

Academic Paper

How Can Charities use Coaching to Develop Managers and Does the Charity Context Matter?

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Abstract

Little research exists on coaching in charities. This article explores how coaching might support managers in the charity sector. Using an interpretivist approach, 20 interviews gathered the views and experiences of key stakeholders: manager coachees, learning and development (L&D) managers and coaches. Findings from interviewees in two large, national, case study charities suggest a synergy between key principles of coaching and those of charities. Investment in coaching was seen as having significant benefits for managers and great potential for charities to help them improve people's lives and the world we live in.

Keywords

coaching, charities, organisational context, managers, leadership,

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Introduction

There is evidence to suggest extensive use of coaching in organisations in the UK. The CIPD (2015) found that about three quarters of organisations surveyed offered coaching/mentoring - although no breakdown was given of the extent of coaching in different sectors. This prevalence of coaching has been accompanied by a significant growth in the body of research on coaching (Theeboom, 2016; Fillery-Travis & Cox, 2018) and a number of reviews of literature on business coaching (Blackman, Moscardo & Gray, 2016). However, little evidence is available on how the charity sector may use coaching interventions to support their work. Nor does much research explore explicitly the organisational contexts in which coaching takes place, despite growing recognition of the importance of context in management literature generally (Johns, 2006, 2017).

Charities are based on a central ethos of people helping people and making the world a better place. Many charities provide valuable services to the public, and almost 80% of households use a charitable service annually (Hudson, 2017). A key component of a thriving modern democracy is a "healthy, independent and influential civil society", with charities being at its core (Cabinet Office,

2018, p.14). The charity sector in the UK is sizeable. There are 166,000 charities with a total annual income of over £47 billion, and employing over 880,000 people (NCVO, 2018). Terminology around the charity sector is somewhat complicated by a number of related terms such as the voluntary, third or non-profit sectors. For this study, charities are defined as organisations in the UK that have solely charitable purposes for public benefit and are registered with the Charity Commission.

Charities are different from the private and public sectors in some fundamental ways. Whilst like the public sector, they have social rather than profit goals (Hudson, 2017), charities are independent from government, have their own regulatory and governance frameworks (Courtney, 2002), and are heavily reliant on fundraising income and donations. Most are governed by a trustee board, and the vast majority are small and often run by volunteers (NCVO, 2018). These and other legal, economic and structural-operational features of charities (Anheier, 2014) can make governance, leadership and management especially challenging.

Based on definitions from Bachkirova, Cox and Clutterbuck (2018, p.xxix) and Rogers (2016, p.7), this study uses a definition of coaching as “a work-related process based on 1:1 structured interactions between coach and coachee that focus on facilitating change, learning, development, performance, and well-being”. The study explores how coaching might help develop managers in charities, and whether the charity context might influence coaching. Following a literature review, the study outlines the research design, and data collection and data analysis methods undertaken. Findings from case study interviews are then given under four main themes. Finally, this study includes a discussion of the findings, suggestions for future research, and a consideration of how findings may be of value to the coaching research field, charities, and ultimately, all our lives.

Literature Review

This review firstly examines management and coaching literature on organisational contexts. Literature is then presented on key features of the charity context and associated challenges for leadership – for which coaching may help. Finally, studies specifically on coaching in charities are reviewed.

Organisational Contexts

Whilst the impact of context on organisational behaviour has been traditionally under-recognised in management literature (Johns, 2006), there is growing appreciation of the role of contextual understanding in research, both for theory building and practice (Johns, 2017). For example, organisational contexts are central in studies of public management (Meier, Rutherford, & Avellaneda, 2017), Human Resource Management and employee engagement (Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013) and talent management (Gallardo-Gallardo, Thunnissen & Scullion, 2019).

In terms of coaching, van Nieuwerburgh (2016) presents a unique collection of practitioner articles that explore coaching in a range of different private and public sector contexts, and the associated professional and personal challenges that can arise. However, the charity sector was not included because coaching was deemed not to be “used extensively” and there was a lack expert authors for case studies. Coaching is acknowledged as “at once different and the same across professional contexts” (van Nieuwerburgh, 2016, p.1), but coaching does not happen in a vacuum and context may be important - whether due to the nature of the sector and/or the people who choose to work in it. In this way, van Nieuwerburgh helps us to start to consider the potential significance of the professional contexts of coaching.

