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Review of the Spark Inside Coaching Programme for Prison Staff

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Background and Aims

Spark Inside is a registered charity in the United Kingdom (UK). For the last decade, Spark Inside have delivered accredited, high-quality coaching programmes to people who are detained in or work within prisons in England. This began with expert coaches working with prisoners, but since the Covid-19 pandemic, it has also included coaching of prison staff. The Spark Inside life coaching programme provides prison staff with the reflective space and tools to improve their own wellbeing and has been delivered to prison staff across all operational grades and has also been made available to those working in prisons from probation, youth intervention and education.

Coaching is defined by Spark Inside as a facilitated conversation, allowing individuals and systems/groups to find their own solutions to their own problems. Unlike mentoring, coaching offers very little advice or guidance, as it is believed that the person is the expert of their own life. Coaching empowers people living and working in prisons, enabling self-sufficiency, fostering independence, and building personal responsibility. It uses specific tools and techniques, including questioning and thought-provoking prompts, which can help transform lives and environments and achieve goals (Spark Inside, 2022a).

This report details an evaluation of the programme, adopting an appreciative enquiry approach, through speaking to the coaches who delivered the programme and to those prison staff who have undergone the programme. Appreciative enquiry approaches are those which adopt a strength-based asset approach, rather than a negative problem identification focus (Centre for Appreciative Enquiry, 2023) The evaluation took place between March and December 2023. The overarching aims of the evaluation were to establish i) What are the experiences of prison staff participants with the Spark Inside programme? ii) What are the experiences of coaches working within the programme? iii) What are the critical success factors (those factors which specifically contribute to the success of the programme)?

More specifically, the objectives were to:

- Understand the perceived impact of coaching in the experiences of prison staff.
- Explore the areas of life that people chose to address through the coaching.
- Identify the perceived benefits of coaching.
- Establish whether the participants of the research left or stayed in the service.
- Understand the self-reported impact of coaching upon workplace skills and motivation.

- Gather recommendations for how the coaching programme could be improved.

The evaluation encompassed three phases:

1. A literature review to understand the wellbeing of prison staff and current approaches used to support prison staff wellbeing.
2. Interviews with prison staff who had taken part in the Spark Inside coaching programme.
3. Interviews with coaches responsible for delivery of coaching to prison staff.

The report will outline the methodology for each of these phases, detail the findings from each element, and make recommendations for the future delivery of the Spark Inside prison staff coaching programme.

Review of the Spark Inside Prison Staff Coaching programme

Methodology

Participants

Seventeen participants who had received coaching completed a semi-structured interview. The average (mean) age was 41 years, with a range of 28-66 years. The average (mean) length of service was 10 years, with a range of 2-24 years. The number of coaching sessions reported to have been attended by participants ranged from 4 sessions to 14 sessions with the average (mean) number of sessions being 6.8 sessions. Participants were from five different prisons and one Young Offender Institution in the South of England. They held a variety of positions including Offender Management, Senior Management (Governor Grades), and Education and Physical Training team roles. There were also a number of specialist roles held by participants which tended to be unitary roles within each prison and therefore the specific detail is not reported here in order to maintain the anonymity of participants.

Seven participants who had delivered coaching for Spark Inside participated in 10 interviews (three participants took part across two interviews to allow for follow up discussion). The age range of coaching participants was 33-71 years, with an average (mean) age of 66 years. The average (mean) number of years that coaches had worked for Spark Inside was 7 years, with a range of 4 years to 10 years of service.

Participants for both groups were recruited via e-mails circulated by a representative from Spark Inside to people who had taken part in coaching programmes and coaches who had delivered the programmes. The recruitment e-mails were circulated several times during the data collection period. People who wanted to take part were invited to contact the research team directly so that Spark Inside were not made aware of the identity of participants. Coaches were provided with a £50 shopping voucher to compensate their time because their work for Spark Inside was completed on a consultancy basis.

Data Collection

Two semi-structured interview schedules (one for coachees and one for coaches) were developed by the research team, in collaboration with Spark Inside, specifically for the purposes of the evaluation. The interview schedules are provided in Box 1, below. The researchers used these as a basis for questions but were able to ask follow-up questions to explore areas of discussion further or to clarify feedback provided.

Box 1: Semi-structured interview schedules

Questions for prison staff coachees

1. General demographics: age, job role, what prison, how long there?
2. How did you hear about Spark Inside?
3. What were your initial thoughts to becoming involved in a coaching programme?
4. What made you decide to engage with the programme?
5. Have you been involved with similar programmes before?
6. Which areas of life did you seek coaching for?
 - a. Did this marry up with what you did talk about during the sessions? What else was covered?
7. If you didn't complete all 6 sessions, why was this?
8. Can you provide a specific example of a time when you found a coaching session to be particularly helpful?
 - a. What did the coach say or do in the session that was particularly helpful to you?
 - b. Did they demonstrate any particular strength, quality or skill that helped you succeed?
 - c. What lasting impact or learning did you take away from that coaching session?
9. Repeat question 8 for additional examples of perceived successful coaching episodes.
10. What impact, if any, has this coaching programme had on your wellbeing?
11. What impact, if any, has this coaching programme had on your ability to do your job?
12. What impact, if any, has this coaching programme had on your feelings towards your job?
13. What, if anything, could be done differently?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Questions for coaches

1. General demographics (age)
2. How long have you worked for Spark Inside?
3. What training materials, instructions have you received? How helpful was the support and communication you received from Spark Inside? Is there anything else they could provide to support your work with them?
4. When provided, to what extent do you tend to stick to the programme or materials?
5. What were the main coaching theories, practices, or approaches that you used when delivering this programme?
6. Can you provide a specific example of a time when you facilitated a coaching session that you felt to be particularly successful? (Talk about a specific session not your coaching approach in general)
7. You can define success in whatever way you like. What was successful about this session?
8. Tell the story in detail. What did you do/say/think/feel/intend in the session?
9. What did you as a person contribute to this effectiveness? What particular strength, quality or skill did you bring to the session that made it succeed?
10. What was it about the coachee that allowed you to coach them successfully? How did the coachee respond?
11. Which particular coaching theories, practices or approaches did you use?
12. Were there any changes reported by the coachee that could have been beneficial for their colleagues or team?
13. Repeat questions 6-11 for any additional examples of perceived successful coaching episodes.

Interviews were conducted and recorded online using Microsoft Teams, where possible, unless specifically requested to be done over the telephone instead. The length of interviews with prison staff ranged from 25 minutes to 53 minutes, excluding initial introductions, overview of the interviews, reiteration of key ethics information (see below) and opportunity for participants to ask questions before and after the interview. The length of interviews with coaches, when adding together the interviews which were done in two parts, was 41 minutes to 80 minutes. After completion, interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Ethics

The evaluation was approved by the University of Lincoln Ethics Application Service (Reference 2023_14401) and the HM Prison and Probation Service National Research Committee (Reference 2023_021). The research was conducted in line with the requirements of The British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2021), as follows:

Informed consent

Potential participants for the interview were provided with an information sheet to read prior to the interview and were provided with the opportunity to ask questions relating to the evaluation/research before the commencement of the interview. After receiving verbal and/or written information regarding the nature of the study, participants were required to sign a consent form. This included the recording of the interview, and the use of direct quotations in reports.

Voluntary participation

To ensure participation was voluntary, the researchers emphasised that participation was not mandatory before the start of the interview and would have no bearing on the relationship between the individual, Spark Inside, or HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). All participants were asked to give information freely. All questions were voluntary within the interview, and participants could leave questions they did not wish to answer.

Right to withdraw

All participants were made aware of their right to withdraw their participation during the interviews and for up to one-week post-participation. No participants chose to withdraw.

Risk of harm

It was not considered that participation would cause harm or discomfort to any of the participants since no deception was involved and participants were free to ignore any questions they did not want to answer. It was acknowledged, however, that as participants were discussing their experiences, this could cause distress and the participants were informed of how they could access support, through signposting to support services.

Confidentiality and removal of data

The interview transcripts were held separately to the data about the participants (names, age, job role) to minimise risk of data breaches. The interview recordings were deleted after transcription. The transcripts will be kept indefinitely, and the personal information destroyed after 5 years.

Analysis

The data from both groups of participants was analysed using the principles of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022) This approach is suited to questions relating to people's experiences and to the ways in which people construct meaning from their experiences. Its purpose is to identify patterns of meaning across a data set.

The following steps were undertaken:

1. Familiarisation with the data by reading multiple times.
2. Generation of initial codes.
3. Generation of themes arising from the codes.
4. Review of themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Report write-up.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of coding, transcriptions were independently reviewed and coded by multiple members of the team and discrepancies and key themes were discussed. To ensure a degree of reflexivity, the researchers discussed pre-existing knowledge, perceptions, and biases in relation to the subject before assessing the data.

Findings

On the basis that the interview questions of the coachees and coaches were quite different, and the analysis of this data was done discretely, the findings of these two data sets are presented separately. Short case studies have been constructed to further illustrate areas of impact of receiving Spark Inside coaching and these are embedded within the findings from interviews with prison staff.

Interviews with Prison Staff

Introduction to Spark Inside and deciding to take part.

First contact

One of the first questions we asked our participants was how they had first heard about Spark Inside and in particular how they had found out about the opportunity to take part in coaching. For the majority the answer was “an email sent out to staff, and if anybody wanted to participate, they can respond to the email” (SI 1). This use of “globals [global mailing lists to all staff within a specific prison establishment]” (SI 12) was common across cohorts 1-3, with a change to this only really noticed amongst cohort 4. Here coaching was offered to people who had been through the assessment process to become Custodial Manager. As well as being offered to successful candidates, some interviewees had received personal emails from the office of the Prison Group Director (PGD), after being unsuccessful in progression to the role of Custodial Manager (band 5). This personal touch was also noted by a couple of others, where a line manager or governor had specifically approached them:

He called me and said that I would benefit from this if I'm willing to engage, and to be fair, I really think he saw something in me, explaining some of the leadership qualities that he saw in me, and how I can improve on them. How the coaching session is going to help me be better (SI 9).

Reasons to engage.

On the basis that so many of our participants responded to a global email, rather than an individual approach, we were interested in why they had made the decision to engage with the coaching programme. The majority of participants had not been involved in coaching before and therefore “didn't know what to expect” (SI 10) but became involved out of “curiosity” (SI 11), a desire for “personal growth” (SI 12), to “contribute to my growth, development and emotional wellbeing” (SI 2), and in order to gain “support and guidance”

(SI 3). A couple also talked about needing help with career decisions, including whether they should leave the service (see impact on retention below). Another stated:

I thought - You know what? It's a free help, why not? Because we don't get much free in HMPPS! (SI 6).

This view, that HMPPS did not offer much in way of support, was shared by others who saw the coaching as an opportunity to get some help. One said they engaged “because I hadn't seen it before” (SI 13), while another stated:

I signed up because it couldn't hurt, and to have the opportunity to talk to somebody with clarity, because who else can you talk about it with, if you ask the manager they go – ‘What? Go give some dinners out’. You're not going to talk to your family, it's about having somebody to talk to, and discuss these things, and you don't get that anywhere else. That's what it gave me, it gave me that place – I can talk to [coach] about this (SI 6).

Others decided to take part in the programme because of the reputation of Spark Inside or because of the individual coaches. One participant stated how they were familiar with the work that the charity was undertaking with their Hero's Journey programme with prisoners and were impressed with the outcomes of that. Another said how they were encouraged to take part by one of their learners who had found their own coaching experience instrumental.

Some of our participants also wanted to take part, for altruistic reasons. One person wanted to “apply [what] I've learned in my teaching” (SI 11) and another because they were thinking about getting a coaching qualification themselves. Several others also spoke about wanting to learn the art of coaching so that they could use it when speaking to their own colleagues:

I thought I could utilise it to support my team, for me to perhaps understand what they were possibly going through in a different way . . . I suppose putting more of that professional boundary in place so they could offload to me in that professional manner; rather than coming through and having a chat – Oh, this happened today. To literally structure it for them (SI 4).

I think it was mostly the coaching part of it, being able to coach me, so I can be able to mentor other people, and to coach them, to shape them to what I feel is the

best way and allow them to speak and get more information out to people. I think that just captured my attention, and I said you know what I want to do this (SI 9).

For those who had received the personal invite, some said that initially they felt obliged to participate, although others appreciated being singled out and supported:

I thought it was really nice for him to reach out and offer that. I know he was offering it to people that passed as well but it was just nice to not be forgotten. I'm quite driven and motivated myself, I like getting involved in things like that, if there is support out there then I will take it and use it (SI 15).

Areas of life for which coaching was sought and used.

For the vast majority, coaching was initially sought for areas of life that related to work and their job role. As our participants explained:

I was going through a time where I was thinking about my career progression basically. I just recently had a promotion, but then I was unsure about certain things and where I wanted to go next, whether I wanted to stay here, move somewhere else, move up, move along. I just thought that every little helps. So, the coaching came at the right time (SI 14).

I was managing an area in the prison, which was a lot of work, it was quite busy, but it took me away from the other things that I would like to learn as a manager. So, when I went for the exam, some things I hadn't practised because my job role didn't really allow me to, that's where I was kind of lacking, so I knew what I needed to work on (SI 15).

I had been working towards my progression and development, I'm just looking for any opportunity to contribute to that (SI 2).

I was recently new in post as a Band 5 . . . so I thought it would be good to have that support and guidance, an ear to listen to, it was all positive and all good (SI 3).

I want to go for promotion . . . when it comes to getting promotion, you get more responsibility, you become a manager, you are managing people. So, there are some things that you need to know . . . about people and behaviour because

human behaviour, it is not static, it is dynamic . . . So, it's just a way to learn how to be dynamic as well. And adapt my style to whatever is in front of me (SI 9).

Case study 1, below, details how one participant had utilised the support from coaching to manage the stress and pressure arising from forthcoming work-related exams.

Case Study 1: Support through the pressure of work-related exams

Key points

- Coaching offered beneficial support during stressful periods around work-related exams.
- Flexibility in timing was helpful in making the coaching accessible.

The person receiving the coaching was working toward an exam to support future promotion within HMPPS. They had previously failed the same exam and found the lead up to re-taking the exam very stressful. The coach helped them to reduce this stress in the lead up by looking at where the stress was coming from. The person also felt to a degree that being offered coaching was supportive in mitigating the impact of failing the exam the first time, although they'd wished it had been available in the run up to the exam the first time, as well as the second time. For the second time of attempting the exam, they had felt more prepared and had only failed by a small margin. However, the reassurance from the coach had helped again, to mitigate this. In addition, the coach had helped make the coaching sessions accessible by helping fit them in around work and family life, and moving to phone sessions, instead of online, where required.

Similar scenarios, in relation to support around progression and exams were described by two other people who had received coaching.

Other issues noted included time management, making difficult decisions, managing difficult colleagues, event, and meeting planning, and managing the prison culture.

A common experience across several participants, however, was that while they had started coaching with an intention to talk about work areas of life, as the coaching sessions progressed and perhaps, they became more familiar with the method and their individual coach, these areas of life moved to more personal matters:

At first it was like 70% work, and then in the middle it was 50/50, and then I think by the end it moved to 70/30; so, 70 home life and 30 work (SI 13).

I think definitely I initially thought it was all about career, and after the first session, very much realised it was about my own personal self as well as my career. And very quickly learned that I needed to do things better like task management, time management, fitting in wellbeing, all that kind of stuff (SI 10).

I wanted to work on - managing up, but at the same time we talked about managing my anxiety, being able to be on my level. So, it wasn't just work related, it was more an approach of you as who you are, and what you are doing to put it into place (SI 12).

Gaining skills and methods to manage stress and anxiety was also mentioned by other participants:

I was stressed at that time, and I couldn't sleep at night, so he gave me some things to try (SI 2).

We ended up covering bits on my emotions . . . conversations about why certain things are stressing me out, why I was worried about certain things, and processing the mental aspect of it, it wasn't part of the plan, but it worked (SI 7).

Not having to be too prescriptive about what the session would cover was also noted as useful. For one participant this allowed them to steer the direction in which the sessions went:

It shifted from work to home. And that's the support. It was designed to probably support me with work, and to get me to maybe look at things differently, or perhaps have a different take on things, but I chose to go that way because that was how I was feeling at the time (SI 13).

For this individual, this was important because it allowed them to use the sessions to talk about things which perhaps, they had not been able to do before including deaths in custody and colleagues who had died by suicide:

There's a lot of things which we spoke about which through my career I have seen, and I think people forget that you see a lot of things in prison, some of the things are really, really unimaginable . . . They are quite hard in themselves to actually process, and I think that's one of the support mechanisms that we sometimes fail in prison (SI 13).

This feeling of being able to open up to the coach was also mentioned by others:

We spoke a little bit about personal life, but not too much, that was maybe the last one or two sessions that I mentioned things that I probably never said before, maybe I was getting comfortable (SI 14).

Other areas included “my passion for travelling” (SI 1), spending time with family and friends, “kids, dogs, holidays, [and] balance of life” (SI 16).

The perceived benefits of coaching

One of the greatest benefits of coaching noted by many of our participants was the fact that the coaches were exceptional listeners:

She was really good at listening, not trying to move the conversation, she didn't have an agenda, she was just there to help me in that moment, however I needed it (SI 15).

It was active listening. I don't think you always get that in work . . . you're talking to someone, they're on the computer, they're multitasking, they're not really paying attention to what you're saying. But it was . . . uninterrupted time with [coach] (SI 17).

We spoke quite a lot about listening, actually listening, people will talk, but they are always distracted. We spoke about how important listening is, and that is why I liked it because he would listen (SI 5).

As part of this active listening many of the coaches repeated points back to the prison staff, which many found useful:

Some of the things that I'm saying to him, it's the first time I've said it out loud . . . and then he's saying it back in a different way . . . now that I've said it to you and you have told me how it comes across, it is quite enlightening (SI 14).

Others found the coaching useful because it really helped them to clarify their own thinking and enabled them to make decisions that previously they would have found difficult. For many this led to a sense of empowerment:

He would lead me down a line, but he wanted to see what my thought process was, rather than tell me what the answers were all the time, so everything that I

decided in the end, was down to me . . . he could have said that he wanted me to do this and this by the end of next week, but he never did that, it was more like an empowering strength . . . He was very good at making me think about it rather than telling me the answers (SI 10).

The coaching cleared my mind, a lot of the foginess of stuff that . . . is sitting there in blocks, but not unlocked . . . [coaching allowed me to think] this is where you are at, this is what you need to do, this is where you want to go, so what are you going to do about it (SI 12).

She spoke and asked questions to try to make me think – You've noticed this is the problem, what is a solution, you know the solution to it. She made me think of the solution myself (SI 9).

I think I've got quite good self-awareness, but sometimes I just need to process it and some help. So, it went really well . . . with one session I felt impostor syndrome, and she was really reassuring, she gave me confidence in myself, and just gave me the boost . . . it was just very validating (SI 15).

He challenged me to think about things differently in a way that I don't think other people have done before (SI 17).

Those sessions were very helpful in redirecting my thought processes and thinking about what I wanted to do, and . . . also reaffirming some of my abilities and skills; and I suppose getting me out of a bit of a rut that I was in (SI 8).

[Coach] is really good at making you question yourself and explore . . . he wouldn't force you down a road to make a decision . . . Just really good at the way he got you thinking. It gets the ball rolling, and then leaves you to it, and he comes in as and when it's needed, it's quite a skill to be able to do that and not just give people your thoughts or your opinions, or the answer (SI 3).

Case Study 2, below, provides further detail in relation to the impact of receiving coaching on decision making, as well as on relationships with others.

Case study 2 – Impact on decision making and on relationships with others.

Key points

- Coachee was able to open up about areas they had never spoken about.
- Coaching had a positive impact on the way they approached challenges or fear-inducing situations.
- Coaching had a positive impact on relationships, both personally and professionally.

The coachee identified that coaching was different to experiences of support that they had received previously because it was not led or dictated by the coach; instead, it was about seeing the bigger picture, helping themselves and looking at things differently. They had been able to talk about things they had not previously spoken about, and conversations also included positive experiences, which they felt was beneficial. The sessions were enjoyable because the coach was so positive, and they had been a little sad when the sessions ended.

The impact of the coaching had been that their mindset had changed in relation to decision making, such that rather than avoiding potentially challenging or scary situations, they would ask themselves, 'what's the worst that can happen?'. This had made them try out new experiences and had made them more 'carefree'. It had facilitated the re-establishment of contact with a family member where the relationship had previously broken down.

It had also had an impact on how they approached challenges in the workplace. For example, they felt more able to ask questions to establish different perspectives between different parties, such as staff and prisoners, and then use this to facilitate mutually beneficial solutions. It also helped them feel better prepared to support people after they had disclosed bad news:

So, in my mind, it would be nice to relieve some of that friction and boundaries, and build up bonds, breakdown barriers; and that's what they're trying to do on the main wing now, my bit was the first bit to try it. Now it's gone on in all the other wings, they do have sessions now where they talked to the staff and try and have meetings with the [people detained]. I have the [people detained] in the [area of establishment] anyway, so they talk to me – 'I'm sad, my girlfriends left me'. They come out with all sorts. All the staff do it, we would probably say different things – 'There's plenty more fish in the sea lads!' I'd be able to ask questions differently, I'm not saying it's better, it's different.

Another of the perceived benefits of coaching was that the participants felt that the conversations were confidential and would not get back to their managers. For all who spoke about this, this was an important aspect of the programme, mainly because this wasn't something that previously they felt was guaranteed:

With work, it is up and down, depending on who you talk to (SI 16).

I can understand why some of the officers don't want to engage due to the fact that, some of the governors struggle with confidentiality sometimes (SI 4).

You might not be able to talk to people at your work, because of trust (SI 2).

The Spark Inside coaches were however vastly different. One described her coach as:

. . . always like my auntie, and you could confide in her, and that's just 'cause she's friendly and chatty, that's what made you feel safe because she was almost like family (SI 6).

