that institutions do evaluate coaching in this way, as we explore later in this paper.

We turn now to the literature on coaching in higher education to identify the tangible benefits of coaching (ie those that can be "measured" in some way); this appears to fall into two main categories: generating outputs and improving practice. The former have provided opportunities for more tangible "measures" of success. Where coaching has been used to support research development, the purpose has been clearly focused on research output (Visagie and Maritz, 2009), to support staff in gaining doctorates (Geber, 2010), and to support publishing activities (Geber, 2010; McGrail et al, 2006; Baldwin and Chandler, 2002). However, where coaching has been used to support teaching activities, the emphasis appears to have been consistently, over the last two decades, much more to improve or change practice, such as collaborative planning and learning from others (Showers and Joyce, 1996), for collaborative and reflective dialogue to support teaching development (McLeod and Steinert, 2009; Scott and Miner, 2008), or making a transition from classroom to technology-mediated and online courses (Trevitt, 2005).

Where coaching has been focused on outputs, there are clear examples of results for individuals and for the organisation. One study reports that nine participants submitted an article for publication following coaching and half of those participants had an article published the following year (Frantz, 2011). Similarly, McGrail et al (2006) report an increase in average publication rates for participants and an increase in the quality of their work. One of the participants in Scott and Miner's (2008) study had won a teaching award and the other had achieved professorial status.

In one study a calculation of the return on the investment shows potential academic earnings from publications for coaching participants were three times the initial investment in the programme and three participants had been promoted (Geber, 2010). When participants were asked to identify the return on investment in a coaching programme by identifying specific business benefits against a number of key business drivers (such as teaching and overseas income; quality of teaching and learning; Research Assessment Exercise; research and third strand income), they identified that an average annual spend of £50,000 on coaching yielded a return of £3.2m for the university (Howlett et al, 2009).

Harding (2013) shows how coaching and mentoring provided a transitional space for academics during a period of significant organisational change and provides support for career, role, time and psychological challenges by providing future focus, support in implementing roles, forward momentum and psychological support; the study also showed how over the time of the study (3/4 years) 11 academics had achieved promotion and how funding applications increased by 223%; successful funding applications increased by 133% and successful publications increased by 50% (Harding, 2012).

An unfortunate typing error on the survey for an invitation to provide free text on further identifiable tangible benefits of coaching yielded some comments on the typo, but no further examples of tangible benefits. The case studies also yielded little in terms of tangible benefits that could be measured against a baseline. However, a number of significant "less tangible", but not necessarily less valued, benefits were identified and we explore these in the next section.

Intangible benefits of coaching in higher education

Respondents to the survey were asked to select what in their opinion were the three most likely "intangible" benefits of coaching, as identified in the literature on executive coaching (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015). The top two related to self-confidence/efficacy/awareness/cognition/insight (21), and to sustained behaviour change which may indirectly improve leadership skills, skills development or job performance (14); a considerable way behind these two was a likely benefit to improve working relationships with others (5). The detail of the responses to this question can be seen in Figure 8. Some participants identified further intangible benefits, describing them as an opportunity to "reflect on strengths" and to "feel empowered", an opportunity to "grip overwhelm"; and, in a positive way, a "personally challenging experience for the coachee". University of Hertfordshire, Bournemouth University and Liverpool John Moores University provide more detailed examples of the intangible benefits of coaching and these are summarised briefly in Box 3.

In the higher education literature on the intangible, or less tangible, benefits of coaching the focus appears to be on behaviour change, with the evidence indicating that this can benefit both the individual and the institution. For example, the supportive and encouraging environment provided by coaching helped writing to advance from a high priority and low behaviour activity to become an inner-directed and institutionally supported activity (Baldwin and Chandler,2002). In another study, where coaching was used to gain knowledge and skills in publishing, there were psychosocial outcomes with academics exchanging ideas and energy, becoming more self-critical and open to suggestions, as well as increasing self-confidence and teamwork (McGrail et al, 2006). Others reported developing a sense of individual responsibility to undertake writing, and to align their self-awareness with their goals and the overall organisational research agenda (Geber, 2010).

Continuing the theme of coaching supporting improvements to teaching over the last two decades, some of the evidence points to behaviour change for those in a coaching relationship. For example, practicing new teaching skills and strategies more frequently and applying them more appropriately, and for longer, than those who were not in a coaching relationship (Showers and Joyce, 1996). McLeod and Steinert's (2009) results showed that participants had increased their confidence in teaching, been exposed to new ideas and had an improved sense of institutional support and collegiality, appreciating the opportunity to discuss and receive suggestions for improvement.

The impact of coaching on changing leadership behaviours has also been reported. Coaching supports leaders in universities by helping them to understand their own leadership styles, improve relationships with staff and stakeholders, reduce conflict and improve collaboration and teamwork (Howlett et al, 2009). At Ulster University, as a result of coaching, a dean reviewed how the senior team communicated and revised the way that they operate in committee (see Box 1).

Box 3 Examples of intangible benefits of coaching

University of Hertfordshire

[Respondents to the survey] rated the impact of coaching on their work and most comment that it has been significant, that their self-confidence has increased, having new techniques and approaches to gain positive outcomes with the people they are communicating with, having the space to reflect on their strengths and areas to develop have been invaluable.

Bournemouth University

We have made significant investment in coaching over the last four years and see it as a way of helping to achieve our organisational strategy by improving our organisational performance through people performance and wellbeing. We find that coaching creates a safe and reflective space for staff to work on their personal and business-focused objectives, aspirations and challenges with a "critical friend" that they do not often find when working in such a complex and busy organisation, or during their everyday interactions with others. Our evaluations to date demonstrate that individuals who have accessed coaching have experienced changes to their internal personal state, for example through increased self-awareness and confidence; changes to their public

role and profile as they stepped into formal and informal positions of responsibility both inside and outside the organisation; and becoming more skilled at dealing with challenging people and situations, which was having a positive ripple effect on the culture of how the university goes about its business. The value at this point is about a shift in staff effectiveness through increased self-confidence and self-awareness, which in turn impacts on the ways in which staff and the university do business.

Liverpool John Moores University

In our experience we have consistently found coaching has helped individuals. As a minimum it helps them to clarify their situation, how they feel about it and what is within their control. This can help them to develop a positive mindset, next steps to take and therefore some reassurance that they can manage the situation better than before.

Impact may be less tangible in the sense that individuals simply feel better about themselves and the situation that they are in. This could result in a better working atmosphere for example, improved working relationships, better work-life balance.

On numerous occasions I have felt that as coaches we are unsure if an individual has found the process useful and have therefore asked them and been pleasantly surprised with the effusive responses received. We would say that the process increases self-efficacy.

Despite the benefits to individual and organisation in terms of outputs and behaviours, the challenge of integrating coaching as mainstream support for academic staff has continued to be an issue. The benefits of integrating coaching behaviours into staff development sessions and of integrating coaching into initiatives that can achieve organisational change, rather than as a stand-alone activity, were suggested as long ago as 1996 (Showers and Joyce, 1996). Yet 14 years later, the findings from a study into coaching in higher education indicate that staff were still making requests for coaching to become a permanent part of the staff development strategy (Maddern, 2010). In addition, the need for strong institutional commitment to coaching was highlighted when a 50% dropout on a coaching programme was attributed to absence of supervision of the activity and lack of oversight by the programme directors (McLeod and Steinert, 2009). Another study suggests that, while a nurturing environment has been identified as necessary for generating research output, more research is needed on the effectiveness of coaching and the impact on research output (Visagie and Maritz, 2009).

We turn now to explore how coaching is evolving beyond something that can be used solely to support a change in outputs or behaviours and how institutions are working towards the development of a coaching culture. These institutions are demonstrating an aspiration for coaching to be a "way of being" within their organisations.

We have established that there is evidence for both the tangible and the intangible benefits of coaching in higher education. However, one of the main challenges in determining the value of coaching is the ways in which it is evaluated, or not. The CIPD's (2009) review of coaching highlights a disconnect between coaching and its value to the organisation and report that only 20% of the respondents to their survey define evaluation criteria at the start of coaching; only 3% use return on investment and 8% return on expectation metrics to measure the impact of coaching. We turn our attention in the next chapter to the ways in which we evaluate coaching in higher education.

5. Realising the value of coaching in higher education

In this chapter:
Approaches to evaluation
Some models for evaluating coaching
How coaching is evaluated in higher education
Planning for evaluation to be effective

Although we may know that coaching works, we do not always know how or how it could work better. The literature generally focuses on the positive outcomes of coaching, although some have highlighted the need to also focus on the negatives (Feldman and Lankau, 2005). Despite the growth of coaching in organisations over the last two decades (Cox et al, 2010) only a small proportion of organisations formally evaluate coaching and this does not appear to be changing very quickly (Laurence and Whyte, 2013; Leedham, 2005). Laurence and Whyte report that research and anecdotal evidence suggest that the majority of organisations make no attempt to evaluate the investment in coaching services. Indeed, despite some organisations spending in excess of £100k per year, only one in seven are reported as calculating the return on their investment in a study by Yates (2015a). The CIPD (2009) report that nearly half of their survey respondents were not measuring the value of coaching, or they have relied on methods that tell little about the value of coaching to the organisation. Indeed, a review of coaching research over the previous 100 years identified a growing body of evaluative research but identified that it suffers from weak methodologies (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011).

In order to help us to understand the ways in which we could more effectively realise the value of coaching we consider the following:

- Approaches to evaluation.
- Some models from the literature for evaluating coaching.
- Planning for evaluation to be effective, including advice from the case institutions.

Approaches to evaluation

One of the most well-known methods for evaluating learning is based on four levels: reaction, learning, behaviour and results (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Kearns (2006) has added an important earlier level, referred to as the "baseline" against which the other levels can be evaluated, rather than attempting to identify the value at the end of the intervention.

A three-step process for measuring the ROI is advocated by Parker-Wilkins (2006) who suggests (i) the need for leaders to understand the business value of coaching (ii) the need to document what staff learn from coaching and (iii) the need to explore how staff used what they learned from coaching for tangible and monetary value for the business, which could include improved teamwork, increased retention and increased productivity. Anderson's (2007) model is constructed in order to ensure that the value of learning in an organisational context is valued in a way that is appropriate to the receivers of the contribution (ie the coachee) as well as considering the views of managers. Anderson's model covers four measures of value: learning function; return on investment (ROI); benchmarking and capacity; and return on expectation (ROE).

A review of the evaluation of learning and development in the workplace on behalf of Hefce has highlighted the weakness of using standard evaluation for learning interventions and notes that there is little empirical evidence for the effectiveness of coaching (Mavin et al, 2010). In contrast, oft-quoted research conducted by Olivero et al (1997) demonstrated that when coaching was added to a management development programme, the productivity of participants was said to have increased by 88%, compared to 22.4% when they had training alone. We turn our attention now to consider some models for evaluating coaching.

Some models for evaluating coaching

The CIPD (2009) have highlighted some of the ways in which organisations are evaluating coaching. They report that 22% evaluate through harder metrics such as KPIs, retention rates, turnover, absence and talent and succession criteria. Just over one fifth of their respondents said that they looked for stories and testimonials

We reviewed some models specifically for evaluating coaching, namely models from the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2010); the Association for Coaching (AC, 2004); the Institute for Employment Studies (IES, 2006); and the views of two practicing coaches, Leedham (2005) and Sofianos (2015). We have extracted and categorised some of their advice on how to evaluate coaching effectively, giving consideration to evaluation purpose, types of data and data sources and outline it in Table 4.. Please note that these are intended to be indicative of ways to approach evaluation and not intended to be an exhaustive list; we trust that it will challenge you to think of more.

Table 4 Indicative examples from models for evaluating coaching

Examples of what to evaluate	Examples of types of data	Examples of data sources
How coaching supported the business purpose (CIPD, 2010). How the coach helped to make the most of the learning process via their skills, techniques and attributes (AC, 2004). Business benefits, not hard metrics, but whether motivation of employee resulted in business benefits (AC, 2004). How coachee relates to the organisation and if they are more likely to stay as a result of coaching (AC, 2004). The will of the coachee, skill of the coach, and drill of the process (Sofianos, 2015). Qualities of coach; foundation factors from set up; behaviours and feelings of coachee; improvements in performance; inner personal benefits; outer benefits; impact on results (Leedham, 2005). Business based; people based; and individual and process based (IES, 2006).	Qualitative and quantitative (CIPD, 2010) Likert scale (AC, 2004) Track evaluation over a period of time for hidden benefits and sustainability (IES, 2006)	Scaling 360 degree feedback Psychometrics Team diagnostics Appraisal tools Engagement surveys Key performance indicators Organisational targets Service levels Testimonies from the coachee and their line manager (CIPD, 2010)

Others have highlighted a need to take a positive psychology approach and to explore "what is right with people" and to demonstrate the opportunity for coaching to enhance wellbeing and performance of well-functioning people and organisations, together with a call for better understanding of what works, why and for whom (Grant and Cavanagh, 2007). Grant also (2014) highlights the importance of taking a flexible approach and using both qualitative and quantitative data to capture the rich array of benefits of coaching. Indeed Yates' (2015b) case study highlights 12 steps for setting up coaching so that it can be managed, tracked and evaluated effectively, including identifying the business case, assessing cultural readiness, linking results to metrics and sharing success stories to increase buy-in.

A number of instruments have been used to evaluate coaching. For example, Grant (2012a) has challenged poorly targeted interventions that only focus on the financial returns of coaching and can actually inadvertently increase job-related stress and anxiety, and instead suggests the use of a Wellbeing and Engagement Framework. A Coaching Effectiveness Survey used by 291 people since 2005 (Tooth et al, 2013) has been seen as a reliable survey instrument and has also identified that coachees were most satisfied with the coaching experience for "softer" benefits, such as developing in key intrapersonal and interpersonal areas, including self-efficacy. These kinds of instruments that value the ways in which coaching can support people's needs within organisations go some way to addressing the challenges to evaluating coaching only against the bottom line. This is useful because organisations are more than money-making machines, they are social and psychological contexts, in which people live, work and relate (Bates and Thomson, 2007). Making money is important, but so is development, growth and wellbeing of people that constitute workplaces and organisations (Baptiste, 2008).

Thus coaching evaluation is taking place in organisations, but there are opportunities to develop its effectiveness. Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) have suggested that the effect of coaching may be situational with specific individuals and organisational contexts. We therefore now look at some of the ways in which coaching is evaluated in higher education.

How coaching is evaluated in higher education

There is little in the higher education literature on coaching evaluation. Vitae (2012), who use coaching for specifics, such as career coaching, and for more general support and life coaching, evaluate at the "reaction" and "learning" levels of the Kirkpatrick (2007) model, but not at the level that demonstrates specific behaviour change or tangible results. This is in contrast to Newcastle University which, not content with knowing anecdotally and through qualitative reports that coaching was providing benefits to staff, undertook an exercise to measure the impact of coaching on the bottom line. Newcastle were able to identify clear and specific outcomes of how coaching helped to change behaviours that have led to tangible business results coaching (Howlett et al, 2009); this appears to be a rare reported example in the higher education sector. The quality of coaching is a focus for Oxford Brookes University (Lawton-Smith, 2016) which has developed a validation approach to the assessment of internal coaching expertise, which has also been used in two other public sector organisations.

When asked how they collected feedback when evaluating coaching, a number of survey respondents commented that, although they did not have formal evaluation processes, they did use anecdotal or informal feedback; another described it as "a peripheral discussion at the end to justify the ROI".