Charity Context

There has been a growth in third sector research in recent years, but it remains limited and is often US-based (Taylor, 2010). Nonetheless, there is some literature that shines a light on the nature of the charity context. Charities are heavily reliant on fundraising for income, for which demonstrating social impact is often crucial (Harlock, 2013), although outcomes and performance are frequently hard to measure (Benjamin, 2013). Charities also have particular governance structures (Hyndman & McDonnell, 2009) and manage multiple stakeholders to whom they are accountable (Wellens & Jegers, 2014), including donors and service users. Trust and accountability have become crucial after recent publicised scandals, and scrutiny of charity finances, fundraising and operations has increased (Hyndman, 2017).

Non-profit organisations are becoming more “business-like” like the private sector, with an emphasis on commercialisation and marketisation (Meyer, Maier & Steinbereithner, 2016). The sector is becoming increasingly professionalised (King, 2017) and there is a growing drive for organisational effectiveness (Liket & Maas, 2015). However, balancing non-profit values and business performance can be difficult and has implications for the development of management capabilities in the sector (Bish & Becker, 2016). Taken together, these features of charities present challenges for leadership and management that coaching may help address.

Some literature identifies particular leadership challenges for charities (Hodges & Howieson, 2017) and indicates a “leadership deficit” in the sector (Terry, Rees & Jacklin-Jarvis, 2018a). There is also a view that charity leaders and aspiring leaders should offer/receive coaching to develop leadership capability (Cabinet Office, 2013). However, charities face two major constraints in enhancing leadership: prohibitive costs of development initiatives and limited time (Terry, Rees & Jacklin-Jarvis, 2018b; Harries, 2016). Furthermore, there are some feelings of guilt in the sector around using precious funds for staff development rather than frontline services for clients (Cabinet Office, 2013). Some of these barriers may apply to coaching, but the importance of leadership in the sector and the potential role for coaching as a development activity are evident.

Coaching in Charities

Using a search strategy, keyword search vocabulary, and inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies, I reviewed specialist coaching journals and relevant bibliographic databases, including EBSCO, Business Search Complete, PsychInfo, and Google Scholar. This search located just 10 studies on coaching in charities - one UK study (Whybrow & Lancaster, 2012) and nine studies from the US. The literature search also revealed little research on the related topic of mentoring for staff in charities, or indeed on coaching or mentoring services provided by charities to their clients. Table 1 below, gives an overview of the ten studies identified in the literature search, summarising for each one its focus, methodology and main contribution to knowledge. This summary table gives a picture of the literature that informed this study and that may also inform future research. None of the studies examined explicitly the nature and potential influence of the charity context on coaching, but three main themes identified are reviewed below: coaching interventions, benefits of coaching, and leadership. The methodological approaches used are also considered.

Coaching Interventions

Whilst most of the studies examine particular coaching initiatives in charities, two important generic studies explore coaching interventions in the sector more widely. Whybrow & Lancaster (2012) give a unique insight into the “what and how” and potential benefits of coaching in charities in the UK. Howard, Gislason and Kellogg (2010a, 2010b and 2010c) present practitioner guides, based on research, that focus primarily on coaching for leaders in the US nonprofit sector and aim to help promote its use and effectiveness. Both Whybrow & Lancaster (2012) and Howard, Gislason & Kellogg (2010a) identified a range of coaching interventions in charities similar to those in other

sectors, including 1:1 coaching (with external coaching more likely at executive or senior level), internal coaching, and initiatives around developing an overall “coaching culture”. Whybrow and Lancaster (2012) maintain that compared with other sectors, charities appeared to use coaching interventions as a more sporadic, tactical resource rather than strategically. In terms of the four-level Coaching Focus Model presented by Keddy and Johnson (2011) that helps position how organisations focus adoption of coaching according to their individual situation and needs, charities might therefore tend to implement coaching at Levels 1 and 2 rather than Levels 3 or 4, as summarised in Table 2. However, as yet there is little research evidence available to support or refute this.