Another said about their coach:

She believed in me when I didn't feel like I believed in myself, really helped me to move forward, and keep motivated . . . It's been a few months now and the feeling is still there (SI 15).

Connected to this, many spoke about how easy it was to talk to their coaches, how they made them feel at ease and how:

I connected with him in a very authentic way, . . . he was somebody that I could be really honest with, and that was a game changer for me . . . I just knew that this is going to be a life changing experience . . . there was somebody that I could trust with what I was saying, and that was what excited me because if I could be real and honest, then he can help me . . . it was completely transformational (SI 12).

I do not talk to people . . . the fact that he actually made me feel comfortable enough to do that. In the first conversation I was thinking - I don't know if I'm really going to relate because he is a man . . . But no, I totally forgot about that. He clearly knows how to communicate (SI 14).

It's always nice to have somebody who is clever, nice, possibly interested in you not as a personality, but interested in improving your life (SI 11).

The key point here was the fact that the coach was independent from the service. This independence was therefore another important benefit of the coaching programme, with "an independent opinion" (SI 12) seen as valuable:

You need a fresh pair of ears, you know, more open to what you are talking about. So that is a benefit (SI 16).

It's always good to get an outside person's opinion, to run stuff by . . . in this job people often say what you want to hear, especially when you go up the ranks, there's an ulterior motive, they might give you advice that might not be right (SI 3). Someone who coaches or mentors you in a prison they've [sometimes] got a vested interest, haven't they . . . Whereas here, he had nothing to gain being the little person on my shoulder (SI 17).

The independence of the coach was also useful in avoiding preferential treatment:

There's a bit of favouritism . . . If you are closer to certain people, then you get more help, if you closer to others, then you just get overlooked . . . Whereas speaking to people outside the establishment, opens you up to [new] thinking (SI 14).

Having the coach not part of the service also meant that the conversation stayed on the prison staff member rather than it being allowed to drift:

Quite often in this job . . . when you talk to colleagues about something they will turn it into a rant about something that's happened to them . . . and unload on you, and then you become a sort of counsellor and your frustration is still there; whereas here you have that independent person to talk everything through, although it wasn't a counselling session, we were still talking about it and finding solutions. At the time, it definitely had a positive impact (SI 3).

She was non-judgmental, she was there for me, she wasn't bringing her stuff into the session (SI 15).

The perceived impacts of coaching

In addition to the above stated benefits, many of our participants also spoke about the lasting impact that they perceived they had received from the coaching programme. This included impacts on how they acted and behaved in work, their intentions to leave the service and also importantly their health and wellbeing. As one participant nicely summed up when asked what the impact of coaching was for themselves:

Rather than retreating into myself and going – I'm an island. I am a beacon of light (SI 12).

Impact on workplace skills and motivation

The perceived benefits, as outlined above, had a positive impact on the participant's workplace skills and motivation. For many it had given them the ability to act differently in the workplace:

. . . asking the question in a different way, presenting myself in a different manner, giving me the mindset of where the manager is, so for example, I want something from my manager, but what does my manager get in return for what I want, yes, I see the value of it, but what's the benefit for them to buy into it? . . . And that has really helped me (SI 12).

I look at things a little bit differently, and I try to be as impartial as I can . . . That's probably what I got from Spark (SI 13).

I don't get as frustrated or angry anymore (SI 3).

Not get irate in that moment . . . it's allowed me to take a little bit more of a step back, and not react . . . previously, I would tend to jump in to try to resolve the situation, and perhaps not necessarily look at the whole picture of what actually it felt like for that person; whether they were in the right, or a poor choice was made. For me, it allowed me to stop for a few seconds, and then interact, rather than just be reactive (SI 4).

For others it had given them more confidence:

More confidence to speak up and be comfortable for people to not agree; just feeling strongly about something and seeing that there could be two sides of it, but not taking it personally, that is what they think and it's fine (SI 15).

100%, confidence, it was almost enlightening in a sense, because it empowered me, it made me be more confident (SI 10).

It made you feel important . . . a bit of self-confidence, a bit of self-belief (SI 6).

Being able to speak up, having a voice, with your managers (SI 1).

I have built a lot more confidence, even looking for promotion or progression, had I not done the coaching, I wouldn't be in the headspace, to be able to deal with the rejection that comes with trying for promotion, the clarity of mind to know that I am going to step into the next step, knowing how I am working and how I am going to approach this, asking for feedback, constantly pushing yourself, to places that could not always bring positive feedback . . . just created more confident and enriched the gifts that I have (SI 12).

He told me I had all the qualities, he showed me I had all the qualities, he made me believe that . . . everyone thinks that I am a confident person, when really you pretend that you're confident, but everyone can hide things easy, that is probably me, people say that I'm arrogant but I'm not, I'm just quite quiet. People expect me to be this and that, and that's not quite the case, but it did give me more confidence. And some things that I probably wouldn't have tried in the past, now I think - Why not? (SI 5).

For some, this renewed confidence had helped them to talk to and engage with others:

I somehow adopted [coach's] way of just asking a question and waiting, and then seeing what comes out (SI 11).

There was an incident that happened with my governor last September, and if I hadn't done the coaching, I would have responded completely differently . . . I wouldn't have even bothered addressing it, I would have just retreated . . . but I actually booked time in with my governor and explained to her – This is how I feel . . . this is how your decision impacted me, and this is my expectation from you as to how I would have liked you to manage it. And she was very appreciative, she responded really positively, and moving on it has enriched our relationship (SI 12).

I've been able to bring in stuff to the induction process, which wasn't there before, and this is due to me . . . being able to approach the number one governor and telling him that this is an idea that I have got. Normally I would never speak to the number one governor . . . But it made me go the extra mile and say do you know what – I think I can do this. I am able to do this. And I was pointed in the right direction. When it comes to writing reports as well, when it comes to interview, in

terms of talking to people, how to get the best out of people. So yes, it was really helpful for me (SI 9).

Furthermore, case study 3, below, outlines how increased confidence had helped them get increased benefit from other initiatives offered to them by HMPPS.

Case study 3 – Coaching impact on other support offered within HMPPS.

Key points

- The coaching had a positive impact on engagement in other support provided by HMPPS, including wellbeing support, interactions with the person's manager, and engagement in a subsequent progression and development programme.
- The coaching programme had been "transformational".

The person receiving the coaching was particularly excited to be given the opportunity to take part because they valued the opportunity to work with someone one-to-one, in the interests of personal development. They did note some anxiety before commencing about whether they would get on with their coach, but upon starting sessions, it became very clear that the coach was able to demonstrate that they really understood the coachee: ". . . literally, they gave me my person. He just understood the junk in my head . . . like he got it".

The coach worked with the coachee to come up with their own answers to their issues, and to also consider the perspectives of their managers which helped them present themselves more positively and respond differently where there had previously been communication issues. It had also contributed to them asking for progression and promotion.

Furthermore, the coachee had experienced other support systems provided by HMPPS. They said that the coaching had been "night and day" in terms of the differences between the two but that the coaching had made them feel better able to engage in the other support by being more articulate about where they were at and what was needed: "the coaching cleared my mind, a lot of the foginess".

Since completing the Spark Inside coaching, the person had been on a further development programme and felt that having the coaching prior to this had helped them to get more from the most recent programme: "In headspace terms, I know exactly what I want, I know where I want to be going, so it made what I'm getting from this a lot more beneficial because it's very intentional".

As a result of all of these factors, the coachee summarised their experience as "completely transformational".

Another lasting impact was the fact that coaching had helped to ease stress and anxiety:

I'm not stressed anymore, working in the prison service is a stressful job, and there will always be degree of stress regardless of what you tried to do, but I think I'm

now a lot more, I wouldn't say laissez-faire, but something will come up and I'll deal with it, and then I'll move on . . . it just helps me focus and deal with that in a different approach, rather than go from here stressed, to here stressed, and nothing in the middle. It's now – Ok, how am I going to deal with that? Let's move on. It has definitely worked. I think I'm more efficient with my work, 100% (SI 10).

Understanding myself, not to get frustrated and get angry, and if I do start finding myself there, think quickly to get it in check. If you wind up angry, the only person it affects is you, if you wind up frustrated, the only person that it affects is you, you have to take that breath, time, think of solutions. If I'm frustrated - Where can I move from this? Again, it's something I do a lot now, I don't have all those frustrations, if it can't be fixed, why am I getting frustrated about it? It is what it is, how do I make it the best situation for me to be in? (SI 3).

So now I am a little bit more carefree, and more fun, maybe (SI 5).

One of the important aspects of coaching, which contributed to general workplace motivation was the fact that it gave the participants a safe space and “time to sit and think” (SI 10). As one participant told us:

There was some stuff where there was some personal things going on, and she was able to give you that space for 10 or 15 minutes of the coaching . . . I had had a really bad day and I needed to process for 10 or 15 minutes, and she was able to help with that (SI 15).

Other participants had used the skills which they had witnessed their coaches use with their own staff:

I line manage six individuals, and I do find myself talking very differently in catch ups with them. Again, I try and get them to tell me what's going on, as opposed to me telling them (SI 10).

I do a lot of coaching with my staff, and I very much use that thing where I don't give them the answer, they come to me with a problem, and I ask them what we can do to resolve that . . . when they do give me the answer, I will ask them if they can think of any pros and cons . . . I've really taken that on board where you can

see the clogs ticking over in their head, and they're not just robots doing as they're told (SI 3).

Showed me how to coach people, how to mentor, those are the key things that I needed for the role that I'm doing at the moment. Being able to talk to people, being able to find that information, being able to make sure that people can confide in you, come to you and talk to you, you can have that good rapport with them . . . giving me a good understanding of how to deal with difficult situations, how to mentor people to become a better version of themselves (SI 9).

The impact on mental health, as well as benefits arising from improved goal setting and utilisation of coaching skills to manage others is further highlighted in case study 4, below.

Case study 4 – Impact on goal setting, managing others and mental health.

Key points

- Coaching had helped to consider options to solve problems and progress in areas they had previously become stuck with.
- This had a positive impact on mental health and creativity.
- The approach had also helped the person receiving the coaching to change their management and communication with people they managed.

One of the coachees had a particularly large-scale project that they were working on and they had become overwhelmed by the decision-making required to progress the project. They were considering a project management course to assist but had been struggling to decide on whether to enrol or not. The coach had assisted by asking questions to facilitate consideration of the worst-case scenario which meant that the person receiving the coaching reached the point in thinking that actually, even the worst-case scenario was not so bad after all. This had helped them become unstuck with a number of significant decisions and they had made plans and more specific goals to move forward with the project. The facilitated support with decision making had also helped to improve the coaches mental health. Having the time and space to think through things had helped them to feel less stressed, and this in turn had helped increase their creativity:

“I think my brain just gets stressed out over figuring things out, and because I had the time and space to kind of sit and process the things that needed to be done . . . time to actually pay attention or focus on things properly . . . after the sessions I would just go into a little creative mode and be like ‘let’s plan this, let’s get through this, and that type of stuff always makes me feel better”.

They had also been able to apply this approach to supporting staff that they managed:

“It’s opened my mind and my understanding: that actually upskills more, gives them more, not just responsibility, but ownership of what they’re doing . . . gives them space to make decisions”.

They went on to describe how this helped to redress some of the power imbalances between prison staff and their managers.

Many participants also spoke about a life coaching wheel and how with intermittently referring back to their wheel they were able to see the progress that they were making:

We did like a wheel of development, it was how I was feeling in my personal life, career wise, and then all the other things. I remember I scored I think between 4 and 5 in some of them, and then by the end of it I felt like it was 7 or 8; it definitely made a huge difference (SI 15).

We were going around the wheel . . . of what we feel confident in as managers, I found that helpful in as much as I wasn't writing down where I was with it, and then every so often we will go back to it and see if it has improved or not improved. So, in that respect, that was positive. I thought it gave me a self-reflection of how I was progressing (SI 13).

Others used the wheel to identify the areas of their life that they needed to prioritise:

We started with the wheel . . . I realised the time with my actual family is really poor because I spent so much time dealing with my home stuff . . . And he just helped me to realise just how much that was important to me, how much I had lost between work and life, so it was good (SI 10).

Impact on retention

As noted above, some participants engaged with the coaching programme because they were deciding whether to leave the service and/or look for employment elsewhere. Coaching therefore came at a pivotal time in their work life:

I was like in the position where I am trying to figure out a lot of decisions in my life - I have no idea what I'm doing. I was in the prison service, but not really all that happy in the prison service, so trying to consider my options, and thought that coaching would be a good way for me to try and figure out where my head was at and what I needed to do (SI 7).

I was having doubts whether I should stay, to be a prison officer, I wasn't sure if it was for me (SI 1).

I wanted change, and I wanted some sort of development, I was kind of a bit unhappy where I was. I'm not too sure how to go about instigating it other than just firing off applications for other posts (SI 8).

I was seriously considering leaving the service . . . it was good to speak to [coach] about that (SI 17).

Of those who talked about using the coaching to help them decide whether to leave the service only one decided to “change careers completely” (SI 1) while another decided to apply to move to another prison establishment:

I'm just very grateful to my particular person, thank you to him, I would like to feedback that I'm in a different post now, and quite happy, and I put a lot of it down to his intervention (SI 8).

The remaining participants stated that the coaching had been instrumental in their decision to stay:

The prison service is/was always something that I never saw myself doing long term, and before the coaching, I was probably interested in looking at what else was out there career wise, because I didn't necessarily know if this is what I was wanting to do forever. I think the coaching has changed that (SI 10).

I genuinely don't know if I would have stuck around if I hadn't done the coaching because of the levels of stress. In the prison service, nobody is ever fully happy at the job, because it's such a high intensity role, and having somewhere where you can decompress, and not unload, but be able to have a different avenue, makes such a big difference (SI 7).

However, one did suggest that the coaching had perhaps given them the confidence to look elsewhere for employment, even if that was not the immediate short-term plan:

Speaking to people outside the establishment, opens you up to thinking that maybe I don't need to be here. Maybe I have a lot to offer . . . maybe I have the confidence now to apply for somewhere else, whether it's another establishment or head office, or maybe you don't want to be in the prison service anymore, you can be in the civil service or anything (SI 14).

Importantly, one participant linked feeling valued and supported to a desire to stay in their job role, stating that it was the experience of the coaching which had given that value:

It's getting that balance right isn't it, making sure you've got enough time to do the day job, but also offering you those opportunities to support you through progression because if you feel valued, if you feel like people are helping you to progress, then you will at least stay (SI 16).

In general, it was felt that coaching and the ability to have someone to talk to could make a real difference to retention rates:

I fear that lots of our young staff, all end up having to go to some kind of CBT for example. Lots of people are getting diagnosed with PTSD in the service now because they don't have that supervision or an outlet to talk about stuff. To talk about how their life is and how it impacts on them. So, I think if there was a chance for that to be a monthly session, it would be really beneficial, and it might help some of us that get retained, because we're not necessarily good at retaining staff (SI 10).

As explained by someone who had participated in the coaching programme: "I'm happy to get up in the morning and go to work actually - kind of, happier!" (SI 8).

Case study 5, below provides further detail about how coaching had helped them to change role but stay within HMPPS.

Case Study 5 – Confidence in decision making in relation to a new job role (within HMPPS).

Key points

- Main focus of sessions was career progression.
- Coach had excellent communication which helped the coachee open up when this was not something they did often.
- The coaching supported them in their decision-making to take a new job role and this impacted on their wellbeing positively.

The person in this case study had first accessed coaching because they had been thinking about career progression, but they were unsure what they wanted to do next. The sessions were not just focussed on career progression but also identified the skills they had and what made them happy in their work. The coachee identified that the relaxed, open, and reflective approach from the coach had helped them to talk about some areas which they had never spoken about before. During the conversations, the coach had picked up on areas where the person had enjoyed elements of their work and

where they had achieved success, even if they had not initially recognised it themselves.

The coachees highlighted how they did not tend to open up and talk to people and rarely had time to reflect in their job or consider personal progression. Having space to reflect with an unbiased person, separate to the service had been particularly important. They reported that the coach's communication was excellent and helped them open up.

The impact of the coaching was that they were able to reflect on what the right job was for them, even if that did not mean continuing to progress to a promotion. Instead of continuing with the job they had previously thought they should be doing, they moved to a slightly less senior role within a different team. Having the coaching helped them recognise their strengths and preferences and have confidence in their decision making around the new job role, and subsequently improved their sense of wellbeing:

"It just made me feel more comfortable because I was always thinking 'but what' and hesitating . . . I knew I could do my job; it was more about if the job was for me . . . [it helped] to clarify things a bit and put myself first and do it well. Am I happy doing it? Is it serving any purpose? So, I just put myself first . . . I am more confident . . . more comfortable in my decision".

Impact on health and wellbeing

As briefly mentioned above, coaching appeared to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of those who engaged with the programme. For some, this was because the coaching had taught them new techniques in which to manage their stress and anxiety:

It taught me techniques like meditation, and when you're stressed or when you're anxious, for example, rubbing your fingers together and feeling the sensations (SI 1).

I applied to move my working week to a four-day week, so I started doing compressed hours . . . So now my [spouse] knows that I'm very busy for four days a week when I'm home or in London visiting prisons, and then the other three days of the week it is all family time, and it's all kind of our time. And that really works for myself and my wellbeing, and I probably wouldn't have even bothered or thought to do any of that, or asked to apply, if I hadn't done the coaching (SI 10).

[Coach] was very good, gave lots of tips; things like just do something for 5 minutes, because if you do it for 5 minutes, you'll do it for 10 . . . [Coach] gave me a bit more confidence of dealing with certain scenarios, and setting targets, timelines, and stuff, with regards to that. So yes, my wellbeing probably improved (SI 16).

For others, it was about having “a safe space to offload” (SI 4) about the pressures of the prison working environment:

Probably the biggest part, because I don't really talk to other people, so it was nice to have somebody to talk to. He wasn't going to have a biased opinion; that was the main thing (SI 14).

At the time, it was really beneficial to have that person, as you can imagine, it was quite a stressful time, to have that new role, to have that investigation, feeling quite isolated and hung out to dry (SI 3).

My brain gets stressed out over figuring things out, and because I had the time and the space to sit and process the things that needed to be done, other things I had ideas about, but never felt like I had any time to actually pay attention or focus on those things properly, and it was like – I have an hour! And usually after the sessions, I would just go into a little creative mode, and be like – Let's plan this, let's go through this. And that type of stuff always makes me feel better (SI 7).

Such conversations allowed people to gain a healthier work/life balance:

It made me evaluate what I need to do in terms of stepping away from work slightly, even as a manager. I think that helped me to say – It's OK sometimes not to come into work if you need a break . . . it's improved my wellbeing and how I think at home (SI 13).

I have a better balance of not taking things from work home, which I'm very happy to do that and it works (SI 15).

Another impact of the coaching was that people were able to use it to understand themselves a little more clearly:

Part of the coaching showed me that I am one of those people that obviously puts the whole front on, you go and do what you have to do in front of other people, and you come home and you're pretty stressed, or you are stressed behind the mask so I think, it was really interesting to see that I was happy go lucky, but some of it was all for show. The coaching showed that I'm somebody that wants to make

people happy quite often, so I would never say – No, I'm not OK. Because you don't need to impact on somebody else's wellbeing for the day. I wasn't really aware of that 100% until the coaching (SI 10).

Unfortunately, for one, the positive impact on health and wellbeing was not sustained once the coaching sessions had finished:

We were trying to do something about me not being able to sleep, yes it worked, but not for a very long time after the coaching, so when there was no coaching, there's nobody to talk to, so I kind of went back to the old way. But during that period of coaching, I knew I was going to speak to him tomorrow, so I needed to try and do what he's told me to do (SI 2).

Despite this, the general feeling with regard to health and wellbeing was positive:

I was virtually on the verge of burning out, I tired myself out, and even when I wasn't at work, all I was doing was thinking about work. And it was nice to have life coaching and think about career stuff, and actually not have to talk about work, it was other stuff that I was passionate about, that I cared about. It was like a hobby but not a hobby (SI 7).

It is a confidence booster, like I said, I was lacking in confidence, but it kind of boosted my confidence, to say - Do you know what, actually you can do this, you've got this, you've got the ability, what you need to do is keep working on yourself and you will get better (SI 9).

He could tell that my anxiety level was really high, so instead of going into what I wanted to work on, we just did stuff about grounding and breathing and just getting me calm and present. So even that, in terms of work related, it is just knowing, I can sit in my own comfortable state, not running away from what I'm feeling, not escaping, it's a thing that's helped me to be grounded and rooted (SI 12).

One participant went so far as to say, “without it I would be in a darker place” (SI 6).

Suggestions

The second to last question asked of our participants was whether anything could be done differently. Even though everyone we spoke to was happy with their coaching experiences

and believed that they had positively benefited from the coaching, they still had some suggestions for Spark Inside to consider.

Recruitment

The first suggestion related to recruitment and how staff were contacted about participating in the programme. Even though, most of the people we spoke to responded to a general invitation email, there was a universal thought that this was not the best way in which to recruit prison staff. As our participants explained:

Most people don't read emails in a prison, especially operational staff, they're too busy getting prisoners out to exercise, getting them to education, getting them to do their laundry, getting them to the canteen . . . an e-mail going around, it's not the best way of advertising it (SI 6).

A lot of people will delete the e-mail. I think if somebody came in just to talk to people, just to say this is what is on offer. This is what it's about . . . I think you would get a bit more interest (SI 5).

Coming in and speaking to prison officers was also mentioned by other participants:

If he is there on the landing, and if he smiles at the prison officer and says – 'We are Spark Inside, we are life coaching, do you know what life coaching is?' It takes three minutes. But you've already spread some idea (SI 11).

It's just a shame it can't be promoted that little bit more other than like an e-mail, because I don't think it does it justice. People look at it in the prison service and people say – We've got this, and we've got that. But none of it works properly, whereas this is a bit different . . . come in and actually speak to a few people, give a few examples, that's the only thing I would say (SI 5).