Bournemouth University sets out that one of the challenges for evaluating coaching is that, when by its nature it has created a safe and confidential space for an individual working within an organisational context, it can appear an abuse of trust to ask them later to share the details (Box 4).

Liverpool John Moores University reports that it does not do a great deal of evaluation but has a series of checking-in points where it can observe the positive impact that coaching has had on individuals. It notes the theoretical position that, where coaching has positively impacted on the organisation, there is an assumption that it benefits the organisation; however, its evaluation process is not set up to capture that (Box 4).

Box 4 How coaching is evaluated in case institutions

Bournemouth University

We are inclined to be more tentative about evaluating the impact of individual coaching than perhaps we would with another type of development intervention. Some of the challenge, and some of the hesitancy, relates to how we can evaluate something that is intrinsically personal and confidential between coach and coachee with the aim of making sense of it as a return on the investment at organisational level.

Setting up the coaching for clear goals is not something that we have encouraged people to do, mindful as we are of that, while goals can provide a focus for coaching, they are not always helpful – see also Clutterbuck and Megginson (2013) for some of the debates around goals and coaching. Our attempts to encourage people to clearly think of something that they want to achieve for the organisation, and something for themselves during the coaching, set in the context of the programme of development that they are on, have not always been connected in the way in which we might have hoped. We commissioned an independent review of coaching at our institution. The results indicate that its value and purpose is largely understood at a personal level, with few people being able to connect it to an explicit corporate agenda. The implicit assumption for most is that by making a difference to the personal and professional wellbeing of the individual, the wider organisation will benefit in turn; we are strengthening the link with the organisational purpose in our current round of coaching, just in case we have missed an opportunity to extend, or to appreciate, the benefit of coaching. While the content of individual coaching sessions remains confidential, our focus when evaluating is to ask coaches and coachees about the process, the administration and the experience of coaching and less so on the outputs. Informal feedback is sought several times during the process to ensure any arising issues are appropriately addressed. We use anecdotal evidence and telephone interviews during the process and telephone interviews and surveys at the end of the process. However, we are exploring ways to identify more effectively the benefits for both the individual and the organisation, without encroaching in the "personally focused space" that coaching can provide.

Liverpool John Moores University

We don't do a great deal of evaluation beyond a discussion with an individual at the end of a session(s,) a contract is usually six sessions and reaction sheets at the end of development sessions. We look to see if the experience has been positive and useful for that person and also to act as reinforcement in their own minds – the idea of self-efficacy…. The simplest way to answer this is to acknowledge the positive impact it has on individuals and that everything hangs from this. They report back increased clarity and confidence going forwards. For many it is the recognition that the status quo cannot remain and this can force them to act. Beyond this we do not have hard evidence that it has impacted the team/organisation. The theory, of course, is that the more assured individual goes on to make a positive impact on the situation that their team is in, which in turns helps the organisation, but we do not have this evaluation data.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact impact of coaching. Individuals will be affected by so many factors that to claim a successful outcome is solely down to coaching would be unrealistic. However, it may well have been the trigger point for starting a process that has snowballed and become successful.

Figure 9 indicates what respondents are aiming to find out about when they evaluate coaching, with a clear focus on outputs, outcomes, benefits, quality and experience. Feedback, whether formal or informal, is collected from a variety of sources and Figure 10 sets out from whom "formal" feedback is collected and Figure 11 sets out from whom the "informal" feedback is collected. The majority of feedback is collected from the coach, coachee and line manager, with 12 respondents reporting a more 360 degree feedback approach to include colleagues and direct reports of the coachee. One respondent also said that the commissioner of the coaching may undertake the evaluation, which may not be HR or the line manager. Another respondent said that they undertake long term feedback on behaviour change, using 360 degree feedback as evidence of longitudinal change.

While three of the survey respondents were happy with the way in which they conduct their evaluation, just over half of the respondents felt that their evaluation processes were "not as good as they should be", that they needed to be "more effective at evaluation" and that they "need to spend more time on evaluation", although another said that it needed to be "more rigorous" but "not onerous". The majority who said that they did not evaluate coaching gave the reason as a lack of resources, with one saying that they had not evaluated their coaching provision for four years. The difficulties in finding time to evaluate coaching, rather than not having the capability to do it, was identified as a barrier by Carter (2006) and it seems that this remains an issue within higher education. Two others said that, although they did have provision for evaluating coaching, they were:

"Nervous about encroaching on a very safe space that we have set up to be confidential."

While many respondents felt unhappy about their evaluation processes, a variety of methods are used to collect feedback and these are set out in Figure 12 with two respondents adding that they use a validation form/coaching agreement and review form at the start and end of the programme; one described how it helps to:

"Outline agreed coaching objectives, examining how the coachee will measure the impact/value of the coaching, what assessment process/diagnostic measures will be used to measure ROI, what success will look like."

It is interesting to note that, while many respondents identified a lack of resources as the reason for not evaluating their provision as well as they would like, only three said that they used any form of external evaluation.

One survey participant acknowledged the need to accept that coaching interventions "will not achieve cultural change overnight". However, four others commented on the importance of ensuring a strategic link between the coaching and the organisational benefits. One of them highlighted the need for it to be part of an overall HR and OD strategy that links to organisational strategy with an evaluation process that facilitates it. Another remarked on the current disconnect between individual and organisational benefits, with another saying that there was a need to be:

"More specific about linking to organisational metrics and key performance indicators."

Liverpool John Moores University also highlights the difficulties in isolating coaching as the factor that has impact (Box 4). Notwithstanding this, the case institutions set out some advice on how to improve the evaluation of coaching impact, based on their own experiences and lessons learned (Box 6). We will consider these in the next section, after returning once more to the general literature for some ideas on how to evaluate coaching effectively.

Planning for evaluation to be effective

In this section we will draw attention to some further ideas in the literature that could help to set up coaching evaluation effectively and then share some of the good practice and learning from the case institutions that may be useful for other higher education institutions.

The Institute for Employment Studies (2006) set out some of the ways in which evaluation can be set up effectively. They suggest the following:

- Define criteria at the start of the process to establish what both the organisation and the coachee expect to gain; for example, what they are seeking to prove, improve or learn.
- Identify how they will know if they have achieved it.
- Identify what processes need to be in place in order to achieve the changes.
- Check that the coachee is happy to use the tools and methods fit for the audience who will receive the evaluation.

This would go some way to resolving the tension for one respondent who shared:

> *"Evaluating coaching can be a challenge, when by its nature it has created a safe and confidential space for an individual working in an organisational context. It can appear an abuse of trust to ask them later to share the details."*

One way in which coaching can increase in effectiveness in organisational contexts is to use multi-stakeholder contracting and the process and benefits have been highlighted through an international study with 651 participants by Turner and Hawkins (2016). Using this approach the coach, coachee and an organisational representative develop a contract for the coaching, which can provide a clear frame for the coaching, clarify roles and expectations, explore boundaries and protocols and develop a joint focus. Nevertheless, there are challenges in this approach and a critical review of the literature and a short vignette from practice by Fillery-Travis and Cavvachia (2013) looks at the interplay between coaches, coachees and their organisational context. They report how coaches see themselves as holding a difficult tension between the personal agenda of the coachee and the implicit/explicit agenda of the organisation and offer an example of where exploring the tension can result in a more generative solution where new knowledge and practice might emerge. Despite these advances in thinking, Yates's (2015a) study with 69 large UK organisations revealed that less than half of the organisations had three-way meetings between coach, coachee and organisation to contract for the arrangement.

Some of the survey respondents described how coaching evaluation is reported beyond the immediate commissioning team. Two said that it was used to "justify further investment" and the majority said that it was to monitor quality and effectiveness, to inform future programmes and to support the development of the coach. Three respondents commented on how it helped to identify "organisational themes" that may require attention.

Leeds Beckett University describe how it reports on value for money, comparing the money saved through the use of internal coaches with the money spent on external coaches; and Bournemouth University reports on how it evaluates process, administration, experiences and benefits of coaching to help make a business case for coaching (Box 5).

Box 5 Reporting items

Leeds Beckett University

In respect of evaluating coaching and value for money, it is reported annually as part of the staff development report, in terms of the voluntary hours provided by internal coaches with estimated costs of external coaches if they were brought in to provide this service.

Bournemouth University

We use evaluation of coaching to improve the process, the administration, the experience and to report on tangible and intangible benefits. This helps to make a business case for continuing or extending the support by demonstrating its value to people and the organisation.

We now share some of the advice on setting up coaching evaluation effectively that case Institutions shared based on their own experiences and lessons learned (Box 6).

Box 6 Advice on evaluating the impact of coaching based on lessons learned

Ulster University

Map your evaluation process to your institutional culture, be courageous. Let go of return on investment, focus on the return on expectation and achievement of goals as measurements of success. Gather your own evidence to inform how you take coaching forward as opposed to trying to prove it works, because it really does work!

University of Hertfordshire

We need to define our outcomes. What do we aim to achieve in respect of the coaching culture, how would we know what success looks like? And thinking again about the investment that's been put into developing Leading through Coaching and our CPD, plus the amount of time that line managers are giving to coaching others and the supervision groups, what benefit is that giving to the university? How would we measure against that? We need to calculate how much is being invested in time and money and how that it is having an impact, not just at individual level, at team and organisational levels as well.

University of Westminster

At the individual level, information from feedback forms is always very positive but what is missing is longer-term impact.

Ensure your coaching strategy supports the aims of your corporate strategic plan. Coaching is a transformational intervention for developing healthy organisations, where people collaborate effectively and are open and respectful. Link coaching with equality and diversity indicators to measure impact eg Athena Swan and female academic career progression. Remember coaching touches on all areas of people's working and personal lives and people bring their whole person into the coaching space.

We need to strengthen the way we measure the longer-term impact of coaching at the organisational level.

Liverpool John Moores University

Anecdotal feedback is very positive from the individuals themselves. However, this is an area which we recognise could be improved eg by asking for line managers' feedback. This would not tell the whole picture, however, because we offer individuals confidentiality and so, while we record numbers of interventions, individuals will not always be named on our system (which is where line managers can view which sessions/programmes their team members have attended).

Leeds Beckett University

A cautionary note to those embarking on the coaching journey: Coaching works in organisations where people are empowered and expected to be resourceful, innovative and problem solve - it is very difficult to create a coaching culture in an organisation where people are task driven and disempowered. The return on investment is difficult to demonstrate, so concentrate on reporting the achievement of coaching goals such as career happiness, productivity, reduced stress, better work life balance, increased confidence and self-esteem and reduced sickness rates, as these are measurements of success that reflect that a coaching culture is embedded within the organisation.

Bournemouth University

The benefits at a personal level are easier to articulate, while the connection to an explicit corporate agenda is less clear. This is leading us to reconsider the ways in which to effectively establish value and purpose at a personal level that links explicitly to a corporate agenda; this includes a more effective approach to ensuring "readiness for coaching" and targeting coaching where it will be most effective.

In the meantime we have learned that the following can help to contribute to the impact of coaching: (i) Ensure that coachees are ready for coaching and know how to make the most of the valuable opportunity that they are given. (ii) Think very carefully about what the individual, team and organisation want to achieve through coaching and the "measures" and "approaches" that will help them to know if they have achieved it.

As has been highlighted through the literature, the survey and case studies, the practice and benefits of coaching are complex, not least because they need to balance a number of tensions in the service of the individual coachee, the commissioning organisation and the coach's own practice.

Recent findings by Dopson et al (2016) identify that, despite higher education being a "knowledge industry", it is not effective at studying its own effectiveness. We have presented a snapshot of how coaching is defined, used, valued and evaluated in higher education. This snapshot demonstrates that there is a lot of seemingly useful activity, but that it may not be executed in the most efficient way; nor do we know the ways in which coaching is truly contributing to efficiency for the sector. Thus the higher education sector faces a timely challenge on the way in which it defines, uses, values and evaluates coaching.

One of our project partners, Lisa Sofianos, an organisational coach, wrote an article for Training Journal (Sofianos, 2015) where she draws attention to the "messiness of people and workplaces" and highlights the complexity of what goes on during coaching. Sofianos challenges the way that coaching is currently measured and highlights the disconnect between what coaching achieves and what we choose to value within it. She suggests that the focus on "value for money" in coaching can be an unhelpful way of measuring the impact and challenges us to ask a broader question of "Am I persuaded that there is value in coaching?", rather than putting coaching as a discipline on trial. This was the focus of our reflections during the development of this paper. In the next chapter we build on what we have learned from the literature, the survey respondents and the case institutions to present a series of provocations on the ways in which the impact of coaching is valued and evaluated.

6. The provocations

Provocation #1: The coaching profession hasn't done enough to de-mystify coaching.

Provocation #2: Insufficient attention is given to the "value chain" associated with coaching, and as such the contributions to value arising from the coachee themselves, their line manager and the commissioners of coaching are largely ignored.

Provocation #3: The level at which evaluative work would be meaningful and useful is the level at which it would cost too much.

Provocation #4: The way we currently measure coaching is distorting its value, and adversely affecting its contribution.

Provocation #5: If we were to properly evaluate coaching we would discover that it didn't offer value for money for the organisation.

Provocation #6: The truth is that no one really cares about evaluating coaching impact.

The purpose of Part Three of this paper is to provide an opportunity to stimulate discussion around the theme of coaching evaluation. A full version of the provocations as a stand-alone resource can be found in Appendix 3. In particular the provocations are designed to stimulate discussion around the theme of coaching evaluation and, specifically, to introduce a series of challenges in the pursuit of a frank and authentic exploration of the topic. In this context, it is important to hold in mind that:

- Although this work sits within a wider exploration of coaching evaluation in the higher education sector, it can be read as a stand-alone paper.
- It is deliberately non-academic in tone, although thoughtful and offered in a spirit of enquiry.
- It seeks to deliberately "push the tiller" quite hard in certain directions to promote debate and discussion. In this sense we may not hold with the arguments proffered, but nevertheless feels there is value in exploring them.
- It may provoke strong reactions in the reader but this is done to stimulate thinking and to enable a useful re-frame of the work that may need to be done.

This section is structured around six core provocations that are developed in the following pages. Each of the provocations contains a challenge to how we might apprehend the task of coaching evaluation. The sequencing of these provocations is not important, although there are clearly relationships and linkages between some of these. They are formatted with a particular intention so that interested parties may lift discrete provocations from the paper to form the basis of detailed inquiry and further thinking.

Provocation #1:

The coaching profession hasn't done enough to de-mystify coaching.

The case

The coaching relationship is usually a confidential arrangement and as such "what happens in the coaching conversation stays in the coaching conversation". And so, in this sense, it is hard for anyone to really know, particularly for someone that has never received coaching, what it entails. Furthermore, there are some well-worn misconceptions about the differences or similarities between coaching and other one-to-one developmental activities such as mentoring, buddying, counselling, performance management discussions, psychoanalysis and so on. The last type of intervention here on the list – psychoanalysis – is offered deliberately because, for many, coaching is understood as a process that is not unlike psychoanalysis with all the imagined conventions that go with it – the long silences, the oblique questions, the meaningful looks and the reliance on what many critics of coaching would call "psychobabble".