Table 1: Summary of Literature on Coaching in Charities

Category	Study and Main Focus	Methodology / Sample Size	Contribution
Generic: UK	Whybrow & Lancaster (2012) How charities use coaching and its impact	Qualitative: Interviews with 5 charities and 2 short case study descriptions	A unique UK study presenting indicative findings/themes on coaching in charities
Generic: US	Howard, Gislason & Kellogg (2010a, 2010b, 2010c) Three guides on how nonprofits can use coaching	Quantitative and qualitative: Based on 4 surveys with 300 respondents, 24 interviews and focus groups with over 50 participants	Highlights coaching in US nonprofits, including benefits, leadership challenges, and perceived barriers
Executive / Leadership	Harder & Company Community Research (2003) Evaluation of a leadership coaching project	Quantitative and qualitative: Survey with 23 executives at start, middle and end of coaching, and 20 additional interviews. 5 case studies, including coaching observation, stakeholder interviews	Uses a mixed methods approach to show the positive impact of coaching for executives and nonprofits
Executive / Leadership	Sheridan & Howard (2009) Evaluation of a leadership coaching project	Quantitative and qualitative: Survey of 22 leaders and additional interviews with 8 of them and their coaches	Highlights a range of organisational and individual benefits of coaching for leaders
Executive / Leadership	Ryan (2009) Review of the experience and effects of a leadership coaching project	Quantitative and qualitative: Used survey data from Sheridan and Howard (2009) for 13 leaders, plus additional interviews with 5 of them	Highlights importance of goals in coaching and benefits of coaching for leaders
Executive / Leadership	Fisher & Beimers (2009) Evaluation of a pilot executive coaching scheme	Quantitative and qualitative: Surveys with self-reporting scores on perceived job performance, and interviews with 9 executives and 5 coaches	Indicates coaching leads to improvements in management and leadership skills for executives
Leadership Development	Deaton, Wilkes & Douglas (2013) Impact of leadership development programme that included coaching	Quantitative. Self-report surveys rating coaching experience with 76 participants in 27 nonprofits	A sizeable survey indicating positive impact of coaching on skills of emerging leaders - and possibly retention and promotion
Internal Coaching	Ali, Lewis & Currier McAdams (2010) Implementation of internal coaching at one non-profit organisation	Quantitative: Few details of method but used coachee and coach feedback surveys, and retention data	Although descriptive, a unique study of an internal coaching scheme

Table 2: Summary of the Four-Level Coaching Focus Model (Keddy & Johnson, 2011)

Coaching Level	Sample Features
1: Tactical	Infrequent coaching, no coaching strategy, coaching outputs not captured/managed
2: Operational	Broad understanding of coaching, coaching impacts captured but resource provision sporadic
3. Strategic	Coaching aligned to business drivers, coaching infrastructure in place, coaching widely used
4. Coaching Culture	Coaching part of business strategy, extensive resource and support for coaching, people at all levels engaged in coaching

Focusing on the benefits of coaching for executive/leadership development, five studies examined coaching initiatives with external coaches (Harder & Company Community Research, 2003; Sheridan & Howard, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Fisher & Beimers, 2009; and Deaton, Wilkes & Douglas, 2013). Just one other study focused on evaluating internal coaching (Ali, Lewis & Currier McAdams, 2010), reporting benefits of developing existing talent and a coaching culture. Whilst this study of an internal coaching scheme (developed as part of a leadership development programme)

is primarily descriptive and gives no data for findings, it indicates how charities might avoid the high costs of external coaching. This may account for the significant use of internal coaching found by a recent survey, with 56% of large UK charities reporting its use (Harries, 2016).

The Benefits of Coaching

A major focus of the literature is on the benefits of coaching in charities. Table 3 summarises the 12 most frequently reported benefits that are primarily organisational or individual.

Table 3: Most Frequently Reported Benefits of Coaching for Charities

Organisational Benefits	Individual Benefits
Leadership development and skills	Increased confidence
Improved relationships with staff and board	Reduced stress
Management skills/behaviour and new ways of working	Improved personal-professional balance
Staff retention	Improved communication skills
Defining organisation's mission/vision	Increased self-awareness
Improved performance	Career goals/planning

The literature gives little evidence of how these benefits relate explicitly to features of charities like those presented earlier in this review, and many appear to be generic and found in any sector. However, two benefits in Table 3 may be particularly important for charities: relationships with the board (Cornforth, 2012) and defining mission (Heyes & Martin, 2015). Whybrow and Lancaster (2012) also reported a third relevant benefit: helping balance a strong social purpose with related pressures. So, whilst there is no available evidence that coaching leads to benefits unique to the charity context, some benefits may be of particular significance to charities and worthy of further investigation.