Other suggestions were that officers who had experienced the coaching programme could be used to promote the programme, with this being seen as particularly useful if the people undertaking this had "a good amount of influence" (SI 7); to place promotional information on TV screens around the prison, with signposting to further information and to use individualised emails:

Sometimes it's a personal touch that goes a long way. So, for me, it could have been somebody at work . . . like my boss . . . and maybe that probably is the best way to go, at times (SI 16).

More sessions

The second recommendation related to the number of coaching sessions that our participants received, with six being the normal prescribed amount. While this was the number that the majority (13 prison staff) participated in, two officers attended 10 sessions and one believed that they had 14. While acknowledging that one size does not fit all, of those who undertook six sessions, the vast majority did not feel that this was enough. The number of quotes here show the strong feeling in relation to this point:

I wish we had more time to continue . . . it would be selfish for me to say 10 or 20, but I wish it continued further (SI 2).

I think eight would have been better. I think six is just too short (SI 6).

Some people might need less sessions, some people might need more than six. It depends on the individual, but sometimes you're thinking – 'Oh gosh, I've only got one session left, let me delay it another week because I'm about to do this and I want to discuss such and such' (SI 14).

I think after the six sessions, at the time, if I was financially able to, it's something that I probably would have continued on, maybe eight-week sessions or 10-week sessions (SI 7).

I still want more sessions, because yes, I have learned a lot, but I need more (SI 9).

If there had been another four to six more, I think that would have cemented the opportunity to offload, and develop skills in different ways . . . Yes, double the length of time personally I think would be more beneficial (SI 4).

The prison service is quite hard to work in, and it's got so many challenges . . . [so] having somebody to help coach around that is really useful, so definitely something that could be more than six sessions. It is better than nothing, but maybe looking at it on an individual case by case, rather than this fits for everyone (SI 15).

Really to me, 10 would be ideal, if not 12 or 15, where you could actually spend those first couple of sessions really building up that rapport, talking over problems; that's only six weeks' worth of coaching really, and that's not a long time for stuff to be brought up and resolved (SI 3).

The ability to have extra sessions, for those who experienced this, was seen as positive. For example, one participant who had an additional four sessions said:

I think six would have left me hanging, and just doing those extra sessions brought everything together . . . [it] really sealed everything that we had learned and put together (SI 12).

Of those who advocated for more sessions, the majority, however, would have liked the extras as check-ins or review sessions, rather than the coaching format throughout the core sessions:

Just to touch base again, it may have been helpful, but over a bit longer, even if it was three months (SI 13).

I think there should have been a follow up maybe . . . if you know you have a key date working to, he could e-mail me or give me a call back . . . I think that's good to have . . . maybe a month or so later (SI 16).

I think it might have been beneficial if I had had six, and then maybe had a break, and then come back to see whether or not I had used the techniques that we had discussed . . . or had I slipped back into old habits and mindset . . . three to six months would have been enough time to see how I had put it into practice (SI 10).

Having review sessions may also have been beneficial for those people who missed the support once it had gone:

I missed it, probably revisiting it every six weeks or something like that, would be beneficial, and I think it would be beneficial to anyone (SI 13).

It would have been better if they had a session that was maybe two months later, and another one four months later, so you're almost weaned off it a little bit (SI 4).

The way that the coaching ends. I had my coaching session and that was it . . . it has been cut off completely (SI 16).

The key point here is the ability to be flexible. When someone needed coaching often depended on what was happening at any given point in time, which did not always correlate to a fortnightly or monthly session:

If somebody needs a few extra sessions then they could have a review at six, and then do another two or three, or if the person is actually in a good place, but would like to have a check in, in three months' time or six months' time, just to see what's been going on, and if there's any support that is needed or not. It would be nice to have that (SI 15).

I think I was done weekly, so even if it had been an ongoing monthly thing, for another year, or another 12 sessions sporadically as and when you sort of needed it, just seeing what was going on, I would happily have carried it on (SI 3).

[Four] months ago, one of my team took his own life. We came in in the morning and found out about it . . . so four months ago I would have snapped your hand off for a load of coaching on how to manage the emotions of staff, my own emotions, so I think with the coaching, it's very much with the timing, and when you need it, what position you are in . . . I wouldn't want to waste six sessions when everything is going really well (SI 3).

You might get six come up, and one more would make a really big difference, perhaps it should be six with an option of two more, at the discretion of the coach (SI 6).

Part of training and development opportunities

Further confirmation of the fact that the coaching programme was beneficial was seen in the suggestion that it should be more widely available and be made part of the training and development options for HMPPS staff. One participant, for example, thought coaching should be a readily available option to support career progression:

Say I want promotion, and my manager disagrees with the fact that I have the development skills, this is something they could offer . . . rather than just shutting

it down . . . in the real world of the prison service there is no level of development or support from management (SI 12).

Your line manager should probably pick that up . . . this person is hard working, this person is quite ambitious, they have mentioned moving up, let's support them . . . more needs to be done to support them (SI 14).

Include coaching as part of talent development, for example, 'we think you could be a great manager, but we'd like to support you with some coaching' (SI 6).

The view of using coaching to support career development was also shared by those who had been contacted about the coaching after they had failed the assessment centre. Not surprisingly, many thought that they would have benefitted far more if the coaching had been offered prior to the assessment centre:

It would be very beneficial before going for the exam, I don't know about other establishments, but in [prison name] we didn't get a lot of support completing the workbooks, anything that we needed to do, we were on our own, so I think coaching beforehand would maybe help more (SI 15).

Sometimes it feels a bit late though because you're doing it after somebody fails their assessment. So, I have failed my assessment, fair enough, why didn't we get it at the beginning? (SI 16).

Using coaching for career development was also thought to be particularly important for those prison staff who were reaching senior levels in a far quicker time than would previously have happened:

Back in the day, you'd climb the ladder through experience. So that by the time you got to manager role or governor role, you'd lived through it . . . But now . . . we have to make sure that our CM's [custodial managers], all line managers, are invested in, so that they have leadership skills, they have management skills, they know how to manage people (SI 12).

It takes four years before you get what's called . . . jail craft . . . What we have now is people joining and thinking that they can just go straight in - in two years I am a governor. And they are! And it is scary (SI 13).

I think it should be mandatory that we do some kind of Spark Inside training, on how to mentor others, rather than learning over a number of years with trial and error (SI 3).

Others thought the coaching programme would be particularly beneficial for those officers who were newly promoted and getting to grips with a new job:

I have gone from officer to supervisor, and now to custodial manager, and that is a big jump . . . it doesn't look like a big jump, it is only one extra stripe on your shoulder, however actually doing it, is a lot (SI 14).

Nothing really prepares you for managing 42 staff with all different dynamics . . . I felt like I had been given zero training, zero preparation, and a bit hung out to dry to be honest; the service had let me down (SI 3).

We don't get prepared very well for things that we do in the prison service. You do what you think you might need to know and then you don't actually really start learning or developing until you're in the role and then even then unless you seek out opportunities to learn from other people and that means you're own time then you just have to survive every day, hoping that you're getting it right and then if you don't then changing what you're doing . . . if we're able to put something in place for people to tap into, should they feel the need for it, like an offer, I think you could probably get a lot of people being up for doing that (SI 17).

In general, however, the view was that coaching would be beneficial for all:

There are lots of stressed people in prisons . . . there are lots of young people in prisons that don't really know what they're doing, whether they want to stay, whether it is the career for them, and I think it would be interesting for other people to see what they could get out of it . . . even a couple of sessions, would just help them see things from a different perspective (SI 10).

There are a lot of us that could do with some kind of help; not just for their wellbeing, but even professionally, you know, there are staff that want to progress, they are being held back in certain ways, maybe they don't know enough, or they haven't got a mentor . . . A lot of people feel like they're being overlooked as well. So, I

think if there was more coaching, whether it is personal or career progression, that is available to everybody, then you will definitely get high intake (SI 14).

Worktime rather than personal time

Another suggestion related to the fact that most of our participants undertook the coaching programme in their own time; often at home, after they had completed a full working shift:

I've done a full day and I come home, and I've got to speak to the coach, it's not a problem, but I'm tired. I drive an hour to work, and I drive an hour home (SI 16).

When the coaching programme was a support mechanism that was being promoted by line managers and HR directors, it felt unusual to the outsider that this was happening in personal rather than in worktime. This point appeared starker with those prison officers who have been offered the coaching after they had failed an assessment centre and who initially felt obliged to take part. While it is acknowledged that the coaching was aimed at developing and supporting such individuals, when it is HMPPS who will benefit from this, it seems at odds that this is not done at the expense of the service. Interestingly, this was in stark contrast to the coaching sessions which were undertaken with governors (bands 6-11). While we only spoke to one governor, they confirmed that all sessions had taken place during work hours.

The suggestion which flowed from this was two-fold: one that the sessions should be on worktime and second there should be facilities in work where such sessions could take place without individuals being interrupted. As one participant said:

What might be good and what would be helpful . . . is if the service actually had coaching rooms with Teams set up, so you don't actually have to take your own time off. I was happy to do it, but I know not everybody is going to be happy, those kind of things might put somebody off going (SI 12).

Most who spoke about this didn't necessarily think that their line manager would be opposed to them asking to have the time off for a coaching session but felt that many people either wouldn't know to ask or wouldn't feel comfortable in asking. As it was, the experience for one participant had been quite frustrating:

They should know that I'm doing this and give me time, I know it's in your own time anyway, but I shouldn't have to explain all the time that I need to leave on time because I have a call with the coach from Sparks (SI 16).

Some were therefore looking for some commitment from HMPPS that they valued the coaching and the time that people were giving up in order to access it:

I just feel creating the space creates an intention from the service that they want to develop you (SI 11).

Even though these suggestions were made, there was nevertheless the acknowledgement that this wouldn't be right for everyone, that some would prefer to do it at home, and some would prefer not to talk to the coach within the prison working environment. The main point being made however was that it would be good to have that choice.

More joined up process

Putting many of these comments and suggestions together one of the main points is that there needs to be a more joined up process when prison staff are engaging in the coaching programme. This should start right at the very beginning when staff are being recruited for the programme. As stated above, many felt that the personal touch was important and that individualised emails were better than global ones. Recommendations from line managers were valued even more and if this was the case such individualised knowledge could be used in making decisions on which coach to match the prison officer with. One participant argued that if:

. . . my governor was to say, we want to put him forward, this is what we know about him, this is what we think he needs help on. And then you've got that information, and then maybe you can match me with the right person, and then you've got a little bit of background, again that is the personal touch (SI 16).

Line managers knowing that their staff were undertaking the programme was also thought to be important. Not just so that time could be set aside for the session during the working shift (see above), but also so that the left hand knew what the right hand was doing:

It would be nice if your managers knew as well . . . today somebody asked me why I'm doing 'Sparks', and didn't even know what 'Sparks' was, not everyone

knew I did it; obviously it's not everybody's business, but my line manager should know (SI 16).

Some described the situation where they had been asked to undertake the programme to help them progress their career but when they had asked to be put forward for the assessment centre again, on completion of the coaching, the answer had been no:

The people that have made the decision for me not to go for it, maybe did not know that I completed the coaching . . . so, in the year that has passed, I have done quite a lot of things that I have put myself forward for, that I've said yes to, it didn't come from line managers, from none of them, so they have made that decision without having the full picture and didn't even ask, it was quite disheartening (SI 15).

For this individual while they still valued the coaching, they wished that HMPPS could work with their own establishment more, so that the experience was more joined up. This also applied to participating in the sessions in work rather than personal time. When we spoke to a governor about this, they commented that it should be fairly easy to facilitate coaching sessions for all prison staff during work hours:

. . . because all prisons have got Teams, and actually we all have shutdowns for training. We have one twice a month first and third Wednesday. So, if we had a number of people that needed to do that, we could have definitely just written it into their working patterns (SI 17).

They did however acknowledge that when emails were sent out to staff following assessment centres from the office of the PGD "line managers were probably left out of that communication to say these people have been identified" (SI 17).

Further suggestions

Further suggestions for Spark Inside to consider include making the sessions face-to-face. While it was acknowledged that online sessions were needed during the Covid-19 pandemic, this is no longer the case and some thought that they may have benefited more if the sessions or at least some of the sessions had taken place in person:

If it was face to face, we probably would have bonded a lot better (SI 13).

I found it over the phone all right but at the same time, it might be nice to be face to face once again to build that rapport (SI 3).

I think it's personal . . . but maybe face to face. It depends on the person, me in general, I'm not usually a phone person, even with friends I'm never on the phone, I like to meet people face to face, just because it feels a bit more personal (SI 14).

Things [are] always better face to face, aren't they? Even if you were [only] getting one (SI 17).

Maybe not every session, but maybe the middle session? That could be a good suggestion . . . You can have that little coffee or something, go somewhere away from the prison (SI 16).

Another comment made by one of our participants was whether it might be useful for there to be the ability to change coach. While they were at pains to express that the relationship with their coach was fine, they were cognisant of the fact that coaching worked for them because of that relationship:

. . . for somebody that does not have that connection with their coach . . . can [you] change coaches, so you're not actually losing the experience, because sometimes it is a person-to-person thing . . . that might take one or two different people for some people to find their person (SI 12)

Final remarks

Our final question asked our participants whether they had any final comments to make, and it is a flavour of these which this section ends with:

Don't give up on us and keep doing what you're doing (SI 2).

Keep doing what you're doing because it's having a positive impact on people (SI 9).

The prison service really lacks anything like this . . . I just want to praise the scheme and say how good I think it is, and that I think it's a great thing that you are doing, that it hopefully continues and gets put out wider (SI 3).

I had the most amazing coach; he was super amazing (SI 12).

I'm just very grateful to my particular person, thank you (SI 8).

Summary: Interviews with Prison Staff

- Most staff had heard about Spark Inside via non-personalised e-mails, while a small proportion had received a personal approach from a manager, sometimes following unsuccessful progression exams or assessment centres.
- While many participants did not know what to expect from coaching, reasons for choosing to engage in coaching included curiosity, seeking personal growth, to gain support and guidance, and for support with career decisions. A paucity of alternative support provision within HMPPS had also been an influencing factor, as had the reputation of Spark Inside built upon their delivery of coaching to prisoners. Some people chose to take part in order to better support others.
- Coaching was sought for a variety of areas within each person's life. Most of these were work related, rather than personal, and included career development, a need to improve time management, event planning and overcoming difficult situations such as relationships with colleagues and issues pertaining to prison culture.
- The main benefit which was repeatedly reported by prison staff was in relation to the fact the coaches were exceptional listeners which helped to clarify thinking and lead to a sense of empowerment. Confidentiality, independence from HMPPS, ease of conversation and projection of belief in the person being coached were also important.
- Multiple impacts were described by participants. These included positive impacts on workplace skills such as managing frustration and communicating with colleagues and prisoners; confidence; the management of stress and anxiety; and a safe space to think and speak. Coaching had also supported career decisions, including the intention to remain within or leave HMPPS. Subsequently, coaching was reported to have a positive impact on physical and mental wellbeing.
- Future suggestions in relation to Spark Inside delivery included alternative approaches to recruitment, such as Spark Inside attending the prison in person, and asking previous coachees to share the benefits of coaching; flexible options for increasing the number of coaching sessions received; the provision of coaching as an integral part of preparation for training and development opportunities, with a more strategic approach with HMPPS to support this; the option to have coaching during work rather than personal time; options for some in person, rather than online sessions; and the option to change coach if this was ever needed.
- The feedback about the coaching received was overwhelmingly positive.

Interviews with Spark Inside Coaches

Who are the Spark Inside coaches?

As part of the interview, the coaches were asked to tell the interviewer some details about themselves, their experience, and their approach to coaching.

Significant Previous Experience

All of the coaches interviewed reported significant experience in coaching, the workplace, and life experience in general, which informed their work with both people detained within prison and staff working in prisons.

Coaching Training and Accreditation

All participants were highly qualified coaches, accredited with various coaching regulatory bodies. Prior coaching training and experience was viewed as a prerequisite for being able to work with Spark Inside:

We join as a coach, and have had our own qualifications, then we get training for working with young men in prison (SIC 5).

This coaching experience was endorsed by external coaching accreditation from whichever body the coach was aligned with. One participant indicated that:

We all come with our own professional experience, either accredited through the ICF [International Coaching Federation], or whatever body it is (SIC 2).

Another stated that this experience and accreditation was universally the case across all Spark Inside coaches:

Everybody . . . is certified through ICF or AC [Association for Coaching], [we all have] lots of coaching with all sorts of clients, and we were invited to do work with staff (SIC 1).

Spark Inside did not train them as coaches but rather specified and adapted their coaching expertise to the prison environment, with both staff and prisoners.

Previous Professional Roles

In addition to their coaching expertise, all seven of the coaches interviewed described workplace experience, or previous careers that helped inform their coaching practice.

Business

Several of the interviewees reported previous corporate careers:

I had a corporate career before this, travelling around the world as an executive making a lot of money, but I wasn't happy or feeling fulfilled. And in that corporate career, even though I was working as an account director, somehow my managers or the people that I was working with would ask me - Can you help this guy or this girl? (SIC 1).

Several mentioned being dissatisfied with corporate life, leading to the realisation that helping people as a coach was more fitting for them as a person.

Counselling

Others had counselling or therapeutic training which informed their coaching practice:

I have done counselling training as well, and life coaching, it's integrative; so, it tends to be mixed together (SIC 5).

Coaching and counselling were viewed as highly compatible and mutually enriching activities which informed and improved one another.

Creative Industries

Some coaches also reported unexpected synchronisation between past careers and their current work as a coach, such as the coach who integrated the playfulness and creativity of previous experience in theatre:

I should say that sometimes I'm quite playful. I have a drama background as well, so I started acting. I do feel very free, and I love to be free with people. It is infectious (SIC 6).

This contagious enjoyment of spontaneous interaction with people was clearly viewed as an asset to be incorporated into coaching practice.

Use of Lived Experience in Coaching

It was not just previous careers or current expertise that coaches brought to their work with prison staff, it was also their experience of life. This diversity of life experience was viewed by all the coaches as an asset in their work:

Well, I have had a lot of experience of very different arenas. I have worked in different parts of the world, I've worked with diplomats, very high members of society from certain countries . . . so I think I have a very broad range of experience (SIC 6).

This experience often guided their sense of appropriate interaction with those they coached:

I really use my lived experience . . . I don't use theories; I used my experience of people . . . It is that kind of experience. That real life lived experience the I am bringing, so it's not something that I even have to try or think about (SIC 3).

As will be seen below, this sense of intuitive improvisation when coaching, was a feature that all the coaches stressed as a vital ingredient of their practice.

Sense of Vocation with Coaching

One of the features that unified all seven of the Spark Inside coaches interviewed, was a strong sense of commitment and vocation for working as a coach in the prison context. This was often expressed with great enthusiasm:

It's hard for me to say what it is because, without sounding cheesy, I feel like I'm living my best life now . . . I like doing this, I get rewarded for this . . . But at the same time, I know that I am where I'm supposed to be, I'm supposed to be doing this (SIC 1).

Statements such as this one expressed not only an enjoyment of working as a coach, but also a sense of competence, personal satisfaction and rightness-of-fit in the coaching role. This was often summed up in terms of being motivated and a sense of privilege for having the opportunity to engage people in coaching, especially in the prison context:

I just feel so privileged doing what I do . . . When I did my original coach training 20 years ago . . . one of them said that they had done coaching in prisons, so I kind of jumped at the opportunity (SIC 7).

This seemed to be especially strong when working with young men in prison. The coaches reported not only a sense of commitment to these individuals but liking them and carrying a strong desire to help them:

I think the very first time that I was in there, I felt it was a privilege, I immediately saw these guys not as they were reported in the Daily Mail, but people with great potential, a lot of them more polite than some of my friends (SIC 7).

The coaches also communicated benefiting themselves from the sense of making a difference they experienced from working with Spark Inside:

That's what keeps me going, I know that whatever I do, it will make a difference (SIC 1).

These experiences meant that the coaches often gained personal benefit from the opportunity to give back to society or help with issues of suffering or injustice:

I have benefited from it hugely, particularly since things like George Floyd. I finally realised I was a very privileged person . . . with great privilege, should come great responsibility (SIC 7).

This sense of vocation communicated by most of the coaches, was perhaps best summed up by one interviewee who referred to his preference of coaching, even over more lucrative professions, because of the enthusiasm for people it engenders:

As soon as I found coaching, I knew that was what I'd always meant to do, even though it didn't exist when I was at school, it wouldn't have been an option, there was no such thing apart from sports coaching. But ever since then, I just Hoover up stuff about how the mind works, how we can be better . . . I think it's an absolute gift what I'm allowed to do and get paid for. Yes, I would get paid more if I worked in the corporate world, but I am passionate about people . . . people who haven't got those opportunities (SIC 7).

The coaches interviewed gave an overall impression of a group of highly experienced experts with significant life experience, wholeheartedly committed to the coaching role they had been given.

Approach to Coaching

To evaluate the practice of the coaches, it was first necessary to understand exactly what they did in their work with prison staff. Each coach was asked to provide a brief statement of the major approaches or theories of coaching to which they adhered to in their coaching practice.

Reluctance to Provide a Formal Label

While all the coaches interviewed reported considerable expertise, training, and coaching accreditation, for reasons that become clear below, almost all of them in the first instance were reluctant to summarise their coaching approach with a single label or theory:

I don't subscribe to following a particular model (SIC 2).

I can't think of a label (SIC 7).

There is some stuff, but I probably don't know their name, I'm sure there's probably some sort of life coaching models and . . . everything overlaps so none of them are exclusive (SIC 1).

This was not a reflection of their lack of expertise, nor an inability to name specific coaching models or approaches, but rather an unwillingness to be doctrinaire or tied down to one particular coaching approach. The coaches were not offering off-the-peg or manualised responses to their clients but reserved the right to adopt the most appropriate approach to whatever the client presented. This is detailed further below.