To add further to the confusion there is a wide array of different forms of coaching and descriptive terms which include performance coaching, executive coaching, business coaching, group coaching, life coaching, career coaching, content coaching, clean coaching, confidence coaching etc. This is demonstrated in an exchange in one of the interviews with coaching commissioners in higher education institutions:

> *Interviewer: When you said you don't do much at team level, do you do any group coaching?*
>
> Right, that's a good question, we don't call it group coaching, I guess you can say it's group coaching but we don't define it as that.
>
> *Interviewer: Can you give me an example?*
>
> It would be, for example, team development days where you look at the team effectiveness and you get people to reflect on what's working well, what's not working well and helping them come up with an action plan that would get them to meet their objectives, so we do that a lot, especially the last couple of years, the demand is increasing. Is that what you mean team coaching?
>
> *Interviewer: Well I think it's a good example because I wouldn't necessarily see it as coaching, I'd see it as facilitation of a team in that context but there's no reason why it can't be and in some ways it gives us a particular attention if you're using coaching techniques to support that team in development so, no, that's valid. (Transcript DS25005)*

Related to this are sometimes polarised assumptions about the motivations for coaching which can range from framing coaching as a problem-centred or sometimes remedial response to an individual's situation in work to coaching as something for those in the very highest positions in the organisation – the most "important" employees. There is mystery too to the way in which people are selected for coaching. This tends not to be something that is made very visible to the organisation, perhaps in the same way that a leadership development programme, for example, might be.

Finally, in terms of the discipline itself, while there are recognised coaching qualifications that people can acquire, it is just as easy and widespread to practice one form of coaching or another with little formal scrutiny of what is done, without supervisory input and without a sense that the industry is being regulated.

> All of this adds to the sense that coaching is a mystical art that is commissioned behind closed doors, delivered by people who may or may not be particularly qualified, doing things that for the most part we have little or no visibility of, and with a very unclear picture of what value is actually being produced. It is this combination of factors that may account for the greater majority of the nervousness and lack of clarity about the business of coaching.

The implications
The major implication of this argument is that the persistent call for better evaluation of coaching may actually be an expression of the confusion that people feel when they hear about coaching. The motivation for answering the evaluation question is really a reflection of how mysterious the whole discipline of coaching has become.

Recommendations
The recommendations in line with this perspective are as follows

- The coaching profession (and those that practice coaching) should take serious steps to demystify the discipline, and to take responsibility for the shape that the reputation of coaching has been taking. It should seek to communicate the clear benefits of coaching on a personal, organisational and societal level in order that potential commissioners and coachees can make confident and informed choices.
- Commissioning entities (usually HR, OD or L&D) should do more to demystify, within organisations, the role that coaching plays in performance improvement.
- Line managers should take it as their responsibility to be much more familiar with the coaching process and how it fits into their managerial responsibilities.

Provocation #2:

Insufficient attention is given to the "value chain" associated with coaching, and as such the contributions to value arising from the coachee themselves, their line manager and the commissioner of coaching are largely ignored.

The case
Too much reliance has been placed on only one variable within the coaching "value chain" – namely the "performance" of the coach in bringing about good results in the behaviour and actions of the coachee. As such the evaluation of coaching has given greatest emphasis to this particular link in the chain, necessarily taking the coachee as being the most reliable witness.

The process of value production arises from the contributions that are made by four key groupings:

- Link 1: The contribution of the coach (where most attention goes)
- Link 2: The contribution of the coachee
- Link 3: The contribution of the line manager(s), and
- Link 4: The contribution of the commissioning entity (typically the HR, OD or L&D department)

Value cannot be created by the coach alone. The coachee needs first of all to put in the necessary work and to commit to addressing what will most likely be some tough challenges. But even if both coach and coachee make a strong contribution (that can be evaluated); the line manager plays a critical role in allowing, enabling, supporting, and catalysing the value that is being created (or conversely potentially detracting value by blocking the efforts of the coachee). And, finally, the commissioning entity has a fundamentally important role in determining that coaching is the right solution (compared to other improvement strategies), ensuring the it comes at the right time for the coachee and that the learning from evaluation is driven back into the coaching process and so on. This poses a first order question regarding what is placed under the microscope in coaching evaluation.

It is clear from the responses to the survey and interviews that many institutions seek feedback on the success of coaching interventions from a variety of stakeholders (the coach, coachee, line managers, peers, direct reports etc). However, what is not evident is a systematic examination of these stakeholders in terms of representing links in a value production chain, each contributing a portion of the total value of the coaching. Neither does there seem to be evidence of work undertaken to analyse the risks or weaknesses, potential added value, nor where value might be leached from the process.

A related question to this is "who should be the arbiter of value?" Very often the coachee is framed as the most important arbiter of value, but this perspective is not without contention. The voice of "the organisation" is rarely heard in the evaluation process and arguably this should be the loudest in the debate. However, the perspectives of "customers" eg students might also be played in, as might the judgments of colleagues working with the coachee and so on.

The implications

The implications of these judgments are wide ranging and they highlight a level of complexity that tends not to be explicitly addressed. There are some methodological tensions in that the commissioning entity (Link 4 in the value chain) is often also the evaluating entity and there is a risk (perceived or real) of not remaining objective in the evaluation as a result. There are similar methodological challenges in stripping out the vested interests in particular outcomes arising from this approach.

Recommendations

In order to act upon the implications of this provocation, it may be sensible to:

- Encourage greater explicitness in the evaluation process regarding the links in the value chain that will be subject to examination.
- Encourage greater explicitness about the judgments to be made about who should be the arbiter of value.
- Consider engaging external partners - that do not have vested interests in the work being done – to assess the value contributed by each link in the value chain.
- Establish and communicate the evaluative criteria used at the outset to those in the value chain, identifying their role in the coaching itself and the process of value production.

Provocation #3:

The level at which evaluative work would be meaningful and useful is the level at which it would cost too much.

The case

The kind of evaluative work that would deliver an acceptable level of rigor, reliability and validity would involve the following:

- Work to establish a baseline point of comparison prior to the coaching intervention.
- A clear and reliable methodology to establish attribution ie being able to attribute outcomes as having arisen from coaching rather than other variables.
- Longitudinal work, as for many the effects of coaching will necessarily take time to develop.
- Data generation from a "basket of indicators" that would include testimony from the coachee, input from those that work closely with the coachee including their line manager (to provide objectivity), data from "hard" measures such as business/organisational performance and so on.
- Scrutiny of the commitments arising from coaching sessions by the coachee and tracking of their enactment.
- A full costing process of the coaching intervention – to include the fees paid to the coach (assuming it is externally provided), the cost of the time invested by the coachee, and the commissioning and process handling cost (we assume by an HR, OD or L&D department).
- A means of tackling confidentiality agreements between the coach and coachee which potentially place some important data out of scope.

This level of investment in coaching evaluation is unlikely to be cost-effective, while a lesser investment would only offer broad and possibly unreliable indications of coaching value.

The implications

This time and cost involved in this area raises some fundamental questions about the preparedness of the higher education sector and those involved in coaching to solve the evaluation question. If there is strong commitment to coaching evaluation then there needs to be some innovation and fresh thinking to overcome the cost-effectiveness problem. To date, this has not been a priority and as a result coaching evaluation has been somewhat inconsistent, relying typically on incomplete evaluations eg conversations with the coachee, and interesting and indicative but not far reaching, rigorous, robust or statistically significant research.

Recommendations

At the heart of this provocation and the implications that arise from it is the need to answer an important question - "do we care enough about coaching evaluation to resolve the issue of cost-effectiveness?" If the answer to this question is "no", which may be understandable in a time of constrained resources, then a decision needs to be made to move away from an expectation that coaching should be evaluated in the formal sense and instead treat it as one of many (non-evaluated) management responses, such as performance appraisals or review meetings, that seek to drive individual and organisational performance. In this sense we seek to lay the argument to rest and allow individual institutions to make the decisions that seem right for them. If however the answer is "yes" then the following may need to be considered:

- Undertaking work that would establish the full cost of coaching (to include the external costs of recompensing or developing coaches, the cost of coachees using their time in this way, and the cost of commissioning and evaluation).
- Developing an agreed strategy across the sector for the evaluation of coaching – one that makes explicit how the trade-offs between rigor and investment will be resolved.
- Acknowledging that coaching delivers value - as it would be hard to argue against this - but undertaking the necessary work to sharpen the focus of subsequent evaluation activity. For example, choosing to evaluate the success achieved when coachees specify the actions they would like to take that have arisen from coaching sessions (or similar segmentation of aspects of coaching).
- Giving attention to the "benefits realisation" aspects of coaching which would involve mapping the factors that drive success in coaching and engaging those involved in the process of creating value.

Provocation #4:

The way we currently measure coaching is distorting its value, and adversely affecting its contribution.

The case

While approaches to coaching evaluation in some respects vary, the greater majority share a common characteristic in that they seek to value what is measureable. More often than not this may involve the completion, by the coachee, of a survey that uses questions to determine the strength of, or frequency of, the coaching impact. The more complicated considerations that sit beneath this, for example, how coaching might have changed the way that the coachee frames and tackles problems, or how the coachee thinks differently about themselves as a leader (and so on), may be missed off the spreadsheet. David Cooperrider, organisational development expert and founder of the Appreciative Inquiry discipline, is known for having said "Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about" (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003), and in this context the questions that we ask of coaching through evaluation work convey what "good" it is doing and, on that basis, what then it should be used to accomplish. The argument that we make in relation to this provocation is that the standard approaches to evaluation skew and run the risk of misrepresenting the "good" that coaching is delivering, and give a false lead in helping us understand what it should continue to be used for.

One explanation for this measurement bias is that too much emphasis is given to frames, conventions and methods that come from the physical (the natural) sciences. In the natural sciences we might, for example, be able to predict that water will boil at a given temperature and providing the conditions are constant the same results will be reliably achieved every time this happens. However, the variables that are put under the microscope in the natural sciences do not seek to make sense of what is happening to them. They do not express an emotion as the temperature is turned up underneath them. They do not need to undo years of socialisation to decide what to do when new input is introduced. The evaluative strategies of coaching currently fail to take account of this complexity, instead nudging evaluation towards assessment practices that do not fit the job.

The implications

There is an argument for looking to evaluate coaching through a more expert application of ethnographic approaches, interviews, observations, grounded theory and other methodologies that come from the social sciences. These, of course, will not produce the numbers and quantitative assurances that many will want, and this therefore suggests that work may need to be done in positioning this kind of evaluative work differently from what has gone before, and in providing added assistance in interpreting the results. This may have implications for the capabilities that some HR, OD and L&D departments possess, and this deeper approach may require an up-skilling in some instances.

Importantly, these represent attempts at evaluating coaching that will more closely describe the value that is actually being produced through coaching (while not succumbing to the more attractive option of measuring and quantifying the impacts of coaching). Furthermore, they stand a greater chance of providing a more honest and helpful guide to how coaching might then be used in the future.

Recommendations

In order to escape the distorting effects of current evaluative practices, there would be merit in:

- Developing evaluative frameworks that draw from the best of the practices found in the field of social sciences.
- Re-framing the language used in relation to coaching evaluation, away from frames that imply measurement, metrics and return on investment, for example, towards more qualitative language that allows for a more nuanced and ethnographic analysis of coaching.
- Paying close attention to the messages emerging from this approach when considering how coaching could continue to be used and the circumstances in which it is most appropriate.
- Determining the capacity and capability gap relating to those (typically those in within HR, OD or L&D) who undertake evaluation – specifically if they are to adopt deeper, more qualitative approaches to evaluation.

Provocation #5:

If we were to properly evaluate coaching we would discover that it didn't offer value for money for the organisation.

The case

The process by which topics are identified for the focus of coaching work usually sits with the coachee who will specify the issues that they will bring to each coaching session. The "organisational voice" in this process is usually much quieter than the coachee's and it is assumed in most cases that what is good for the coachee must therefore be good for the organisation. The more effective the employee is, the more effective the organisation is. This is how the logic usually goes. While from one perspective this may hold true, in many instances it may not. For example, if a coachee brings an issue to coaching that is related to their reputation in the organisation, or their career progression, or dealing with their work-life balance, or how they can be more influential in the organisation (not unusual coaching themes), this may not necessarily coincide with the organisation's view of the most pressing priorities, let alone whether these accord with strategic imperatives. Line managers, who may be more able to speak for the organisation's interests, typically express varying degrees of interest and involvement with the coaching of their direct reports, and even where they are engaged, the terms of confidentiality of the coaching relationship often make this difficult. This is illustrated by a survey response:

However, we also need the (coaching) intervention to be business-focused and, while we believe we have the pillars in place for coaching to bring benefits for both individual and organisation, we think that there is sometimes a disconnect, with more of a focus on the individual. (202457-202450-14641627)

Other arguments in support of this provocation relate not only to the process of issue selection, but also the less desirable consequences of coaching – from an organisational perspective - that sometimes arise. We know that one outcome from coaching for some coachees is sometimes the decision to depart from the organisation and pursue a different career. In other instances, recipients of coaching may decide that they will work fewer days for their employer (perhaps shifting from full to part-time arrangements). We might also see particular employees advantaged in their career progression as a result of coaching, over and above other colleagues that haven't benefitted from coaching. These and other unexpected consequences may not fit with the organisation's interests or with the organisation's obligations to provide a level playing field for progression and advancement. However, current evaluative mechanisms pay limited attention to these considerations, giving an incomplete picture of the cost effectiveness of coaching.

The implications

Organisations invest all their time in activities, infrastructure, research, services and capital assets and so on. The benefits though of these investments are usually felt widely across an organisation and may most directly and positively impact customers (or students), partner organisations and so on. Even in relation to other areas of developmental spend which, by design, are internally focused, the beneficiaries can be many. Leadership development programmes for example usually see cohorts numbering in the 10s, 20s and 30s.

However, coaching investments fall on individual employees and the spend per head is often much greater than the equivalent spend per head for participants in leadership development programmes, for example. It is for this reason that there should be an appropriate level of scrutiny of the use of coaching money, and care should be taken to ensure an alignment between the interests of the individual receiving coaching and the interests of the organisation paying for it. In many instances there is insufficient attention given to the latter and there are causes for concern, sufficient enough at least to trigger a much more thorough analysis of the outcomes of coaching at the organisational level, and for the learning from this to be played back into the coaching design process.

Recommendations

In responding to this provocation and its implications the following recommendations are made.

- Greater internal visibility at senior levels should be given to coaching assignments, and the commissioning entity (usually HR, OD or L&D) should put mechanisms in place for ensuring that organisational interests are represented in issue selection and benefits realisation in coaching.
- Line managers should be required to play an active role in coaching assignments where they relate to their own direct reports. Three-way "contracting" meetings should be a core feature of this involvement.
- Work should be undertaken to identify how coaching can be used to drive forward strategic priorities for the organisation.

Provocation #6:

No one <u>really</u> cares enough about evaluating coaching impact.

The case

If we were to believe that coaching impact evaluation was part of the repertoire of essential organisational activity we might expect many of the following to be true:

- Coaching regularly appears on the agenda of the senior team.
- The outputs of evaluation are always carefully scrutinised and deployed strategically.
- Coaching represents a significant cost to institutions as a percentage of total expenditure.
- Coaching has the potential for serious organisational risk compared with other organisational activities.
- If coaching impact evaluation was to cease there would be serious repercussions to the health of the institution.
- It is so important to get coaching impact evaluation right that there is a large body of discussion, best practice, staff development etc on this subject.

Few of these indicators of organisational importance are attached to coaching. This may be because there is wide agreement that coaching is considered to be "a good thing" for modern, progressive institutions to offer their staff. Furthermore, the very presence of coaching within organisations makes employees feel valued and that their development is a priority for the organisation.

Interviewer: If you do not have formal evaluation processes for coaching, how do you know if it has any impact?

Response: Again, anecdotally, individuals feedback positively. Clearly the idea of coaching and mentoring is viewed positively at a senior level as evidenced by the introduction of mentoring for new academic staff and professional services staff in 2016/17.