Leadership Development

Leadership development coaching has received increasing attention recently (Korotov, 2017), and developing leadership in charities was the most commonly-found benefit in the literature - partly because four studies focused specifically on coaching for executives/leaders. The prominence of executive coaching may be related to its popularity and perceived effectiveness, as indicated by a survey of over 3,000 nonprofit executives in the US that rated executive coaching as the most effective professional development activity (Cornelius, Moyers & Bell, 2011). Just one study explored leadership development coaching with non-executives and emerging nonprofit leaders (Deaton, Wilkes & Douglas, 2013). It found that coaching helped develop leadership in terms of personal and skill development, and had a positive impact on retention. A success factor was coaching being part of a broader leadership programme – as also reported by Sheridan and Howard (2009). Evidence of the attraction of coaching for leadership development was also found in a survey of nearly 500 UK charities, where coaching (with external coaches) was the second most popular leadership development activity after training, and with internal coaching also being used (Harries, 2016).

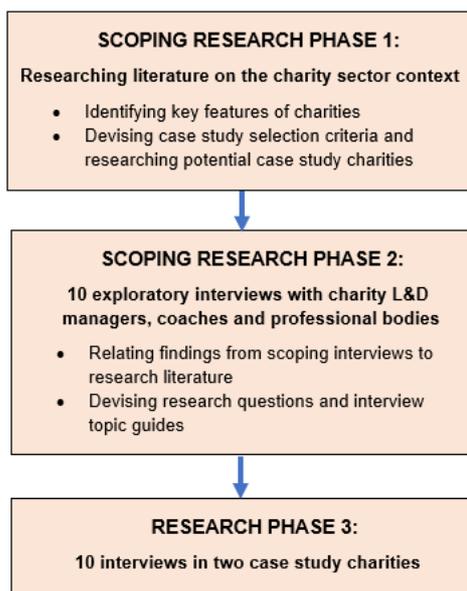
As highlighted in Table 1, the current literature tends to rely heavily on quantitative surveys of the self-reported benefits of coaching. Studies are also predominantly practitioner-based and/or small-scale in nature. The study by Harder & Company Community Research (2003) stands out in the literature as using a valuable mixed methods approach (including multi-source feedback, observation of coaching sessions and reviews of coaching logs) and avoids the limitations of over-reliance on self-reporting. Howard, Gislason and Kellogg (2010a) suggest that charities can assess the impact of coaching against goals and gain complementary multi-source feedback, not just from coachees. Whilst the literature on coaching in charities is limited, this review helped inform and shape the scope of this study. There is some agreement between the studies on the various

benefits of coaching for the sector. However, there is a clear opportunity for robust research to provide significant new knowledge on coaching in charities and on the context of coaching.

Methodology

Taking an interpretivist approach that is particularly suited to description and explanation (Fitzgerald & Dopson, 2009), this study aimed to explore the experiences and views of stakeholders in charities that offer coaching. With little previous literature existing to help shape this study, an exploratory research approach was appropriate as the field was generally unfamiliar and an initial open understanding was needed (Flick, 2018). An emergent research design (Morgan, 2008) also offered flexibility that can be seen as core to coherent qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015). This enabled some aspects of case and interviewee selection to evolve in a pragmatic way during this study (although the interview data collection technique remained unchanged). The research design involved two initial scoping phases to help gain an understanding of the charity context, consider which charities to study, and formulate research questions. These phases involved reviewing literature on charities, and 10 exploratory interviews with professionals in the sector. The third and final phase involved 10 semi-structured interviews in two case study charities. These three phases are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Scoping and Data Collection Research Phases



Scoping Research Phase 1

To better understand features of charities and potential charities to study, the first phase aimed to map rapidly key concepts in the literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). I chose to study large national charities because of their greater income, higher number of managers and potential to invest in coaching. I used a Charities Aid Foundation dataset of the 1,000 largest UK charities (published by The Guardian, 2012) to identify those with an annual income of over £5m - just 1.3% of registered charities (Charity Commission, 2018). I then devised further selection criteria and a rationale to shortlist 34 potential case study charities, based on factors such as field, activities and funding sources. I also checked each charity's most recent annual accounts to confirm that income and staffing levels had not changed substantially.