Formal Labels given to Coaching Approaches

However, when pushed further to specify the approaches they used, or asked to give examples of their use of coaching models in practice, a significant range of models and orientations were reported.

Performance-Related (GROW) Coaching

Unsurprisingly, most of the coaches outlined some use of Whitmore's Performance Coaching approach, utilising the G.R.O.W. (Goal, Reality, Obstacles/Options, Way Forward) model as a framework:

I would say my default would be performance related coaching; particularly with professionals (SIC 3).

Though even this was seen as one among several possible approaches to be drawn upon:

Of course, we will potentially utilise the GROW model and some of the other models (SIC 1).

Humanistic/Person-Centred Coaching

Other coaches took a Rogerian Humanistic or Person-Centred approach as core to their coaching practice:

So, I would say my approach to coaching is probably drawing on the humanistic side of things (SIC 4).

Emotion-Focussed Coaching

And while not explicitly using the term, some outlined a well-developed approach to working with clients that can best be described as drawing from emotion-focused interventions:

[I] use lots of things like bringing emotions and feelings into it a lot, so I'll have an emotions checklist, I will bring in . . . the importance of the connection between values and vision (SIC 2).

Solution-Focused Coaching

Some coaches explicitly referenced the combination of performance coaching with elements of the Solution Focussed Coaching approach, noting the similarity and easy combination of the two processes:

Performance coaching is in some ways solution focused, but then there's also solution focused therapy which can be like a therapeutic intervention, and I use some of their principles (SIC 3).

But even they recognised that this combination did not exhaust the skills and theories that their coaching practice drew upon:

But that's not as simple as just solution focus, it's got some nuances to it (SIC 3).

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

As a similarly popular approach in the corporate world, it was unsurprising to find some of the coaches drawing on NLP as a source of multiple models and techniques:

So, there might be things like NLP that I might use (SIC 3).

But even they recognised that NLP in itself was a-theoretical and drew upon numerous other models and techniques:

With the NLP there's lots of models, I think it's almost based on models, so in my tool bag there are so many models and frames of references (SIC 3).

Transformative Coaching

Other coaches used the term Transformational Coaching to summarise their general approach, or aspects of thereof, which they elaborated as the attempt to shift coachees' self-concept in a positive direction leading to changes in presentation and behaviour:

It's more about the paradigm, and shifting identity in how we think about ourselves, and I think that will have a knock-on effect of how we show up and act (SIC 4).

Gestalt Coaching

Additional reference was made to the benefits of two-chair technique when dealing with conflict management:

For example, the chair one . . . where you sit somebody in a chair, and you say - What would they say to you in this situation? (SIC 5)

With this being a reference to the coaching approach derived from Gestalt Psychotherapy.

Embodied Coaching

Other coaching approaches emphasised direct work with bodily awareness:

Again, I'm sort of doing a bit more work with embodied coaching, asking people - How is that presenting to you physically? (SIC 6).

This chimed with recent developments in Somatic and Embodied Coaching practices, which emphasise real-time reports of internal body sensations as a means of addressing coaching issues.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Several of the coaches mentioned their use of Stephen Hayes' ACT:

And I do use other things - metaphors is quite big for me as well using ACT. I quite like the use of metaphor within acceptance commitment therapy, so I draw on that (SIC 2).

This became particularly evident in the use of metaphor as a coaching technique with prison officers, detailed further below.

Transactional Analysis

Some coaches referred to using the tripartite self-state model (Parent/Adult/Child):

There are other ones like the parent child adult triangle (SIC 5).

With this being a formulation commonly utilised in Transactional Analysis (TA) for understanding social interactions.

Integrative

Overall, most of the coaches described their overriding coaching model as integrative, or holistic, suggesting a coherent application of multiple models and psychological approaches applied to coaching:

I have done counselling training as well, and life coaching, it's integrative; so, it tends to be mixed together (SIC 5).

Often these approaches had been learned over a period of time and blended in a way that allowed each coach to create a unique coaching philosophy:

I have several theories and practices that I use from my professional development over time, and how I usually work is that I merge them (SI 3).

This in part explains the initial reluctance of the coaches to label themselves by adherence to a single coaching orientation. All of them, however, were to some extent merging and integrating a diverse range of approaches.

Coaching centred on the client

The main reason however, that the coaches were unwilling to label themselves according to a single style of coaching was their unanimous commitment to adapting their approach to the presenting issues and requirements of the clients they worked with. There was agreement among all seven of the coaches interviewed that coaching as an activity was a client-led enterprise.

Following the client

First off, the coaches were very clear that the agenda and subject of the coaching session was very much down to the client:

So, it's more or less meet the person . . . ask them what they want to talk about (SIC 4).

The coaches were willing to allow the prison staff to set the agenda of the sessions, without dictating the exact direction that the session should take:

I will cover anything that they want to bring to the coaching. And I make it clear up front that I'm not going to come to a session one day and say - Today this is what it is. It is driven by them (SIC 2).

Consequently, the coaches were willing to be adaptable and shape their use of tools or coaching interventions according to their assessment of what the client needs:

So, it's really exploring where they're at, and then I will adjust myself accordingly to what he or she needs in that moment (SIC 1).

All of them asserted the importance of building a working coaching alliance with the prison staff before any focused work on coaching issues could begin:

The style tends to be to get that rapport first of all, then there is a little background information. And then sometimes there are things from the past, and then we try and concentrate on actions in life coaching tips (SIC 5).

Not only the topic but also the pace and speed of the coaching conversation was adjusted and adapted to the client, so that they could be relaxed in exploring whatever issues were important to them:

So, it is very much adapted to them. And I will say to them sometimes - We can slow down. If we are doing face to face sessions, I will say - If you want to go and get a drink, feel free, if you want to stretch, do whatever you want to do. I just want them to feel really relaxed in the sessions (SIC 5).

They reported a sense that engagement or self-exploration in coaching could not be forced and is more likely to occur without coercion:

But I have realised that people engage when the pressure is off, so I think that was a good philosophy (SIC 3).

And that adherence to a client-led ethos in which the coaches refrained from restricting staff to a preconceived set of objectives made it more likely that they would hear about what really mattered to their clients:

So, I think it is really person centred, and humanistic in terms of who the person is in front of you, and also what is emerging in that present moment, rather than preconceived ideas of what needs to happen (SIC 4).

Overall, all of the coaches communicated that effective coaching required a decentring of their own agendas or needs in favour of following the client's goals and desires for coaching. This was expressed as a general principle of all coaching.

For me, it is the principle of coaching that holds true. Coaching isn't about me; it is about them and their development (SIC3).

But it held particularly true when working with people in the prison environment:

Coaching in the prison, it very much depends on what the person brings (SIC 2).

Believing in the client

Being centred on the client however did not just mean the coaches were passively abdicating their responsibility to set the tone of the session. The coaches came across as strong advocates for their clients, believing in their ability to act in the direction of their own aspirations and goals:

When I'm coaching, I have my client's back, that is my position (SIC 6).

Even if this felt to some extent at odds with the prevailing objectives of the institutional environment, many of the coaches still emphasised their commitment to the client as a person:

I don't care who is paying me, to tell you the truth, I have a brief, and just because somebody is paying me, it doesn't mean they're buying my allegiance, obviously I'm going to behave ethically, but where I am is with my client (SIC 6).

Some of the coaches resorted to imagery to explain what it meant to believe in the client. Some viewed it as championing or cheerleading their clients to achieve:

Part of my role as a coach, is to be a champion who is at the top of the hill that they're trying to climb, holding the flag up going - You can do it, I believe in you! (SIC 7).

Others viewed it as a kind of relational sponsorship of their client, like a sibling or relative supporting them:

So, I guess sometimes in that environment I could be a brother, and uncle, a father; whatever I can play that role (SIC 1).

Another view envisaged coaching as an encouraging or comforting, helpful relationship:

Being with the person, where they are, just being like a friend with your arm around their shoulder or something. Figuratively, rather than literally (SIC 7).

Whatever metaphor was used, all the coaches described the ideal coaching attitude as maintaining a strong belief in the client.

Strengths of the client

This belief in the client also implied a particular way of attending to the client, an investment in listening for the ideal future self of the client, who they could become:

When you are listening to the person that you are coaching, don't listen for the person with all the challenges, problems, angst and issues, your job is to listen for their most magnificent self, and that has always stuck in my mind. My job is helping them to maybe get a glimpse into who they really could be (SIC 7).

Similarly, this seemed to involve a sense that the client has resources, abilities, and strengths to draw on, even if not immediately evident:

I guess a good philosophy . . . is the client is resourceful and whole (SIC 3).

Some of these strengths and abilities may be confined to particular areas of life and the coach's role is to help coachees to expand and express these where needed:

They are good at something. And if they're good at something, what skill can be now transferred to what . . . they could potentially do (SIC 1).

This attentiveness to strengths allows the coaches to look beyond the problems presented by the staff, to their resources and abilities. Sometimes their problems could be understood as examples of over-used strengths:

We looked at what was interesting for her, looking at weaknesses and strengths, and saying . . . if we overwork our strengths, they can actually become a weakness. If you are helping people too much, then you don't have anything for yourself, so that was really helpful for her (SIC 5).

The coaches also spoke about admiring the prison staff they worked with, particularly their persistence in dealing with workplace stressors and the work-ethic demonstrated by some of those with whom they worked:

My hat is taken off to her in terms of this incredible work ethic and strength. I'm looking up to her, you know? I just think she is amazing (SIC 5).

Believing in the strengths of the client was in some ways an ability to retain an appreciation, admiration, or sense of wonder at their abilities.

Co-creation and collaboration

This belief in the client is what allowed the coaches to co-create coaching sessions with the prison staff, in which they viewed them as a participant and a collaborator in shaping the direction of the session:

My style of coaching is very collaborative, client centred (SIC 6).

Some viewed this as an essential ingredient of performance focused (GROW Model) coaching:

I guess in simple terms, there's a thing called the Co-creative model that I was trained in, and that is where we look at where people's visions and goals currently are, where their reality is, what they want to do to bridge that gap; so, it is kind of the GROW model (SIC 2).

This allowed them to point to explicit models that identified collaboration as an area of exploration in considering how stressful situations are addressed:

Kilman's collaboration model, in terms of the way people either compete or avoid or collaborate, under stressful situations. I quite like to bring that in (SIC 2).

The coach's collaboration with the staff member was viewed as a microcosm of the kind of collaborative partnerships the prison staff were required to create with their colleagues and helped in making such relationships effective.

Presence and Space

When asked what this collaborative style with clients looked like in practice, coaches often used the language of being present in, or providing space for, the client:

What it would look like in practice is a lot more presence and space, kind of holding that space and seeing what emerges in the space (SIC 4).

The coaches were prepared to be patient and attentive to the client prior to settling on an action plan for the session:

I would say that since I trained as a coaching supervisor, I have been much more attentive to the here and now, to the space that's being created between us. I am very much there (SIC 6).

Rather than leaping straight to technical interventions or tools, this ability to remain in the present moment often meant holding their desire to do something for the client, even the need for coaching progress, in abeyance.

Relationship Over Technique

In terms of placing the client at the centre of their work, all the coaches expressed this in terms of building the coaching relationship before settling upon tools or strategies of intervention:

Just create a connection with the other person rather than diving straight into it; asking them about their life and their challenges (SIC 7).

Even though they were highly trained and possessed an enormous number of coaching techniques, they prioritised the relational connection before turning to the use of psychological tools:

I have a massive bag of tricks that I can trot out at any time, but I'm really much more interested nowadays in that space in between, and what we are creating together, and how that can support the client to do the thinking that is necessary to make some kind of change (SIC 6).

This relationship building is what allows the right coaching tools to emerge:

It very much depends on what the client brings. If it feels like that is an area that they're heading into, or a territory that they're heading into . . . then that is a tool that I will use (SIC 2).

This also requires the coaches to hold their expertise lightly, rather than heavy-handedly applying techniques prematurely without having secured a connection with the officer being coached:

Rather than hanging on to the tools too heavily, I think it's more about that rapport and that connection that you make with the other person, and then having those things to draw on if you feel you need them . . . That's why I say I don't hold too tightly to the tools, because I don't really think it's about bells or whistles (SIC 4).

They were thus willing to hold a very loose model of the sequence of coaching, to meet the clients need:

So, therefore my model is very loose because I want it to fit what he needs, or she needs (SIC 1).

Ultimately this close pacing of the client presentation in the session required a flexibility and spontaneity from the coaches:

To be honest, there are so many theories that it can get confusing sometimes, and then it stilts me, if I've learned that theory and that theory, I prefer to just go with the flow; that seems to be the best way at the moment (SIC 5).

This ability to adapt and improvise, especially in the volatile prison environment was seen as a requirement for coaching to be effective in addressing the actual issues raised.

Improvisation

Many of the coaches ultimately described themselves as spontaneous or unstructured:

I am very much spontaneous, and I go with the flow, so I am kind of less structured (SIC 5).

They found it most effective to go into the session with a sense of openness and flexibility which allowed them to respond with agility and effectiveness to whatever the client brought. Far from being a lack of pre-work this was viewed as the most powerful way of working towards coaching outcomes defined by the client:

I go in with no preparation, I just go in open - Where are we going to go today? That I feel is really profound (SIC 6).

This meant that the coaches followed their intuition and hunches based on previous experience:

I am allowing myself to use my hunches or to bring up my intuition (SIC 6).

Yes, I do think I am intuitive, even in my daily life (SIC 5).

This allowed them to read the people they worked with by observing them closely and paying attention to non-verbal communication:

I think I see it; I don't even put it down to intuitive, just by looking around and seeing people's body language and their facial expressions, what they're saying to us, what they're saying to each other, what they're not saying (SIC 3).

Several of the coaches referred to this as improvisation, borrowing the language of music or theatre to express how a skilled performer is able to take a broad repertoire of abilities and adapt them to the needs of the moment:

You take people through the steps, but sometimes when I'm in it, then I can tell there is a strong atmosphere or something, and I start to improvise with it in what I get people to do, and I think it always works well (SIC 3).

One of the coaches phrased this as playfulness, and that this allowed her clients to leave behind some of the demands that otherwise oppressed them:

I think she came to the conversations feeling that it was a place that she could set aside a lot of the worries that she had, and just sort of be with me, play... I'm quite playful... I do feel very free, and I love to be free with people. It is infectious (SIC 6).

Overall, while the coaches were initially unwilling to label themselves with a single approach or technique, this was not because of a lack of expertise but rather because all the coaches possessed a diverse range of skills and tools which could be selected based on the situation presented by the client. They had too many coaching strategies at hand to be defined by one alone, and they selected from these based on the client's requirements. In general, this is how the coaches saw themselves and not just in their work with Spark Inside.

[How do Spark Inside support the coaches work with prison staff?](#)

The coaches were then asked how they came to work with Spark Inside and what they thought of the support and materials provided to them by the charity.

General satisfaction with support from Spark Inside

Pretty unanimously the coaches were very positive about working with Spark Inside and felt very supported in the role of coaching prison officers. They found the charity to be generous and helpful:

My understanding of Spark is that they will give you whatever you want. So, I think it's all been really helpful (SIC 3).

They also viewed the charity as responsive to their needs:

They have been incredibly responsive . . . I am very happy with the current provision: couldn't be better and couldn't be more helpful and responsive (SIC 6).

Spark Inside were also viewed as being good at orientating them to the prison environment:

So, I don't know how Spark could make it any easier, because unless you've been in that environment, there is no reference point (SIC 1).

The coaches were invited to speak freely and confidentially about Spark Inside, and the overall tone of their comments was positive and appreciative. They clearly liked working with Spark Inside and appreciated the opportunity to do the work they were doing.

Provision of Materials

The coaches were asked to comment on the materials provided by Spark Inside in terms of coaching prison staff, and to what extent they found this material helpful.

Little concern about lack of material or guidance provided.

The coaches were almost unanimously confused by the question of materials with regard to coaching prison staff. Most of them thought they had not been given any:

From the staff point of view, there have been almost no materials (SIC 6).

Some of them interpreted the question as specific training for coaching staff, of which they also had no knowledge:

In terms of staff training, I would say that we have not received specific training around coaching staff (SIC 5).

Others however reported broader training provided by Spark Inside, not specific to prison staff, but building on their coaching expertise for the prison context:

Spark haven't specifically got us trained in the coaching, but they have given us additional coaching and training to build on that (SIC 2).

None of them were concerned by this or viewed it as a lack of provision however, because their coaching qualifications and expertise more than covered the proposed work with staff members:

Nothing really because it's coaching (SIC 7).

We didn't receive any training materials, primarily because this was a coaching engagement (SIC 3).

Most of them simply reported being invited to work with prison staff and expressing an interest:

All we got was - Are you interested in working with prison staff? (SIC 7).

And many of them voiced enthusiasm and interest in expanding the work of Spark Inside into the staff population:

I am dredging my brain. I'm pretty sure there was nothing specific, it was – 'Would you be interested in doing this?' It seemed like a sensible thing to do, and I was more than happy to do it (SIC 2).

Similar to previous coaching work

The main reason given by coaches that they were not overly concerned about receiving little prison staff-specific training or materials from Spark Inside, was that they felt the work with prison staff was very similar to the kind of professional and workplace coaching they delivered on a regular basis:

There's not much that I would do in an executive setting, that I'd say that would never work in the prison, because I find that they all crossover (SIC 2).

Their coaching skills were viewed as easily transferable into working with prison staff:

I would say that working with the staff more than the prisoners, felt more similar to what I do a lot in other areas (SIC 2).

Trusted based on previous experience

The coaches also communicated that they felt trusted by Spark Inside to get on with the work they had been given to do with prison staff:

I have been a coach for 20 years, and we're all recruited, vetted by the prisons, but also vetted by Spark Inside to see that we've got the right attitude, and watching us in action and things like that, so I guess all of that is kind of done (SIC 7).

The professional coach training and accreditation reported earlier was one of the things that gave them confidence to deliver coaching to the staff:

There's probably been less formal coaching from Spark on that one because as coaches we all come with our own professional experience, either accredited through the ICF, or whatever body it is (SIC 2).

Rigorous Recruitment Process

In addition to this, some of the coaches referred to the rigorous vetting and recruitment process which gave them confidence as coaches that Spark Inside understood their level of competence:

Of course, after the six-day job interview, they know we are all very experienced coaches and can take whatever comes at us (SIC 6).

This allowed the coaches to feel some freedom to operate in their preferred mode of coaching. They felt the flexibility was available to follow the client when working with prison staff in the same way they would when coaching other professional groups:

I thought I had flexibility to be honest. So maybe Spark Inside had a really flexible approach which was really good. I guess I have flexibility to support those coming to the session to talk about what was important for them (SIC 3).

Spark Inside were viewed as providing a context with prison staff that allowed the coaches to coach in exactly the way they preferred and found to be most effective.

Comparison to Hero's Journey with prisoners

When asked about the materials provided for coaching prison staff, some coaches contrasted this dearth with the extensive materials and training provided for taking prisoners through the Hero's Journey programme. The programme utilises life coaching to build motivation, improve life skills and reduce future risks of violence in prison and reoffending (Spark Inside, 2022b). The Hero's Journey was viewed as the signature intervention for which Spark Inside was known:

The training material was regarding the Hero's Journey because that is what they are predominantly known for (SIC 1).

Tried-and-Tested Programme

In comparison to coaching prison staff, in which little additional training or material was provided or required, the coaches viewed the Hero's Journey as a very extensive and highly developed set of materials:

Coaching the young people in custody, loads of materials, very well developed, and thought through materials... the whole materials thing has been very well done (SIC 6).

They noted that the Hero's Journey had been developed and adapted through multiple iterations to improve its delivery:

In terms of working with the prisoner population, there's a workbook called the Hero's Journey workbook, and there is a set of approaches to using that material; that's iterated several times (SIC 2).

There was a considerable volume of training and materials surrounding the delivery of the Hero's Journey:

There was quite a bit of training on that: documentation, tests, running various scenarios; so that was the majority of training that we received along with the experienced coaches who had already delivered the Hero's Journey (SIC 1).

This reflected the tried-and-tested nature of the Hero's Journey, having been delivered multiple times with prisoners and therefore accumulating a shared wisdom and experience on how it should be delivered to best effectiveness.

Significant Orientation Training

Alongside the actual content of the Hero's Journey, the coaches also reported that Spark Inside did a good job of orientating them to exactly how it was to be delivered with the prison population. This was initially a daunting prospect for even experienced coaches:

It was pretty comprehensive; also, a little bit daunting as well because you don't know what to expect (SIC 1).

But it seemed that Spark Inside were familiar with the experiential process required to get the coaches up to speed, which included experiencing the programme from the inside by completing it themselves:

We get some material that makes it simple to deliver the workshop, but before you get this material, you go through the HJ (Hero's Journey) yourself; so it's words mixed with experience which I think is a great way of training (SIC 3).

This training was also repeated and refreshed so that the coaches had some sense of all being on the same page in terms of its delivery. While they adapted and improvised, when necessary, this retained the sense that they were all delivering the same programme in roughly the same way:

Refresher training has occurred through that period to make sure that we're all using the Hero's Journey in a similar kind of way (SIC 2).

The coaches saw the Hero's Journey as a well-established process that could be relied upon as a basis for working with prisoners.

Good Foundation for 1-2-1 Coaching

When speaking about coaching prison officers, the Hero's Journey often came up as a contrast, because people detained in prison completed this programme as a prerequisite before individual coaching session began:

As far as the coaching is concerned, that comes on the back of the Hero's Journey (SIC 2).

According to the coaches this provided a strong launchpad for individual coaching to take place, because a common purpose and an initial relationship was already established to some extent:

The strength of the workshop, the Hero's Journey workshop, is that we provide a stimulus which we facilitate around, with the one to ones, it's just not the same, the success of the one to ones, I believe it's based on the relationship that you have with a young person, and how engaged the young person can be (SIC 3).

As will be seen in the section below, one of the difficulties in coaching prison staff was sometimes the lack of this common point of reference for both the relationship and the purpose of coaching. With the prisoners this was provided by the Hero's journey, which acted as a kind of orientation to coaching for them.