The implications

The implications of a lack of commitment to the task of coaching evaluation is that we fail to invest fully in a well-articulated, comprehensive approach, instead permitting a proliferation of approaches that do not work usefully together. Arguably too, evaluative work often falls short of the standard that should be applied in such circumstances, allowing methodologically incomplete practices to go unquestioned. And, even having gathered evaluative data, we very often leave it to languish in drawers and cupboards with potentially valuable insights being lost along the way.

- Not enough financial resource is put into developing and delivering coaching evaluation.
- There is insufficient attention given to the capabilities to carry out this work.
- There is often insufficient scrutiny of the outcomes of coaching evaluation.
- There is arguably a largely unsubstantiated belief that coaching is a "good thing" and often better than other interventions of a similar cost.

Recommendations

If we were to really take seriously the business of coaching evaluation within higher education institutions, we might undertake the following:

- Develop a sector-wide view on the strategic importance of coaching, and in doing so agree a proportionate and appropriate level of investment in defining the value of coaching to the sector.
- Focus organisational effort on setting up the coaching for success and educating employees so that they can be more strategic.
- Stop evaluating all coaching interventions and take an auditing approach to quality control, including strategies from random sampling to interventions over a certain spend.
- Stop putting coaching on trial and develop a clear strategy on how and when a coaching intervention may be used effectively.
- Develop a view on the importance of coaching as compared to other similarly costing interventions (perhaps develop a decision tree of sorts to aid investment decisions).

Here we have put forward six provocations designed to stimulate discussion around coaching evaluation and a summary of recommendations will be presented in the summary chapter.

7. Summary

Returning to the challenges at the start of this paper, our aim was to:

- Help to address the evidence gap on how coaching is used, valued and evaluated, most specifically in higher education.
- Provoke thought leadership and debate within the sector, specifically on how coaching is evaluated, to prompt institutions to consider what questions they need to ask when initiating, developing, implementing and evaluating coaching interventions, set against the wider policy/efficiency landscape, to ensure coaching effectiveness for individuals and organisation.

In order to achieve this we: reviewed the literature on coaching impact in organisations generally and most specifically within higher education; conducted a special interest group with organisational development (OD) practitioners to inform the study; distributed a survey to staff and organisational developers across the sector; and conducted interviews with six OD practitioners in order to develop a more detailed understanding of coaching value and evaluation within institutions, and to help to bring the survey to life. All of this activity enabled us to develop a series of provocations for the sector to stimulate discussion around the theme of coaching evaluation. In this chapter we provide a brief summary of the main findings.

What is coaching and how is it used in higher education?

In Chapter 3 we explored definitions of coaching; how coaching is used in higher education; how coaching is organised; and the ways in which universities are moving towards developing coaching culture. The growth of coaching in organisations has been evidenced through the literature and through sector-wide activities. Our explorations have shown that, while definitions of coaching may differ between institutions, they are connected by the spirit of an individually focused and supportive activity with a view to enabling people within organisational contexts.

The majority of data appears to point to individual coaching although there were some indications that team coaching is also on the agenda for institutions. Indications were given of the range of people who access coaching, the situations where coaching is offered, and how it is being used for capacity building.

While it seems that the majority of coaching is provided for executives and leaders, it is also available for professional and support staff and academics. Investment in developing internal capability means that more staff at different levels are being given the opportunity for coaching, with coaching being commissioned mainly in formal ways. Coaching is provided as a stand-alone initiative or embedded in development programmes and one university has established a collaborative partnership arrangement with other organisations.

The diversity in definitions, use and organisation indicates that there is no one right way to facilitate coaching in higher education and signpost the benefits of a situational approach. Nevertheless, the potential for developing a culture that uses coaching approaches in a range of situations seems to be a developing benefit for the sector, with evidence pointing to the ways in which it can have a beneficial ripple effect, with leaders creating more empowering environments, and students also benefiting from coaching opportunities.

The benefits of coaching in higher education

In Chapter 4 we look at the benefits of coaching, in particular how coaching is valued and the tangible and intangible benefits for higher education. The literature points to the ways in which coaching can be beneficial for organisations, individuals and for those around them. The value attributed to coaching varies across the sector with evidence of how it has shifted over time. There were accounts of senior support, engagement and investment with a belief in the potential to improve the organisation through improving its people. Conversely there were accounts of it being an abstract resource still under exploration, or being used to support poor performance.

However, overwhelmingly those who receive coaching feel valued and there is a growing interest in taking up opportunities for coaching, with some indications of value for those close to people who have received coaching. Some respondents noted the missed opportunities for coaching, including the ways in which it could support future potential and talent.

While there is some confusion on terminology between coaching and mentoring in the literature on coaching in higher education, studies have shown how coaching has helped to improve tangible benefits, such as increasing academic outputs and changing practice. The more intangible benefits are increases in self-confidence and sustained behaviour change, improvements in leadership and other skills and relationships.

Realising the value of coaching in higher education

One of the challenges in determining the value of coaching is due to the range of ways in which it is evaluated, or not. In Chapter 5 we explore approaches to evaluation to help realise the value of coaching, along with some good practice around ensuring benefits for both individual and organisation. The evidence that we collected for this project indicates that evaluation practice varies across the sector and that coaching brings some of its own challenges when it comes to evaluation; particularly when it comes to encroaching on a confidential space, and the time that it takes to evaluate effectively.

There was almost a sense that what is deemed to benefit the individual must also benefit the organisation, and implicit in this was an assumption that coaching is beneficial and so the quality of attention paid to evaluation is not so necessary. Also implicit, or interpreted, is that coaching has the potential to achieve in ways quite different to other learning interventions, and maybe one of the challenges for the sector is that we need a model that best fits the value that we attribute to it, or its potential value. The evidence has pointed to a range of tangible and intangible benefits for both individuals and the organisation and that coaching helps to navigate through the complexity of people working within organisational contexts, providing a very human way of navigating through that maze. This resonates with Downey (2003: x-xxi) who describes coaching as a way to "bring humanity back to the workplace". It was this very challenge of what we value and how we demonstrate that value that inspired us to develop the provocations on which this paper rests.

Summary observations on the provocations

There are particular threads that run through the cases put for each provocation which highlight some important difficulties that are inherent to the business of coaching evaluation. These include recognition that:

- Uncertainty still remains as to the value that coaching delivers to the sector.
- There is not a commonly agreed best practice approach to evaluating coaching.
- The full costs of coaching for the sector are not currently known.
- In some respects, coaching remains shrouded in mystery, and this is reflected in important definitional variations[3], the confidential nature of coaching conversations, and an absence of a common understanding of its purpose, potential and its strategic value.
- The coaching discipline has not yet developed a widely accepted set of professional standards for coaching evaluation.

The provocations explored in this section reflect these challenges and raise important questions about a number of areas of coaching evaluation.

3

Coaching attracts multiple definitions and interpretations. Coaching is sometimes taken for being the same as other activities such mentoring, buddying and counselling. The skills of coaching are sometimes seen as synonymous with coaching itself. There is far from a common understanding of terms such as team coaching, reverse coaching, clean coaching, performance coaching, life coaching and so on.

The role of the coaching profession

To begin with, it is proposed that not enough work has been done by the coaching profession, and those that feel responsible for the discipline, to de-mystify the work of coaching and the value that it delivers. Many of the difficulties we now face follow on from this unclear and, at times, misleading picture. This is partly, but not only, related to the confidentiality of coaching conversations and the difficulty of "getting inside" the work of coaching to understand its effects. But it is also related to the confusion that is caused by a proliferation of coaching terms, approaches, schools of thought and purposes to which it is put. Taken together, these make it difficult to select the most appropriate strategy for coaching an individual. The sector would benefit from having a clearer picture of the discipline and the tools of evaluation that are available and recommended.

Thinking about coaching as a value production chain

Evaluative work would benefit greatly from an explicit application of a *value production chain* methodology which recognises the links in the chain that contribute (or can subtract) value from the process. Much attention is given to the work and value of the coach, and the extent to which the coach has affected a change in the behaviour of the coachee, and too little is given to the contribution made by the coachee, their line manager, the L&D department and other links in the chain. What precisely is being evaluated, and who should be selected as the arbiter(s) of value, needs greater attention.

Continuing this theme, it is clear that still more needs to be done than is currently the case to strengthen the evaluation process. Often we see overly simplistic measures in use. These typically involve surveys (usually post-intervention only), informal conversations and work to gather up anecdotes. This kind of analysis is usually judged to be more or less sufficient to demonstrate what are complex outcomes, and complex interactions between the coach, the coachee and other variables in play. However, in order to prove attribution/causality, to demonstrate change over time, and to get beneath the more reactive indications of impact, more sophisticated approaches are required. Our argument is that the costs involved in undertaking work at this level of confidence about the conclusions would most likely be prohibitively high, and as a result evaluators settle for a halfway house that fails to provide a reliable indication of value. The sector needs to reach a view on what it should do about this, and whether it is willing to invest the resources likely to be required or whether it will accept the halfway house solution.

Methodologies, measurement and return on investment

Looking to the specific methodologies and analytical frameworks used in coaching evaluation, an argument that may warrant attention is that too much has been borrowed from the natural/physical sciences, which assume a level of predictability and objectivity that is not found in the world of human systems. The variables that are put under the microscope in the natural sciences do not seek to make sense of what is happening to them. They do not express an emotion as the temperature is turned up underneath them. They do not need to undo years of socialisation to decide what to do when new input is introduced. The evaluative strategies of coaching currently fail to take account of this complexity, instead nudging evaluation towards assessment practices that are more positivist and business-influenced.

By using more positivist frames, and the language that accompanies them - of "return on investment", "measurement", "quantification", "metrics" and so on – evaluative work runs the risk of distorting the contribution that coaching can make, and the purposes for which it is then used. If coaching is to be evaluated in a way that is more in keeping with the social sciences and the study of human systems, which might, for example, involve more ethnographic methods, we might get a truer and possibly quite different picture of the value that coaching brings.

Looking more closely at the benefits of coaching, coaching is often sold as a means of delivering value at the organisational level, as well as at the level of the individual. While there may be anecdotal evidence that supports benefit flowing towards individuals, there is very little evidence that has been systematically gathered that would demonstrate a positive impact at the organisational level. To date it has been assumed that if benefits accrue for the individual coachee then this will translate into benefits for the organisation ie what it good for the individual is good for the organisation - and

in some instances this may be true. However, coaching may in fact introduce a kind of advantage for a small proportion of employees (the recipients of coaching) that then enables them to further their careers in ways that others (that have not received coaching) cannot. This then focuses the spotlight on the process for determining who is offered coaching in the first instance and what participants then do with that advantage. Taking this further, we know that coaching can sometimes lead to a reduction of benefit at the level of the organisation (at least in the short term), in instances where recipients of coaching might alter their career aspirations and leave the organisation as a consequence of their coaching (for which there are many examples). The headline of this provocation is that more work needs to be done to determine how the benefits of coaching are being secured for the organisation as a whole.

Testing our commitment to proper evaluation

Finally, although there is not yet a robust and compelling body of evidence to support the value of coaching, particularly in terms of the value for money argument, a sense nevertheless prevails that it is a "good thing" for organisations. During this research there were no instances of respondents suggesting that coaching wasn't a good form of developmental intervention – in fact the opposite was true. Recipients and commissioners alike come out strongly in support of coaching. One way of accounting for this rather puzzling conclusion, given the gaps in the evidence relating to its value, is that there is little genuine appetite to evaluate coaching properly. This is a provocation that sits at the heart of this research work. While the case for coaching hasn't yet been proven, the community, it would seem, has made its mind up. The question that therefore needs to be posed is "are we prepared to evaluate coaching properly to determine its value?" And possibly too, in light of the prevailing view of the community, "how might we protect an evaluation process from a confirmation bias?"

Scope for future research

The purpose of this paper was to find out how coaching is being used and valued across the sector and how it is evaluated. From this it was our intention to provide a provocation to the sector that relates to the value of coaching; how it measures its impact; and to what extent coaching has the potential to drive, or support, improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in higher education. This endeavour has perhaps provided more questions than answers and we have identified some scope for future research as follows:

- The evidence presented in this paper is only a snapshot of coaching in higher education and so there is scope to undertake a much broader study across the sector.
- The academic literature on coaching in higher education is sparse and focuses mainly on academics, so there is scope to undertake further academic studies, and also those which focus coaching for: executives; leaders; professional and support staff; and students.
- We looked only at the practice around coaching impact and not about the investment that is made, so there is scope to undertake further exploration into the benefits compared to the investment.

However, our greatest hope from this paper is that we will have started a debate about coaching in higher education that may nudge both higher education practitioners (and maybe the coaching profession) to start their exploration in a quite different place.

The provocations have provided some inspiration for such exploration, most notably:

- Developing a clearer picture of the discipline and the tools that are available and recommended.
- Application of *value production chain methodology* to look at what precisely is being evaluated and who should be the arbiter(s) of value.
- Methodologies which recognise the complexity of people working within organisational contexts and perhaps use more qualitative research, such as ethnography, to identify a different dimension on the value that coaching brings.
- Looking more closely at the benefits of such an individually focused intervention at the organisational level and how the benefits of coaching are being secured for the organisation a whole.

Concluding remarks

During a time when the spotlight is on efficiency and effectiveness in higher education, a clear question for universities must be how the provision of targeted, or individual, coaching supports improvements in efficiency or effectiveness in the higher education workforce. Maybe now it is time for higher education to recognise explicitly that we, like other organisations, have made the paradigm shift from our more mechanised past to the recognition that organisations, workplaces and cultures have shifted to psychological spaces. That the rhetoric around the things that we value about coaching has become disconnected from the ways in which we measure, or intend to measure, its value. That we are trying to turn coaching into something which it is not, and in trying to make it fit existing value and evaluation frameworks we are putting ourselves in a dangerous position of missing its true value. By forcing ourselves to consider how to measure what is instant, observable and quantifiable we will never make the paradigm shift that we need in order to recognise the true value of coaching as a contributor to organisational effectiveness and its success through its people. Maybe now is the time to focus not just on the benefits of coaching to individuals, but to explore the systemic nature of coaching and the impact of coaching individuals on the wider system. And maybe now is the time to take a hard look at ourselves and question whether we are in anxiety, paroxysm or habit - to enable us to step off the treadmill of traditional evaluation thinking and to take a fresh perspective.

We are looking forward to the challenge!

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Figures and boxes

Tables

Figures

Boxes

Appendices

Appendix 1

Survey on coaching in higher education

Evaluating the impact of coaching in higher education

Question 1: What is coaching used for in your institution? Please tick all that apply:

- Executive development
- Leadership development
- High potentials
- Academic staff development
- Academic staff career development
- Professional and support staff development
- Professional and support staff career development
- To support 360 Degree Feedback
- To support transitions
- Development of internal coaches
- Life coaching
- Team coaching
- Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

Question 2: How is coaching used in your institution? Please tick all that apply:

- Stand-alone initiative
- Offered as an embedded part of a development programme
- Offered in parallel to a development programme
- To support/develop good performers
- To support/develop poor performers
- Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

Question 3: How is coaching commissioned in your institution? Please tick all that apply:

- Embedded in an internal development programme
- Offered as part of an external development programme
- Through HR processes
- Via a line manager
- Directly by the coachee and invoiced to the institution
- Paid for from a central development budget
- Paid for from a local development budget

Question 4: What type of coaches do you use? Please tick all that apply:

- Internal
- External
- Internal and external

Question 5: How many coaching sessions are typical of your offering? Please tick all that apply:

- One off isolated sessions
- One off sessions aligned to an activity, such as 360 Degree Feedback
- Staff are offered a course of 1-3 sessions
- Staff are offered a course of 3-6 sessions
- There is no limit to the number of sessions
- A rare and specific intervention

Question 6: What mediums are used for coaching? Please tick all that apply:

- Face to face
- Telephone
- Skype or similar, i.e. GoToMeeting/Zoom
- Email
- Blended approach

Question 7: The literature outlines a number of tangible benefits of coaching, which of the following are, in your opinion, the three most likely TANGIBLE benefits of coaching?