Scoping Research Phase 2

The second phase involved conducting 10 exploratory, unstructured, telephone or face-to-face interviews (each lasting between 20-60 minutes). Interviewees, as summarised in Table 4, were professionals purposefully selected from three stakeholder groups with knowledge of coaching in charities.

Table 4: Profile of Scoping Interviewees

NO.	SCOPING INTERVIEW STAKEHOLDERS
5	Senior L&D/HR managers in large charities
3	Coaches/management consultants working with charities
2	Major professional bodies supporting L&D/coaching and/or the charity sector

The main topics covered in these scoping interviews were perceptions of coaching in charities (e.g. how well coaching is understood and developed), potential research issues to explore, and any known relevant literature and charities that provide coaching.

Research Phase 3

A case study method was chosen as an empirical, in-depth inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) within its context (Yin, 2014), and it was suitable for the research questions and exploring stakeholder perspectives (Fitzgerald & Dopson, 2009). Using a dual-case design, the study explored coaching in two charities to give richness of data on stakeholder perspectives on more than one configuration of coaching interventions.

Case selection involved a phenomenon-driven as opposed to a theory-driven approach due to the lack of existing theory and empirical evidence and the topic of study being under-researched (Fletcher et al., 2018). To explore the phenomenon of coaching in charities, criterion sampling was used to select cases which met predetermined criteria that were important for the scope and topic of the study (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2011). Focusing on those charities in the shortlist where I found professional contacts, I emailed senior L&D/HR manager gatekeepers, inviting participation in the research. I used contacts and other tactics to help overcome common problems in organisational research with access to the field (Alexander & Smith, 2019).

The two case study charities were a mental health charity (called CS1 here) with around 500 staff, and an environmental voluntary organisation (CS2) with 160 staff. Whilst this latter organisation is not registered as a charity due to associated legal restrictions on political campaigning, I adjusted selection criteria to include it because another charity withdrew from the research at a late stage due to lack of available interviewees. For brevity, I use the term “charity” for CS2 too.

Semi-structured interviews allowed some flexibility in responding to interviewees and follow-up of any unanticipated issues (Bryman, 2016). I devised interview topic guides and piloted questions with an L&D manager/coach who mirrored key characteristics of the interview sample (Maxwell, 2013). Interviews were all face-to-face, lasted between 25-80 minutes (averaging 45 minutes), and were recorded for transcription. As the interviewer may evoke particular kinds of responses (Finlay & Gough, 2003), after each interview, I reflected on my interactions, and made adjustments where necessary to the interview approach and style. After transcribing one interview myself to understand the transcription process, the remaining interviews were transcribed professionally.

Sample

I chose a purposeful sample of interviewees to select information-rich cases that provide in-depth understanding and insight into research questions (Patton, 2015). Interviewees were from three stakeholder groups to gather a range of perspectives: L&D/HR managers, manager coaches, and

coaches. L&D managers put me in touch with available manager coachees as potential interviewees. A total of 10 interviews were carried out, five in each charity. Table 5 summarises the stakeholder roles of interviewees - three L&D/HR managers in CS1 were also internal coaches. All four L&D/HR managers had undertaken coaching skills training and had had experience of coaching themselves. All five manager coachees had had at least three to five sessions with an external coach, and they had received coaching skills training too.

Table 5: Stakeholder Roles of Ten Interviewees

CHARITY	L&D/HR	MANAGER	COACH
CS1	3	2	3
CS2	1	3	1
TOTAL INTERVIEWEE ROLES	4	5	4

Data analysis

With thematic analysis offering an accessible method and flexibility for different research questions and qualitative methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2013), I used the six-phase process of thematic analysis of Braun & Clarke (2006). I firstly familiarised myself with the data, checked transcripts for accuracy, and then coded over 1,200 data extracts. After reviewing and refining codes, I allocated them to potential sub-themes and checked them against the data extracts and across the dataset, amending codes and sub-themes as necessary. I then drafted a thematic map which when refined, consisted of three over-arching themes with 11 sub-themes.