Wheel of Life/Coaching

When pushed further on what materials had been provided to assist in the coaching of prison staff, some of the coaches eventually recalled the 'Wheel of Life' or the 'Wheel of Coaching'.

Delayed Arrival

Perhaps one of the reasons this was not immediately recollected by them was that it had arrived some way into the process of coaching prison staff, rather than presented as an essential element at the start of the initiative:

After a while they did give us a model, which is the coaching wheel (SIC 6).

Some said it would have been more helpful if provided earlier on:

That template . . . would have been better before we started with them, rather than halfway through (SIC 5).

Others, as seen below, were already using something similar and therefore didn't view it as a Spark Inside resource, in the same vein as the Hero's Journey.

Different Uses

However, several coaches did report using the Wheel in different ways: to guide the conversation, to build the coaching relationship, and to measure progress towards coaching goals.

Model, Tool, or Guide

In concert with the view of themselves as expert improvisors, the coaches who reported using the Wheel in working with prison staff, integrated it into an already established way of working:

We received a template around the life coaching wheel of life, I call it the wheel of life because I was already using that (SIC 5).

Others viewed it as a rough guide or an imperfect tool that did not need to be perfect to be useful:

It's useful in terms of it's a means to an end, but at the same time, is not a fool proof way of measuring coaching or choosing what people want to work on (SIC 4).

Rapport Building

Some of the coaches used the wheel of life to fast track the building of rapport in the coaching relationship within the first few sessions:

Normally the wheel of life is a really good first session, because that really gets into the nitty gritty of work, of financial situations, their family life, their relationships, their self-care, their environment, where they work, where they live, their whole way of living, their mental wellbeing, spirituality, and religion, then future focus, past issues that might still be affecting them today. We tend to work from that (SIC 5).

It allowed them to get a sense of what really mattered to the prison staff they were working with:

It is something I do normally, which is just to layout the terrain for the client to see where the most interest would be in developing the coaching (SIC 6).

The wheel also allowed them to press into areas of personal or private life that the officers may not have brought up spontaneously, unless following a protocol that invited them to do so:

They might even choose something from the wheel of life, or it could be that this is going on at the moment, I'd like a promotion at work, this is going on in my private life (SIC 4).

Sometimes the holistic nature of the wheel of life was unexpected for the staff being coached. It opened them up to reflect on their personal lives outside of the prison. This invitation to open up was experienced by some of them as overly intrusive and occasionally led to their withdrawal from coaching:

A session where we did the wheel of life, and it's almost like there was one particular question that I don't know if that had a negative impact for him, but it was too much (SIC 5).

Most of the coaches viewed this as one of the primary aims of using the wheel: to get coachees to think about areas of their lives that they otherwise may not focus upon:

Let us say there is eight to 10 areas in the wheel of life, they might talk about work/life balance, but they might not be as willing to bring in faith or relationships or friendships, hobbies; there could be that little bit of resistance to bring [them] in at the initial outset (SIC 4).

Sometimes, as stated in the quote above, this unwillingness to reflect on areas of the wheel was seen as a kind of resistance to coaching which could potentially be overcome if the staff coached were willing to explore these emotionally sensitive areas further.

Outcome Measure

Some coaches viewed the wheel as a rough and ready way of keeping track of coaching progress:

I received a wheel of life, which is a tool to measure the successful outcomes of the coaching, so that is something that we would give beforehand, and kind of towards the end of the session (SIC 4).

This was done with a recognition that not all the developments reported in coaching can be tangibly measured, but that it is helpful to focus on which areas the person is planning to make changes in:

I think it's useful, coaching is not something that can be necessarily tangibly measured, so I think the wheel of life is useful in a way to be able to measure outcomes and possibly also to be able to narrow down what that person wants to work with (SIC 4).

Some suggested that the wheel was more expressly used as an outcome measure in later cohorts of coachees:

In the last tranche, the third load of it, we have to do it before and after. So, we started doing some benchmarking and some measuring (SIC 6).

This was viewed as a relatively useful benchmarking process to keep track of the overall outcomes of coaching the staff.

Professional Support

When asked about support received from Spark Inside, aside from materials provided, the coaches were most satisfied with the processes by which Spark Inside supported them professionally in their role as coaches.

Supervision

Many of them talked about the value and usefulness of the coaching supervision provided through Spark Inside, especially in orienting them to work in the prison context. Given that coaching supervision is a professional requirement, and often at significant expense, Spark Inside were viewed favourably for making this part of the offer to their coaches:

They provide coaching supervision which I think is absolutely essential . . . especially in the environment that people are working in in prisons, it is so important, and Spark are being extremely open handed and generous with the coaching supervision (SIC 6).

The supervision was reported as being available regularly, but also on demand, when particular issues arose, and the coach needed to check-in:

I think supervision was available and was always available; not just on a predetermined date, but at any time you could talk to a supervisor, arrange supervision if you had any issues (SIC 2).

It was viewed as an essential ingredient for ensuring that coaches were performing to the best of their ability and were given space to reflect on how they could improve as coaches:

I'm very good at reflecting with the help of supervision, which Spark Inside does . . . to look at things that maybe didn't go quite as well as I hoped they would, and the next time that I see that person, to resolve that (SIC 7).

Peer Support

Alongside formal supervision, the coaches also described a more informal peer network between them that allowed them to seek advice or support informally, a kind of peer supervision or ad hoc professional mentoring. This seemed particularly useful when coaches were new to both Spark Inside and working in prison and required some orientation to the unique challenges of the environment:

The new coaches . . . benefit from . . . speaking to the older coaches and what they have done and how they handled certain situations; it is very powerful (SIC 1).

There was also a strong sense among the coaches of being a group who can collaborate to learn and become more effective as coaches:

I guess the training around coaching has been more to do with us coming together and working as a group to make sure that our coaching is working, and learning from each other, in a way that is most effective (SIC 2).

Some of the coaches who were more experienced in working in prisons were willing to be on hand to help or advise coaches who were earlier in the journey of adapting their coaching expertise to the prison system:

One of the fellow coaches contacted me regarding a particular scenario that he had encountered and said - What do I feel he should have done or would have done or could do? And this is an example where a situation occurred where somebody was acting in a way that he didn't know what to do, this doesn't happen in my normal practice . . . I will talk to whoever needs support with our other coaches in dealing with that (SIC 1).

The sense of being willing to support other coaches was particularly strong in those who had been working with Spark Inside for some time. This orientation to working in prison was a valued area of support the coaches attributed to Spark inside. While the expertise in coaching was transferable across contexts, there were clearly striking differences in applying this to prisoners and prison staff that coaches had to be aware of:

. . . because coaching in prisons is unlike coaching professionally in any way shape or form: it is a totally, totally different environment (SIC 1).

Rationale for Coaching Prison Staff

Before working with the prison staff, the coaches reported appreciating the briefing they were given by Spark Inside as to the rationale and aims of doing so. Some of this was the logistic information they were provided once they had accepted the invitation to work with prison staff:

Information around how many sessions, how long the sessions would be, and how to contact the people that we were coaching (SIC 4).

They also appreciated the rationale for working with staff. The sense that their aim was to attend to staff performance and wellbeing:

If the staff feel better, they will do a better job indirectly, and we can support the staff in doing a better job (SIC 3).

Beyond this the coaches had a strong sense of contributing to the improvement of the lives of the prisoners they were more accustomed to working with, because ultimately the staff

were part of the same system. Helping the staff could indirectly benefit the young people who were the original population Spark Inside had aimed the coaching at:

Essentially, staff are part of the system, and actually supporting the staff . . . has an indirect impact on the young people, but also, supporting the staff to directly think about their roles has a direct impact on young people (SIC 3).

The coaches spoke of being well-supported by Spark Inside, particularly in the areas of peer support, supervision, and orientation to the prison environment. This, alongside the pre-existing coaching expertise they possessed, made the relatively sparse materials provided for work with staff (in comparison with that provided for prisoners related to the Hero's Journey), largely irrelevant. They felt they had most of what they needed to perform well as coaches. This is not to say that they did not identify a small number of improvements that could be made to Spark Inside's prison staff coaching initiative, which are discussed below.

What kind of issues did prison staff raise in coaching?

The coaches were asked to give examples of the kinds of issues prison staff presented with for coaching. While the coaches generally viewed coaching as a holistic enterprise, concerned with the whole person, and therefore resisted the division of coachee concerns into professional and personal issues, for the sake of convenience the issues raised were divided in this way.

Professional Issues

Many of the staff who were coached, presented with issues related to their work in the prison.

Career progression and promotion

Several coachees were concerned with career progression or promotion. Some had recently been unsuccessful in their attempts to be promoted, others were ambitious towards progression in the prison service. Some of the staff talked about needing to be more effective in their current role in order to progress to more senior positions:

That person in particular had two real ambitions. One was to do it better or get on better, but also to get a promotion and move on and get another job. They actually did both (SIC 2).

Others were confused about their lack of progression and used the coaching sessions as a way of exploring this:

What was really helpful for this person . . . she had been in the prison service a long time, and she couldn't understand why she wasn't progressing, because on paper, she should be progressing (SIC 5).

Some had been refused promotion and used coaching to reflect on the issues that had come up in the feedback as a result, such as their difficulties managing or relating to other members of staff- an issue that expanded into an examination of their style of relating to people generally:

This person was trying to get a promotion . . . he failed but he was very close, he had to wait a few months and then he would get the chance to do it again, so we kind of talked about that as well as things around his family, and there were particular incidences and things that had been quoted to him in terms of the way that he dealt with some of the other people (SIC 7).

In some cases, the prison staff viewed the prospect of promotion as a crucial factor in whether they were able to stay in the current role they occupied:

I think when I look back, maybe at the outset, the areas that people brought primarily to coaching, some of it was career change, some of it was out the service - I've had enough . . . I like the service but not this job and I need a promotion, or I need to move sideways or need to be at a different prison (SIC 2).

In all such cases, the coaches applied their expertise to exploring what was most important to the clients, in their various ways of relating to the prospect of career progression.

Confidence

One of the major issues that arose in several coaching sessions, was the issue of staff gaining confidence. Sometimes this was viewed as one of the main reasons for lack of career progression in the service:

I noticed that she was quite shy, in her way of speaking, she would speak a bit quietly, and we spoke about that and how could she practise . . . because people

get stuck in their ways. And I think she wasn't quite saying - Here I am! And she was not being confident enough (SIC 5).

Confidence also emerged as a vital ingredient for staff being able to be competent and detail oriented in their role even if under time-pressure to do things more quickly and less diligently:

By the end of that coaching relationship, this person felt more confident to be able to say - I need a bit more time to read over these documents. That was a massive impact not only on how this person was showing in work, and how they're interacting with colleagues, [but] also how they felt about themselves (SIC 4).

In working with confidence, the coaches drew on a range of approaches, and viewed this kind of issue as very much within their skill set:

You know, you can work on confidence in the performance approach but [there are] also some other life coaching approaches which I have picked up over time. I would include knowledge and skills sets (SIC 3).

And they were confident that developing self-belief in their clients was a core part of effective coaching:

But I think that certainly gave her some more self-belief (SIC 7).

Navigating Maternity Leave

Alongside career progression, coachees also felt able to bring other career transition concerns to the coaches, such as navigating the dilemmas of pregnancy and maternity leave alongside commitment to career:

[She] was trying to get pregnant when I first met her, she was the only person that I met that liked working in the prison. The only one. Actively liked it, not just put up with it, she liked it. She relished the contact with people in custody, she relished the whole managing the institution. She was... very worried about getting pregnant (SIC 6).

Retirement

The other career transition issue that arose was that of retirement. Several coachees used their session to discuss whether they were approaching the right time to retire from the service:

I was really talking to her about what is the future for the next two years, and beyond, she wasn't sure whether she was going to retire, or reduce her hours, winding down and all of that (SIC 2).

In this case the coach assisted the member of staff to gain a clearer view of the enjoyable future that might be available to the member of staff, so that retirement could be feasible when the right time came:

I started talking about how these dreams could be realised rather than waiting until whatever might come down the road (SIC 2).

By challenging the client to engage in the activities they would enjoy after retirement, while still working for the prison service, the coach encouraged the client to develop a clearer picture of a positive future:

Only by doing that challenging thing a little bit –‘So what are you going to do about it? It is a vision, what could you do without it being the full retire? what could you do now? what could you do next week?’ And actually, she started taking that on and making things happen (SIC 2).

Organisational Issues/System Dilemmas

Some of the staff talked about the tensions and dilemmas inherent in the organisational system of prison work. Sometimes this was a desire to create positive change in the culture of prison life, motivated by the frustrations they encountered in the organisation:

They wanted to create positive change; sometimes it was frustrations around the system and everything like that, but the outcomes for them were really wanting not only to create positive change in the system but in other areas of their life as well, which probably in turn impacted work (SIC 4).

This was often motivated by their desire to do good work and the feeling that the culture or their immediate team prevented them from doing as well as they could. This was brought to coaching in the hope of exploring a better route forward:

I think most of the frustrations and difficulties that people had was with each other, the system, and things getting in the way of them doing the best job that they could do for the prisoner (SIC 2).

Occasionally this was communicated as a clash of culture between older members of staff and newer recruits who were more idealistic about the role, and sometimes quickly disillusioned by the prison working environment:

There's an older culture and a newer culture in a prison. You've got the old boy who've been there for whatever number of years, the sort of - This is the way that you do it . . . There's a lot of younger people that have been recruited into the service in the last five or six years, and I think there is a bit of a conflict sometimes in terms of what goes on (SIC 2).

When faced with these issues, one of the coaching responses was to support the staff member in recognising that the rate of systemic change was not as quick as they would like, and that the coach could stand with them- recognising areas that were under their control and emphasizing their action in these:

Maybe there was some frustrations around wanting to create change in the system, and not being able to do that as quickly as they might want to, but then being able to take that willingness and desire to create positive change and applying it to other areas really gave them that sense of control and ownership (SIC 4).

Crucial for this coaching process was to identify the values with which the staff identified and recognising that these could be realised in various areas of life even if they were frustrated in the work context:

I can still as a human give my value to create positive change in the world, this is not just because I work here, this is not the only place that I can create that; maybe the coaching helped them realise that they were able to do that (SIC 4).

Work-Life Balance

Sometimes an initial conversation about the stresses of working in prison quickly gravitated towards the interaction between the coachees' personal and professional lives. One coach described this as the conversation some of the staff wanted to have if it was made available to them:

I might do some work on what their skills are, that kind of thing. But I must say that generally they weren't interested in that, much more interested in going a bit deeper (SIC 6).

This was a standard understanding among the coaches: the most effective coaching could not always be confined to conversations about work-based issues. Indeed, it was assumed that sometimes a session directed at personal issues could be the best way of addressing difficulties at work:

Anything is on the table, it is not about - How can I make you better at your job... anything that gives somebody more of a positive feel, about their work and their life, can help... the culture in the atmosphere inside the prison (SIC 7).

In several sessions reported by the coaches, it was the neglect of personal or home life that was the major stressor for the member of staff being coached, and this needed to be addressed if they were to perform well at work:

She took her job seriously but almost to the detriment of her own personal life, everything outside of that... she was working long days, going home, eating, and sleeping and then back in the prison. She wasn't doing a lot to look after herself (SIC 2).

This notion of needing to care for oneself could come as a surprising insight for some of the staff when it came up in coaching, and occasionally led to disengagement from the coaching process:

We only had one session! He never came back, and I still don't know why, so that was interesting . . . it was all around self-care and how much time he spends on himself. You could almost hear this realisation of - Oh my God, I live for my work, I live for my family, but I don't even know how to live for myself, I don't know what

that looks like. It was very prolonged that sense of – Gosh, wow. So maybe it was too much, maybe for him, that was opening too much (SIC 5).

However, for those staff who were willing to explore their personal lives, this became a means of helping them cope with work life. This involved limiting the extent to which their stresses at work impacted their families and reducing the amount of work-talk at home if other family members also worked for the service:

Others had family strains I guess - How do I not take the pressures home? What happens when I do bring them home? Some of them had partners that also worked in [establishment] . . . [so we looked at] techniques of almost debriefing each other, decompressing each other- let's have half an hour of downloading what's going on and then we stop (SIC 2).

Additionally, the coaches reported using the same work ethic that could be detrimental to the employee when over-used on the job but could become an asset if applied to the task of self-care:

All those qualities of being driven and committed, if you were doing them for yourself what would that look like? What would be possible if you were just bringing those qualities to bear fruit for you? (SIC 2).

The coaches therefore skilfully addressed work-life balance by attending to both ends of the equation. Helping staff to improve home life so as to be more resilient at work, and taking the best of their skills at work and bringing these to bear on the issues that arose personally at home.

Personal Issues

Some of the issues raised by staff however were presented as outside of the usual range of work-based issues. The coaches' holistic approach to the whole person in coaching, allowed them to be equally attentive to these areas of importance to the client as they were to the more evidently professional issues outlined above.

Physical Fitness

One coach for example, described working with an officer on improving their physical fitness, and exploring how this would improve their life overall:

If somebody says – ‘Well actually, I want to get fitter’. We look at what that means to them, and why it would be important in their life (SIC 5).

This also involved some detailed organisation so that an otherwise vague goal could be specified and achieved with all its associated benefits:

And then I would say to them – ‘Can we actually look at your diary now as we are in this session, would that be helpful?’ And actually, they will say – ‘That’s going to be really helpful’. And that’s actually helped some clients move forward and actually do something that they’ve wanted to do for a while, because they’ve taken the time with their pen to look in their diaries and say - Actually yes, I could go to the gym, I could walk at that time or this time or that time, and then they like that accountability as well afterwards to check in on them. And see if it is working (SIC 5).

Holding clients accountable for the goals they had committed to was viewed as an important part of addressing some of these whole-person projects.

Creative and Recreational Projects

Many of the clients when asked what was important to them chose to speak about creative or recreational activities outside of the prison service. For some, this was a side-business they were running in their spare time, which was part of future planning for life beyond prison:

Some people had a hobby job on the side, and they’re trying to build it up... they had the job, and the long-term future was that they weren’t sure where they will be in five or ten years, that they probably wouldn’t be in the prison service, they would be doing this other job (SIC 2).

Their enthusiasm to talk about these initiatives outside prison nevertheless had a significant positive effect on their relationships, not just outside of work, but also with colleagues inside prison too:

[It] also impinged on other things like their partner and colleagues and friends and all that kind of things. So, they have quite a lot of outside prison stuff that they wanted to focus on (SIC 2).

In certain cases, this creativity took the form of specific projects, such as coaching clients in the completion of a book:

We had lots of interesting conversations because she was writing a book about her experiences, and sometimes we would think about that, and I could be a bit of a writing coach to get the book moving... we did spend time on what was stopping her etc. (SIC 6).

While these projects and abilities were superficially disconnected from work, the coaches viewed them as essential areas to explore if they mattered to the staff. They were important to acknowledge if the prison officers were to bring their whole selves to their work.

Mental Health Issues

The coaches also talked about the prevalence of mental health issues raised by the prison employees. One went so far as to state that all the prison staff were to some extent traumatised by their experiences working in prison:

Probably every client that I had, had some kind of trauma going on . . . I thought that all the staff were traumatised (SIC 6).

Other coaches worked with the mental health of prison staff by coaching them to deal with their inner critic, the internal monologue of critical thinking that effected their mood state and their relationship with others:

We did a lot of coaching around this person's mental health, and there was a lot of work around working with other colleagues, and the kind of inner voice and inner critic (SIC 4).

The coaches recognised that some of the people they worked with really needed counselling or therapeutic mental health support but found that this was not easily accessible for prison officers:

I felt that some of them are really on the edge and of course I always recommend seeking help. But there wasn't the help available. Prisons always say they can seek help, but there's no help available in prison (SIC 6).

Even if help was available the staff themselves often saw accessing or asking for it as a sign of weakness and feared other colleagues becoming aware of their need for mental health assistance:

This wasn't a sign of weakness, actually it could really kind of help, so definitely quite a few examples of how it shows up in the system (SIC 4).

The coaches did their best to assuage this stigma around mental health support.

Stress

The most prevalent psychological problem the coaches reported dealing with was the stress of working in the prison environment. In this case, coaching could be a way of sharing the difficulty both with the coach and with others within the prison service:

This person was having difficulty, a lot of anxiety, a lot of stress with the job, and didn't necessarily feel that they could ask for help, and through coaching and talking it out with someone, this person realised actually that could say to their colleagues – Look, I'd like some support, can you come with me to this incident (SIC 4).

Some of the greatest stressors were reported by those with leadership responsibilities, who at times such as the Covid-19 lockdown, keenly felt the weight of responsibility for the lives and wellbeing of the prisoners:

They described it as feeling responsible for people's survival . . . life and death things, people were locked up for that amount of time, it was very difficult for this person to be in charge of the whole prison during that (SIC 2).

Conversely, those who occupied positions lower in the prison hierarchy reported being stressed out and frustrated by their powerlessness to bring about effective change in their working environment:

Someone might be feeling a bit stressed, burnt out and disengaged . . . they go into a coaching session, they feel really motivated, and they go - Actually I realise I have been slacking, I realise I haven't been as patient with the prisoners, maybe I've been a bit harsh, maybe even treating some people unfairly, I'm going to make a difference. And then someone spits in their face. That can undo everything. I

guess what I'm saying is that sometimes those types of environments where they are quite chaotic and people are in the thick of it, you are really banking on human will and emotion in a way that is quite easily influenced (SIC 3).

The coaches related stories of stress at both ends of the prison management hierarchy, as a result of feeling responsible for things that ultimately could not be fully controlled.

Infrequent Reports of Prisoner Issues

One coach noted with surprise, an omission from the subjects raised by the officers who presented for coaching. Very few, if any, spoke about ongoing issues with the prisoners themselves. Most of their complaints or concerns centred around the system in which they worked, not the job itself:

I suppose what probably surprised me was that very few of them chose to do the interaction with the men. It was very seldom anything to do with - I'm having problems with prisoner A, or - I don't know how to deal with this wing. I don't know what to do when men act up (SIC 2).