- Personal goal achievement
- Metrics/Key Performance Indicators
- 360 Degree Feedback
- Quality
- Productivity
- Revenue
- Costs
- Time
- Conversion – units; money; %; hours
- Response time
- Capacity
- Cash
- Customer satisfaction
- Project management deliverables
- Return on Investment
- Return on Expectation
- Links to organisational strategy
- Links to organisational objectives
- Business oriented benefits
- Organisational strength

In your experience are there any other tangible benefits of coaching that cannot be categorised within those listed above? Please specify:

Question 8: The literature outlines a number of intangible benefits of coaching, which of the following are, in your opinion, the three most likely INTANGIBLE/LESS TANGIBLE benefits of coaching?

- Clarity
- Self-confidence / efficacy / awareness / cognition /personal insight
- Managing the self-emotional
- Motivation
- Morale
- Working relationships with direct reports
- Working relationships with immediate supervisors
- Teamwork
- Sustained behaviour change, which may indirectly improve leadership skills; skills development; job performance
- Stress reduction; improved mental health
- Skills enhancement/transfer to job i.e. leadership; communication; listening
- Commitment to, or engagement with, job/organisation
- Attitude (work related)
- Motivation to change
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Breaking down silos
- Job satisfaction
- Career satisfaction
- Balance between work and personal life
- Life changing experience
- Conflict management
- Strategic thinking
- Credibility with others
- Planning skills
- Patience
- Learnt more about business and internal politics
- Developed thinking systems
- Coping with ambiguity
- Feeling more powerful
- More effective at meeting one's own responsibilities and obligations
- Encourages diarised reflective/sense-making space to deal with day to day complexity

In your experience are there any other intangible/less tangible benefits of coaching that cannot be categorised within those listed above? Please specify:

Question 9: When you evaluate coaching what are you aiming to find out about? Please tick all that apply:

- Positive outcomes/outputs
- Negative outcomes/outputs
- Tangible benefits
- Intangible benefits
- Coaching process
- Experience of coaching
- Programme administration
- Feedback on the quality of the coach
- Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

Question 10: From whom do you collect formal feedback on coaching? Please tick all that apply:

- Coach
- Coachee
- Line manager of coachee
- Direct report of coachee
- Colleague of coachee
- Programme facilitator
- Coach supervisor
- Human Resources
- Organisational Development
- External evaluation
- Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

Question 11: Where does informal/anecdotal feedback come from? Please tick all that apply:

- Coach
- Coachee
- Line manager of coachee
- Direct report of coachee
- Colleague of coachee
- Programme facilitator
- Coach supervisor
- Human Resources
- Organisational Development
- Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

Question 12: How do you collect feedback? Please tick all that apply:

- We do not collect any feedback
- Survey
- Individual interview
- Focus group
- Programme review meeting
- Three way meeting with coach, coachee, line manager or other organisational representative
- Coachee narrative
- Coachee reflective diary
- Case study
- Individual narrative
- Anecdotal feedback
- Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

Question 13: How is coaching valued in your institution?

Question 14: How is the coaching evaluation used once it is collected?

Question 15: In your opinion are there missed opportunities for coaching in your institution? If yes please give details.

Question 16: How well do you feel that your current evaluation system fits with your experiences of the benefits of coaching? How could it be enhanced?

Question 17: If you do not have processes for evaluating coaching, how do you know if it works?

Question 18: If you do not have processes for evaluating coaching, what stops you from doing this?

Question 19: We may like to ask you some further questions about the responses in this survey. Please add your name, email address and telephone number below

Appendix 2

Graphs of survey responses

Figure 1 What coaching is used for in higher education

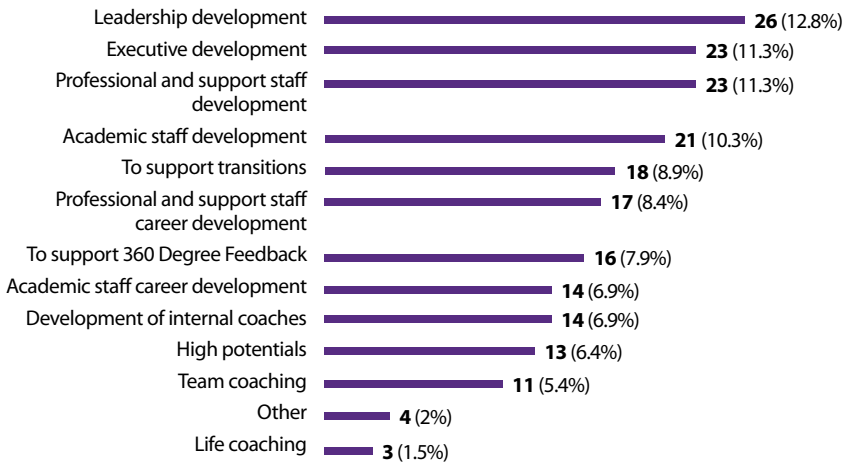


Figure 2 How coaching is used

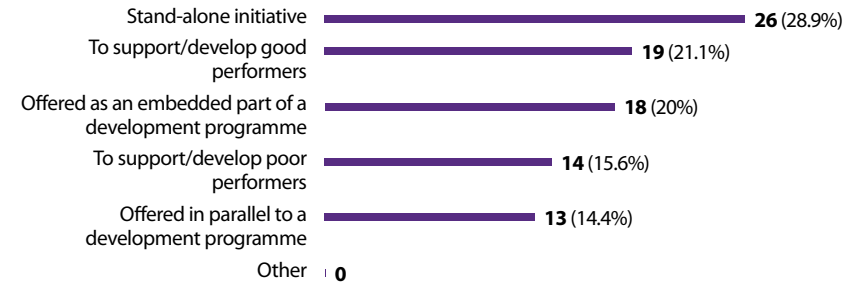


Figure 3 How coaching is commissioned in higher education

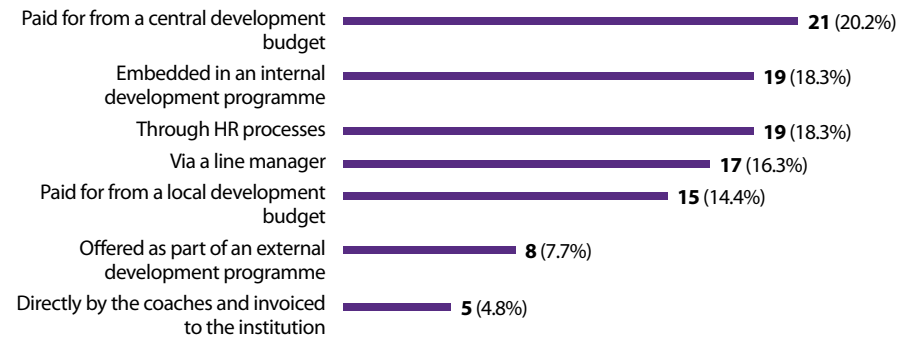


Figure 4 The type of coaches used in higher education

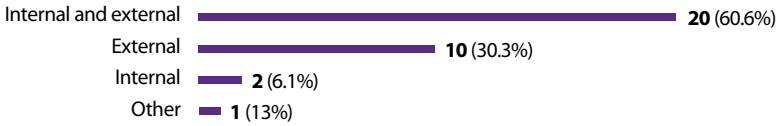


Figure 5 The number of coaching sessions

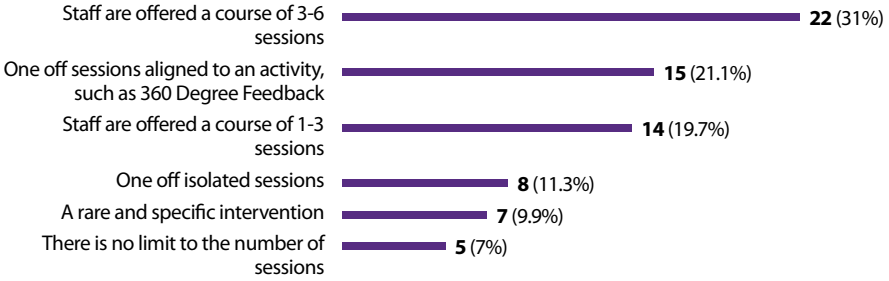


Figure 6 Mediums used for coaching

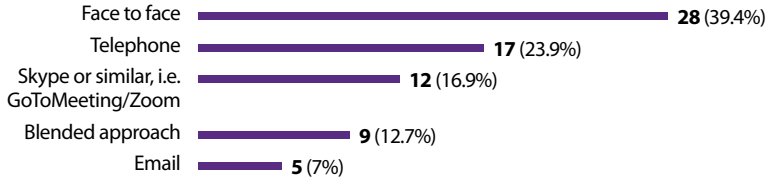


Figure 7 Top three most likely tangible benefits of coaching in higher education

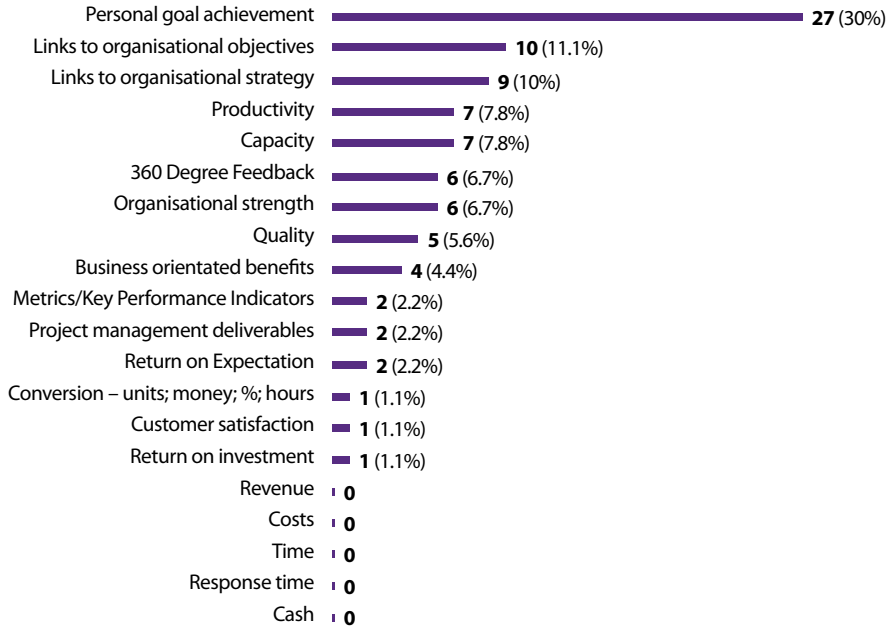


Figure 8 Top three mostly likely intangible benefits of coaching in higher education