Findings

The first phase of ten exploratory interviews with professionals in the sector identified pertinent issues regarding coaching in charities that also mirrored various findings in the literature. Interviewees reported some charities offering various forms of coaching interventions - but were aware of little literature about them. They perceived many benefits of coaching, including personal and professional development, dealing with change, developing new ways of working, and managing work relationships. Barriers to coaching in charities were clearly identified as the cost of coaching and time to do it. Coaching was portrayed as being seen as a luxury, with feelings of guilt around spending precious money on it, and employees tending to neglect their own personal development. Nonetheless, employees were perceived as feeling valued if offered coaching opportunities, and coaching was seen as having great potential for the sector overall. From the themes and sub-themes, four main findings are presented here: coaching interventions offered, similarity in ethos between coaching and charities, providing coaching as values in action, and benefits of coaching.

Coaching Interventions

Anticipating merely finding ad hoc, occasional coaching, this study instead found significant investment in a variety of planned coaching interventions in the two case study charities. Both charities provided coaching with external coaches (CS1 also offered internal and peer coaching) and both offered coaching skills training for managers. CS1 was also explicitly developing a coaching culture. These coaching interventions are summarised in Table 6.

Although the two case study charities differed in terms of, for example, mission, size and coaching initiatives provided, there was much similarity between them in the views of interviewees. There were also similarities in both charities working in fast-changing and uncertain external environments that required them to be reactive and respond rapidly. Furthermore, the missions of both charities - mental health and climate change/environmental issues - were at the time high

profile, “hot” topics for government, media and public attention. This was seen as an opportunity but also as a pressure on resources and a challenge for managers.

Table 6: Coaching Interventions of Case Study Charities

	CS1	CS2
Coaching Provided	1. Development of coaching culture as part of HR strategy 2. Leadership Development Programme (includes internal, peer and executive coaching) 3. Peer coaching as part of internal project management training 4. Internal coaching 5. Coaching with external coaches	1. Three session follow-up to internal management training 2. People returning to work - parental or long-term sick leave 3. Up to 6 sessions for specific workplace challenges
Coaches	Internal L&D coaches, peer coaches, and external coaches	External coaches
Coaching Skills Training	1. Part of Leadership Development Programme 2. Part of project management training course 3. Workshops for managers	1. Part of management training 2. Course for managers and staff

Ethos of Coaching and Charities

A key finding, although tentative at this stage, is an apparent significant fit between the ethos and values of coaching, and the social values of charities and the services they provide to clients. Interviewees gave a strong sense of how coaching can demonstrate, reflect and link with important values of charities: “I feel like the nature and ethos of coaching just really matches with the nature and ethos of a charity, especially CS1 as a mental health charity” (L&D/HR Manager, CS1). This fit between the nature of coaching and the charity context seemed to relate not only to services for clients, but also to ways of working, organisational culture and management of staff. This finding is significant because it suggests that the values-led charity context may be conducive to coaching where there is some fundamental synergy between the principles and ethos of coaching and those of charities – particularly those that provide support services.

Values in Action

The charity context also played a role in coaching being seen as demonstrating clearly a charity’s values in action and as a gift to staff working under pressure. Interviewees described the great passion and commitment of staff to the cause of their charities, who work exceptionally hard (“workaholics” as one interviewee described them), and often struggled with work-life balance. There was a distinct impression, particularly at CS2, of how investment in coaching can send out important positive signals to staff about the charity appreciating them and showing commitment in return. Coaching was seen as giving staff the valuable opportunity for individual support:

It inherently feels like a good thing to do because it supports somebody on an individual level, it shows commitment and value to them as a person to be offering them a personal opportunity (L&D Manager, CS2).

By offering coaching, the charities were seen as being ethical and progressive employers that invested in employee development and wellbeing:

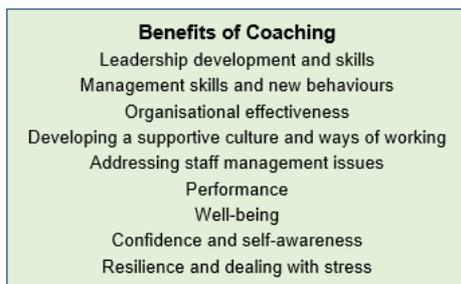
Providing coaching fits with the [...] almost moral standpoint of charities, in the sense that it is about a culture of developing your staff, looking after wellbeing and trying to be progressive in the way that we think about work and workers, and what an employee’s responsibility to the them is and what their responsibility is to the employer (Coachee, CS2).