This coach assumed that most prison officers viewed dealing with difficult prisoners as simply part of the job which, while difficult at times, was largely taken in their stride:

Almost like - That is a given, I have been trying to do my job, I know how to do my job and I'm enthusiastic in doing my job and I want the best for the prisoners. That came across loud and clear (SIC 2).

This constituted an example of the general tone of admiration with which the coaches spoke about the prison staff, and the challenging job they were required to perform.

What did the Spark Inside Coaches offer in response?

In addition to asking the coaches to generally outline their approach to coaching and the overall ethos they adopted towards those they coached, we also asked them to give specific examples of what they did with this particular set of prison staff. Their responses largely fell into two categories, the personal qualities they displayed in dealing with the prison officer, and the technical tools or exercises they brought to bear in the coaching relationship.

Coach Qualities

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their emphasis on the coaching relationship over specific interventions, when asked to outline their activities in coaching the prison staff, almost all of the coaches began by talking about the quality of relationship they brought to the prison staff. They described their attitudes rather than their activities. How they aim to be with the staff, not what they do.

Non-Judgemental Listening - Space to Think

The first thing that almost all the coaches mentioned when asked what happened in successful sessions of coaching with prison staff was listening. This was referred to in many different ways as: attentive listening, deep listening, creating space, being present, non-judgemental presence and so on. The examples of these were plentiful, with just a few selected below:

Being present is actively listening; so really truly listening to that person without any agenda, and when I say agenda, I don't mean my agenda, I mean any agenda that we have to use this tool or we have to get to this place . . . being able to hold that space about the person, and also be able to park my own personal stuff outside that space (SIC 4).

It's very much about what we would call attentive listening, just asking questions and saying tell me more about that (SIC 7).

Deep listening . . . where I am totally focusing on her and her words and her mannerisms and her body language, and I am all for her, as much as possible, I've not got my other thoughts popping in. If I ever did have that, I would quickly bring it straight back to this person in front of me (SIC 5).

Several of the coaches commented on how rare it is to have the opportunity to be listened to thoroughly and attentively in this way, and that this is one of the main gifts of the coaching relationship:

I know it's really listening, that person hasn't been heard before (SIC 1).

I also feel that there's very few places in the world in life that we can go and have that space provided for us, because generally people will advise or tell us what

they did, and it comes from a kind place, but I think there's something really beautiful about being able to hold that space (SIC 4).

The prison, it's true for a lot of work areas, there was definitely a lot of people saying- you just don't get this opportunity to speak about this kind of thing, it's not the done thing to go and have a chat with your colleague about your concerns (SIC 2).

This was especially true for those in senior leadership positions, who were understandably nervous about sharing personal or emotional concerns openly with their teams:

If you are a senior governor, or a deputy governor, you are a bit lonely because you don't want to share that you have a concern about how things are going. So, I think making sure that they knew that they had the space to just share, express concerns, be open (SIC 2).

The coaching session was also a confidential place where staff could speak and therefore think without being interrupted or distracted:

Ideally, to have somewhere where they're not going to be overheard, interrupted . . . it is having the time and space to have the conversation (SIC 7).

The coaches perceived that officers who were able to take advantage of this environment found it beneficial and something they looked forward to, even when things were difficult:

I did feel that I was providing something to her that she was looking forward to, even though she was tired and worried, it really felt like a good place for her to be (SIC 6).

One coach viewed it as a privilege to provide a listening space that fulfilled the fundamental human need to be seen and appreciated in a non-judgemental way:

I think as humans we crave that feeling of being seen, out of the darkness, and not to be judged, because we have this fear that we will be judged, and as a coach, to be able to hold that space with someone, I think it is really profound, and it is a privilege, and I don't take that privilege for granted (SIC 4).

It is worth emphasising that this space to listen, while seemingly simple and non-technical, was viewed by many of the coaches as the primary and necessary condition without which their coaching could not be effective. Many of the other coach qualities mentioned below are direct consequences or required components of the listening space created by the coaches.

Relational Contact

One coach talked at length about the way in which the creation of a space to speak and be heard allowed a relational connection to be made, which then underpinned all coaching progress thereon:

I'm feeling that connection with the other person. I feel they are being really authentic and real and so am I . . . Now we are connecting, now we can coach on whatever comes up, both must trust each other, there's no necessary right or wrong here, we could just work with what's happening, and that little voice isn't still in the back of my head where I'm trying to get that person to connect in the space (SIC 4).

Authenticity

The coach cited above was not the only interviewee to mention the importance of authenticity in the way the coach approaches the prison officers. Another coach stated this is one of the most essential elements of the coaching relationship:

Number one priority is to be authentic all the time because these guys . . . can smell fear and lying . . . so it is important that you are authentic and real (SIC 1).

This realness and authenticity allowed the coach to present as fully human in the coaching process, as someone who shares the dilemmas and challenges of the human condition as their coachee does, without overstepping the mark of the coach self-disclosing personal challenges unhelpful to the client:

I go through ups and downs as well, but you can stay on the positive side if you choose, and you do have a choice. You are going to have problems as well, you don't show your in-depth problems, but you can say you're not having a great day or it's not too good (SIC 1).

The authentic coach is one who is willing to share the burden of their client with a recognised common humanity:

Regardless of whether I am holding space for a prison officer, whether it's one of the men who are in prison, no matter what they share with me, even if I haven't had that experience, I think that because we are human we have experienced all of the spectrum of emotion, so even if I haven't been disappointed by the same example, or had grief or joy or pain in the same actual story that they've had it, I have experienced the emotion (SIC 4).

Positive Intention

Furthermore, just as the coaches outlined their belief in the client as part of their general approach in the first section, one described this manifesting in their work with prison staff as a general positive intention towards them and the outcomes they wished to achieve:

I intend that the sessions go well, I intend my day to go well, I have to because the day can be so chaotic when you turn up to a prison environment. I intend that they get something out of it, I don't know what that something is, but I definitely intend that they're going to leave the session with myself with a higher energy than the lower energy; that is an absolute must (SIC 1).

Determination

Maintaining the authenticity, positive intention and relational connection that constitute the open listening space of coaching, required the coaches to display some tenacity in advocating for this in the prison environment. Some even went so far as to describe themselves as stubborn.

Probably I should say I am a bit stubborn and determined, persistent (SIC 2).

This determination was viewed as modelling commitment and reliability to the client:

I would like to think that it's demonstrating something to him about commitment, loyalty, keeping promises, being reliable (SIC 2).

These qualities came from a personal valuing, adherence, and belief in the coaching process by the coaches themselves:

What is it about me? Because I am a coach and I truly value, I have coached a long time, and I trust the process, and I really believe in the power (SIC 4).

This determination was also necessitated by the need to be patient with the systems and frustrations of the prison environment which were not always welcoming to coaching, and even with the coachees themselves, who may not always be initially responsive to the coaching relationship:

It also taught me patience as well, having to go into a prison, because you have to see three people and none of them are there . . . I was coaching somebody yesterday who... didn't want to talk to me at all, he gave me yes/no answers, but I just stayed with him for a while . . . And at the end he said, when we agreed that we were going to stop - Thanks for caring anyway (SIC 7).

Empathy/Compassion

At the core of the coaching relationship for all the coaches interviewed, was a clear care and empathy towards the staff being coached. Many of the coaches felt that this was an attitude that was evident to some of the staff who received coaching:

She could hear that I cared, because I did... if I don't care, then I couldn't do my job, so they must pick up on that (SIC 5).

Others framed this as the ability to be present even when quite difficult negative emotions were expressed:

I feel I have a lot of compassion for people's experiences. I feel like I can hold a space for quite deep, hard emotions (SIC 4).

This empathy was viewed as a signal of what should be explored by coaches in the sessions:

I will admit that I am empathic, I feel things as well, so something will come up and I will look at that, and then we will explore it (SIC 1).

It was also viewed as something that coaches had to maintain an awareness of, so as not to over-empathise with some of their clients, or under empathise with others:

Actually, I do have empathy because that gets me in trouble sometimes because I get too sucked into my clients, so I have to be very careful about that. But I think I am compassionate. I think people pick up on that (SIC 6).

This empathy was not just an emotional affinity with the client but also involved an attentive and caring interest, an intellectual curiosity about the client and how they could grow and improve their lives:

Curiosity; that's very important as a coach. Being curious about being in somebody else's shoes . . . I am interested in people, I'm fascinated by them, and that whole thing about how they could be better, not in terms of my better, but in terms of better for them than they are right now. I just have a fascination about it (SIC 7).

Safety/Vulnerability/Trust

The coaches aimed to create an environment of psychological safety in which the client could be vulnerable, and trust could develop:

Everyone is consistent in talking about safety, and how safe they feel. I think I've developed skills to make them feel safe and not judged, and stuff like that (SIC 3).

Once the prison staff understood the nature of the coaching environment they had been offered, they used it to discuss issues they may not have otherwise been comfortable realising:

I have always said that I am here if things come up that are difficult, just because of the nature of the conversation, I'm here if you want me to open up that space to explore it's in a safe environment (SIC 5).

This atmosphere that the coaches facilitated is what allowed conversations on difficult issues such as mental health and neurodiversity to take place:

I'm just getting that feedback that it was really helpful to be able to talk through because . . . the environment that this person is working in, they don't feel they're able to talk about troubles in terms of mental health, or neurodiversity (SIC 4).

This was a marked contrast to the prison environment in which they worked where vulnerability and help-seeking were not always welcome:

I think they also find it hard to find time to be vulnerable, or to look vulnerable, or to appear vulnerable, that's a hard thing for them . . . they tend to go out the room and put their mask back on and be tough (SIC 2).

One coach boiled the whole success of a good session down to the coach creating an environment safe enough for the client to be vulnerable:

What makes a good session is the vulnerability (SIC 3).

Once this trust was established then more challenging or directive approaches could be adopted towards the client, because the client knew the coach could be trusted with their vulnerability:

They trust me, so when I say something that could be challenging, it's [accepted] . . . So, it is the vulnerability, and the openness/lack of defensiveness; and then they're willing to engage in it (SIC 3).

One of the key professional boundaries for the trusting coaching relationship in which vulnerability could occur, was the importance of confidentiality:

The crux for me either working with the staff or the guys in prison . . . is it is a confidential space (SIC 4).

The fact that the coachees know that what they say will not go any further creates the framework within which a good working alliance can be built. In the final analysis all the qualities the coaches brought to their work with prison staff were with the aim of building a relationship of sufficient trust vulnerability and openness:

I think there is something about what we call working alliance, that's why I do a lot of contracting at the beginning, it is all about their relationship, we can establish a working relationship that works for both of us, and I think when we have that, that's when people feel a sense of trust, and they feel secure, and they feel open (SIC 6).

Coaching Techniques

The coaches were also asked to identify which tools or techniques were present in their most effective sessions of coaching. These were drawn from examples of working with the prison staff and indicated the diversity and creativity of the Spark Inside Coaches.

Opportunity Awareness

Several of them talked about getting the coachees to consider the options available to them, to give them a sense of the autonomy they could harness to move things forward. Very often the coaching task was to remind the client of the options available to them:

I suppose it is really about options. That is something that I do work with in coaching, I really believe that there are always options, and typically a lot of people that come from the prisons, they have closed down all their options, they couldn't see anything, but a very tunnelled way forward. It was about opening the options (SIC 6).

Once the options were identified, some coaches present the client with the pros and cons of the different ways forward and allow them to reflect on the outcomes that could occur for each:

Almost like a path, and a crossroads, you can go left or right, and as he was speaking, I just started writing things - So if you go that way, this could happen. If you go that way, then that can happen (SIC 2).

A similar exercise to make the coachee aware of the opportunities that were available involved reviewing significant moments in life and letting them consider which alternative paths were available, as a means of recognising that other paths were open to them and still are:

Sometimes I do use an adapted technique . . . where you demonstrate to people that at every point in their life there's always a choice where they could be next, and nothing is ever predetermined (SIC 2).

These options are also frequently specified as goals that can be pursued and accomplished, meeting the five criteria of a SMART goal:

Then we do look at goal setting, if that is what is important to them. And sometimes it will be about work life balance, in which case we will look at the basic SMART tool (SIC 5).

Ultimately this formal technical aspect of coaching is aimed at helping the client to problem solve and make good decisions:

It is a form of problem solving, choice making, decision making, a decision point (SIC 2).

Metaphor

The coaches also drew on a rich set of metaphors to bring their clients to a point of insight or understanding. For example, letting distressing thoughts go, could be communicated by the metaphor of a stream:

Things like the leaves in the stream is quite a good one, let the thoughts go like leaves and drift away (SIC 2).

Hands raised to the face could be used to convey how we become obsessed with the problems that confront us and are unable to see beyond them:

If you've got things that concern you, you can imagine them being in your hands and if you put your hands in front of your face, you can't see anything apart from the problem because they're hiding your eyes (SIC 2).

The same coach described a spontaneous metaphor that occurred during a session in which he encouraged a stressed-out person to write her name by holding the pen tightly and then again, lightly. This became a way of referring to ways of doing things without being too tense about them, and was one that the client continued to use even after the sessions had finished:

This person was getting really tense and stressed about virtually everything they did, and I got her to write her name on a bit of paper, holding the pen in a vice like grip, and then hold it again when she was hardly touching it, and it was almost falling out of our fingers. . . and actually, it worked for her because when she wrote to me afterwards, she said - I'm still holding the pen very lightly! (SIC 2).

Travel metaphors were also used to bring home psychological lessons. One coach was fond of a metaphor drawn from positive psychology of a sailboat which could be used to teach wellbeing and resilience:

The ocean is their life, and that is their normal environment, and then there are lots of different things that affect us, which is the steering wheel which is your needs and values, and meaningful direction. And then the destination of the boat which is where we're going in life, and that would be to do with your goals and wishes . . . The phrase is - I am not afraid of storms because I'm learning how to sail my ship (SIC 5).

Another coach used a metaphor of a train platform to encourage those he coached to make imperfect decisions now rather than procrastinate while waiting for a perfect outcome that may never arrive:

Imagine you are in a station, and there's a few dirty old trains going through, and there is the Orient Express perhaps sitting there with luxury meals and carriages, and sleeping quarters, but it's not actually moving, it is sitting in the station, but meanwhile loads of other trains have actually left the station. Are you waiting on the Orient Express, or would it be better to actually get on your way? (SIC 2).

These metaphors and others were used with the aim of building the coaching relationship and enhancing the staff's appreciation of the options that were available to them.

Visualisation

Alongside metaphors, other creative techniques were used by the coaches to help the clients think outside of the box. Several of them described visualisation or closed-eye processes to help their clients draw on inner resources to deal with current challenges. Some of these exercises were drawn from the Hero's Journey and were translated into individual coaching with prison staff. When used, these were very impactful:

I remember doing it with one guy, and it is kind of a closed eye process, and when he opened his eyes, he kind of just looked at me like it was magic . . . You could tell that he just had the experience, the exact experience that I wanted him to have. He was like - What was that, was that some kind of magic? (SIC 3).

One coach described this as an envisioning exercise, in which the clients were taken through a guided imagery script to receive a gift from a magical stranger:

I invite the person to go on a bit of a walk, I can't remember exactly which one I use, there are a few I use, but one is just to go on a walk through meadows, woods, stream, hear the sounds and listen, get to a place and sit down, see a stranger, sit down and meet the stranger, chat, realise that this stranger is you in the future, the stranger offers you a gift, offers you some advice, you come back from the walk, you open your eyes (SIC 2).

Sometimes the client would talk about what happened in these visualisation techniques, sometimes they would keep it to themselves as a private psychological resource.

Social Skills Training

Rehearsing and imagining future situations also played a strong part in the social skills training that many of the coaches took up with their clients. The coaches seemed to gravitate towards this approach for clients who were in conflict with colleagues, or were looking for promotion through interview, or were generally lacking confidence. One coach described how a prison officer was taught to get on better with colleagues by attending to the way they breathed before becoming agitated:

A couple of people who are struggling to get on with colleagues, they were regularly butting heads . . . What are some of the techniques for breathing? Being aware of that. Choosing different words. Not allowing ourselves to be triggered and all those kind of things. And just sticking to very clear points that she was trying to make (SIC 2).

Another coach used rehearsal of posture and voice training to help her client present more positively in interview contexts. This involved directly instructing the client on how to adjust body language, vocal tone, and posture to appear more confident:

Knowing that she was lacking in confidence, when she goes into the interview, her body language . . . we did some practice interviews actually . . . So, I said - How would it feel to be able to practise now if you were in an interview, just in terms of body language. So, we did that... So, she came in, and I think her shoulders were a bit low, so I said - OK just before you go into the room, just take that deep breath, and straight away, chin up, and act like you want to own who you are . . . I was

saying things like read out loud from a book . . . so she got used to being a bit more assertive . . . So, I think she found that really helpful . . . having that feedback, allowing her to speak and talk and just have a relationship with someone she didn't know; just to give her a bit of praise as well (SIC 5).

This kind of confidence training also involved comments on practical matters like how the client presented themselves in written materials like CVs or formal letters. Some coaches were willing to look at these and help the client to improve their written skills, as a way to increase their chances of career progress:

Could you show me your CV, just give me a bit of history about what is going on there? And what I noticed was that basically her English skills were not tip top, and I don't think anybody ever pointed that out to her. So, I was thinking . . . this could literally be it (SIC 5).

Limiting Beliefs

Closely related to social skill training for confidence was the way in which the coaches describing working strongly with 'limiting beliefs', another theme taken from the Hero's journey and translated into the individual coaching sessions. These limiting beliefs were things the client held to be true which stood in the way of their ability to do things but could be challenged in the coaching context. Often the prison staff were unaware that they held a limiting belief, and the first stage of the process involved the coach drawing their attention to this:

I reflected that to them - I'm hearing you talk about this in a way that is a bit like a limiting belief . . . they asked what I meant, and I explained to them a limiting belief (SIC 3).

Sometimes limiting beliefs would be unearthed because the coachee demonstrated a lack of confidence or a sense of self-doubt, underpinning by recurrent ruminations:

She had got to a place where she was almost second guessing that she wasn't going to get promoted anyway, she was already second guessing . . . often the thoughts are just in our head around and around, just to have experienced that for the first time (SIC 5).

In many cases this work on limiting or negative belief systems could have a powerful effect on prison staff who were feeling constrained or stuck in their range of effective action:

I remember with the first staff member that I worked with, I used a limiting belief type exercise that was hugely impactful for them; that was a game changer for them, that's why I really remember it (SIC 3).

Once the limiting belief was uncovered, the coach could draw upon other models or principles to assist the client in seeing where they may have more influence or control than they previously realised:

Steven Covey - cyclic influence, circle of concern. And this is really working with a couple of deputy managers, so they clearly have a lot of influence, and it's helping them to identify what that influence is, and what they have control over (SIC 3).

Challenge

Closely related to addressing limiting beliefs is the way in which the coaches challenged their clients with tough questions. This was often presented as a dilemma to be navigated skilfully by the coaches. They needed to push their clients to consider things they may have never thought about, without offending or discouraging them. If they got this right, it could be a powerful means of moving the client on:

So how do I say it in a way that doesn't offend her but it's also important to point it out? And she actually said that it was the first time that anyone had ever pointed that out to her. And that was really helpful (SIC 5).

Several coaches viewed this challenging of the client as similar to the coaching relationship, something the clients did not get anywhere else, and an essential part of the coaching process. However, challenging the client could be risky, in the sense of not always knowing how the client would receive the challenge:

Who knows how these things land, but I do feel that I am providing him with something that he really can't get anywhere else in his life at the moment. And that feels really valuable. Deep, philosophical conversations, he's very smart (SIC 6).

Several coaches noted that a strong coaching relationship was an absolute requirement for challenging to be received well:

[We] know that we're both on the same page, and they know that I'm challenging them because I challenge them gently, not forcefully (SIC 3).

Once the client knew the coach was supportive of them, the challenge could be seen not as a threat but as an opportunity to learn and be curious. The coach presented the challenge not as contradicting the client, but as a reflective inquiry:

We don't ask difficult questions . . . [but] reflective questions, that is something that I hold anyway. This might be a coaching philosophy or something, it's just my personal way of working, nothing is wrong (SIC 3).

To be effective, challenges couldn't be arbitrary or lacking in rationale, the coach needed to ensure they had a reason or a principle on which to base their querying of the client's perspective:

I can challenge them based on the principle: it's not an opinion or an idea, if it was an opinion or an idea then I would frame it as that, but I see it as a principle (SIC 3).

The coaches viewed it as important that this reframing was never perceived by the client as being told they were wrong. But they could be challenged through gentle techniques such as changing the language, of success and failure, that they tended to use:

Say they use the term lose; I would say - How can this loss be a win? How can this loss get to a win? Let's explore that . . . I like to do that a lot, because it's very easy for them to remain on that negative side of the mindset (SIC 1).

Really effective challenging seemed to involve a light touch from the coach, a minimal effort, that makes the client more likely to take the challenge on board without feeling coerced by the forcefulness of the coach:

I think when it's at its most successful, when people are getting the most from it, is almost when [I'm] doing less as a coach. It's like being challenging, and challenging what they're saying, challenging their beliefs, challenging their choice of words, asking them to be curious about what they actually mean or what's going on in situations (SIC 2).

One coach described doing this by silent coaching, so the client was not even required to respond out loud and could therefore process the coach's questions in whatever way they chose, without feeling forced to comply or agree with the thrust of the questions:

I did a little technique called silent coaching which is kind of asking questions, but not asking for answers and letting the person self-reflect. Then work on things like - What drivers, what values were behind the concerns that they were having (SIC 2).

All the coaches interviewed to some extent described the need to take a challenging posture with their clients at times, and that this was an essential element of how coaching introduced new information and new perspectives to clients. These reframing activities were a key part of opening the client to new possibilities of action and were therefore an expression of good coaching rapport, not a violation of the working alliance. Clients who knew what coaching involved came with a desire to be challenged by the conversation and thereby learn something new.