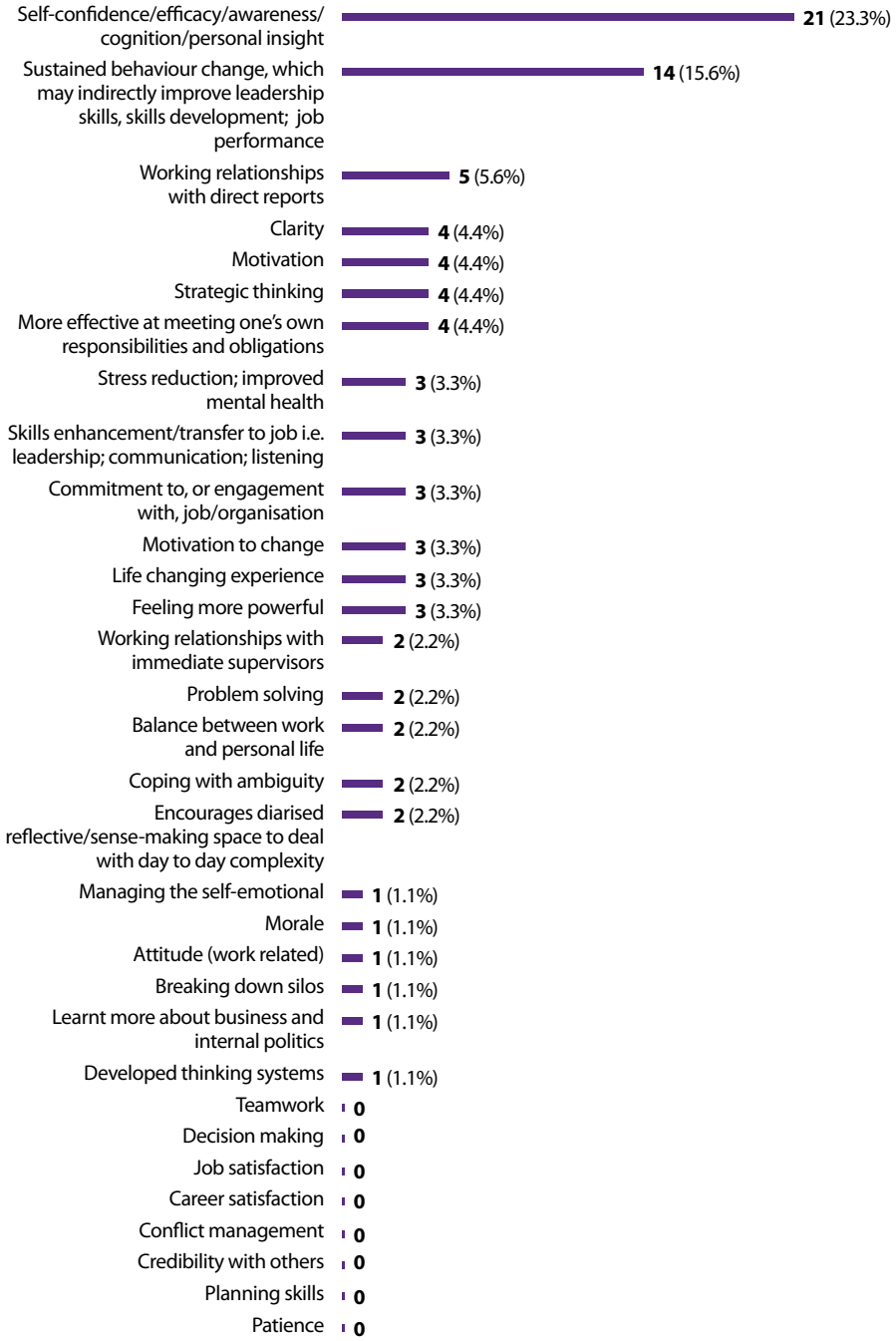


Figure 9 What evaluation is designed to find out

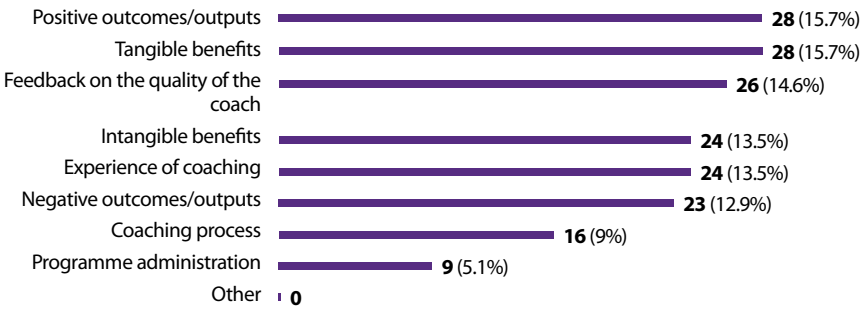


Figure 10 Who formal feedback is collected from

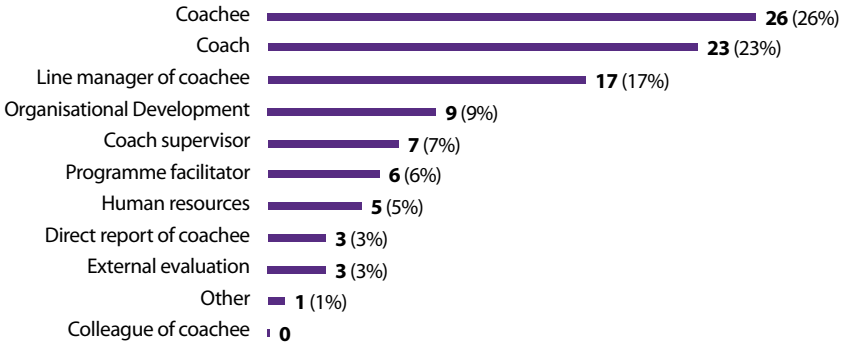


Figure 11 Who informal feedback is collected from

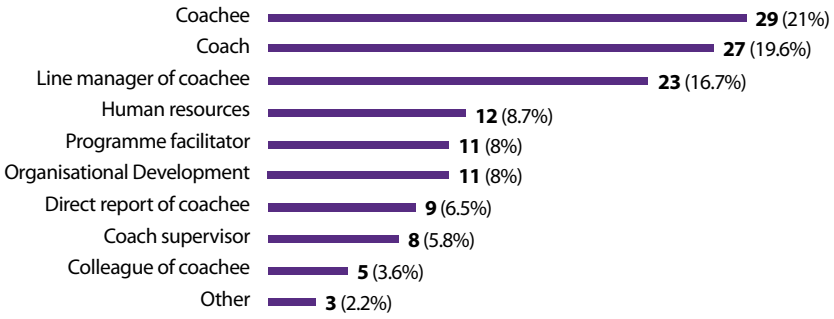
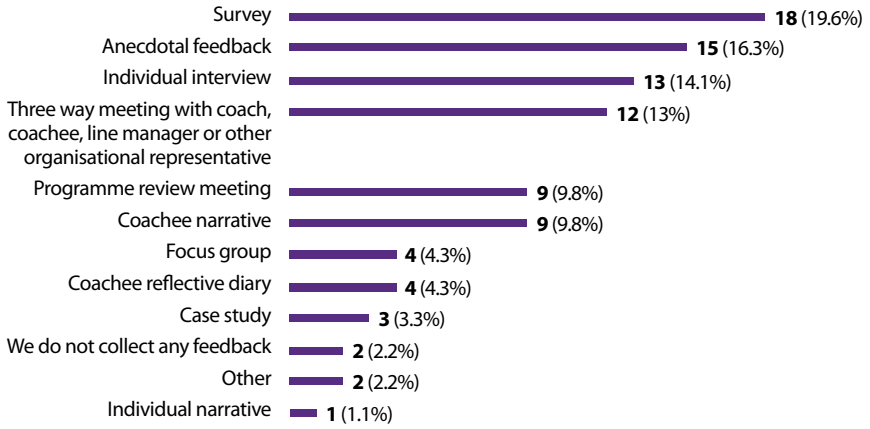


Figure 12 How feedback is collected



Appendix 3

The provocations as a stand-alone resource

Coaching evaluation: the provocations

How to reference this resource:
Harding, C., Sofianos, L. and Box, M. (Date) *Exploring the Impact of Coaching in Higher Education*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

In particular we would like to thank Lisa Sofianos for making the most of her natural propensity to question in order to build on our conversations, the literature, survey findings and case studies to develop a series of provocations to stimulate thinking within the sector (and most likely beyond).

Setting the context

1. The purpose of this section of the paper is to provide an opportunity to stimulate discussion around the theme of coaching evaluation and specifically to introduce a series of challenges in the pursuit of a frank and authentic exploration of the topic. In this context, it is important to hold in mind that:

   - Although this work sits within a wider exploration of coaching evaluation in the higher education sector, it can be read as a stand-alone paper.
   - It is deliberately non-academic in tone, although thoughtful and offered in a spirit of enquiry.
   - It seeks to deliberately "push the tiller" quite hard in certain directions to promote debate and discussion. In this sense we may not hold with the arguments proffered, but nevertheless feels there is value in exploring them.
   - It may provoke strong reactions in the reader but this is done to stimulate thinking and to enable a useful re-frame of the work that may need to be done.

2. This section is structured around six core provocations that are developed in the following pages. Each of the provocations contains a challenge to how we might apprehend the task of coaching evaluation. The sequencing of these provocations is not important although there are clearly relationships and linkages between some of these. They are formatted with a particular intention so that interested parties may lift discrete provocations from the paper to form the basis of detailed inquiry and further thinking. The headlines for these provocations are as follows:

   - **Provocation #1:** The coaching profession hasn't done enough to de-mystify coaching (Annex 1).
   - **Provocation #2:** Insufficient attention is given to the "value chain" associated with coaching, and as such the contributions to value arising from the coachee themselves, their line manager and the commissioners of coaching are largely ignored (Annex 2).
   - **Provocation #3:** The level at which evaluative work would be meaningful and useful is the level at which it would cost too much (Annex 3).
   - **Provocation #4:** The way we currently measure coaching is distorting its value, and adversely affecting its contribution (Annex 4).
   - **Provocation #5:** If we were to properly evaluate coaching we would discover that it didn't offer value for money for the organisation (Annex 5).
   - **Provocation #6:** The truth is that no one really cares about evaluating coaching impact (Annex 6).

Summary observations

3. There are particular threads that run through the cases put for each provocation which highlight some important difficulties that are inherent to the business of coaching evaluation. These include a recognition that:

   - Uncertainty still remains as to the value that coaching delivers to the sector.
   - There is not a commonly agreed best practice approach to evaluating coaching.
   - The full costs of coaching for the sector are not currently known.
   - In some respects, coaching remains shrouded in mystery, and this is reflected in important definitional variations[4], the confidential nature of coaching conversations, and an absence of a common understanding of its purpose, potential and its strategic value.
   - The coaching discipline has not yet developed a widely accepted set of professional standards for coaching evaluation.

4. The provocations explored in this section reflect these challenges and raise important questions about a number of areas of coaching evaluation.

5. The role of the coaching profession

   To begin with, it is proposed that not enough work has been done by the coaching profession, and those that feel responsible for the discipline, to de-mystify the work of coaching and the value that it delivers. Many of the difficulties we now face follow on from this unclear, and at times, misleading picture. This is partly, but not only, related to the confidentiality of coaching conversations and the difficulty of "getting inside" the work of coaching to understand its effects. But it is also related to the confusion that is caused by a proliferation of coaching terms, approaches, schools of thought and purposes to which it is put. Taken together, these make it difficult to select the most appropriate strategy for coaching an individual. The sector would benefit from having a clearer picture of the discipline and the tools of evaluation that are available and recommended.

6. Thinking about coaching as a value production chain

   Evaluative work would benefit greatly from an explicit application of a *value production chain* methodology which recognises the links in the chain that contribute (or can subtract) value from the process. Much attention is given to the work and value of the coach, and the extent to which the coach has affected a change in the behaviour of the coachee, and too little is given to the contribution made by the coachee, their line manager, the L&D department and other links in the chain. What precisely is being evaluated, and who should be selected as the arbiter(s) of value, need greater attention.

7. Continuing this theme, it is clear that still more needs to be done than is currently the case to strengthen the evaluation process. Often we see overly simplistic measures in use. These typically involve surveys (usually post-intervention only), informal conversations and work to gather up anecdotes. This kind of analysis is usually judged to be more or less sufficient to demonstrate what are complex outcomes, and complex interactions between the coach, the coachee and other variables in play. However, in order to prove attribution/causality, to demonstrate change over time, and to get beneath the more reactive indications of impact, more sophisticated approaches are required. Our argument is that the costs involved in undertaking work at this level of confidence about the conclusions would most likely be prohibitively high, and as a result evaluators settle for a halfway house that fails to provide a reliable indication of value. The sector needs to reach a view on what it should do about this, and whether it is willing to invest the resources likely to be required or whether it will accept the halfway house solution.

4
Coaching attracts multiple definitions and interpretations. Coaching is sometimes taken for being the same as other activities such mentoring, buddying and counselling. The skills of coaching are sometimes seen as synonymous with coaching itself. There is far from a common understanding of terms such as team coaching, reverse coaching, clean coaching, performance coaching, life coaching and so on.

8. Methodologies, measurement and return on investment

   Looking to the specific methodologies and analytical frameworks used in coaching evaluation, an argument that may warrant attention is that too much has been borrowed from the natural/physical sciences which assume a level of predictability and objectivity that is not found in the world of human systems. The variables that are put under the microscope in the natural sciences do not seek to make sense of what is happening to them. They do not express an emotion as the temperature is turned up underneath them. They do not need to undo years of socialisation to decide what to do when new input is introduced. The evaluative strategies of coaching currently fail to take account of this complexity, instead nudging evaluation towards assessment practices that are more positivist and business-influenced.

9. By using more positivist frames, and the language that accompanies them - of "return on investment", "measurement", "quantification", "metrics" and so on – evaluative work runs the risk of distorting the contribution that coaching can make, and the purposes for which it is then used. If coaching is to be evaluated in a way that is more in keeping with the social sciences and the study of human systems, which might, for example, involve more ethnographic methods, we might get a truer and possibly quite different picture of the value that coaching brings.

10. Looking more closely at the benefits of coaching, coaching is often sold as a means of delivering value at the organisational level, as well as at the level of the individual. While there may be anecdotal evidence that supports benefit flowing towards individuals, there is very little evidence that has been systematically gathered that would demonstrate a positive impact at the organisational level. To date it has been assumed that if benefits accrue for the individual coachee then this will translate into benefits for the organisation ie what it good for the individual is good for the organisation - and in some instances this may be true. However, coaching may in fact introduce a kind of advantage for a small proportion of employees (the recipients of coaching) that then enables them to further their careers in ways that others (that have not received coaching) cannot. This then focuses the spotlight on the process for determining who is offered coaching in the first instance and what participants then do with that advantage. Taking this further, we know that coaching can sometimes lead to a reduction of benefit at the level of the organisation (at least in the short term), in instances where recipients of coaching might alter their career aspirations and leave the organisation as a consequence of their coaching (for which there are many examples). The headline of this provocation is that more work needs to be done to determine how the benefits of coaching are being secured for the organisation as a whole.

11. Testing our commitment to proper evaluation

    Finally, although there is not yet a robust and compelling body of evidence to support the value of coaching, particularly in terms of the value for money argument, a sense nevertheless prevails that it is a "good thing" for organisations. During this research there were no instances of respondents suggesting that coaching wasn't a good form of developmental intervention – in fact the opposite was true. Recipients and commissioners alike come out strongly in support of coaching. One way of accounting for this rather puzzling conclusion, given the gaps in the evidence relating to its value, is that there is little genuine appetite to evaluate coaching properly. This is a provocation that sits at the heart of this research work. While the case for coaching hasn't yet been proven, the community, it would seem, has made its mind up. The question that therefore needs to be posed is "are we prepared to evaluate coaching properly to determine its value?" And possibly too, in light of the prevailing view of the community, "how might we protect an evaluation process from a confirmation bias?"

Key recommendations

12. Each of the provocations explored in the following pages highlight some initial recommendations for consideration – 23 in total. Although these arise from a process of challenge they are intended as practical and realistic steps that might be taken by the sector to advance the work in this area. In terms of the recommendations that we would offer as higher priority, these are as follows:

    h) The coaching profession, those that practice coaching, and the higher education L&D community should take serious steps to demystify the discipline, and to take responsibility for the shape that the reputation of coaching has been taking. It should seek to communicate the clear benefits of coaching on a personal, organisational and societal level in order that potential commissioners and coachees can make confident and informed choices.

    i) There should be greater explicitness in the evaluation process regarding the links in the *value production chain* that will be subject to examination, and greater explicitness about who should be the arbiter(s) of value.

    j) Work should be undertaken to establish the full costs of coaching - to include the external costs of coaches or developing internal coaches, the cost of coachees using their time in this way, the cost of commissioning, evaluation and so on. With this information it will be possible to make much clearer and more informed decisions about value for money.

    k) An agreed strategy should be developed by the sector to guide the evaluation of coaching. This strategy should make clear and explicit the trade-offs between rigor and the level of investment involved.

    l) Work should be undertaken to develop evaluative frameworks that draw from the best of the practices found in the field of social sciences, such as ethnographic methods.

    m) In light of the methodological demands of undertaking robust and reliable evaluation of coaching, a review should be undertaken of the capacity and capabilities of those (typically those working within HR, OD and Learning & Development) who undertake evaluation – specifically if they are to adopt deeper, more qualitative approaches to evaluation.

    n) The sector should develop a view on the importance of coaching, as compared to other similarly costing interventions, and with this in mind perhaps develop decision-making models that will aid investment decisions.

Provocation #1: The coaching profession hasn't done enough to de-mystify coaching.

The case

1. The coaching relationship is usually a confidential arrangement and as such "what happens in the coaching conversation stays in the coaching conversation". And so in this sense it is hard for anyone to really know, particularly someone that has never received coaching, what it entails. Furthermore, there are some well-worn misconceptions about the differences or similarities between coaching and other one-to-one developmental activities such as mentoring, buddying, counselling, performance management discussions, psychoanalysis and so on. The last type of intervention here on the list – psychoanalysis – is offered deliberately because, for many, coaching is understood as a process that is not unlike psychoanalysis with all the imagined conventions that go with it – the long silences, the oblique questions, the meaningful looks and the reliance on what many critics of coaching would call "psychobabble".

2. To add further to the confusion there is a wide array of different forms of coaching and descriptive terms which include performance coaching, executive coaching, business coaching, group coaching, life coaching, career coaching, content coaching, clean coaching, confidence coaching etc. This is demonstrated in an exchange in one of the interviews with coaching commissioners in higher education institutions:

   Interviewer: When you said you don't do much at team level, do you do any group coaching?

   Right, that's a good question, we don't call it group coaching, I guess you can say it's group coaching but we don't define it at that

   Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

   It would be, for example, team development days where you look at the team effectiveness and you get people to reflect on what's working well, what's not working well and helping them come up with an action plan that would get them to meet their objectives, so we do that a lot, especially the last couple of years, the demand is increasing. Is that what you mean team coaching?

   Interviewer: Well I think it's a good example because I wouldn't necessarily see it as coaching, I'd see it as facilitation of a team in that context but there's no reason why it can't be and in some ways it gives us a particular attention if you're using coaching techniques to support that team in development so, no, that's valid. (Transcript DS25005):

3. Related to this are sometimes polarised assumptions about the motivations for coaching which can range from framing coaching as a problem-centred or sometimes remedial response to an individual's situation in work to coaching as something for those in the very highest positions in the organisation – the most "important" employees. There is mystery too to the way in which people are selected for coaching. This tends not to be something that is made very visible to the organisation, perhaps in the same way that a leadership development programme, for example, might be.