This finding suggests a role for coaching in charities to demonstrate being ethical and responsible employers by investing in the development and wellbeing of staff. This is particularly poignant in the light of interviewees at CS2 also seeing staff as de-prioritising their own personal development, and feeling it a “distraction” from their work and commitment to the charity’s mission.

Benefits of Coaching

Key imperatives of the charity context described by interviewees were the constraints of limited finances and time, a need to focus on delivery and impact, and demand outstripping resources. These issues presented management challenges and pressures to be as efficient and effective as possible. In terms of coaching, interviewees portrayed vividly the many powerful benefits of coaching for managers in facing such challenges in their management and leadership roles - and benefits around organisational effectiveness too. There were perceptions of various positive functions of coaching, including opportunities for support around management problems, giving staff the space for reflection, and helping develop an organisational coaching culture. Figure 2 summarises the main benefits identified.

Figure 2: Benefits of Coaching Reported by Interviewees



Coaching was viewed as beneficial for both individuals and their charities, and there was acknowledgement that many individual benefits actually translate into organisational ones, for example:

I suppose in a very broad sense, having access to coaching has helped me be better at delivering some of my own objectives in my role, and so I think that that's been beneficial to the organisation (Coachee, CS2).

There was evidence of coaching playing a key role in developing effective leadership and individual leadership style. Coaching offered one interviewee:

the protected time, the skill, the impartial external person, the accountability, that all really fed my leadership needs [...] I definitely feel more capable as a leader because of it (Coachee, CS1).

Finally, interviewees expressed many positive feelings about the experience of coaching and their coaches, and there was a clear desire for more access to coaching if resources were available. Coaching was seen as having significant potential for the rest of the sector too in helping develop and support committed staff to deal with the many challenges of working in the charity context.

Discussion

By exploring the views and experiences of stakeholders in two charities, this study gives a rare insight into coaching in the charity sector. Each of the four main findings and their contribution to knowledge are discussed in turn, followed by considerations of limitations and implications of the study, and opportunities for future research.

Coaching Interventions

The significant planned investment in coaching by both charities was surprising given the limited resources in the sector - neither charity was providing ad hoc or sporadic coaching as reported by Whybrow and Lancaster (2012). Applying the Coaching Focus Model (Keddy & Johnson, 2011) summarised in Table 2, the charities appear to use coaching characterised by aspects of Levels 2 (Operational) and 3 (Strategic), with CS1 also adopting coaching with features of Level 4 (Coaching Culture). This evidence of well-developed coaching initiatives may relate to the recent continued development of coaching in organisations since the Whybrow and Lancaster (2012) study.

Ethos of Coaching and Charities

Another unexpected finding was the apparent importance of the charity context and perceived synergy between the ethos and principles of coaching and those of charities. There does appear to be much congruence between three key principles proposed by van Nieuwerburgh (2016) that underpin the practice of coaching and those that are central in many charity services (and indeed organisational culture): being non-judgmental, the right to self-determination, and taking personal responsibility for development. Further possible commonalities between the principles and purpose of coaching and those of charities are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Similarities in Ethos and Principles of Coaching and Charities



This apparent synergy between the principles of coaching and charities needs further exploration but offers support for the view of van Nieuwerburgh (2016) that the context of coaching can matter, and where context involves “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning” (Johns, 2006, p.386) of coaching. This finding suggests a need to put the context of coaching more centre-stage in coaching research, both in the business coaching literature generally, but also in literature on coaching in the charity and public sector contexts where research is limited. In terms of coaching practice, the findings of this synergy and the importance of the charity context might increase recognition of coaching as a particularly valuable L&D activity in charities.