Emotional Education

Just as challenging questions and creative exercises allowed coaches to open their clients to new perspectives, sometimes the coaches would briefly adopt an explicitly psychoeducational standpoint when this suited the client's style of taking in information. Most often this concerned information about emotions and how to navigate them:

Maybe they prefer to go down a different route which . . . might be more factual . . . some people quite like to talk about models . . . I think it just depends (SIC 2).

This was often linked to confusing or difficult situations that the client had encountered and discussing emotions was designed give them greater self-awareness and insight into their own behaviours:

It was emotion driving the behaviour. So, what happened to this person was the awareness showed them it was the emotion driving their behaviour (SIC 3).

This awareness of emotional states served the purpose of expanding the repertoire of responses so that the staff member felt empowered and had more options and freedom to behave skilfully in the face of demanding situations:

Then they actually felt empowered because once you are aware of something, you can change it. But even if they were emotional, they could find another strategy to manage that emotion, and they could just choose to not do it. So that was quite powerful for them (SIC 3).

Emotional awareness also allowed prison staff to reflect on what really mattered to them, in terms of their values, and how they adhered to these even in the midst of trying circumstances. It helped them retain a sense of empowerment and agency even in the midst of chaotic or conflictual environments:

We did some work on emotion; we did some work on values (SIC 2).

Often prison staff were not aware of their emotions, and some work had to be done to get them to identify exactly how they were feeling:

A lot of people . . . have difficulty expressing emotions, and it can cause people problems by not being able to do that (SIC 5).

Once emotions were identified, the coachee could be encouraged to use these as information to understand the best way to respond, or the purpose that the emotion could perform for them. One coach used a model called the feeling wheel to explore this:

I have this feelings wheel; it is really helpful because somebody might say that they're angry but what is behind that? Sometimes people really keep a lid on their emotions and it's not helpful for them . . . what I really try to do is say - how are you feeling right now? What is coming up for you? What are you taking out of this session moving forwards? Sometimes as they're saying that they will say - do you know what, I just feel lighter, just to be able to talk out loud (SIC 5).

Sometimes, identifying an emotion and finding an appropriate way to express it was enough to improve the way a coachee was feeling. Part of the reason for this, according to one coach was the intimate connection between the body and emotion, which led to bodily release accompanying emotional expression:

Remember that all our emotions are actually in our body, we hide them in our body, we feel them in the body (SIC 1).

This notion of embodiment was another area that some of the coaches chose to focus on in their work with the clients.

Embodiment

Lack of connection to emotions, and the consequent alienation from the vital social information they carry, was viewed by some coaches as a direct result of disconnection for bodily sensation. Getting the prison staff to be aware of their bodies was, for some of the coaches, one of the ways of breaking the unhelpful spiralling of negative thoughts:

Most people are not connected to their bodies, they are usually coming from their heads . . . there's something about trying to get people to inhabit perhaps the kind of difficulties that they're having, because that somehow breaks that terrible going around in their head, overthinking . . . When we are thinking, we think we are actually managing something, but it's actually just another displacement activity very often, it doesn't get you anywhere (SIC 6).

Through attending to the body rather than the conceptual content of the mind, the staff could be encouraged to find more rounded alternative perspectives on problems that their thinking tended to exaggerate or fixate upon:

What could you be doing? If you woke up tomorrow and it was better, what would it look like? Some kind of conversational goals let's say (SIC 6).

Overall, the Spark Inside coaches in their work with prison officers, demonstrate why it was that they viewed themselves as improvisers when it came to coaching. They adopted a flexible stance, shuttling between two poles of activity. On the one hand, they aimed to create a psychologically safe environment of trust and vulnerability, where staff could confide in them with sensitive areas of concern. Simultaneously, they held this relational space in tension with the need to introduce challenging and new information to the clients, which give them greater perspective and more options of response to the difficult situations thrown up by working in prison. Needless to say, this kind of coach conversation required a lot from the staff who participated in it and some of them took to it better than others.

What allowed prison staff to use the coaching well?

Having described what they did in coaching with staff when it went well, the coaches were then asked to reflect on what they needed from the staff for their coaching to be maximally effective.

Attendance

At a very basic and obvious level, the prison staff needed to attend coaching sessions to benefit from them. Some of the prison officers disengaged after only a small number of sessions, but the coaches were cognizant that even having attended one session may have affected some reflection or support:

The fact that they had taken the step to coaching, had already increased the options in itself. So that is always a good thing. Whether or not those conversations landed, in a way that was necessary to make the change that was needed, not so sure about that... At least we started those conversations, if people hadn't come to coaching, maybe those conversations wouldn't have come into being (SIC 6).

Sometimes the mere fact that the member of staff had chosen to attend was taken as a sign that the person may be willing to work on the issues they had brought to the coaching sessions:

Well obviously, she chose me first of all, I don't think she had a picture of me or anything, she chose me, and she was willing to try, and she was willing to give it a go (SIC 5).

The coaches were quick to ensure that the prison officers were attending intentionally rather than feeling coerced or forced into meeting with them:

I said right from the beginning that there's no commitment to carry on, if for whatever reason this isn't for you, but ideally tell me what's not working for you, so we can adapt it (SIC 5).

Giving them permission not to attend was a way of inviting them to personally commit to the coaching process rather than view it as something imposed upon them. This recognition of their choice to attend or not, was viewed as fundamental to engaging with the process that occurred within the session.

Willingness to be coached

However, just turning up to the coaching sessions, while necessary, was not sufficient for the session to be fruitful. When asked what it was that the coachee brought to the session that allowed it to be successful, the coaches were unanimous in referring to 'willingness to be coached'.

Bravery to talk about whole selves

By willingness to be coached, some of the coaches were referring to the bravery required from the prison officers to talk about the whole of their lives, not just the issues that arose at work:

I think what made those successful, off the top of my head, was that they were willing to bring their whole selves into the space. I didn't feel that there was a barrier (SIC 4).

For some of the prison officers a conversation that initially seemed to be confined to the workplace, eventually deepened into a more holistic conversation about their whole lives:

People who maybe initially started talking about work, brought other aspects of themselves in, and were willing to share, and have the courage to be brave enough to bring all of themselves into the session (SIC 4).

When this broadening of focus occurred, the coaches were able to help the employees more fully and effectively.

Openness at the Start

Some of those being coached arrived with this open attitude, conducive to being coached, at the start of the sessions. One of the coaches described this as a consenting attitude to the exploratory journey of coaching:

I suppose their consent to come on the journey with me . . . a commitment to the process, a willingness to step into the unknown, all that stuff always takes you somewhere interesting (SIC 6).

Those who were open to coaching from the beginning, knew how to use it. They grasped that it was an opportunity for growth and development that they could take advantage of in whatever way they wished:

Them being open to it, open minded really. And realising that this isn't a remedial thing, this is a development opportunity. And they can use it for whatever they want (SIC 7).

Sometimes this was because they had received some kind of coaching before and therefore knew what they had signed up for. This seemed to be especially true for the senior managers who had previously undergone interventions like coaching:

I think for some of the more senior members I think coaching wasn't something they were unfamiliar with, so they might have done leadership development, or they might have done training in their career progression . . . some of them might have experienced coaching or knew what coaching could offer (SIC 2).

Other prison staff were willing to be open to being coached even without prior experience and were willing to explore their lives from the outset:

I think it was their willingness even if they didn't understand it, that once they got the understanding, they were willing to explore through coaching as an intervention (SIC 4).

The best candidates for coaching presented with a combination of all of the above: willingness to be vulnerable and talk about themselves, and an openness to questions and different perspectives:

They are willing to be raw, vulnerable, they're willing to bring topics to be coached on, they're willing to explore and answer questions. Not only just answer the questions, but to take in their questions and reflect on them, they're willing to take on different perspectives and play around with it, as opposed to somebody else who maybe wasn't shown what coaching is, not open to it (SIC 4).

Openness developed through coaching

Some of the staff who arrived for coaching were not initially open to it at the start but became more amenable to it as coaching progressed. This initial reluctance in coaching was seen by some coaches as a challenge to be overcome, and they found that some clients would become more relaxed with the coaching environment as the sessions

progressed. In one case the coach got the sense that his client wanted to benefit from coaching but needed to be gently introduced to how best to use the time:

I did have to gently push her a little bit to be able to open up. She wanted to use that chance of having coaching, I don't think she'd ever had coaching before . . . even though that lady wasn't that confident or talkative, we were face to face, and as time went on and she trusted me, she opened up more and there was more of that back and forth (SIC 5).

In some cases, the openness to coaching would increase and evolve in the coachee over the course of one session but be difficult for them to maintain between sessions. One coach described this as being like Sisyphus, having to start from scratch in each session:

We would build [trust] in the session, and it was quite difficult to move through it, but usually by the end of the session, she was relaxed enough and trusting, and was really engaging and thinking about things that she could do later. When I saw her the next time, it had all fallen away, she simply didn't have the resources . . . Was it because of the relationship? I don't know (SIC 6).

This coach wondered whether this client needed a different approach, and in the end facilitated a transfer to one of the other coaches.

Passion/Enthusiasm

Energy was reported as one of the markers of a really good coaching session for most coaches. When the staff were passionate or enthused by their work and the coaching conversation this was viewed as a sign of progress in coaching:

A few moments spring to mind where it's more about the coachee or the client being really enthused and motivated (SIC 4).

It was precisely this passion that the coaches aimed to capitalise upon, working out what the client cared for or was excited over, and then using coaching to facilitate the expression of this energy:

All of us have a passion of some sort that we have come here to do, but very rarely are we actually doing it, so I like to explore - If you had unlimited time and money what would you do? Where would it take you? Some people won't think that big

because they haven't had a reference point that says - This is what is available, this is what I can achieve, I can't go beyond that (SIC 1).

Some of the coaches reported that what made the coaching work, was not so much that the staff members had a clear passion for something, but that they found the examination of possibilities exciting in itself. Part of their willingness to be coached was a willingness to be excited by what might be possible:

He had a natural kind of enthusiasm, he was excited by possibilities, he was animated, he clearly wanted to move things forward. He was just lacking some sort of way of sorting out some of the thoughts in his head and making decisions about them. So, I think his own natural enthusiasm was what made it possible (SIC 2).

For some coachees their passion and enthusiasm were for the job itself. One coach remarked that prison officers are aware that their job is not especially glamorous and therefore some who do it throw themselves into the role with a high degree of commitment. This wholeheartedness is one of the factors that allowed coaching to work because the officer was dedicated to doing a good job:

There is a sort of passion for the job. There's very few that come along that don't want to be in there. They're frustrated by the system, frustrated by the setup, you get a lot of that coming through in what they bring, but I think what allows them to get a lot from the coaching is that they really are looking to do the best job that they can despite all the things that get in their way . . . they put a lot of themselves into it, in terms of - What can I do better? What can I do to be even more effective? (SIC 2).

Coaching is also to some extent an intellectual activity, and the passion and enthusiasm of the client was often centred around what interested them or attracted their curiosity. One coach noted that the energy of the client went up, not when he (the coach) asked questions but when the coachee started to ask themselves questions:

I've noticed the energy, is when they ask questions. So, I may be coaching, and they become so intrigued that they begin to ask questions, and the reason why I think that is a good session is because it shows engagement (SIC 3).

It is notable that many of the coachee qualities that the coaches identify as important for coaching to be successful are also qualities that the coaches themselves possess. The commitment, openness to possibility and sense of vocation that make a person a good candidate for coaching are the qualities that make for a good coach. The best coachees are, or become like, the coaches themselves. Several of the coaches referred to the importance of coach and coachee being able to see themselves in one another.

What got in the way of coaching staff?

However, coaching with prison staff did not always go to plan and to explore this, the coaches were asked to identify what got in the way when the coaching was not as effective as they would have liked.

Misunderstanding of coaching

The main reason given by the coaches for the coaching not going well was that the staff had no idea what coaching was or how to use it. This was viewed as a problem in how staff were selected or referred for coaching. Often, they thought they were attending for training:

A couple of people who arrived at coaching, thought that I was going to tell them what to do; so, there was a bit of a mismatch in that. They arrive at the coaching session, and I'm like - What would you like to talk about? and they are looking at me like - You tell me what to do . . . Some of the participants had got a promotion, and there was a whole group of them that have been put forward for coaching, but when they arrived in the room, I think they thought that coaching was training (SIC 4).

Sometimes they had been sent for coaching by senior staff, and considered it to be punishment, retraining, or remedial action for something they had done wrong:

I had in one prison somebody saying – 'I've been recommended to do this, what am I doing wrong? Or - What's it for?' And not really understanding what coaching is. People who haven't been coached before tend to think we will ask them some questions, you should be doing this or you should be doing that, which obviously isn't what coaching is, it is getting people to see who they can be at their best (SIC 7).

This experience with staff was a marked contrast to working with prisoners, where they have a strong awareness of what coaching is from the Hero's Journey programme, and chose it based on a knowledge of the coach, the material, and the boundaries of the coaching relationship:

Possibly one reason would be that they haven't had the workshop . . . so once I arrived in the room with [the men in prison], we already have a rapport and they have an idea of what coaching is, so that relationship is already built. They have to decide – Yes, this is something that I want, and this is why I want it. Rather than arriving in the room and not knowing what it is, and us both looking at each other as if to say – What's going on? (SIC 4).

Resistance to exploration

In contrast to the willingness of some staff to be coached, a lack of awareness of what the coaching process was, presented in others as a reluctance to explore experiences of work or personal life:

I would say, 'what would you like to bring to the session today? What has gone on since the last time we spoke?' 'Same old, same old, nothing much changes around here'. 'Anything happening in your private life?' 'No, that's all good'. It's kind of this fear, not willing to go there, maybe not feeling they can trust or that they're willing to answer questions in the same way (SIC 4).

These very brief, often one-word answers hampered the development of the coaching conversation. Consequently, the prison staff could come across as not wanting to be coached or bemused by any questions that approached their personal thoughts or feelings:

You can't coach somebody who doesn't want to be coached (SIC 4).

It was just those one or two personal questions that seemed to floor him (SIC 5).

Distractions

Another way that the prison staff misunderstood or interfered with the process of coaching was through being unable to create an undistracted space in which to concentrate on the coaching. Some were unable to detach from phone calls or radio messages:

I had one coaching session with somebody, he was at work in the prison, and he kept getting calls, and I said, 'Would this be better if we could do it when you are at home?' And he said that he was working all the time at home anyway. It was just constant distractions. There were some things that he wanted, but he didn't come back again (SIC 7).

This led to stilted and inattentive conversations, which often led to the staff disengaging from the coaching conversation.

Resultant Poor Outcomes

From the coaches' point of view, these less-than-optimal interactions were associated with poor coaching outcomes. Often, the individual left the coaching after one session:

One or two people that I got assigned to, they had one session and said it wasn't what they were really expecting (SIC 7).

Sometimes they expected the coach to be reporting back to their management, as if coaching was a form of feedback into the prison system rather than thinking through how they could take strategic action themselves:

I have had situations where people are giving me a big list of things that need to change, and then I'm repeating that - this is between us, and I am not reporting back, and then I get - I was kind of hoping that you would report back! People are almost telling me what they want someone else to hear (SIC 4).

Other coachees simply ran out of things to talk about after a small number of sessions:

They might have had something to explore for sessions one, two and three; but if they have eight sessions, then they are not sure what to use four to eight for (SIC 3).

This lack of engagement and resistance to exploration was attributed by some of the coaches to a misunderstanding of coaching in the selection and recruitment of staff:

Let's say you are the contact in the prison, you are going to recruit some of your staff to the programme, and maybe you don't even have 100% idea what it is, so then the people who you put forward, you probably think they would really benefit

from it, but they arrive in front of me as a person to be coached, and they don't know what coaching is (SIC 4).

Level of Influence

Other coaches wondered whether the coaching was better targeted at higher management levels in the system, because those who were at lower levels had less facility to implement changes that would improve their working lives:

There is nothing wrong with working with any officer, but my understanding by observation of the system is that if you are an officer . . . you are really just implementing. You may not be able to make any change. You might be able to make day-to-day decisions, but that's really not significant enough to impact things long term (SIC 3).

Some of the misunderstanding of coaching was sometimes attributable to this junior level of management at which prison staff were less likely to be thinking strategically about decision-making or influence, and more likely to want the coach to take the initiative in the sessions:

More junior staff thought they were coming to something where somebody might tell them how to do stuff – 'What's the answer? Can you give me some guidance?' . . . The first one or two sessions might have been getting over that hump (SIC 2).

Some of the coaches resorted to educational models in the first coaching session to orientate these staff into the coaching process. Others suggested that maybe a focus on more senior staff would be more productive in influencing the wellbeing of the workforce, or that a targeted approach with custodial managers (band 5) would be appropriate. To land well the coaching needed to be adapted to the level of the client:

Working with governors was really important... if we could work with governors, that would be great because they obviously govern prisons. And if they are going to work with the officer level, what I would personally advocate is to focus on custodial managers (SIC 3).

Overcoming barriers

The Spark Inside coaches were not resigned to the barriers presented to coaching but proposed a series of potential solutions to improve coaching engagement and outcomes among the prison staff.

Coaching orientation for staff

First, several of the coaches recommended a more robust orientation process for staff being referred for coaching. This could take the form of information provided to prison officers on coaching, or a short video explaining the process, so that they knew what they were signing up for before they began:

You could send anybody who is interested in it some information. I think possibly a short video would probably have better traction, just sort of explaining a bit about coaching and what it is (SIC 7).

More than one coach wondered if a formal orientation process could be constructed, that officers completed before moving on to the individual coaching. Something that would perform for staff what the Hero's Journey did for prisoners, but less time-consuming:

The other demographic that we work . . . there's a whole workshop around it, and they know what it is beforehand. But I think with the staff, it is a different thing . . . explain coaching etc, even if it's not the same level, some thought around what their infrastructure looks like, in order to get the prison staff in the room (SIC 4).

Other coaches thought that offering the staff a series of guided topics would help them transition into coaching more seamlessly:

Almost like another programme or something that if people want to show what it was they wanted to discuss or talk about, then I could make some suggestions, and they could choose . . . potentially guided topics (SIC 3).

Clear contracting

Aside from altering the infrastructure of how coaches were recruited and oriented, the coaches also worked hard to engage seemingly resistant staff in the opening sessions of coaching. As previously mentioned, this sometimes took the form of an extended period of contracting in which the coachee was educated in how to best use coaching:

I do a lot of contracting. I don't think any of the people that I have coached have had coaching before, so there is a certain amount of . . . explaining what coaching is (SIC 6).

This also involves enquiring about their previous experience of being coached and what they made of it, so as to ascertain their level of understanding:

I ask them - Have you ever had any counselling or life coaching before? So, if they have, I will say - Did it work for you? And if it didn't, I will say - What didn't you like about it? So, I know what they're looking for and the kind of person that they are (SIC 5).

This education process in the first few sessions of coaching, is also an opportunity to clarify what it is clients want from coaching:

It is important to contract in some way, to explain to them what it is, what it isn't, and what they want out of it. Quite often they haven't thought about it (SIC 7).

Part of the orientation is also to explain to the prison staff who the coach is, their background, experience, and the kind of questions and activities coaching often involves:

Towards the beginning of the sessions, I share with them my background, what kind of people I have worked with, what kind of subject areas people might bring to coaching; nothing is off limits really. We agree that in the contract (SIC 2).

It's explaining to them what coaching is . . . it's about asking you questions you haven't been asked before and creating more self-awareness for yourself (SIC 7).

Trust is also built with the client by recognising which areas of life they may not wish to speak about:

I will also say that - If there's a question that you don't want to answer, that's fine, this is for you, if you are uncomfortable with it, then just say and we'll move on to another question (SIC 7).

One coach talked about how the induction and contracting phase of coaching allowed them to agree that they may ask questions that the coachee may not wish to answer. Giving

them permission not to answer could increase their trust in the coach and their willingness to explore previously unexplored areas in coaching:

In my contracting, one of my questions is always - Is it OK if I can ask you the wrong question? Because I need to feel free just as my clients do. So, I need to be able to go somewhere, and maybe I am quite wrong, and I want them to be able to say - Not so sure about this one, maybe park that (SIC 6).

As a whole, the coaches took the view that the opening sessions of coaching with staff were invaluable for setting the expectations and boundaries of the coaching relationship. This is where the trust and confidentiality that would allow the openness and vulnerability essential to good coaching could be established. Not all prison staff were ultimately ready to engage in a coaching conversation, but the coaches were skilled in doing everything they could in the opening sessions to maximise the chances of staff investing in the process.

Outcomes of successful coaching

Ultimately, the coaches were asked what kind of results or positive outcomes they saw in the prison staff that they coached. Most of them talked about the benefits their coachees reported. In their view all of them gained something from the coaching they received:

Every client that I had benefited . . . coaching is a brilliant process, and all you have to do is not get in the clients way a lot of the time. I would say quite confidently that everybody benefits from it (SIC 6).

Some coaches noted that even staff who were unfamiliar with the coaching process could get to a place of insight, even if they had not expected to benefit from the coaching:

There was a lot of wows – ‘Wow, oh my gosh, I can't believe I didn't realise this!’ And this was about something that they had control over (SIC 3)

While acknowledging that some of the staff had been resistant to coaching and reluctant to engage in the personal exploration required, on the whole the coaches felt that their work with staff had been successful.

Differing definitions of success

When asked what success meant to them, it was clear that the coaches had different understandings of what success looked like in the coaching process, but most of them agreed that the main success criteria were client-defined:

I think success for me is what is successful for them (SIC 1).

This was consistent with the view of coaching espoused by all coaches at the outset, as a client-led process in which coaching was viewed as a means of helping people to achieve things that mattered to them. It also explains why coaching was viewed as stilted or unsuccessful with clients who were unable to formulate a clear goal, or who expected the coach to provide them with a sense of direction.