4. Finally, in terms of the discipline itself, while there are recognised coaching qualifications that people can acquire, it is just as easy and widespread to practice one form of coaching or another with little formal scrutiny of what is done, without supervisory input and without a sense that the industry is being regulated.

5. All of this adds to the sense that coaching is a mystical art that is commissioned behind closed doors, delivered by people who may or may not be particularly qualified, doing things that for the most part we have little or no visibility of, and with a very unclear picture of what value is actually being produced. It is this combination of factors that may account for the greater majority of the nervousness and lack of clarity about the business of coaching.

The implications

6. The major implication of this argument is that the persistent call for better evaluation of coaching may actually be an expression of the confusion that people feel when they hear about coaching. The motivation for answering the evaluation question is really a reflection of how mysterious the whole discipline of coaching has become.

Recommendations

7. The recommendations in line with this perspective are as follows

- The coaching profession (and those that practice coaching) should take serious steps to demystify the discipline, and to take responsibility for the shape that the reputation of coaching has been taking. It should seek to communicate the clear benefits of coaching on a personal, organisational and societal level in order that potential commissioners and coachees can make confident and informed choices.
- Commissioning entities (usually HR, OD or L&D) should do more to demystify, within organisations, the role that coaching plays in performance improvement.
- Line managers should take it as their responsibility to be much more familiar with the coaching process and how it fits into their managerial responsibilities.

Provocation #2: Insufficient attention is given to the "value chain" associated with coaching, and as such the contributions to value arising from the coachee themselves, their line manager and the commissioner of coaching are largely ignored.

The case

1. Too much reliance has been placed on only one variable within the coaching "value chain" – namely the "performance" of the coach in bringing about good results in the behaviour and actions of the coachee. As such the evaluation of coaching has given greatest emphasis to this particular link in the chain, necessarily taking the coachee as being the most reliable witness.

2. The process of value production arises from the contributions that are made by four key groupings:

- Link 1: The contribution of the coach (where most attention goes)
- Link 2: The contribution of the coachee
- Link 3: The contribution of the line manager(s)
- Link 4: The contribution of the commissioning entity (typically the HR, OD or L&D department)

3. Value cannot be created by the coach alone. The coachee needs first of all to put in the necessary work and to commit to addressing what will most likely be some tough challenges. But even if both coach and coachee make a strong contribution (that can be evaluated), the line manager plays a critical role in allowing, enabling, supporting, and catalysing the value that is being created (or conversely potentially detracting value by blocking the efforts of the coachee). And, finally, the commissioning entity has a fundamentally important role in determining that coaching is the right solution (compared to other improvement strategies), ensuring that it comes at the right time for the coachee and that the learning from evaluation is driven back into the coaching process and so on. This poses a first order question regarding what is placed under the microscope in coaching evaluation.

4. It is clear from the responses to the survey and interviews that many institutions seek feedback on the success of coaching interventions from a variety of stakeholders (the coach, coachee, line managers, peers, direct reports etc). However, what is not evident is a systematic examination of these stakeholders in terms of representing links in a value production chain, each contributing a portion of the total value of the coaching. Neither does there seem to be evidence of work undertaken to analyse the risks or weaknesses, potential added value, or where value might be leached from the process.

5. A related question to this is "who should be the arbiter of value?" Very often the coachee is framed as the most important arbiter of value, but this perspective is not without contention. The voice of "the organisation" is rarely heard in the evaluation process and arguably this should be the loudest in the debate. However, the perspectives of "customers" eg students might also be played in, as might the judgments of colleagues working with the coachee and so on.

The implications

6. The implications of these judgments are wide ranging and they highlight a level of complexity that tends not to be explicitly addressed. There are some methodological tensions in that the commissioning entity (Link 4 in the value chain) is often also the evaluating entity and there is a risk (perceived or real) of not remaining objective in the evaluation as a result. There are similar methodological challenges in stripping out the vested interests in particular outcomes arising from this approach.

Recommendations

7. In order to act upon the implications of this provocation, it may be sensible to

- Encourage greater explicitness in the evaluation process regarding the links in the value chain that will be subject to examination.
- Encourage greater explicitness about the judgments to be made about who should be the arbiter of value.
- Consider engaging external partners - that do not have vested interests in the work being done – to assess the value contributed by each link in the value chain.
- Establish and communicate the evaluative criteria used at the outset to those in the value chain, identifying their role in the coaching itself and the process of value production.

Provocation #3: The level at which evaluative work would be meaningful and useful is the level at which it would cost too much.

The case

1. The kind of evaluative work that would deliver an acceptable level of rigor, reliability and validity would involve the following:

- Work to establish a baseline point of comparison prior to the coaching intervention.
- A clear and reliable methodology to establish attribution ie being able to attribute outcomes as having arisen from coaching rather than other variables.
- Longitudinal work, as for many the effects of coaching will necessarily take time to develop.
- Data generation from a "basket of indicators" that would include testimony from the coachee, input from those that work closely with the coachee including their line manager (to provide objectivity), data from "hard" measures such as business/organisational performance and so on.
- Scrutiny of the commitments arising from coaching sessions by the coachee and tracking of their enactment.
- A full costing process of the coaching intervention – to include the fees paid to the coach (assuming it is externally provided), the cost of the time invested by the coachee, and the commissioning and process handling cost (we assume by an HR, OD or L&D department).
- A means of tackling confidentiality agreements between the coach and coachee which potentially place some important data out of scope.

This level of investment in coaching evaluation is unlikely to be cost-effective, while a lesser investment would only offer broad and possibly unreliable indications of coaching value.

The implications

2. This time and cost involved in this area raises some fundamental questions about the preparedness of the higher education sector and those involved in coaching to solve the evaluation question. If there is strong commitment to coaching evaluation then there needs to be some innovation and fresh thinking to overcome the cost-effectiveness problem. To date, this has not been a priority and as a result coaching evaluation has been somewhat inconsistent, relying typically on incomplete evaluations eg conversations with the coachee, and interesting and indicative but not far reaching, rigorous, robust or statistically significant research.

Recommendations

3. At the heart of this provocation and the implications that arise from it is the need to answer an important question - "Do we care enough about coaching evaluation to resolve the issue of cost-effectiveness?" If the answer to this question is "No", which may be understandable in a time of constrained resources, then a decision needs to be made to move away from an expectation that coaching should be evaluated in the formal sense and instead treat it as one of many (non-evaluated) management responses, such as performance appraisals or review meetings, that seek to drive individual and organisational performance. In this sense we seek to lay the argument to rest and allow individual institutions to make the decisions that seem right for them. However, if the answer is "Yes" then the following may need to be considered:

   - Undertaking work that would establish the full cost of coaching (to include the external costs of recompensing or developing coaches, the cost of coachees using their time in this way, and the cost of commissioning and evaluation).
   - Developing an agreed strategy across the sector for the evaluation of coaching – one that makes explicit how the trade-offs between rigor and investment will be resolved.
   - Acknowledging that coaching delivers value - as it would be hard to argue against this - but undertaking the necessary work to sharpen the focus of subsequent evaluation activity. For example, choosing to evaluate the success achieved when coachees specify the actions they would like to take that have arisen from coaching sessions (or similar segmentation of aspects of coaching).
   - Giving attention to the "benefits realisation" aspects of coaching which would involve mapping the factors that drive success in coaching and engaging those involved in the process of creating value.

Provocation #4: The way we currently measure coaching is distorting its value, and adversely affecting its contribution.

The case

1. While approaches to coaching evaluation vary in some respects, the greater majority share a common characteristic in that they seek to value what is measureable. More often than not this may involve the completion, by the coachee, of a survey that uses questions to determine the strength of, or frequency of, the coaching impact. The more complicated considerations that sit beneath this, for example, how coaching might have changed the way that the coachee frames and tackles problems, or how the coachee thinks differently about themselves as a leader (and so on), may be missed off the spreadsheet. David Cooperrider, OD expert and founder of the Appreciative Inquiry discipline, is known for having said "Human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about" (Cooperider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003), and in this context the questions that we ask of coaching through evaluation work convey what "good" it is doing and, on that basis, what then it should be used to accomplish. The argument that we make in relation to this provocation is that the standard approaches to evaluation skew and run the risk of misrepresenting the "good" that coaching is delivering, and give a false lead in helping us understand what it should continue to be used for.

2. One explanation for this measurement bias is that too much emphasis is given to frames, conventions and methods that come from the physical (the natural) sciences. In the natural sciences we might, for example, be able to predict that water will boil at a given temperature and providing the conditions are constant the same results will be reliably achieved every time this happens. However, the variables that are put under the microscope in the natural sciences do not seek to make sense of what is happening to them. They do not express an emotion as the temperature is turned up underneath them. They do not need to undo years of socialisation to decide what to do when new input is introduced. The evaluative strategies of coaching currently fail to take account of this complexity, instead nudging evaluation towards assessment practices that do not fit the job.

The implications

3. There is an argument for looking to evaluate coaching through a more expert application of ethnographic approaches, interviews, observations, grounded theory and other methodologies that come from the social sciences. These, of course, will not produce the numbers and quantitative assurances that many will want, and this therefore suggests that work may need to be done in positioning this kind of evaluative work differently from what has gone before, and in providing added assistance in interpreting the results. This may have implications for the capabilities that some HR, OD and L&D departments possess, and this deeper approach may require an up-skilling in some instances.

4. Importantly, these represent attempts at evaluating coaching that will more closely describe the value that is actually being produced through coaching (while not succumbing to the more attractive option of measuring and quantifying the impacts of coaching). Furthermore, they stand a greater chance of providing a more honest and helpful guide to how coaching might then be used in the future.

Recommendations

5. In order to escape the distorting effects of current evaluative practices, there would be merit in:

- Developing evaluative frameworks that draw from the best of the practices found in the field of social sciences.
- Re-framing the language used in relation to coaching evaluation, away from frames that imply "measurement", "metrics" and "return on investment", for example, towards more qualitative language that allows for a more nuanced and ethnographic analysis of coaching.
- Paying close attention to the messages emerging from this approach when considering how coaching could continue to be used and the circumstances in which it is most appropriate.
- Determining the capacity and capability gap relating to those (typically those in within HR, OD or L&D) who undertake evaluation – specifically if they are to adopt deeper, more qualitative approaches to evaluation.

Provocation #5: If we were to properly evaluate coaching we would discover that it didn't offer value for money for the organisation.

The case

1. The process by which topics are identified for the focus of coaching work usually sits with the coachee who will specify the issues that they will bring to each coaching session. The "organisational voice" in this process is usually much quieter than the coachee's and it is assumed in most cases that what is good for the coachee must therefore be good for the organisation. The more effective the employee is, the more effective the organisation is. This is how the logic usually goes. While from one perspective this may hold true, in many instances it may not. For example, if a coachee brings an issue to coaching that is related to their reputation in the organisation, or their career progression, or dealing with their work-life balance, or how they can be more influential in the organisation (not unusual coaching themes), this may not necessarily coincide with the organisation's view of the most pressing priorities, let alone whether these accord with strategic imperatives. Line managers, who may be more able to speak for the organisation's interests, typically express varying degrees of interest and involvement with the coaching of their direct reports, and even where they are engaged, the terms of confidentiality of the coaching relationship often make this difficult. This is illustrated by a survey response:

However, we also need the (coaching) intervention to be business-focussed and, while we believe we have the pillars in place for coaching to bring benefits for both individual and organisation, we think that there is sometimes a disconnect, with more of a focus on the individual. (202457-202450-14641627)

2. Other arguments in support of this provocation relate not only to the process of issue selection, but also the less desirable consequences of coaching – from an organisational perspective - that sometimes arise. We know that one outcome from coaching for some coachees is sometimes the decision to depart from the organisation and pursue a different career. In other instances, recipients of coaching may decide that they will work fewer days for their employer (perhaps shifting from full to part-time arrangements). We might also see particular employees advantaged in their career progression as a result of coaching, over and above other colleagues that haven't benefited from coaching. These and other unexpected consequences may not fit with the organisation's interests or with the organisation's obligations to provide a level playing field for progression and advancement. However, current evaluative mechanisms pay limited attention to these considerations, giving an incomplete picture of the cost effectiveness of coaching.

The implications

3. Organisations invest all their time in activities, infrastructure, research, services, capital assets and so on. The benefits of these investments are usually felt widely across an organisation and may most directly and positively impact customers (or students), partner organisations and so on. Even in relation to other areas of developmental spend which, by design, are internally focused, the beneficiaries can be many. Leadership development programmes for example usually see cohorts numbering in the 10s, 20s and 30s.

4. However, coaching investments fall on individual employees and the spend per head is often much greater than the equivalent spend per head for participants in leadership development programmes, for example. It is for this reason that there should be an appropriate level of scrutiny of the use of coaching money, and care should be taken to ensure an alignment between the interests of the individual receiving coaching and the interests of the organisation paying for it. In many instances there is insufficient attention given to the latter and there are causes for concern, sufficient enough at least to trigger a much more thorough analysis of the outcomes of coaching at the organisational level, and for the learning from this to be played back into the coaching design process.

Recommendations

5. In responding to this provocation and its implications the following recommendations are made.

- Greater internal visibility at senior levels should be given to coaching assignments, and the commissioning entity (usually HR, OD or L&D) should put mechanisms in place for ensuring that organisational interests are represented in issue selection and benefits realisation in coaching.
- Line managers should be required to play an active role in coaching assignments where they relate to their own direct reports. Three-way "contracting" meetings should be a core feature of this involvement.
- Work should be undertaken to identify how coaching can be used to drive forward strategic priorities for the organisation.

Provocation #6: No one really cares enough about evaluating coaching impact.

The case

1. If we were to believe that coaching impact evaluation was part of the repertoire of essential organisational activity we might expect many of the following to be true:

- Coaching regularly appears on the agenda of the senior team.
- The outputs of evaluation are always carefully scrutinised and deployed strategically.
- Coaching represents a significant cost to institutions as a percentage of total expenditure.

- Coaching has the potential for serious organisational risk compared with other organisational activities.
- If coaching impact evaluation was to cease there would be serious repercussions to the health of the institution.
- It is so important to get coaching impact evaluation right that there is a large body of discussion, best practice, staff development etc on this subject.

2. Few of these indicators of organisational importance are attached to coaching. This may be because there is wide agreement that coaching is considered to be "a good thing" for modern, progressive institutions to offer their staff. Furthermore, the very presence of coaching within organisations makes employees feel valued and that their development is a priority for the organisation.

> *Interviewer: If you do not have formal evaluation processes for coaching, how do you know if it has any impact?*
>
> *Again, anecdotally individuals feedback positively. Clearly the idea of coaching and mentoring is viewed positively at a senior level as evidenced by the introduction of mentoring for new academic staff and professional services staff in 2016/17.*

The implications

3. The implications of a lack of commitment to the task of coaching evaluation is that we fail to invest fully in a well-articulated, comprehensive approach, instead permitting a proliferation of approaches that do not work usefully together. Arguably too, evaluative work often falls short of the standard that should be applied in such circumstances, allowing methodologically incomplete practices to go unquestioned. And even having gathered evaluative data we very often leave it to languish in drawers and cupboards with potentially valuable insights being lost along the way.

- Not enough financial resource is put into developing and delivering coaching evaluation.
- There is insufficient attention given to the capabilities to carry out this work.
- There is often insufficient scrutiny of the outcomes of coaching evaluation.
- There is arguably a largely unsubstantiated belief that coaching is a "good thing" and often better than other interventions of a similar cost.