Values in Action

The relevance of the charity context that was also found in the strong perception of coaching demonstrating a charity's positive values in action (by investing in the development of committed staff) concurs with findings of Whybrow and Lancaster (2012). The vivid descriptions of highly committed staff echoes the importance of values and motivation in the non-profit management literature, both in UK charities (Stride & Higgs, 2014) and in US non-profits (De Cooman et al., 2011). Whilst the definition of a recent North American term “Public Service Motivation” is not uncontested (Bozeman & Su, 2015), it is likely to be applicable to nonprofit staff too (Word & Carpenter, 2013). This motivation and commitment deserve further recognition and has associated implications for HR practices and successful nonprofit outcomes (Akingbola & van den Berg, 2019). Offering coaching could be an effective way for charities to recognise the motivation and commitment of staff and support their development needs and wellbeing.

The Benefits of Coaching

There appeared to be much congruence between the many benefits of coaching perceived by interviewees in this study (Figure 2) and those found in the literature (Table 3), for example, in terms of leadership, management skills, performance, confidence and dealing with stress. Whilst these benefits were self-reported descriptions (from coachees or those seen by L&D managers and coaches), their commonality and the evident positive feelings about coaching do not seem to diminish the perceived overall value of coaching for individuals or for the charities.

Limitations

The exploratory nature of this study means that some findings are tentative and the limited research literature makes it difficult to relate findings to an existing evidence base. Research on coaching in other charities (that are, for example, smaller, working in other fields, or experiencing less growth or change in their external environments) could also help provide evidence to add to the findings. This would complement an assessment of whether the specific contexts, participants and circumstances of this study are similar enough to merit any “safe” transfer to other situations or settings (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Whilst interviewees from three stakeholder groups gave a variety of perspectives, further stakeholders (for example, charity CEOs and senior managers), could have given additional valuable views on e.g. the strategic role and financial investment in coaching. Potential bias, although difficult to overcome, may also have had some impact on findings due to the charities that were willing to participate and the way interviewees were selected by L&D managers. Participants with a particularly successful experience of coaching may have chosen to take part and so influenced the picture of coaching obtained.

Future Research

Fruitful avenues for future research include more in-depth exploration of the extent and nature of coaching in the charity context, and creating a better understanding of the synergy between the values of coaching and those of charities. Such research might confirm the apparent importance of the context of coaching in research generally, and also lead to a better understanding of the potential coaching has for social values-led charities.

Further research that explicitly evaluates coaching in charities might give robust evidence of coaching as a development tool and aid HR investment decisions (Greif, 2013). This research could use a variety of methods and data sources for high quality evaluation (Ely et al. 2010), including valid experimental methods to assess both short and longer-term outcomes (Blackman, Moscardo & Gray, 2016) and qualitative research methods to help increase our understanding of how coaching works (McDowall & Lai, 2018). Evidence on the use of internal or managerial coaching in charities is missing in the literature, as is evidence on developing a coaching culture.

Implications

This study contributes to the literature on coaching by furthering an understanding of how the context of coaching appears significant. The literature has so far been almost silent on the topic of coaching in charities and the study provides new evidence of potential links between the ethos of coaching and those of charities. Findings may contribute to the development of models and theory to increase our understanding of how the charity context may influence the need for coaching, how it is delivered, and the nature of its impact.

For the charity sector, the research provides evidence of how coaching as an L&D intervention can offer many benefits in terms of individual staff support and development, and organisational

effectiveness. The findings may play a part in promoting understanding and the development of coaching in the sector, and its potential fit with the ethos of many charities and as an investment in committed staff. The study may also help coaches better appreciate the nature of the commitment of charity staff, challenges faced in their work, and the potential that coaching can have in this context. The findings could help charities and coaches develop and deliver coaching initiatives in the sector that really make a difference.

Conclusion

This study is the first to examine in charities the views and experiences of those who manage the delivery of coaching, managers receiving coaching and coaches. It has given an insight into how charities can use coaching to develop and support managers. The findings have brought the charity context centre-stage into the coaching research literature and indicate the potential for further research to help fill the gap in knowledge about the charity context of coaching. During my research, I felt moved by hearing vivid descriptions of how coaching helps passionate charity managers and their organisations deal with the many pressures and challenges they face. I hope the findings lead to a better understanding of coaching in charities, further research on this much neglected topic, and ultimately more coaching interventions in charities to help them improve our lives and change the world for the better.

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