Professional Dilemma

However, defining the success of coaching by the goals set by the clients did lead to some professional dilemmas for the coaches, particularly when the successful outcome from the client's perspective may have been at odds with the organisational objectives of the prison service.

Coaches leaving HMPPS

Perhaps the prime example of this given by the coaches was when prison staff clarified their desire to leave the prison service, either by retirement or career transition, in response to the coaching conversation. For some this was because they became disenchanted with the role of prison officer and found that it conflicted with their ideals of working in the service:

One poor fellow, one of the first ones that I ever had, I don't think he'd ever really talked to anybody before, at least unburdening himself. He was a trainee, and he was very idealistic, and he unfortunately joined just before lockdown, and he was so committed, going to college, and of course none of that happened, he had a terrible time... And he had left the service, it was so sad, all his idealism had sort of crashed (SIC 6).

In this case, the coach initially thought they were helping someone to remain in the service, but ultimately found that the staff member had used the coaching to decide to leave. Coaching was therefore a means for the staff member to come to a full sense of perspective on their options:

When I left him, I thought he was going to make it, and he didn't, and that was very sad; but I also feel like at least he tried, and he was able to go on to the next thing (SIC 6).

Other coaches reported that the coaching process revealed to the staff the level of stress they were managing, and its consequent impact on work-life balance, particularly its effect on those at home:

The sessions have helped her to step back because she was getting so involved with work, the stress of working in a prison, that it was like consuming her life . . . So, for her it was more like work life balance; also potentially thinking of leaving the prison service. Her strength of not wanting to leave colleagues in that mess, made her stay, but it was having a negative effect on her life, so when she came to coaching, it was getting to the point where she was getting to burnout (SIC 5).

The holistic nature of the coaching relationship allowed a consideration of the psychological burden of the role in the round and allowed a balanced view of the dilemma of avoiding burnout, caring for family and responsibilities for colleagues.

Rationale of good outcome

While it could be argued that these coaching outcomes could be considered to be at odds with a prison service that would be keen to retain rather than lose staff, all of the coaches when asked viewed these individual decisions to be best for HMPPS as a whole:

On one hand, I have no ethical qualms about it, but on the other hand, I don't know if the prisons would see the benefit! But you know, I do believe there are benefits because they don't want people having meltdowns and having a year off, better that they leave sensibly and then move on in a positive way for everybody (SIC 6).

Helping the client to leave cleanly without expensive periods of long-term sick leave or emotional burnout was seen by all the coaches as a good outcome for the employer:

A lot of the time I was coaching people out of the prison service; well maybe half the time . . . I feel it is important that to leave well is an excellent thing for an employer, otherwise you get people just melting down (SIC 6).

This belief that the client's best interests ultimately served the employer, was a familiar way of resolving a recurrent dilemma for all the coaches who worked in professional contexts: being led by the client and yet being paid by their employer.

Professional outcomes of coaching

Nevertheless, the coaches did report successful professional outcomes for many of those who were coached.

Career progression

Some prison staff discussed both personal and professional goals and were able to achieve both through the process of coaching:

They actually managed to achieve both. . . they wrote to me later and said – It's happened and it's good and it's excellent. Said that the coaching had helped, which was good, it had been useful at the time, it was timely (SIC 2).

In the ideal scenario, working on the personal issues presented by the client were matched by achievement of professional goals also, a validation of the holistic approaches taken by the coaches in which the person was viewed as a whole.

Developed skills and abilities

Other coaches reported significant improvements in the professional skills and abilities reported by prison staff as a result of coaching. One coach described a prison officer who was particularly good at inducting new prisoners on their first night, who had learned to have confidence in this ability and view it as contribution to the prison team:

Our conversations gave him a bit more belief that he wasn't just fighting his own battle, he was trying to change and influence the culture, so more people could actually speak to these guys at their level, rather than just be rushed and hurried, and bang them up straight away; because I think what he was trying to do was probably make a better environment for everybody in the prison (SIC 7).

This was one among many examples of how the positive outcome of coaching could ripple through the social systems in which the coachees were based.

Improved relationships with colleagues

Alongside professional progress and upskilling, coaches also reported that their clients frequently disclosed improvements in professional working relationships with colleagues. In some cases, this was about learning to communicate more clearly and without excessive emotion:

She was able to enter the conversation by laying out what her wants and needs were in a more logical and less emotional way. And not be so emotionally attached . . . She was able to kind of manage her limbic system a bit better and engage her prefrontal cortex a bit more! (SIC 2).

Those in management positions reported using the coaching to work out how they could more effectively influence those around them to be better at their jobs. This often-meant harnessing strengths such as creativity, which they already had, but had not thought of applying to these situations:

She was also trying to help and maybe encourage other people in her area to be a bit more like she was in dealing with stuff; obviously there's ways of doing that rather than saying - Why don't you be a bit more like me? When we went into creativity, I'd say things like-how can you bring your creativity more into your conversations with the guys that you are dealing with (SIC 7).

Discussing conflictual relationships with colleagues and how to resolve them often involved recognising transferable skills that were equally applicable to the home environment with family:

Sometimes I have people who had difficulties with colleagues. So, we looked at that, thought about that and how we could work through, one definitely did and said - That was really helpful, it helped me work through that, and actually I even use it with my son at home (SIC 6).

And sometimes it occurred the other way round, that relational skills developed at home, were brought to work as part of the optimal way to manage staff:

Within work, that obviously filtered into her partnership working with colleagues and the way that she did things, and also how she managed to influence people that she was managing (SIC 3).

Strategic influence

Sometimes this ripple effect of coaching migrated upwards in the service, with some members of staff utilising the coaching as a means of planning strategic influence to alter inefficient or unhelpful aspects of the organisation:

I remember one of the last people that I worked with they had a conversation with someone quite senior . . . outside of the prison establishment, and it . . . was basically like a strategy session that we had, and even before leaving the session, they were buzzing; then they obviously implemented it in the conversation, and it was a fantastic conversation in terms of moving that senior leader . . . It was their opportunity to impact the system. So that was huge in terms of it's not just them. It is not just their prison but its policy even . . . They would impact multiple establishments (SIC 3).

Coaches who described their clients making this kind of broad organisational impact were highly enthused and excited by the potential of it.

Moving into action

The coaches commonly asserted that often the prison staff were sitting on plans of potential action, that they had yet to put into practice:

She was clearly very action orientated; she hadn't got to the position that she was in, without being very focused, very committed, very driven . . . So that allowed her to make it happen. She was ready to take actions when she knew everything, she . . . just had to uncover it a bit, unlock it a bit (SIC 2).

Coaching became the context in which energy could become matter. The coaches worked to help staff transform their passion into concrete action.

Personal outcomes of coaching

Many of the coaches reported that the major changes for the staff being coached occurred not in the workplace but in their personal lives, which then had a knock-on effect to work. Improvements in wellbeing and general confidence outside of the professional role, were still perceptible in the workplace:

It really impacted her life outside of work. I would say that was the biggest influence probably. And it was to do with her wellbeing, and even her relationship, which would relate to me in her general confidence outside of work (SIC 3).

Some of the coaches viewed these wider outcomes of coaching to be almost more important than workplace outcomes because it was about:

. . . seeing how that impact has a ripple effect, not only in their work life, but also in their personal and home life, and for me, those moments are really the most rewarding (SIC 4).

Home life wellbeing

Many of the coachees told their coaches about the ways they had taken the coaching home with them. Several of the prison staff used the coaching as a means of improving relationships with their partners at home. One of them took the coaching questions and explicitly worked through them with their partner and found it to be very helpful:

That particular person revealed later that they had taken all that away and worked with their partner with it and found it really useful to do at home because they were working on some things, personal things, and that person got a lot from that session; that obviously spread out into the wider life rather than just their life within the prison (SIC 2).

Another member of staff started to develop and invest in her marriage as her awareness of the importance of relational connectedness increased:

She went away with her husband for the weekend, they were having cocktails (SIC 6).

Reflecting on habitual ways of relating to other people, was also just as applicable to home life as it was to work:

The ripple effect would have been for her and their children, and her mental wellbeing, because she is always trying to be a people pleaser, always trying to help people (SIC 5).

This was yet another example of how the domains of personal and professional development could not be entirely separated.

Holistic sense of wellbeing

Unsurprisingly, given their commitment to viewing the prison workers holistically, the coaches tended to report wellbeing improvements in the staff as occurring across multiple domains of life:

Hers was really holistic in that sense. She was really telling me the impact that this was having. For her the biggest was wellbeing (SIC 3).

The possibility of a wide-ranging coaching conversation meant that the person being coached was given the chance to improve their life in multiple dimensions:

This isn't a work context. It could also be in a personal context, and in a personal context, it could be marriage related, emotion related, friendship related, cooking related, fitness related, exercise (SIC 3).

Some of the changes for the better as a result of coaching were often not immediately seen by the coach themselves but continued after the coaching sessions had ended. Often this was because the client started to run under their own steam and pursue outcomes that were never raised in the coaching conversations:

Coaching isn't necessarily what happens in the session, it's what happens as a result of it, so people will go away and percolate stuff, and then they might go-oh that's just giving me a thought, maybe I could do this? And they do it. And the next time that you see them, they have done that, and it's not something that you have said (SIC 7).

This was part of the logic of the coaches being client-led. Effective coaching was seen to end with the coach being made redundant and the client continuing to pursue the courses of action that mattered to them, and which expressed their values. For many of the Spark Inside coaches, coaching ended when the client became their own coach.

Summary: Interviews with Coaches

- The Spark Inside Coaches were vastly experienced and highly trained, with accredited qualifications. Many reported a sense of calling and vocation to provide coaching and reported positive benefits from being able to make a difference to others.
- While most coaches were reluctant to provide a formal label to the coaching approach they offered, a significant range of models were reported, including Performance related (GROW) coaching, Humanistic/Person-Centred coaching, Emotion-focussed coaching, Solution-focussed coaching, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Gestalt Coaching, Embodied Coaching, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Transactional Analysis. Most coaches reported the use of integrative coaching, drawing upon multiple models to provide holistic support which allowed them to provide coaching centred on the client. This overall approach included following the client, believing in the client, strengths of the client, co-creation and collaboration, presence and space, relationship over technique. The use of improvised, flexible approaches was prevalent.
- The coaches felt well supported by Spark Inside in the delivery of their coaching to prison staff. They reported little in the way of specific training or materials for undertaking this, but this was of little concern to them due to their previous experiences of delivering workplace coaching. In addition, there had been rigorous recruitment procedures, and significant orientation training. Use of the Wheel of Life was positive for a number of reasons, including rapport building and keeping track of coaching progress. The coaches also valued the supervision and peer support provided/organised by Spark Inside.
- Coaches reported that prison staff tended to raise professional issues during the course of coaching. These mirrored the reports from prison staff interviews and included career progression, confidence building, navigating career transitions such as retirement, overcoming organisational issues and dilemmas, and achieving a work-life balance. Personal issues discussed included physical fitness, recreational projects, mental health issues and managing stress. Coachees rarely reported or discussed issues relating to prisoners.
- Coaches perceived that they could offer non-judgemental listening and a space to think, relational contact, authenticity, positive intention, determination, empathy and compassion, and safety and trust to allow coachees to become vulnerable.
- Coaching techniques and tools included opportunity awareness, use of metaphors, visualisation, social skills training, reflection of limiting beliefs, challenge, emotional education, and embodiment.
- Factors which were perceived to allow prison staff to pursue coaching well included attendance, a willingness to be coached, passion and enthusiasm. Conversely, barriers to effective coaching included a misunderstanding of coaching, a lack of willingness to be open and distractions. There were some suggestions that coaching would be

better directed towards higher management levels in order to affect greatest change in improving the working lives of prison staff. Suggestions to overcoming barriers included improved coaching orientation and clear contracting.

- Outcomes for successful coaching were typically client defined. However, some outcomes led to professional dilemmas such as coachees leaving the service. Professional outcomes typically mirrored those reported by coachees and included career progression, developed skills and abilities, improved relationships with colleagues, strategic influence, and movement into action. Personal outcomes included home life wellbeing and a more holistic sense of wellbeing.

Discussion

The amalgamation of data

Despite the fact that we had two discreet data sets and the coachees that the coaches were referring to were not necessarily the same people that we had spoken to, there were nevertheless some commonalities. These will be discussed here before a summary of recommendations for Spark Inside to consider is presented.

The importance of relationships

One of the most obvious crossovers between the data sets was the focus on the coachee/coach relationship, with positive relationships being seen as the key to successful coaching. Many of the coaches therefore prioritised the relational connection with their client over the psychological tools that they were using, with often the first session being devoted to building a trusting relationship between the two parties. The importance of this was also noted by the prison staff, who on several occasions talked about the connections that they had made with their coaches. Helping to build the relationship was also why some of our participants suggested having face-to-face sessions. In both datasets, there were references to the coaches being regarded as family members, one coach said he would act like a brother or uncle, while a coachee described her coach as like an auntie. The importance of this relational connection led one prison officer to suggest that if the connection was not right then perhaps there should be the ability to change coaches, with this practice actually mentioned by one of the coaches interviewed.

Understanding what coaching is (and isn't)

One of the barriers to successful coaching noted by the coaches was the fact that some of their clients did not really understand what they had signed up for when they came to their first coaching session. Many thought that they were coming for training or to be told the answers to their challenges and concerns. This initial misunderstanding was also mirrored in the data from the prison officers. While many officers still benefitted from the programme, time taken to correct these misconceptions took away from the time for the actual coaching and may have been one of the reasons that the prison staff did not feel that six sessions were sufficient.

Another early misunderstanding was that many of the clients thought that the coaching was only for their professional lives and were not aware, and in some cases unprepared, to also talk about their home and personal lives. In the interviews with the prison staff, there was a clear shift seen in the contents of the session from professional to personal over the course of the sessions; with this change often connected to the building up of trust with the coach.

More directed recruitment

Both parties also spoke about the need for more directed recruitment and a better orientation as to what coaching actually was. The coachees spoke about personalised emails rather than the utilisation of global mailing lists and the Spark Inside coaches coming into the prisons so that staff could hear about the programme first hand, and relationships could begin to develop. Coaches spoke about the orientation programme used on Hero's Journey and suggested making use of an adapted version. A suggestion from both datasets was also whether coaching would be best suited to those who were at band 5 (Custodial Managers) and above, as these were the people who had more influence in the prison, and who would also be in a position to cascade coaching skills down to band 3 and 4 prison officers.

The need for support/to be listened to

Another clear parallel was the fact that many of the prison officers did not have alternative outlets in terms of support. Some felt that they could not trust their work colleagues to always give them the right advice, some were too afraid to show that they needed help, while others felt that if they did ask for support the focus of the conversation would move onto another person. One key point for the coachees, therefore, was that the coaches were great listeners, they would stay focused on them and their issues and evidenced this by often repeating back to the coachee what they had previously said. All prison staff valued this personal attention, with one saying that it had been one of the reasons that they had stayed working in the service. This quality of coaching was also mentioned by the coaches who all realised how important deep listening was, not just for the clients but also for the coach/client relationship.

Linked to this was also the fact that coaching gave the prison staff a safe place to talk about their concerns, something else that both coaches and coachees noted was lacking in current HMPPS provision. Coaching provided a confidential space where the client could bring whatever problem was concerning them and receive help and support to solve this in a non-judgemental way. The safety and security provided by this is

undoubtedly the reason why so many of the staff we interviewed were sad when the coaching ended and stated that they would have liked more sessions. For many they had been in receipt of this support and care and then it had been taken away.

Benefits and lasting impact

The clear and long-lasting benefits of coaching were discussed by both coaches and coachees. These included impacts on workplace skills and motivation, including confidence; workplace behaviours; managing mental health concerns, including stress and anxiety; retention; and demonstrable differences to health and wellbeing, including a better work-life balance.

Mutual admiration

Finally, and as seen in both datasets, it was obvious that there was mutual admiration between the prison staff and their coaches. Coaches spoke about their esteem for prison staff and the fact that they worked in such stressful and at times traumatic environments. They noted their persistence in dealing with work-place stressors and the work-ethic that many of them demonstrated. Prison staff, likewise, described their coaches as 'amazing'.

Recommendations

Suggestions which came from our research participants are noted in the above analysis. Here we present a summary of our recommendations which Spark Inside might like to consider:

- Use a more personal and directed recruitment process – line managers could be involved in this process.
- Use an orientation process prior to the commencement of the coaching sessions – this could either be an adaptation of that used for the Hero's Journey or could involve Spark Inside coaches coming into the prison on a more informal basis. The use of influential prison staff who have already completed coaching and who found it to be beneficial would also be valuable.
- Create time in the prison officers working day so that they can participate in coaching in worktime rather than home time. This would need to be in an environment where they are not distracted and will not be interrupted.
- Make face-to-face coaching sessions an option for those who would like them.
- Be more flexible in the number of coaching sessions which individuals can access – although if relationship building and orientation occurs prior to the

programme commencing this will naturally provide more time for the actual coaching.

- Provide a three - six month check in opportunity for those who want it.
- Make the Spark Inside coaching programme part of a suite of training options which can be used prior to a promotion application and/or at the commencement of a new job role.
- Ensure that line managers and HR are aware that a colleague is participating in the programme so that practical arrangements, such as time off, can be considered and participation can be fed into assessment centre decisions.
- Widen the availability of the programme so that it can be used as a confidential avenue to support those who find themselves in the prison working environment. This is likely to improve health and wellbeing and through this staff retention.

Strengths and Limitations

Overall, this evaluation has provided rich qualitative data yielding a substantial evidence base for the utility and impact of coaching to prison staff. While the number of interviews for each group conducted was small, it was felt by the research team that data saturation, the point at which there is no new data, themes, or coding, was reached (Guest et al., 2006). In addition, there was good representation across a range of prisons and prison roles to encompass a variety of prison experiences and perspectives.

One limitation that maybe perceived is that it was not feasible to match the data from coaches with their respective coachees. However, we feel this is mitigated by the fact that there were commonalities across groups, as consolidated in the discussion above. A further limitation is in relation to the potential for self-selection biases to be present, such that those who volunteered to take part may been more inclined to do so specifically because they had positive experiences of coaching. Future evaluation may consider incentivisation to encourage those with less positive experiences to participate, along with a focus on staff who did not complete the programme (Damyanov, 2023). Finally, some prison staff participants had completed the coaching over a year prior to being interviewed which meant their recollection of events was less detailed than those who had received coaching more recently. An ongoing evaluative approach may consider the use of short questionnaires immediately after the end of the coaching process.

Conclusion

The aim of the current evaluation was to assess the utility and impact of Spark Inside coaching for prison staff. Through in-depth interviews with both coaches and coachees, this report provides an evidence base for the multiple positive impacts arising from coaching. These impacts include professional development, enhanced decision making, improved working relationships with others and improved wellbeing, both on an occupational and personal level. Despite the evaluation being conducted across two discrete groups, there was vast synergy in the responses from both coaches and coachees, with mutual admiration a key factor. The evaluation has further provided some operationalisable recommendations for Spark Inside to consider implementing within their continued development of coaching programmes.

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Karen Harrison is a Professor of Law and Penal Justice at the University of Lincoln. She graduated with a Ph.D. from the University of Wales - Aberystwyth in 2004 and over the last 20 years has established a national and international profile in sentencing and penal policy. She has written extensively on the legal and ethical implications of risk reduction and management strategies with high-risk sex offenders, often writing with criminologists and psychologists. Karen has completed a number of funded empirical projects including looking at why British South Asian women fail to report sexual abuse and examining the implementation of Body-Worn Cameras in Humberside Police. She is the author of *Dangerousness, Risk and the Governance of Serious Sexual and Violent Offenders* (2011), the editor of *Managing High Risk Sex Offenders in The Community* (2010) and co-edited with Dr Bernadette Rainey, *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Legal and Ethical Aspects of Sex Offender Treatment and Management* (2013). Her most recent publication is *Penology: Theory, Policy and Practice* (2020).

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Dr Roger Bretherton is a Clinical Psychologist and Associate Professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Lincoln. He worked in Adult Mental Health in the NHS for over a decade, in clinical practice, management and psychological therapies training. He joined the University of Lincoln in 2007, and delivers teaching related to psychotherapy and coaching. His research centres on Character Strengths, the positive qualities of character (such as gratitude, wisdom, hope, curiosity, kindness and so on) related to wellbeing. In his consultancy work, he has delivered coaching, keynotes, and workshops to leaders in the public and private sectors, in the spheres of health, education, business and the charity sector.

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Rachael Mason is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Health and Social Care, at the University of Lincoln. Her undergraduate degree is in Psychology and Criminology and her Masters degree is in Forensic Psychology. Rachael has worked for HMPPS delivering accredited Offender Behaviour Programmes for substance users. Following this, Rachael worked in a residential housing project as a Duty Officer and Training Co-ordinator, supporting young people aged 16-25 years old to develop life skills and help them prepare to live independently. Rachael's main research interests include emergency responses to substance use, and the health and wellbeing of people in the criminal justice system including issues related to substance use. She is a member of the Combating Drugs Partnership/Substance Misuse Core Priority Group for Lincolnshire

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Prior to joining the University of Lincoln as a Lecturer in Psychology in 2020, Lauren worked in voluntary sector services supporting people in the Criminal Justice System for 14 years. Her roles included performance and development of services, delivery of resettlement support services in prisons, development and delivery of support services for people transitioning from the community into prison, delivery of services to families of people in prison, and work within a supported accommodation provider for families and young people. She is now a Senior Lecturer and her research interests are centred around the rehabilitation and reintegration of people with convictions, including the complex relationships between homelessness, employment, health and addictions and

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Abbreviations

AC	Association for Coaching
ACT	Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
CM	Custodial Managers
GROW	Goal, Reality, Obstacles/Options, Way forward
HJ	Hero's Journey
HMPPS	His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
ICF	International Coaching Federation
NLP	Neuro Linguistic Programming
PGD	Prison Group Director
TA	Transactional Analysis
UK	United Kingdom



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