Recommendations

4. If we were to really take seriously the business of coaching evaluation within higher education institutions, we might undertake the following:

- Develop a sector-wide view on the strategic importance of coaching, and in doing so agree a proportionate and appropriate level of investment in defining the value of coaching to the sector.
- Focus organisational effort on setting up the coaching for success and educating employees so that they can be more strategic.
- Stop evaluating all coaching interventions and take an auditing approach to quality control, including strategies from random sampling to interventions over a certain spend.
- Stop putting coaching on trial and develop a clear strategy on how and when a coaching intervention may be used effectively.
- Develop a view on the importance of coaching as compared to other similarly costing interventions (perhaps develop a decision tree of sorts to aid investment decisions.

Appendix 4

Taxonomy of selected coaching impact literature

Throughout this paper we have drawn attention to a number of reported studies from the literature on coaching. These studies take a variety of stances, such as the view from the coach, coachee, and organisational purpose, coaching approach, relationships, process and who is undertaking the coaching. As we reviewed the evidence-based literature we developed a taxonomy of coaching and impact. A taxonomy is a way of categorising and ordering information to arrange it within a structure with metadata values.

We structured the taxonomy in two dimensions similar to a pattern noted in De Haan and Duckworth (2012). The taxonomy reflects findings from both the higher education and wider organisational literature on coaching.

(i) A focus on factors that can impact on the effectiveness of the coaching, such as the environment, coach characteristics and client needs.

(ii) A focus on the impact that coaching had for individuals and organisations, which can be described as both tangible and intangible outcomes of coaching.

In order to provide a resource for readers we have included a taxonomy of some of the coaching literature that we reviewed in Appendix 4. This is included to signpost the reader to just some of the literature on coaching impact in order that they can explore further the aspects of coaching and impact that most interest them, and this may help to guide their own evaluation practice. However, the taxonomy should be viewed as a sample from the reviewed literature, rather than as a comprehensive picture of the coaching impact literature.

Factors that can impact on coaching

Factors that can impact on coaching include the purpose of the coaching; the environment in which it takes place; the characteristics of both the coach and the coachee; the relationship between the coach and coachee, and between a variety of stakeholders; the coaching format and approach. Leedham (2005) also identified the importance of similar foundation factors on the impact of coaching results. A variety of administrative factors, such as the coaching contract; how coaching is targeted; managed and evaluated can also impact on the coaching. Some examples and some further reading can be found Figure 13.

The impact that coaching can have

Our analysis of the literature shows that coaching can generate both tangible and intangible benefits.

More tangible benefits were deemed to be those that were associated with: goal achievement; improvements in performance; measurable through multisource feedback; and those with harder metrics such as increases in promotion or retention; or where a return on investment can be calculated.

Intangible or less tangible benefits in the literature were deemed to be those that were more associated with perspectives on the self, working with others, wellbeing, developing skills and behaviours and engagement with, or commitment to, the organisation.

Examples of perceived tangible benefits from the reviewed literature are outlined in Figure 14 and examples of perceived intangible/less tangible benefits from the reviewed literature are outlined in Figure 15.

Figure 13 Factors that impact on coaching

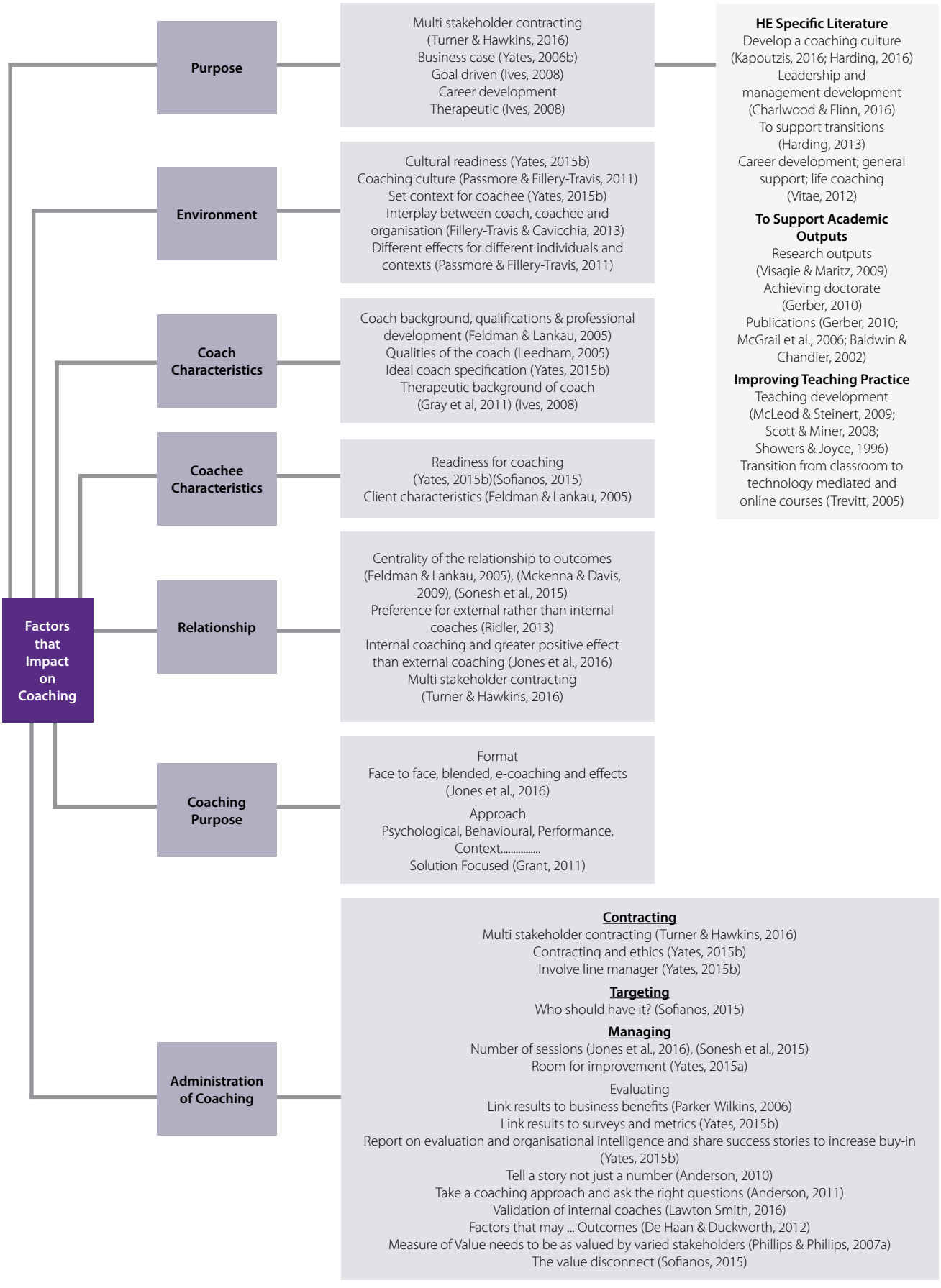


Figure 14 Tangible benefits of coaching

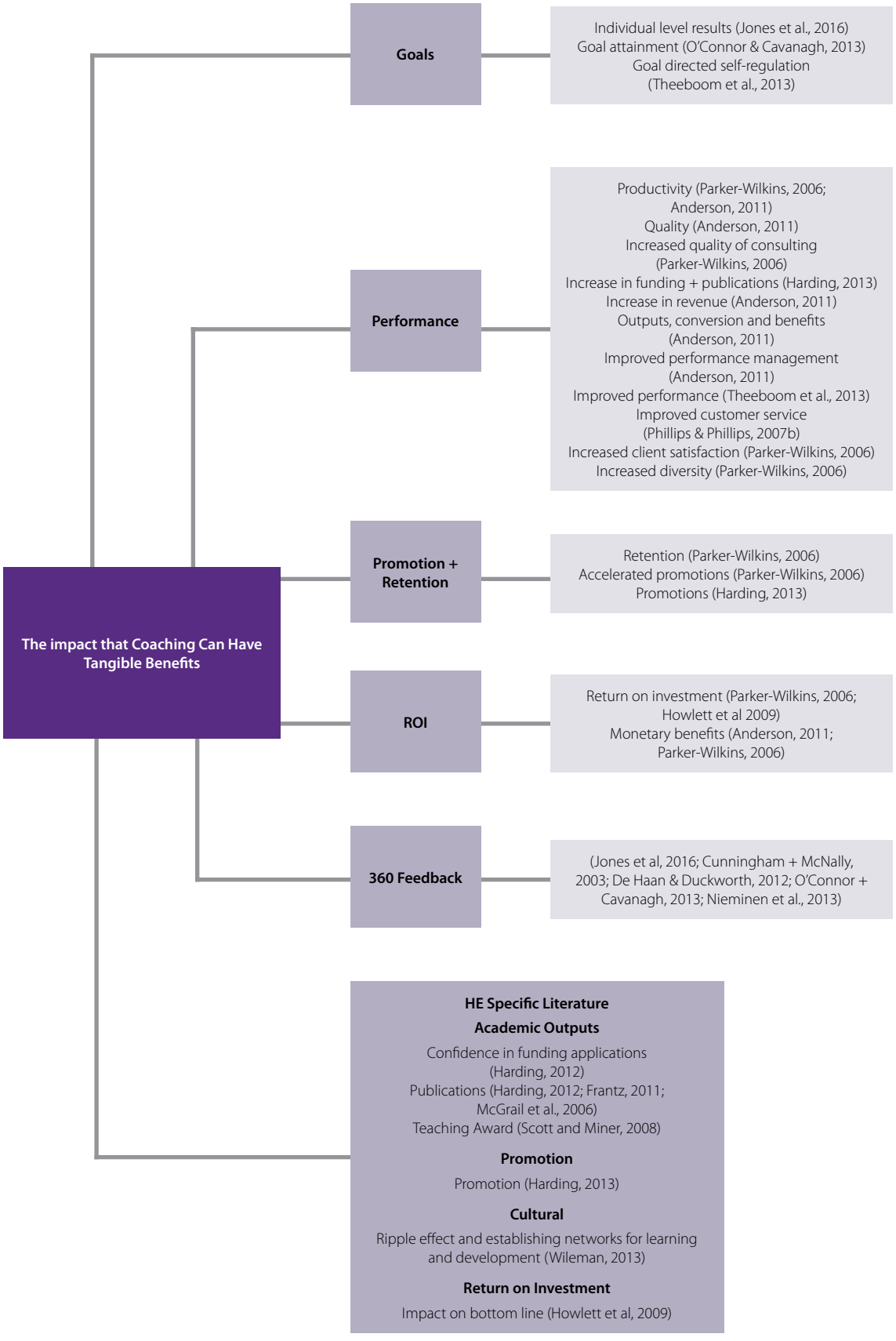
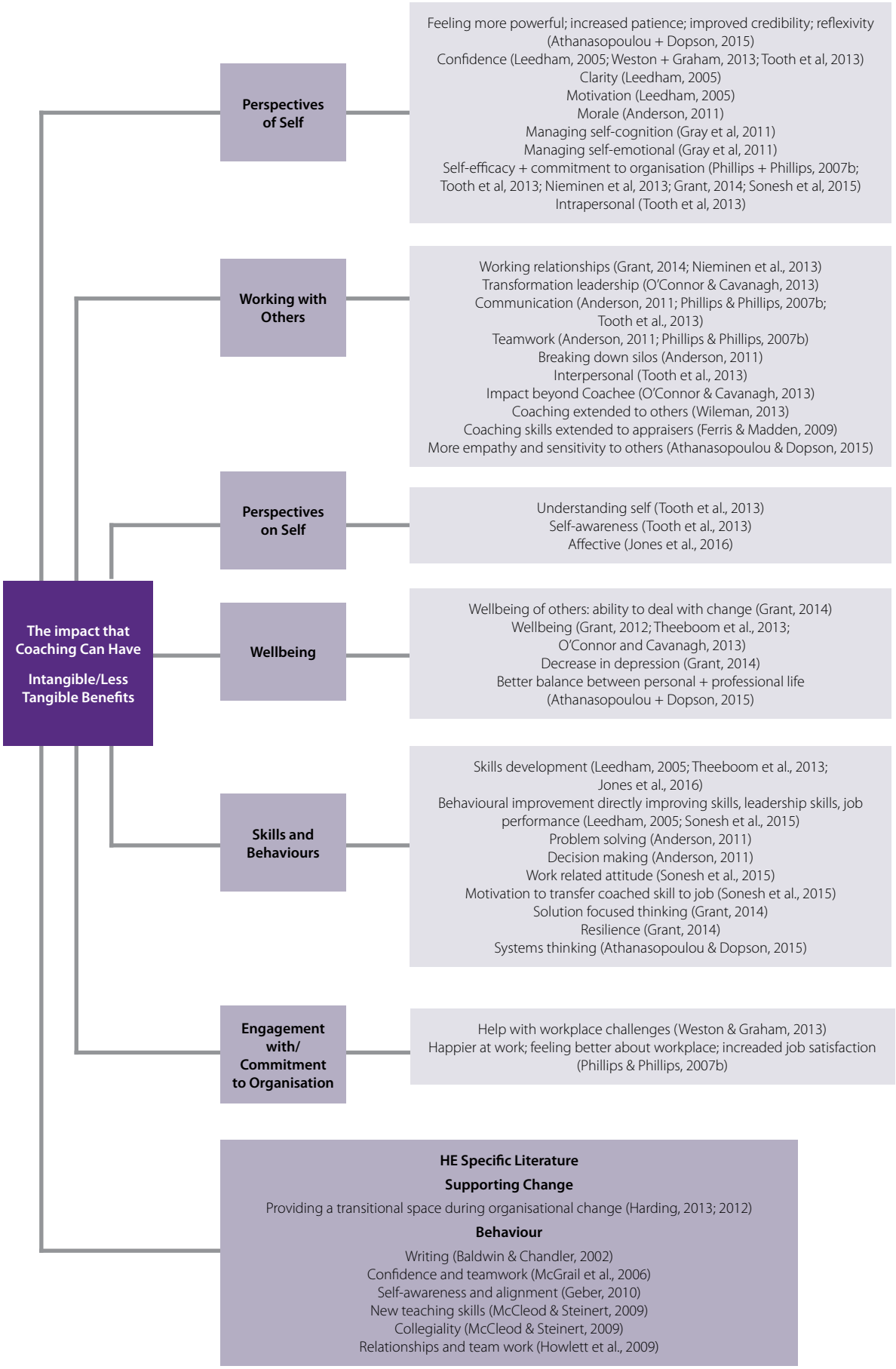


Figure 15 Tangible/less tangible benefits of coaching



Biographies

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Colleen is head of organisational development at Bournemouth University and instigated the South West and South East Coaching Forum for Higher Education. Experience of working in the public, private and charity sectors has generated a lifelong interest in the challenges of keeping people and organisations happy and performing well. A passionate advocate for coaching and mentoring, Colleen is assistant editor of the International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring, which she says helps to keep her abreast of the ways in which organisations across the world are developing good practice in supporting individuals and teams within increasingly complex working environments.

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Meriel has more than 20 years' management experience working in higher education and is passionate about helping people to realise the full extent of their potential. As chair of the LGBT Staff Network she has been instrumental in enabling Liverpool John Moores University to achieve international recognition as a Top 100 Employer since 2010 in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index; leading the sector on LGBT equality practice. In July Meriel spoke at the Stonewall National Education for All conference. Meriel is a member of the Leadership Foundation's Diversity Advisory Group.

Meriel also provides consultancy and supports people across sectors in leadership and organisational development. She is a person centred counsellor, coach and personality profiler and is a member of the British Psychological Society and Equity.

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